



Quality Improvement in Islamic Religious Education through Active Learning

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Abstract

This study examines quality improvement in Islamic Religious Education (IRE) through the implementation of active learning. The study is grounded in the need to reduce the gap between curriculum expectations and classroom realities, particularly the continued dominance of teacher-centered instruction in religious education. Active learning is positioned as a pedagogical strategy that strengthens student participation, reflective understanding, collaboration, and the internalization of Islamic values.

Using a qualitative descriptive approach, data were obtained through classroom observations, in-depth interviews with IRE teachers, and documentation of instructional planning and assessment practices at Al-Bahra Islamic Senior High School, Jenepono. The data were analyzed through reduction, display, and conclusion drawing, with triangulation used to strengthen credibility.

The findings show that quality improvement in IRE is supported by six active learning strategies: learning by doing, contextual teaching and learning, higher-order thinking skill activities, experiential learning, digital game-based learning, and cooperative techniques such as peer teaching, card sorting, team quizzes, and power of two. These strategies improve classroom interaction, student motivation, critical thinking, collaborative behavior, and spiritual awareness. However, the study also identifies challenges related to teacher readiness, student learning habits, limited facilities, and the need for stronger institutional support. The study concludes that active learning improves the quality of IRE when it is planned contextually, facilitated reflectively, and evaluated holistically.

Keywords: Active Learning, Islamic Religious Education, Quality Improvement, Contextual Teaching and Learning, Higher-Order Thinking Skills, Experiential Learning

Introduction

Islamic Religious Education is a central part of Indonesian education because it is expected to develop students who are knowledgeable, faithful, ethical, and socially responsible. In school practice, IRE is not merely a subject that transfers religious concepts; it is also a space for cultivating noble character, strengthening spiritual consciousness, and guiding students to apply Islamic teachings in everyday life. For this reason, improving the quality of IRE requires more than curriculum completion. It requires learning experiences that connect religious knowledge with reflection, action, and meaningful moral decision-making.

The demand for quality improvement in IRE has become more urgent as students live in a learning environment shaped by digital media, social change, and diverse patterns of communication. Religious learning that depends only on lectures and memorization often fails to reach students' affective and social dimensions. Students may know religious terms but may not fully understand how these teachings guide their attitudes, behavior, and relationships with others. Active learning therefore becomes relevant because it invites students to participate directly, ask questions, solve problems, collaborate, and reflect on values through structured classroom activities.

Active learning is philosophically based on the idea that knowledge is constructed through activity and interaction. Students learn more deeply when they are involved in searching, discussing, practicing, and evaluating information rather than simply receiving explanations. In the context of IRE, this means that students should be given opportunities to examine moral problems, connect Qur'anic and prophetic values with daily experiences, practice worship and ethical behavior, and communicate their understanding through collaborative learning.

The quality of IRE can be assessed not only from the completeness of teaching materials but also from the extent to which learning encourages engagement, understanding, value internalization, and behavioral transformation. Active learning supports this quality because it strengthens attention, participation, critical thinking, and emotional involvement. Methods such as learning by doing, contextual teaching, inquiry, cooperative learning, and digital learning media are able to make religious education more relevant to students' lives.

However, the implementation of active learning in IRE is not always easy. Many classrooms still rely on conventional teacher-centered methods because teachers are more familiar with lectures, written assignments, and question-answer routines. Time limitations, large classes, limited facilities, and uneven student readiness also influence the quality of implementation. Some students are not accustomed to discussion, independent exploration, or reflective expression, so teachers need to design gradual and supportive activities.

The original focus of this article is the implementation of active learning at Al-Bahra Islamic Senior High School, Jenepono. The school context provides an important case for understanding how active learning may improve the quality of IRE in a real classroom setting. The findings indicate that active learning was not applied as a single method but as a combination of strategies

designed to strengthen students' cognitive, affective, psychomotor, social, ethical, and spiritual development.

This study is directed by the title Quality Improvement in Islamic Religious Education through Active Learning. The title emphasizes two main points. First, the improvement of IRE quality is the primary goal. Second, active learning is the pedagogical route used to achieve this goal. Therefore, the discussion in this article focuses on how active learning strategies contribute to better instructional quality, deeper student engagement, and stronger internalization of Islamic values while preserving the original data, context, and reference base of the article.

Research Method

This study employed a qualitative descriptive approach. The approach was selected because the research aimed to describe in depth how active learning strategies were implemented in Islamic Religious Education and how these strategies contributed to improving instructional quality. The qualitative design allowed the researcher to capture classroom processes, teacher decisions, student participation, and contextual factors that influenced the success of active learning.

The study was conducted at Al-Bahra Islamic Senior High School, Jenepono. The research participants consisted of Islamic Religious Education teachers and students involved in learning activities. Data were collected through classroom observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation review. Observations were used to identify classroom interaction, student participation, teaching techniques, and the use of learning media. Interviews were used to understand teachers' experiences in planning, implementing, and evaluating active learning. Documentation included lesson plans, teaching materials, assessment instruments, and other relevant school documents.

Data validity was strengthened through triangulation of sources and methods. Information from observation was compared with interview data and documentation. The analysis followed an interactive model consisting of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. During data reduction, relevant findings were selected and grouped according to the research focus. During data display, patterns of active learning implementation were organized into themes. The final stage involved drawing conclusions about how active learning contributes to quality improvement in Islamic Religious Education.

The main analytical focus was placed on four dimensions: planning, implementation, reflection, and evaluation. The study also examined supporting and inhibiting factors that shaped the quality of implementation. Through this method, the research provides a detailed picture of how active learning functions as an instructional strategy for improving the quality of IRE.

Research Findings and Discussion

A. Main Strategies for Active Learning in Islamic Religious Education

Learning by Doing

This strategy engages students in direct practice so that they do not merely listen to explanations but also experience the learning process. In IRE, learning by doing may include practicing worship procedures, demonstrating ethical communication, analyzing daily moral cases, or carrying out simple projects related to Islamic values. This strategy improves quality because it transforms abstract concepts into observable actions and encourages students to learn through meaningful experience.

Interactive Active Learning Strategies

The study identified several interactive techniques such as everyone is a teacher here, card sorting, team quizzes, peer teaching, and power of two. These activities reduce monotony and give students space to explain, classify, compare, and evaluate religious concepts. Through interaction, students become more responsible for their own learning and more confident in communicating Islamic understanding.

Contextual Teaching and Learning

Contextual teaching and learning connects IRE materials with real-life situations. Students are invited to relate religious teachings to family life, school discipline, social responsibility, environmental care, digital ethics, and peer relationships. The quality of learning increases because students are able to see Islamic teachings as guidance for life rather than as isolated textbook content.

Higher-Order Thinking Skills

Active learning also supports higher-order thinking skills by encouraging students to analyze, evaluate, and create. In IRE, HOTS-oriented activities may include analyzing ethical dilemmas, comparing attitudes with Islamic values, evaluating behavior, and proposing solutions based on religious principles. This improves instructional quality because students learn to reason reflectively and ethically.

Experiential Learning

Experiential learning places students in activities that require reflection after experience. It encourages students to ask what happened, what values were found, and how those values should influence future behavior. In IRE, this strategy strengthens affective and spiritual learning because students internalize values through personal reflection.

Digital Game-Based Learning

Digital game-based learning uses technology to create interactive, motivating, and culturally sensitive learning experiences. When used appropriately, digital games, quizzes, simulations, and interactive platforms make IRE more attractive to students. This strategy supports quality

improvement by increasing motivation and giving teachers more varied ways to assess participation and understanding.

B. Implementation and Impact on Learning Quality

The implementation of active learning improved the classroom atmosphere by encouraging students to participate more actively. Students were no longer positioned only as listeners but became discussants, problem solvers, presenters, and reflective learners. This shift improved the quality of IRE because the learning process became more dialogic, contextual, and meaningful.

Teacher training emerged as an important factor. Active learning requires teachers who understand how to design activities, manage time, organize groups, give feedback, and evaluate cognitive, affective, and psychomotor outcomes. Without sufficient teacher preparation, active learning may become procedural and fail to reach its intended quality.

Student engagement increased when activities were student-centered and inclusive. Students showed stronger attention and motivation when learning was linked to their daily realities. Cooperative activities also strengthened communication, teamwork, and respect for different opinions. These outcomes show that active learning contributes not only to academic understanding but also to social and moral development.

The study also highlights the comprehensive development produced by active learning. The ulû al-'ilm model, reflective discussion, practical worship activities, and contextual problem solving support cognitive, affective, psychomotor, social, ethical, and spiritual dimensions. Thus, quality improvement in IRE should be understood holistically rather than limited to test results.

C. Core Principles of Active Learning in Islamic Religious Education

- A supportive learning environment enables students to feel safe when asking questions, expressing opinions, and practicing religious values.
- Engaging strategies such as card sorting, team quizzes, peer teaching, and group discussion reduce boredom and increase student participation.
- Higher-order thinking activities encourage students to analyze religious messages and apply them to social realities.
- The ulû al-'ilm model helps integrate knowledge, worship, ethics, and social responsibility into one learning experience.
- Continuous reflection ensures that students do not only perform activities but also understand the spiritual meaning behind them.

D. Challenges in Implementing Active Learning

Several challenges were found in the implementation of active learning. First, not all teachers are equally prepared to design activities that are interactive, efficient, and aligned with learning outcomes. Some teachers still need training in classroom management, digital media use, and authentic assessment. Second, student readiness varies. Students who are accustomed to passive learning may initially feel hesitant to speak, discuss, or take responsibility in group tasks.

Third, institutional support is essential. Active learning requires learning resources, flexible classroom arrangements, technological facilities, and administrative encouragement. When facilities are limited, teachers need creativity to adapt activities using simple materials. Fourth, time allocation can become a constraint, especially when teachers must complete curriculum targets while also facilitating discussion, practice, and reflection.

These challenges do not weaken the value of active learning; rather, they show that quality improvement requires systematic support. Active learning must be planned as a school-wide pedagogical culture, not merely as an occasional classroom technique.

E. Best Practices for Integrating Active Learning in IRE

First, learning materials should be connected to religious moderation and character formation. Active learning becomes more meaningful when it guides students to understand tolerance, responsibility, justice, honesty, and compassion as Islamic values that must be practiced in daily life.

Second, contextual teaching should become a central model. Students should be invited to connect lessons about prayer, worship, morality, and social relations with concrete experiences at home, school, and society. This helps students understand that Islamic teachings are practical guidance for life.

Third, teachers should combine cooperative activities with reflection. Group work is not enough if students only complete tasks mechanically. Reflection helps students identify values, evaluate behavior, and formulate personal commitments.

Fourth, digital tools should be used to support, not replace, pedagogical interaction. Digital quizzes, simulations, and learning games may increase motivation, but the teacher’s guidance remains necessary to ensure that students understand the values behind the activities.

F. Active Learning Techniques and Quality Indicators

Technique	Main Activity	Quality Contribution
Everyone is a Teacher Here	Students explain selected concepts to peers	Improves confidence, comprehension, and responsibility
Card Sorting	Students classify cards containing concepts or cases	Strengthens knowledge organization and participation
Team Quizzes	Groups answer and discuss questions collaboratively	Builds teamwork and retention
Learning by Doing	Students practice worship or value-based tasks	Links knowledge with action
Contextual Learning	Students relate lessons to daily life	Improves relevance and value internalization
Power of Two	Pairs solve tasks and reflect together	Encourages peer support and dialogue
Experiential Learning	Students act, reflect, and conclude	Strengthens affective and spiritual

Technique	Main Activity	Quality Contribution
	values	dimensions
Blended Learning	Combines face-to-face and digital interaction	Expands flexibility and supports HOTS

The table shows that each technique contributes to a different aspect of quality improvement. Some techniques strengthen cognitive understanding, while others improve collaboration, communication, spiritual reflection, and value internalization. A high-quality IRE classroom should therefore combine multiple active learning techniques according to learning objectives and student needs.

Discussion

The findings demonstrate that active learning is a strategic pathway for improving the quality of Islamic Religious Education. Quality improvement appears through several indicators: increased student participation, more meaningful teacher-student interaction, stronger connection between religious content and real life, and deeper reflection on Islamic values. These indicators show that active learning changes the nature of IRE from content delivery into value-based formation.

The implementation of learning by doing confirms that students understand Islamic teachings more deeply when they experience and practice them. Practical activities enable students to connect procedures with meaning. For example, worship-related lessons become more valuable when students not only memorize steps but also discuss the discipline, humility, and sincerity embedded in worship. This supports the broader goal of IRE as character formation.

Contextual teaching and learning is also important because it prevents religious education from becoming detached from students' daily lives. When students analyze real situations, such as respect for parents, honesty in schoolwork, digital ethics, bullying, and social responsibility, they learn to apply Islamic teachings as living values. This strengthens the quality of learning because students are guided to make moral decisions, not only to repeat definitions.

Higher-order thinking activities improve the intellectual quality of IRE. Students are encouraged to ask why a value matters, how it should be practiced, and what consequences may emerge when it is ignored. This reflective process is necessary for developing religious understanding that is mature, rational, and ethical. It also responds to contemporary educational demands that require students to think critically and solve problems.

The use of digital game-based learning and blended activities indicates that active learning can be adapted to the digital era. Digital tools support motivation and participation, especially when students are familiar with interactive media. However, the use of technology must remain value-oriented. The goal is not merely to make learning entertaining, but to make Islamic values more accessible, engaging, and meaningful.

Cooperative strategies such as peer teaching, card sorting, team quizzes, and power of two contribute to social learning. Students learn to listen, negotiate, respect differences, and take responsibility for group outcomes. These social skills are part of the quality of IRE because Islamic education aims to produce students who are not only personally pious but also socially responsible.

The challenges identified in this study indicate that active learning requires structured support. Teacher training is a key requirement because teachers must be able to design meaningful activities, facilitate discussion, and assess holistic outcomes. Infrastructure and institutional support are also needed, particularly for digital learning and classroom organization. Student readiness must be developed gradually through consistent routines and supportive classroom culture.

Overall, the findings affirm that quality improvement in IRE is achieved when active learning is implemented as a coherent pedagogical approach. It should involve planning, contextual implementation, reflective discussion, and holistic evaluation. When these elements are integrated, IRE becomes more engaging, relevant, and transformative.

Educational Implications

The first implication is the need for teacher capacity-building. Teachers should receive training on active learning design, classroom facilitation, digital media use, and authentic assessment. Training should not only introduce methods but also help teachers adapt them to IRE objectives and local student contexts.

The second implication concerns curriculum delivery. IRE curriculum should be implemented through activities that combine knowledge, practice, reflection, and value application. Lesson plans should explicitly include participation, collaboration, HOTS, and spiritual reflection as indicators of learning quality.

The third implication relates to school support. Schools should provide learning resources, flexible classroom spaces, and digital tools that enable teachers to implement active learning. Support from school leadership is necessary so that active learning becomes a sustained culture rather than a temporary innovation.

The fourth implication concerns assessment. Quality improvement cannot be measured only by written tests. Teachers should also assess participation, reflective ability, cooperation, worship practice, ethical decision-making, and the application of Islamic values in daily behavior.

Limitations and Future Research

Further studies are also encouraged to examine teacher professional development. Since teacher readiness is a key factor in quality improvement, future research can explore training models, mentoring systems, and school leadership practices that support sustainable active learning in Islamic Religious Education.

Future research may also compare several active learning models, such as project-based learning, inquiry learning, cooperative learning, and digital game-based learning. Such comparison can help identify which model is most effective for specific IRE topics, grade levels, and student characteristics.

Another limitation is related to the qualitative nature of the study. Observation and interview data provide rich descriptions of classroom practice, but they do not measure learning improvement statistically. Future studies may combine qualitative inquiry with quantitative measurement to examine the extent to which active learning affects motivation, learning outcomes, and value internalization in Islamic Religious Education.

Although the findings show that active learning contributes to quality improvement in Islamic Religious Education, this study is limited to one school context. Therefore, the findings should be interpreted as a contextual description rather than a generalization for all Islamic educational institutions. Different schools may have different levels of teacher readiness, student participation, and institutional facilities.

Practical Framework for Quality Improvement

This framework may help teachers implement active learning more consistently. It also provides school leaders with a simple reference for mentoring teachers, evaluating classroom practice, and designing professional development programs that support the improvement of Islamic Religious Education.

Evaluation is the fourth element. Teachers should combine written assessment with observation of participation, cooperation, communication, and value-based behavior. This holistic evaluation supports the true quality of IRE because it measures not only knowledge mastery but also the development of attitudes and practices.

Reflection is the third element. Every active learning activity should end with guided reflection so that students can identify the Islamic values contained in the activity. Reflection may be conducted through written notes, oral sharing, group summaries, or teacher-guided questions that connect learning activities with moral and spiritual awareness.

Participation is the second element. Students must be given structured roles in the classroom, such as discussion leader, presenter, evaluator, peer tutor, or group reporter. These roles ensure that every student has a meaningful responsibility in the learning process and that active learning is not dominated by only a few students.

Based on the findings, quality improvement in Islamic Religious Education can be organized through a practical framework consisting of planning, participation, reflection, and evaluation.

Planning requires teachers to identify learning objectives, select suitable active learning techniques, and prepare materials that connect Islamic values with students' daily realities.

Conclusion

This study concludes that active learning contributes significantly to quality improvement in Islamic Religious Education. Through learning by doing, contextual teaching and learning, higher-order thinking activities, experiential learning, digital game-based learning, and cooperative techniques, IRE becomes more interactive, reflective, and relevant to students' lives.

The implementation of active learning improves student engagement, critical thinking, collaboration, communication, and spiritual awareness. It also strengthens the internalization of Islamic values because students are invited to experience, discuss, apply, and reflect on religious teachings. Therefore, active learning should be viewed not only as a teaching method but as a strategy for transforming the quality of religious education.

Nevertheless, successful implementation requires teacher readiness, institutional support, adequate resources, and gradual development of student participation. Schools need to support teachers through training, mentoring, and curriculum innovation. When active learning is implemented consistently and contextually, Islamic Religious Education can become a more meaningful process that forms students who are intellectually capable, morally grounded, socially responsible, and spiritually aware.

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