

# Transforming Islamic Religious Education Through Active Learning Strategies to Strengthen Student Character

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## Abstract:

This study is motivated by the suboptimal implementation of Islamic education learning in shaping students' character amid the dynamics of modern society. The main problem lies in the dominance of conventional teaching approaches that limit student engagement. This study aims to analyze the implementation of active learning strategies in Islamic education and to identify the supporting and inhibiting factors. This research employs a qualitative descriptive approach conducted at Sekolah Tingkat Dasar Negeri 3 Plosoklaten Kediri. Data were collected through observation, interviews, and documentation, and analyzed using an interactive analysis model consisting of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The findings reveal that the implementation of active learning strategies enhances student engagement, independence, and interaction in the learning process. Methods such as discussion, problem solving, and jigsaw are proven effective in encouraging active participation. Supporting factors include students' learning motivation, teacher competence, and adequate learning facilities, while inhibiting factors involve students' lack of confidence and differences in learning abilities. Therefore, active learning strategies contribute positively to improving the quality of Islamic education learning.

## Keywords:

active learning, Islamic education, student character, engagement, interactive analysis

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## INTRODUCTION

The rapid advancement of science and technology, along with social transformation, has significantly influenced educational systems, including Islamic Religious Education (PAI). Contemporary educational challenges are not only structural but also cultural, affecting students' mindsets, attitudes, and behaviors. Education plays a strategic role in developing individuals by cultivating knowledge, character, values, and morality (Islam, 2021). Consequently, PAI is expected to adapt to societal changes while maintaining the Islamic values that form its normative foundation.

The changing characteristics of learners in the digital era further intensify this challenge. Modern students have broad access to information and tend to prefer interactive and participatory learning experiences (Wimpertiwi, 2024; Karakose, 2022). As a result, learning can no longer be viewed merely as the transmission of knowledge from teacher to student but rather as a multidimensional process involving intellectual, emotional, and spiritual development (Wulandari,

2021; Syihab, 2024). In this regard, PAI should function not only as a cognitive learning process but also as a medium for continuous value internalization.

Despite these expectations, empirical evidence reveals persistent behavioral problems among students, including juvenile delinquency, violence, and moral degradation (Bidayatul et al., 2023). Such conditions suggest that educational processes, particularly PAI, have not fully achieved their objective of character formation. One contributing factor is the continued dominance of conventional learning approaches that position students as passive recipients of knowledge (Faisol et al., 2025). These approaches provide limited opportunities for learners to develop critical, reflective, and problem-solving skills. Effective learning should instead involve dynamic interactions between teachers and students, enabling exploration, elaboration, and meaningful knowledge construction (Faisol, 2025; Sujana, 1989).

To address these challenges, educational innovation is required through the adoption of active learning strategies. Grounded in constructivist theory, active learning emphasizes students' active participation in constructing knowledge through meaningful experiences and social interaction. Learning is understood as a systematic effort to develop learners' cognitive, affective, and psychomotor potentials (Dimiyati & Mudjiono, 1999). PAI itself is conceptualized as a process of value transformation aimed at shaping Muslim personalities through the internalization of Islamic teachings in both personal and social life (Ali et al., 2025). Therefore, active learning is closely aligned with the broader objectives of Islamic education.

Active learning strategies encourage learners' physical, mental, emotional, and intellectual engagement (Faisol et al., 2025; Hisyam et al., 2005). Silberman (1996) defines active learning as a comprehensive set of strategies designed to activate learners, while Sukandi (2003) emphasizes that learning is fundamentally a process of meaning-making by students. In the context of PAI, active learning facilitates not only conceptual understanding but also the internalization of Islamic values through discussions, problem-solving activities, case studies, and reflective experiences (Bastian & Thohir, 2024). Furthermore, these approaches foster higher-order thinking skills, enabling students to analyze, evaluate, and apply religious teachings in real-life situations (Aldi, 2025; Silberman, 1996).

Empirical studies consistently demonstrate the effectiveness of active learning in improving educational outcomes. Research has shown that active learning principles such as direct involvement, contextualization, and social interaction enhance student engagement, learning achievement, and value internalization (Thohir, 2024; Yusniar et al., 2024). Muhaimin (2002) further argues that the success of PAI depends largely on the compatibility between teaching methods, learner characteristics, and instructional objectives. Likewise, problem-solving and collaborative learning strategies have been found to strengthen students' analytical and critical-thinking abilities.

However, important gaps remain in the literature. Existing studies primarily focus on the conceptual foundations of active learning and rarely investigate its implementation within the specific context of Islamic Religious Education. Moreover, limited research has explored how active learning strategies are applied in secondary schools and how contextual factors support or hinder their effectiveness (Syaharuddin et al., 2025). Therefore, further practice-based investigations are necessary.

This study aims to analyze the implementation of active learning strategies in Islamic Religious Education at SMP Negeri 3 Plosoklaten Kediri and to identify the supporting and inhibiting factors influencing their application. The findings are expected to contribute to the development of more effective, context-specific PAI learning strategies and to provide practical recommendations for educators seeking to improve the quality of Islamic education in schools.

## METHOD

This study employed a qualitative descriptive design to explore the implementation of active learning strategies in Islamic Religious Education (PAI). A qualitative approach was selected to provide an in-depth understanding of participants' experiences, interactions, and perceptions regarding active learning practices within the natural educational setting. This design enabled the researchers to capture the complexity of classroom phenomena without manipulating variables.

The study was conducted at SMP Negeri 3 Plosoklaten, Kediri, Indonesia, during the 2024/2025 academic year. The school was selected purposively because it had implemented various instructional approaches aligned with active learning principles in PAI learning. Participants were recruited using purposive sampling. Informants were PAI teachers and students who were directly involved in classroom learning activities and considered capable of providing rich, relevant information on the implementation of active learning strategies. Participant selection continued until sufficient information was obtained to address the research objectives.

Data were collected through classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis. Classroom observations were conducted to examine the implementation of active learning methods, teacher–student interactions, and student participation during learning activities (Shaw, 2019). Semi-structured interviews were conducted with teachers and students to explore their experiences and perceptions of active learning practices. In addition, relevant documents, including lesson plans, learning materials, and school records, were reviewed to complement and verify the findings obtained from observations and interviews.

Data collection was conducted iteratively, allowing emerging findings from one method to inform subsequent data collection activities. The process continued until data saturation was achieved. To ensure the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings, source and method triangulation were employed. Information obtained from observations, interviews, and documentation was compared and cross-checked to confirm consistency and enhance the accuracy of interpretations. Field notes and interview records were reviewed repeatedly throughout the analysis process to strengthen the dependability of the findings.

Data were analyzed using an interactive qualitative analysis model consisting of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing (Bhangu, 2023; Hitchings, 2020). Data reduction involved selecting, organizing, and coding information relevant to the research objectives. Subsequently, the data were systematically displayed to identify patterns, themes, and relationships. Finally, conclusions were drawn and continuously verified throughout the research process. Data analysis was conducted concurrently with data collection, enabling ongoing refinement of interpretations and ensuring a comprehensive understanding of the implementation of active learning strategies in PAI learning.

## RESULT

The findings indicate that the implementation of active learning strategies in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) at SMP Negeri 3 Plosoklaten Kediri was generally effective. Students actively participated in classroom activities through questioning, answering questions, group discussions, and task completion. Furthermore, students demonstrated self-directed learning behaviors by independently seeking information and engaging with learning materials. These findings suggest a shift from a teacher-centered approach toward a student-centered learning environment.

Table 1. Active Learning Activities of Students in PAI Learning

Activity Aspect	Indicator Findings	Interpretation
Participation	Asking and answering questions	High level of activeness
Cognitive	Problem solving	Critical thinking is developing
Social	Group discussion	Collaboration is increasing
Independence	Seeking information	Self-directed learning
Affective	Learning enthusiasm	High intrinsic motivation

The study found that teachers employed a variety of active learning methods, including discussion, problem-solving, jigsaw, recitation, question-and-answer sessions, demonstrations, and role-playing. These methods encouraged students' active participation in cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains. Classroom observations revealed two-way communication between teachers and students, as well as collaborative interactions among students, creating a dynamic and participatory learning environment.

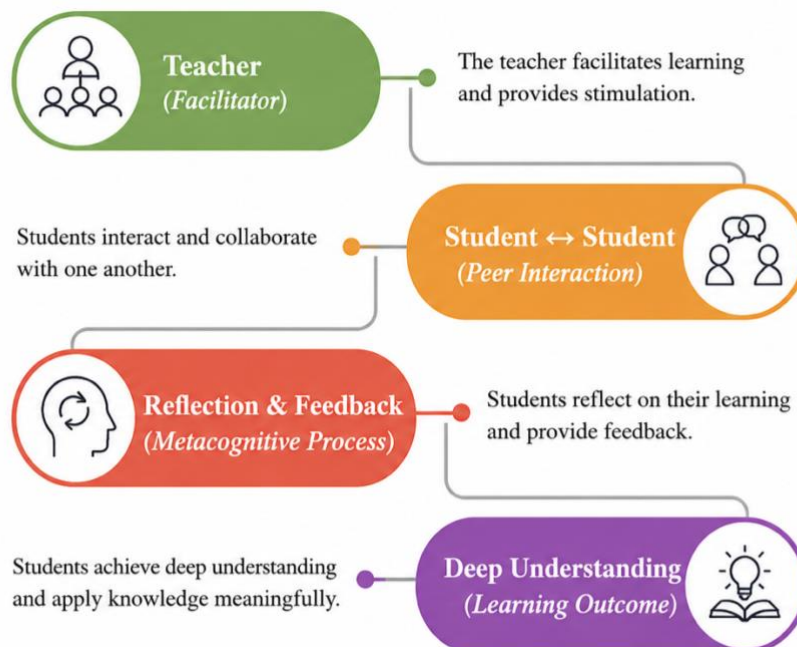


Figure 1. Active Learning Interaction Pattern

The interaction pattern demonstrates the teacher's role as a facilitator who provides learning stimulation, while students actively construct knowledge through peer interaction, communication, reflection, and feedback, ultimately leading to deeper understanding.

Table 2. Supporting and Inhibiting Factors

Supporting Factors	Inhibiting Factors
High learning interest	Lack of self-confidence
Teacher professionalism	Differences in student abilities
Adequate facilities	Uneven participation

The implementation of active learning strategies was influenced by several factors, both supportive and inhibiting. Supporting factors included students' high interest in learning, teacher professionalism and commitment, and adequate learning facilities. Conversely, barriers included low

self-confidence among some students, differences in academic ability, and unequal participation in learning activities.

The findings further revealed four interconnected components underlying the active learning process: experience, interaction, communication, and reflection. Students were actively engaged in experiential learning activities, including discussions, simulations, case studies, and collaborative tasks. These experiences facilitated knowledge construction, communication of ideas, and reflective thinking. The integration of these components contributed to meaningful learning outcomes and a deeper understanding of Islamic values.

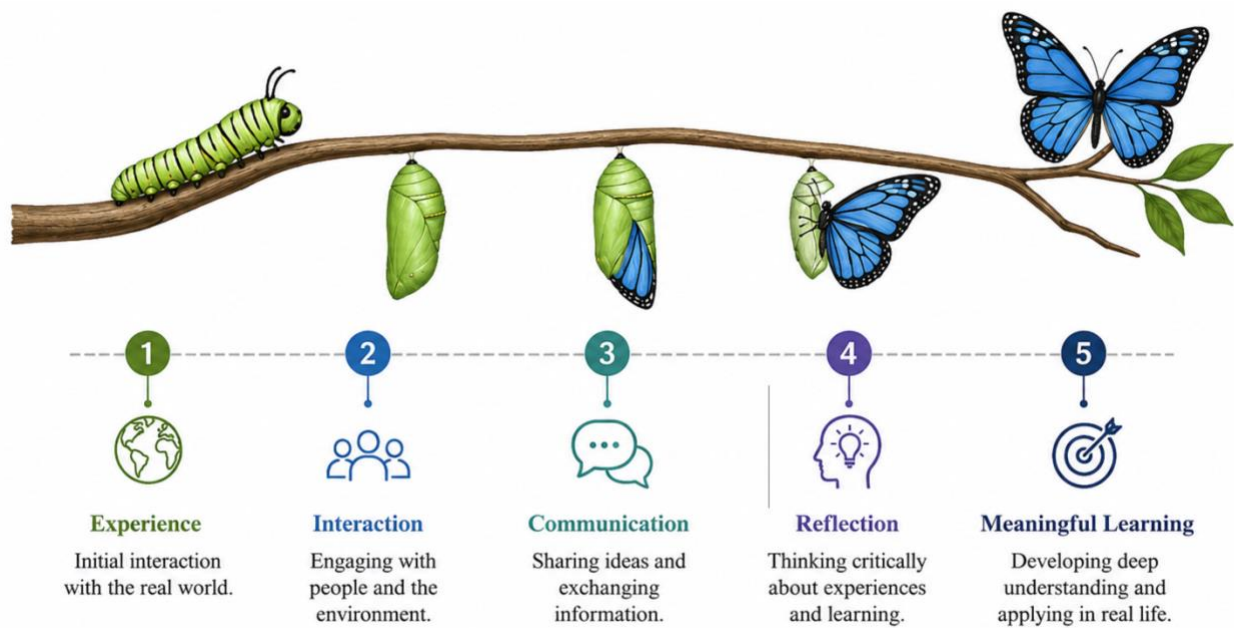


Figure 2. Active Learning Components Model

The model illustrates how learning evolves through sequential stages of experience, interaction, communication, and reflection, culminating in meaningful learning and value internalization.

### DISCUSSION

The findings demonstrate that implementing active learning strategies, including discussion, problem-solving, jigsaw, demonstration, question-and-answer sessions, and role-playing, successfully transformed PAI learning from a teacher-centered to a student-centered process. Students actively participated in questioning, discussion, collaboration, and independent information seeking, indicating increased engagement and learning autonomy. These findings support constructivist perspectives that view learning as an active process of knowledge construction through experience and social interaction.

The observed interaction patterns further suggest that active learning extends beyond cognitive engagement by promoting communication, collaboration, and reflective thinking. Through active participation, students were not merely recipients of religious knowledge but became active agents in constructing understanding and internalizing Islamic values.

The findings are consistent with Silberman's (1996) argument that active learning techniques enhance student engagement, conceptual understanding, and critical thinking. Increased participation in classroom discussions and problem-solving activities observed in this study reflects these principles. Similarly, the findings support Muhaimin's (2002) view that the effectiveness of PAI learning depends on the alignment between instructional methods, learner characteristics, and educational objectives.

This study also reinforces the work of Semiawan (1992) and Zuhairini (1993), who emphasized the importance of direct experience, interaction, and motivation in improving learning outcomes. However, unlike Joni's findings reported in Sukandi (2003), which highlighted limited success of the CBSA program, the present study demonstrates that active learning can be effectively implemented when supported by teacher commitment, student motivation, and adequate learning resources. These findings suggest that implementation success depends not solely on the instructional model itself but also on contextual conditions within the school environment.

A major contribution of this study is the development of an empirically grounded active learning model consisting of four interconnected components: experience, interaction, communication, and reflection. The findings indicate that meaningful learning emerges through a cyclical process in which each component reinforces the others, ultimately contributing to students' cognitive, social, and moral development.

Furthermore, this study highlights the compatibility between active learning principles and Islamic educational values. Discussion activities reflect the principle of shura (consultation), collaborative learning embodies ta'awun (mutual cooperation), problem solving encourages ijihad (independent reasoning), and reflective activities promote tadabbur and tafakkur (reflection and contemplation). These findings demonstrate that active learning is not merely a contemporary pedagogical innovation but also aligns with foundational principles of Islamic education.

The study, therefore, contributes to the broader discourse on tarbiyah by providing evidence that active learning can simultaneously foster knowledge acquisition, character formation, and spiritual development. This is particularly relevant for educational systems seeking to modernize Islamic education while preserving its religious and moral foundations.

The findings have important implications for educational practice. Teachers should be encouraged to adopt diverse active learning methods that promote participation, collaboration, and reflection. Professional development programs should strengthen teachers' competencies in facilitating active learning and managing diverse classroom needs. School administrators should also ensure adequate learning resources and supportive learning environments that facilitate student-centered instruction.

At the curriculum level, the results support policies that emphasize active and meaningful learning within PAI. By engaging students in authentic learning experiences, active learning strategies can foster critical thinking, communication skills, self-confidence, and Islamic character values.

This study has several limitations. First, it was conducted in a single school, limiting the transferability of findings to other educational contexts. Second, the qualitative design provides rich contextual understanding but does not allow quantitative measurement of learning outcomes or character development. Third, the study identified several barriers, including low student confidence and differences in learning abilities, but did not evaluate interventions to address these challenges. Finally, the research did not examine the long-term sustainability of active learning outcomes beyond the classroom setting.

Future studies should employ mixed-methods or quasi-experimental designs to evaluate the effectiveness of active learning strategies quantitatively. Research involving multiple schools and educational levels would improve the generalizability of findings. Longitudinal studies are also needed to investigate the sustained impact of active learning on students' character development and religious practice.

## CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that the implementation of active learning strategies has been generally effective in promoting student engagement and learning independence. Students actively participated in classroom activities through questioning, discussion, problem-solving, and independent information seeking, indicating a shift from teacher-centered to student-centered learning. The use of diverse instructional methods, including discussion, problem solving, jigsaw, and demonstration, further enhanced learning effectiveness. Nevertheless, several challenges were identified, particularly students' low self-confidence and differences in learning abilities, which affected participation levels.

The findings reinforce the relevance of constructivist learning theory, underscoring that meaningful learning occurs when students actively engage in knowledge construction. In the context of Islamic Religious Education, active learning not only facilitates cognitive development but also supports the internalization of Islamic values through interaction, collaboration, and reflection. These findings highlight the importance of teachers' roles as facilitators who create adaptive, participatory, and learner-centered learning environments.

This study contributes to the literature by providing empirical evidence on the implementation of active learning strategies in Islamic Religious Education at the secondary school level. Furthermore, it identifies both supporting factors, such as student learning interest, teacher professionalism, and adequate facilities, and inhibiting factors, including limited self-confidence and heterogeneous student abilities, that influence the success of active learning implementation. The proposed model of experience, interaction, communication, and reflection also offers a contextual framework for understanding how active learning promotes meaningful learning within PAI classrooms.

The study is limited by its focus on a single school and its qualitative design, which restricts the generalizability of the findings. Future research should employ mixed-methods or experimental approaches to examine the effectiveness of active learning strategies across diverse educational contexts. Further studies may also explore the integration of digital technologies into active learning models and investigate their impact on student learning outcomes, character development, and the internalization of religious values across different educational levels and sociocultural settings.

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