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Strategic Program Innovation to Optimize
Islamic Religious Education in Schools

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ABSTRACT

Islamic Religious Education (PAI) in schools has an important role in shaping the character and spirituality of students. However, the challenges of the digital era and social dynamics demand strategic program innovations to optimize PAI learning. This article discusses various innovations that can be applied, such as the integration of technology in learning, the development of a relevant curriculum, the improvement of teacher competence, and the application of active learning methods. By adopting these strategies, PAI is expected to be more effective in forming a generation that is faithful, noble, and able to face the challenges of the times.

ABSTRAK

Pendidikan Agama Islam (PAI) di sekolah memiliki peran penting dalam membentuk karakter dan spiritualitas peserta didik. Namun, tantangan era digital dan dinamika sosial menuntut adanya inovasi program strategis untuk mengoptimalkan pembelajaran PAI. Artikel ini membahas berbagai inovasi yang dapat diterapkan, seperti integrasi teknologi dalam pembelajaran, pengembangan kurikulum yang relevan, peningkatan kompetensi guru, dan penerapan metode pembelajaran aktif. Dengan mengadopsi strategi-strategi tersebut, diharapkan PAI dapat lebih efektif dalam membentuk generasi yang beriman, berakhlak mulia, dan mampu menghadapi tantangan zaman.

PRELIMINARY

Islamic Religious Education (PAI) in schools plays a vital role in shaping the character and spirituality of students. However, along with the rapid development of technology and socio-cultural changes, traditional learning methods in PAI face significant challenges. The digital era demands innovation in educational approaches to ensure that Islamic values can be conveyed effectively and relevantly to the context of the times.

Innovation in Islamic Religious Education learning is an urgent need to improve the quality of religious education in schools. Innovative learning models, such as project-based learning, cooperative learning, and the use of information technology, have proven effective in achieving Islamic Religious Education learning goals. However, its effectiveness is influenced by several factors, including teacher skills and readiness, availability of resources, and support from schools and parents (Rahmawati et al., 2024).

In addition, an integrated thematic approach in Islamic Religious Education learning planning in elementary schools can improve the effectiveness of learning and students' understanding of the teaching material. This approach allows the integration of Islamic values with various disciplines, so that learning becomes more contextual and meaningful (Nafisyah et al., 2022).

However, in its implementation, there are challenges that need to be overcome, such as limited teacher skills in implementing innovative learning models, availability of adequate resources, and support from schools and parents. Therefore, collective efforts are needed to ensure that teachers have adequate

skills and readiness, as well as the availability of resources that support the implementation of innovative learning models (Rahmawati et al., 2024). Thus, innovation in strategic Islamic Religious Education programs in schools is essential to ensure that Islamic religious education can adapt to the development of the times, while maintaining the essence and fundamental values that we want to convey to students.

METHOD

This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach complemented by a literature study method to explore and analyze strategic program innovations in optimizing Islamic Religious Education (PAI) in schools. This method was chosen because it allows researchers to understand the phenomenon in depth based on empirical data, documents, and relevant literature. A qualitative approach is used to thoroughly understand how various innovation strategies are applied in PAI learning. This study focuses on descriptive data exploration, obtained through literature analysis and empirical data collection. Literature study is one of the main methods in this study. Researchers collect various written sources, such as scientific journals, books, research reports, and relevant education policy documents.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

In this study, we found several results regarding strategies that can optimize Islamic Religious Education learning in schools.

Technology Integration in Islamic Religious Education Learning

Integration of technology in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning is one of the strategic steps in facing the changing times and challenges of globalization. In this digital era, technology has changed many aspects of life, including education. The use of technology is not only limited to general knowledge, but also extends to the field of religious education. In this context, PAI as one of the important elements in education in Indonesia also adapts to technological developments, so that it is more relevant and easily accessible to students at various levels. The use of technology in PAI learning aims to facilitate the process of delivering material and enrich teaching methods.

Technology offers a variety of digital applications and platforms that can help teachers deliver religious material in a more interesting and interactive way. Through this integration, learning is no longer limited to textbooks or conventional methods such as lectures, but can be done through learning videos, educational applications, and virtual simulations that can strengthen students' understanding. In Islamic Religious Education learning, technology also allows students to access religious information from various sources quickly and accurately. The internet, for example, is a warehouse of information that can be used by students to search for references or deepen religious material independently. This greatly helps students to be more active in the learning process because they do not only rely on teacher explanations in class but can also explore various perspectives and understandings of religion through valid digital sources.

On the other hand, the integration of technology in Islamic Religious Education learning not only facilitates access to information, but also opens space for more dynamic collaboration and interaction between teachers and students. Online learning platforms, such as Google Classroom or Moodle, for example, allow students and teachers to communicate in real-time, share materials, and hold online discussions on religious topics. This will certainly increase student participation in learning because they can interact and exchange ideas more flexibly. The use of information technology in Islamic Religious Education learning can increase the interactivity and accessibility of teaching materials. The use of digital platforms, mobile applications, and multimedia content allows for the delivery of more interesting materials and in accordance with the needs of the digital generation. The Ministry of Religion encourages the digitalization and optimization of media for Islamic education to improve the quality of learning.

Integration of technology in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning is one of the strategic steps in facing the changing times and challenges of globalization. In this digital era, technology has changed many aspects of life, including education. The use of technology is not only limited to general knowledge, but also extends to the field of religious education (Nasution, 2024). Using game-based learning applications, simulations, and collaborative platforms, students can develop a deeper understanding of religious teachings and apply them in the context of everyday life. Thus, the integration of technology in Islamic Religious Education learning is very good.

The integration of technology in Islamic Religious Education learning also provides opportunities for students to learn independently and in groups. By using available digital resources, students can

explore various religious topics in more depth and explore complex concepts better. In addition, collaboration between students through online platforms allows them to share ideas, solve problems together, and discuss various aspects of religious teachings, all of which are important components in a constructive learning process.

Relevant Curriculum Development

Curriculum development is based on the concept of curriculum development, where all dimensions of the curriculum, namely ideas, design, implementation, and evaluation of the curriculum are planned in one unit. According to Law Number 20 of 2003 concerning the National Education System, the curriculum is a set of plans and arrangements regarding objectives, content, and learning materials and methods used as guidelines for organizing learning activities to achieve certain educational goals. Based on this understanding, there are three dimensions of the curriculum, (1) Plans and arrangements regarding objectives, content, and learning materials, (2) Methods used for learning activities, and (3) Measures of educational achievement. The curriculum in the learning process is a guide and guide for teachers and every teacher has an obligation to understand and master the curriculum and develop it because the curriculum is the most important system in the context of education. So that teachers can choose and determine the direction and objectives of learning, learning methods, learning techniques, learning media, and learning evaluation tools that are in accordance with the material that will be used for teaching and learning.

The Islamic Religious Education curriculum needs to be developed to suit the current context without neglecting the essence of Islamic teachings. Innovation in curriculum development can be done by including relevant contemporary issues, such as digital ethics, tolerance, and the environment. Madrasah teachers must be able to innovate the development of the Islamic Religious Education curriculum to answer the challenges and needs of students in the development of the millennial era. The development of the Islamic Religious Education curriculum must be carried out by all elements of the madrasah education unit every school year. This is because of the efforts to ensure internal and external quality, especially the relevance when the Madrasah Self-Evaluation (EDM) when accreditation by BAN-S/M will be carried out, as well as the development of input on the complexity of materials, students and the carrying capacity of the madrasah every year. This is important as part of the implementation of the total quality and service management of madrasah education.

Curriculum changes and improvements are important along with the continuity of all possibilities that occur related to the development of society, science, technology and arts and culture at the local, national, regional, and global levels in the future. On that basis, conceptual and contextual designs for curriculum improvements are a necessity that must be prepared carefully according to needs. Teachers in the millennial era face very complex challenges, including; (a) digital literacy, (b) lifelong learners, (c) presenting enjoyable and meaningful learning, and (d) must be role models (Nurlaeli, 2020).

Improving the Competence of Islamic Education Teachers

Teachers are people who play a direct role in the teaching and learning process. This strategic position and role require special competence, so that teachers are truly able to demonstrate their optimal professional abilities. A professional teacher is a teacher who has a set of competencies, both concerning knowledge, skills, and behavior that must be possessed, internalized, and mastered by teachers in carrying out their professional duties (Noor & Wathoni, 2020).

Islamic Religious Education teachers must have adequate competence in teaching and guiding students. Competence improvement can be done through continuous training, workshops, and comparative studies. Teachers in Indonesia are required to have a strong knowledge base as an embodiment of technology and science. Learning media is anything in physical form that is used to communicate learning materials to students so that the learning process can take place effectively, efficiently, and enjoyably.

Through learning media, it will be easier for students to receive and understand the subject matter. The role of supervisors in supervising the use of media, aids and learning resources in schools is to provide learning to teachers who lack the ability to use learning media. Learning media is anything in physical form that is used to communicate learning materials to students so that the learning process can

take place effectively, efficiently, and enjoyably. Through learning media, it will be easier for students to receive and understand the subject matter.

Implementation of Active Learning Methods

Games in learning are very much liked by all students, games are usually done by moving from one position to another, or with direction from the teacher only. When playing games, students seem to pay close attention to the directions given by the teacher, and it is true that students also like learning with games. Games are something that can be played with exclusive rules so that there are winners and losers, generally in a non-serious context with the aim of refreshing.

A child has a very active character, such as imagining, likes to move, getting to know their environment and always being curious about everything they find. Playing activities are activities that children like, they can express their character. This activity can be done anytime, at school or anywhere with parents, society, friends. Playing activities are activities that are done by themselves without coercion, this game is always played by children. They do play activities because of their own desires for their own pleasure. Playing is a fun activity, takes time, and is always done by children. Therefore, playing activities cannot be separated from children, and the world of children is the world of play (Kusuma & Inayati, 2023).

Discussion method is a teaching method in which the teacher gives a problem to the students, and the students are given the opportunity to solve the problem together with their friends. Discussion method is a learning method that confronts students in a battle. This discussion method can encourage students to think systematically by confronting them with problems to be solved. In addition, students are actively involved in the teaching and learning process using discussions, students can exchange information, receive issues, and can also defend their opinions to solve the problem.

Active learning methods, such as group discussions, simulations, and role-playing, can increase student participation and understanding in Islamic Religious Education. This approach encourages students to think critically and apply Islamic values in everyday life. Innovation in Islamic Religious Education learning is an important need to create meaningful and effective learning experiences along with the development of the times (Syafa & Mukhrij Sidqy, 2024).

Optimizing Learning Methods to Increase Spiritual Intelligence

The right learning method can improve students' spiritual intelligence. Optimization of PAI learning methods in improving students' spiritual intelligence has been studied and shown positive results (Intan, 2020).

To create a superior generation with a good personality, a quality learning process is needed. If a child is only equipped with intellectual intelligence, then a mindset and perspective will be formed that will produce educated people with intelligent brains, but behavior, attitudes and lifestyles that are very contrasting with their intellectual abilities. Therefore, efforts to form personality by fostering Spiritual Intelligence in students is a path that must be implemented by every element of education (Rofi & Anggraini, 2024).

The inhibiting and supporting factors found in this study include internal and external aspects that influence the success of Islamic Religious Education teachers in improving students' spiritual intelligence.

1. Inhibiting Factors

Internal: Lack of self-awareness and spiritual discipline among students is a major obstacle. Many students are still unable to talk about their personal problems or feel insensitive to their own feelings and those of others.

External: An unsupportive social environment, social pressure, and technological distractions are also challenges for Islamic Religious Education teachers in teaching and strengthening students' spiritual intelligence.

2. Supporting Factors

Internal: Strong motivation, willingness to learn from mistakes, and open-mindedness in students are important supporting factors. Active involvement in spiritual activities at school also has a positive impact on students' spiritual development.

External: A supportive school environment, quality religious education programs, and support from teachers and parents are external factors that are very helpful in increasing students' spiritual intelligence (Intan, 2020).

Development of Religious Culture in Schools

Religious culture in schools is a culture that is created from the habituation of a religious atmosphere that lasts a long time and continuously until awareness arises from all members of the educational institution to carry out religious values. The initial foundation of religious culture is the existence of religiosity or religiousness. The religiousness referred to here is practicing religion in its entirety. By practicing religion in its entirety, a person must have internalized religious values (Rahmayanti & Arif, 2021).

Creating a religious culture in the school environment can support Islamic Religious Education learning. Developing a religious culture through religious activities and the habituation of Islamic values in schools can optimize Islamic religious education. Student religious development activities aim for students to be able to have religious abilities and Islamic insight and good faith. Thus, local religious content activities have a special purpose, namely, supporting the success of other activities such as Islamic Religious Education lessons (Ilmuna & Anwar, 2022).

Religious culture consists of long-standing customs and beliefs, with every member of society understanding religious values. Cognitive, affective, and psychomotor form cultural and religious education. In other words, religious education not only prohibits religion, but more importantly prohibits children from obeying, worshiping, and behaving according to religious standards in their lives. Diversity or religiosity can appear in various aspects of human life. This includes performing rituals (worship) and performing other actions that are driven by supernatural powers.

Some reasons why Islamic religious education should become a school culture are as follows:

- a) Parents have the right to choose which school is most suitable for their children with a longer time, so that better schools are sought, and worse schools are left. This happens in almost all cities in Indonesia. Parents in various cities choose schools with high quality and more religious to avoid the negative effects of the globalization era.
- b) Values, norms of behavior, beliefs, and culture are important for the implementation of education in schools, both public and private. In addition, Islamic foundations run the schools.
- c) Today, many people consider academic achievement as observable, measurable, and recognized qualities, such as UNAS scores and school facilities. If there are additional components, such as software, values, beliefs, culture, and behavioral standards, that shape human organizations. In fact, it affects more individual and organizational (school) performance, which generates profits.
- d) School culture greatly influences performance. The main factor that determines the success or failure of a school is its culture (Cahyani et al., 2023).

Integrated Thematic Approach in Islamic Religious Education Learning Planning

Learning is an activity that has educational value. In the learning process, educational values occur that color the interaction between teachers and students which are directed to achieve certain goals that have been formulated before learning is carried out. Thus, learning occurs well if the interaction between educators and students has educational value. In implementing the 2013 curriculum, the government designs how the learning process can run using integrative themes (Mahfudz, 2023).

Thematic learning is integrated learning that involves several lessons (even across subject groups) that are tied into certain themes. This learning involves several basic competencies, learning outcomes, and indicators of a subject, or even several subjects. Furthermore, it is necessary to understand that thematic learning is integrated learning that emphasizes student involvement in learning. Students are actively involved in the learning process and empowerment in solving problems, so that this fosters creativity according to their potential and tendencies that differ from one another. Basically, the term thematic is the same as integrative which means integrated, so thematic-integrative learning is often referred to as integrated learning or integrated teaching and learning. An integrated thematic approach in planning Islamic Religious Education learning in elementary schools can improve the effectiveness of learning and students' understanding of teaching materials (Hakim et al., 2024).

Integrative thematic learning as a learning approach that integrates various competencies from various subjects into a particular theme. Usually in its implementation it can be combined with a scientific approach, with the intention of providing students with an understanding in terms of recognizing, then understanding various materials to obtain information. Teachers as the subject of the implementation of integrative thematic learning, its implementation runs well, if the curriculum used is also good, but sometimes the curriculum is good but in its implementation the teacher is not optimal, then the results are also not optimal. Conversely, if the curriculum used is simple, but in its implementation the teacher is optimal, then the learning process will be created well. Thus, the teacher's ability to deliver material in the learning process is an important factor in the implementation of integrative thematic learning today, so teachers must be able to quickly adapt to the existing curriculum and a good approach in the learning process so that its objectives can run smoothly and in accordance with the objectives that have been formulated.

CONCLUSION

Based on the description above, it can be concluded that strategic program innovation in Islamic Religious Education in schools is very necessary to face the challenges of the digital era and social dynamics. Technology integration, relevant curriculum development, improving teacher competence, implementing active learning methods, and developing religious culture in schools are some strategies that can be implemented. Thus, Islamic Religious Education can be more optimal in shaping the character and spirituality of students according to the demands of the times.

Based on the discussion, strategic program innovation in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) in schools is an urgent need to answer the challenges of the digital era, social development, and changes in the needs of 21st-century students. PAI, as an important instrument in shaping students' religious and moral personalities, requires a relevant, adaptive, and innovative approach. From the results of the analysis, there are several main conclusions that can be drawn: first, the PAI curriculum must be designed adaptively, integrating Islamic values with 21st-century skills such as critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, and digital literacy. An innovative curriculum is able to bridge the gap between the demands of traditional learning and modern needs.

Second, project-based learning methods, interactive discussions, and technological approaches have been proven to increase students' interest and understanding of PAI materials. Learning that actively involves students can also instill Islamic values in a more applicable context. Third, the use of digital media, such as online learning platforms, educational applications, and social media that are managed in an Islamic manner, can increase the accessibility and flexibility of learning. Technology helps students learn anytime and anywhere with interactive and interesting materials. Character education based on religious values must be an integral part of Islamic Religious Education learning. Programs such as religious activities in schools, the habituation of Islamic values, and character strengthening through contextual learning are important strategies to create a generation with noble character.

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