

Original Article

Islamic Cultural History Learning Problems in Class VII MTSN 1 Bengkalis: Analysis of Students' Difficulties in Understanding The Material and Their Solutions

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Abstract

The urgency of this research lies in the importance of learning Islamic Cultural History (ISH), which not only conveys historical information but is also rich in Islamic values that can shape students' character, morality, and religious insight. This study aims to analyze the problems faced by seventh-grade students of MTsN 1 Bengkalis in learning Islamic Cultural History (ISH), particularly in the aspect of understanding the material. This study uses a qualitative approach with a phenomenological design to explore the subjective experiences of teachers and students during the learning process. The study population included 32 ISH students and 3 ISH teachers, with a purposive sampling technique to select participants based on their direct experiences in ISH learning. Data collection instruments consisted of semi-structured interviews, participant observation, and documentation. Data were analyzed thematically by identifying key themes such as difficulties in understanding historical figures, obstacles in memorizing chronology, and limitations of visual media. The results showed that students' difficulties were caused by low reading interest, monotonous teaching methods, limited learning media, and time constraints. In addition, students' emotional and cognitive factors also influenced their understanding of historical material. Data validation was conducted through triangulation of sources and techniques, as well as member checking to ensure the validity of the results. As a solution, the implementation of varied learning methods such as storytelling, group discussions, and the use of technology-based interactive media is recommended to increase student engagement and understanding. These findings are expected to be contribution to improving SKI learning strategies to be more effective, contextual, and enjoyable in madrasahs.

Keywords: Learning Problems, History of Islamic Culture, Analysis of Student Difficulties, Qualitative

Introduction

The teaching of Islamic Cultural History (ISCR) in Islamic Junior High Schools (MTs) is highly crucial for shaping the character and historical awareness of Muslim students (Fadillah et al., 2024). This subject not only conveys a series of historical events but also serves as a means of developing Islamic identity, exemplary behavior, and a broad and profound understanding of Islamic civilization. By understanding Islamic history,



students can foster a sense of pride in the intellectual and cultural heritage of Islam, which has played a significant role in the development of world civilization (Samsudin et al., 2018).

At MTsN 1 Bengkalis, like many other madrasas, Islamic Religious Education (ISK) is a crucial component of the Islamic Religious Education curriculum. However, the implementation of ISK learning still faces various challenges, both in terms of methods, materials, and student readiness. One of the main challenges is students' poor understanding of historical chronology and their lack of understanding of the relevance of past history to their lives today. Many students struggle to grasp the flow of historical events because learning is more oriented towards memorization than towards contextual narrative understanding (Samsudin et al., 2018). Teachers still tend to use monotonous lecture methods, lacking interactive spaces that allow students to think critically and actively discuss. This learning model does not adequately facilitate the process of internalizing values, moral reflection, or strengthening students' cultural identity (Al Anshory, 2020). In fact, history education should be able to provide cross-time insights that connect past events with current conditions and future challenges.

One factor exacerbating this situation is the use of teaching materials that lack contextualization and focus on grand narratives of civilization without connecting them to students' local cultures. As researchers have argued, Islamic history learning must be able to ground universal Islamic values in the real lives of students living in unique local environments (Nur et al., 2020). When students are unable to connect historical figures to their social realities, the learning material becomes meaningless and irrelevant. Difficulties in understanding also arise because classical terms such as caliphate, daulah, or futuhat are not explained contextually. These terms are often considered foreign and confusing to students because they are rarely used in their daily lives. When the language of history becomes too high-skilled or elitist, students tend to feel alienated from the material and ultimately lose interest in learning (Rochmawati, 2023).

Furthermore, many teachers face time constraints in delivering material. A dense curriculum forces teachers to rush through all basic competencies without the opportunity to delve deeply into a single topic (Nurhayati et al., 2024). As a result, students are not given enough time to explore, ask questions, or reflect on the learning content. Research shows that visual and narrative approaches are very helpful in increasing students' absorption of historical material (Mustofa et al., 2023). For example, the use of infographics, time maps, and visual timelines has proven effective in helping students understand the sequence of historical events. In fact, role-playing strategies or historical dramas can be powerful pedagogical tools for instilling an understanding of the values and meaning of Islamic history.

Students' emotional engagement is key to success in SKI learning (Mustofa et al., 2023). When students feel emotionally connected to the stories of figures like Umar bin al-Khattab or Khalid bin Walid, they will more easily grasp the moral messages and exemplary values contained in the historical narratives. However, the dominance of rote learning remains a major obstacle in learning practices. Students are only required to remember names, dates, and places, without being challenged to think analytically about the meaning of these events. Researchers emphasize the importance of learning that builds conceptual understanding and encourages critical thinking (Yolanda, 2024). History education should teach students to analyze cause and effect, assess impact, and draw lessons from history to apply in the context of contemporary life.

To address these challenges, a transformation of Islamic Education (IS) learning methods is necessary. Research at MTsN 5 Bengkalis aimed to deeply analyze the obstacles faced by students in understanding Islamic Education (Mutiara et al., 2016). This study concluded that efforts to update learning methods are essential, ranging from more communicative teaching strategies, the use of digital media, to contextual, project-based learning approaches. Digital media such as animated historical videos, augmented reality Islamic history, or interactive quiz platforms can arouse students' interest and bridge their understanding of complex historical material (Hajri, 2023). The digital generation, growing up with technology, requires learning media that are visual, interactive, and easily accessible (Al, et al., 2020). Digital-based history learning not only enriches the learning experience but also facilitates the integration of historical values into students' current realities. Adopting a storytelling strategy also has great potential. In this approach, teachers deliver material in a narrative style that arouses students' curiosity and emotions. This method empirically improves students' memory and appreciation of historical events. Other techniques such as role playing, guided discussions, and mind mapping can also improve students' analytical skills and creativity in understanding history.

Theoretically, this study contributes to the literature on Islamic education, particularly in the field of historical pedagogy. Such research demonstrates that the challenges of teaching Islamic history must be addressed through innovation, not simply through simplification (Hendrik Dewantara, 2024). Teachers, as agents of change in the classroom, must be equipped with pedagogical training that is responsive to the dynamics of the times and student character. This research also highlights the importance of developing a more flexible, thematic, and character-building Islamic education curriculum. A curriculum that integrates local contexts, contemporary issues, and values-based learning will provide students with a closer connection to their history, not only as a lesson from the past but also as inspiration for the future (Nasution, 2025).

The recommendations from this study are crucial for Islamic Education (IS) teachers, particularly at MTsN 1 Bengkalis. Teachers are advised to develop experiential learning strategies that involve observation, simulation, and reflection. Learning that is connected to students' daily lives will be more meaningful and foster higher-order thinking skills such as analysis, evaluation, and synthesis. With contextual learning, students will be better able to internalize Islamic values embedded in history. Researchers can emulate figures such as the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), Abu Bakr, Ali ibn Abi Talib, and others, not only from a biographical perspective but also from a moral and leadership perspective. This is where Islamic Education (IS) plays a crucial role as a vehicle for developing the true character of Muslim students.

This research offers significant innovations in the teaching methods of Islamic Cultural History (ISHC) by developing digital-based learning strategies and narrative approaches. These innovations include the use of various media such as animated historical videos, interactive infographics, storytelling based on the stories of Islamic figures, and role-playing simulations that can bring historical events to life in a more lively and participatory classroom environment. By utilizing technology and engaging visual approaches, learning is no longer one-way, but encourages students to be more active, critical, and reflective in understanding the values of Islamic history.

Literature Review

Learning Islamic Cultural History (ISH) plays a crucial role in instilling an understanding of history and Islamic values in students. Several previous studies have highlighted student difficulties in learning history, such as low interest in learning, limited learning resources, and conventional or lecture-based teaching approaches, which make it difficult for students to grasp the material in depth (Hidayati, 2018; Syafri, 2019). These studies also indicate that some teachers are still not optimizing interactive methods, innovative learning media, and differentiation strategies that are appropriate to students' abilities, resulting in less than optimal understanding of ISH material.

Unlike previous studies, this study specifically focuses on the analysis of SKI learning problems at MTSN 1 Bengkalis, focusing on the difficulties experienced by seventh-grade students in understanding the material, both from the cognitive, affective, and psychomotor aspects. Furthermore, this study not only describes the problem but also analyzes the implemented solutions, ranging from adaptive learning strategies, the use of interactive media, to strengthening discussion and reflection activities. This approach offers a new contribution, as previous literature tends to only highlight learning difficulties in general without exploring practical steps to overcome these problems.

The study results indicate that the challenges in SKI learning do not solely stem from student abilities, but are also influenced by teaching methods, material presentation, and limited supporting facilities. Thus, this study provides a comprehensive perspective on integrating appropriate learning strategies to reduce student difficulties, while simultaneously closing the gap in previous studies that emphasized problem descriptions without concrete solutions. This emphasizes the need for innovation in learning methods, media, and evaluation in SKI so that students can understand the material more effectively and gain meaningful learning experiences.

Method

This study employed a qualitative method with a phenomenological design focused on exploring the subjective experiences of teachers and students during the Islamic Education (IS) learning process in grade VII of MTsN 1 Bengkalis (Hadi, 2021). This approach was chosen based on its ability to help researchers understand the realities experienced directly by participants, particularly regarding students' difficulties in understanding Islamic historical narratives and teachers' efforts to address these issues. Islamic Education (IS) learning, which demands an understanding of historical context, figures, and past civilizations, cannot be sufficiently analyzed through quantitative data alone; it needs to be understood from the perspective of students' experiences and perceptions, as well as the teaching strategies implemented by the teachers. Furthermore, through a phenomenological approach, researchers can identify the emotional and cognitive dimensions that accompany students' learning process when interacting with Islamic history material.

The population in this study was 32 seventh-grade students and 3 Islamic Studies (IS) teachers at MTsN 1 Bengkalis. The sampling technique used purposive sampling, which involves selecting informants based on specific objectives, namely those deemed to understand the problem and have direct experience in Islamic Studies (IS) learning (Lenaini, 2021). Researchers selected students deemed to represent various levels of understanding, including high, medium, and low levels, to obtain a comprehensive picture of the dynamics of classroom learning (Adi et al., 2025).

Meanwhile, teachers were selected because of their direct involvement in the teaching process and the development of Islamic history learning strategies. Purposive sampling is highly relevant in phenomenological research because it allows researchers to obtain rich and meaningful data from relevant subjects (Nurhayati et al., 2024).

Data collection was carried out using semi-open interview techniques and participatory observation to obtain in-depth information, in order to get a comprehensive picture of the difficulties and strategies in learning SKI (Nashrullah et al, 2023). Semi-structured interviews were conducted by asking students and teachers open-ended questions, allowing researchers to explore more deeply their perceptions of the difficulty of understanding historical events, such as the time of Khulafaur Rasyidin, the Umayyad Dynasty, or the progress of Islamic civilization in Andalusia. This interview was also used to explore teachers' experiences in delivering material and the challenges they faced in creating meaningful learning (Melvarisa et al, 2023). In addition, observations were carried out directly in the classroom to see teacher-student interactions, the methods used, and students' responses to the history material being taught (Sari et al., 2021).

Data analysis was conducted using thematic analysis techniques, where interview and observation data were categorized into recurring themes, such as: difficulties understanding historical figures, obstacles in memorizing chronology, and students' interest in historical visual media. The data obtained were then tested for validity using source and technique triangulation methods, namely by comparing interview and observation data, and member checking, namely reconfirming with participants to ensure that the data interpretation results are in accordance with their experiences. The validity of the results of this study is very important so that the data obtained truly reflect the actual conditions of Islamic history learning in the field (Nurohmah et al., 2025). With the application of triangulation and validation, the reliability of the findings of this study is expected to be able to provide a strong contribution to improving Islamic history learning strategies in madrasas (Nurfajriani et al., 2024). The following is a framework for thinking in this study:

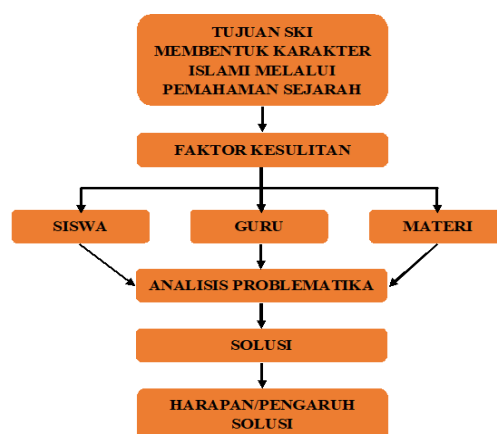


Figure 1. Thinking Framework

Results

The Islamic Cultural History (IS) lesson in grade VII of MTsN 1 Bengkalis, which refers to the Independent Curriculum, contains various important materials related to the history of Islam, the influence of Islamic culture in various regions,

and the contributions of Islamic figures in shaping world civilization. During the lesson, several materials became the main focus and also caused difficulties for students, namely the history of the life of the Prophet Muhammad, the process of the spread of Islam in the archipelago, and the role of ulama in the development of Islamic civilization. Other materials such as Islamic culture and Islamic historical heritage tended to be easier for students to understand, as evidenced by better grades and responses to these materials. This study, involving 32 grade VII students, was conducted through one week of classroom observations, which aimed to identify challenges in the IS learning process. Initial observations showed that learning was still dominated by teacher lecture methods with the use of learning media limited to simple images and videos from teachers' personal devices. This less varied and less interactive learning media made learning less interesting and reduced students' ability to understand abstract and historical material.

The results of a questionnaire given to students indicated that 46.88% of students had difficulty understanding the material on the life history of the Prophet Muhammad, 31.25% had difficulty with the material on the spread of Islam in the archipelago, and 21.87% with the material on the role of ulama. These difficulties arose due to several factors, including the lack of learning media capable of visually and contextually depicting historical events, teaching methods that did not actively involve students, and limited supporting resources such as textbooks and suboptimal internet access. The following table presents material that was considered difficult by students:

Table 1. Results of the Questionnaire on Student Difficulties in Learning SKI

No	Difficult Material to Understand	Percentage of Students	Factors Causing Difficulties
1	History of the life of the Prophet Muhammad	46.88%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of visual and contextual learning media • Less active teaching methods
2	The Spread of Islam in the Archipelago	31.25%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of visual and contextual learning media • Limited supporting facilities
3	The role of scholars in Islamic history	21.87%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited textbooks and internet access • Teaching methods do not involve students enough

The table above presents the results of a questionnaire administered to students to identify their level of difficulty in understanding various materials taught in the Islamic Cultural History (ISCR) course. The results indicate that there are three main materials that pose obstacles to students' understanding, with varying levels of difficulty. The material most frequently encountered was the life of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), which reached 46.88% of respondents. This high figure indicates that students experience difficulty in understanding the chronology and important events in the Prophet's life, which are essentially the main foundation of ISCR learning. This is strongly suspected to be related to the lack of learning media capable of presenting the material visually, such as videos, animations, or contextual infographics. Furthermore, teaching methods that are still conventional and do not actively involve students in the learning process also exacerbate the level of perceived difficulty.

Furthermore, 31.25 % of students experienced difficulties with the material on the spread of Islam in the Indonesian archipelago. This material is supposed to provide a historical understanding of the arrival and development of Islam in Indonesia, including the role of Islamic kingdoms and prominent figures in its spread. However, these obstacles are often caused by limited learning resources that clearly and engagingly depict the socio-cultural conditions of the period. The lack of media supporting contextual learning makes this material feel abstract and difficult for some students to understand. The third material that also presented a challenge was the role of Islamic scholars in Islamic history, with a percentage of 21.87%. Although this percentage is lower than the previous two materials, this figure still indicates a problem with understanding that needs attention. The main contributing factors are limited access to comprehensive textbooks and suboptimal internet access, making it difficult for students to obtain additional information or in-depth references about the contributions of Islamic scholars to the development of Islam.

In general, the factors causing students' difficulties in understanding SKI material can be categorized into three main aspects, namely: (1) limited visual and contextual learning media, (2) teaching methods that are less interactive and do not adapt to students' learning styles, and (3) minimal learning support facilities, including representative textbooks and adequate access to technology. Therefore, these results recommend the importance of developing innovative learning media, using active learning methods such as discussions, simulations, or project-based approaches, and providing learning resources that can be easily accessed by students. Improving the quality and strategies of SKI learning is a strategic step to improve students' understanding of Islamic history in a comprehensive and meaningful way.

Further observations of the learning process show that students often experience difficulty connecting historical material to the realities of everyday life. Most students are unable to demonstrate a critical understanding of the relevance of Islamic historical values in a modern context and the challenges of contemporary life. This indicates a lack of a learning approach that integrates cognitive, affective, and conative aspects, making Islamic Islamic studies learning less meaningful for students. Furthermore, interviews with Islamic Islamic studies teachers revealed several significant obstacles, including limited learning support facilities such as a lack of reference books, inadequate technological devices, and limited internet access, which hinder the development of more varied and innovative learning materials. Teachers also stated that the dominance of lecture methods without variation leads to low student participation and boredom, especially during afternoon hours, which reduces student concentration.

To address these challenges, more innovative, technology-based learning strategies are needed. The use of interactive learning media such as digital maps, historical documentary videos, event simulations, and engaging online learning platforms can enhance students' understanding and interest in learning. Furthermore, project-based learning methods, group discussions, and contextual learning that connects SKI material to surrounding social and cultural situations can deepen students' understanding while developing critical and creative thinking skills. Teacher training in the use of educational technology and the development of contextual and relevant teaching materials are crucial for improving the quality of SKI learning. Furthermore, school support is needed to provide adequate facilities and infrastructure for optimal learning. With the implementation of these solutions, SKI learning at MTsN 1

Bengkalis is expected to be more engaging, meaningful, and effective in shaping students' character and historical knowledge in accordance with the demands of the Independent Curriculum and the needs of the times.

Discussion

Problems in SKI Learning for Class VII MTsN 1 Bengkalis from Teachers' Perceptions

Islamic Education (SKI) learning is an essential element in Islamic education, with the main goal of fostering historical understanding and awareness in students of the values of Islamic civilization, as well as the exemplary role of its figures. However, at MTsN 1 Bengkalis, the implementation of SKI learning for grade VII faces various problems, ranging from low student interest, less varied methods, to limited time and learning media. SKI material that is rich in figures, events, and developments in civilization requires students to have analytical skills and contextual understanding. However, in reality, most students tend to memorize names and dates of events without understanding the meaning behind them. This is in line with the view of Syaiful Bahri Djamarah, who stated that "students' learning difficulties are often caused by approaches that are not in accordance with the characteristics of the subject matter" (Syaiful Bahri Djamarah, 2008). History learning that emphasizes memorization will make it difficult for students to develop critical reasoning skills. In this context, the word of Allah SWT in QS. At-Taubah verse 122 serves as a reminder of the importance of deepening religious knowledge;

"...Why not leave some people from each group among them to deepen their knowledge of religion and to warn their people..." (QS. At-Taubah: 122). This verse demonstrates that seeking knowledge, including understanding Islamic history, is an obligation for some people so that it can serve as a reminder to others. In terms of methods, the dominance of lectures and written assignments leads to minimal active student participation. This is exacerbated by the lack of use of visual or digital media such as historical infographics, documentary videos, or interactive applications. However, according to Jean Piaget, in explaining his theory of cognitive development, adolescent students are already at the formal operational stage, capable of abstract and logical thinking. Therefore, it is crucial to provide an approach that hones reflective and analytical thinking skills (Rahmaniar et al., 2022). Regarding learning motivation, many students fail to see the urgency of studying Islamic history, especially if it is only treated as a supplementary subject (Mitra et al., 2020). This is where the role of teachers becomes crucial in instilling historical values that are applicable and relevant to real life. HAR Tilaar stated that education must create individuals who are aware of their history and national identity, and who are future-oriented.

This is reinforced by the verse of QS. Az-Zumar verse 9: "Say: 'Are those who know equal to those who do not know?'" (QS. Az-Zumar: 9). This verse motivates that seeking knowledge is a characteristic of people with intelligence and high status. In addition, limited learning time makes teachers unable to convey all the material thoroughly. This hinders in - depth understanding and instilling values. For this reason, emphasizing the importance of contextual teaching and learning (CTL), namely a learning approach that links material to real -life contexts so that it is easier to understand and meaningful for students (Hulaimi, 2019). Information technology support is also a key solution. QS. Al-Kahfi verse 109 implies the breadth of knowledge:

“If the sea were ink for (writing) the words of my Lord, the sea would be exhausted before (the words of my Lord) were exhausted...” (QS. Al-Kahfi: 109).

Problematizing the SKI Learning Process from Student Perception.

This shows that God's knowledge is so vast, and humans must continue to explore knowledge, including through technology-based learning. Finally, QS. Al-Mujadilah verse 11 provides spiritual motivation for students and teachers: "Allah will exalt those who believe among you and those who are given knowledge by degrees." (QS. Al-Mujadilah: 11). The challenges of SKI learning must be answered with innovative methods, teacher training, utilization of technology, and instilling spiritual values in the learning process so that students are not only intellectually intelligent, but also aware of the importance of history as a reflection of civilization and faith.

Interviews and observations of seventh- grade students at MTsN 1 Bengkalis revealed a number of problems in the Islamic Cultural History (SKI) learning process. The main problem was the monotonous and uninteresting learning method. The majority of students stated that learning was too dominated by one - way lectures without involving participatory activities such as group discussions, educational games, or the use of visual media, making students tend to feel bored and lose motivation in learning. As emphasized by learning, it will be effective if it can stimulate student activity and creativity through varied and enjoyable methods (Azizah et al., 2024). In Islam, good learning is one that can inspire and arouse the spirit of seeking knowledge (Mitra et al., 2021). Allah SWT says: "Allah will exalt those who believe among you and those who are given knowledge by degrees." (QS. Al-Mujādilah: 11). This verse shows that knowledge has a very high position in Islam, so the process of acquiring it must be designed with a quality and motivating approach. In addition to the method, students also stated that the Islamic Studies (IS) material was considered too complex and non-contextual (Fahmi, 2022). The material, which included numerous names of figures, historical events, Islamic dynasties, and foreign terms, made it difficult for them to understand and memorize. Learning is often textual in nature, lacking any reinforcement of meaning or values that can be applied to everyday life. According to Muhaimin, learning Islamic history should prioritize the interpretation of values and contextual relevance, not just memorizing dry facts detached from reality (Rusydi, 2021): The Qur'an emphasizes the importance of using reason in understanding knowledge: "Indeed, in this are signs (of Allah's greatness) for a people who give thought." (QS. Ar-Rūm: 24).

Deep understanding is prioritized over mere memorization. Therefore, an approach is needed that encourages students to think critically, analyze, and understand the essence of Islamic history. Another issue highlighted is the limited use of learning media. Teachers tend to rely solely on textbooks and whiteboards. Students hope that interactive media such as historical videos, animations of Islamic figures, infographics about dynasties, and online quizzes can be integrated into learning. According to Amin, learning media is an important tool in bridging educational communication between teachers and students. Digital media can increase information absorption, stimulate motivation, and broaden students' learning experiences (Amin, 2019). Furthermore, psychological barriers also contribute to students' difficulties. They feel pressured by having to memorize difficult-to-understand information and are reluctant to ask questions for fear of being judged unintelligent. An unfriendly learning environment also exacerbates this condition. In this context, learning should be directed towards an approach full of empathy and compassion. Allah

SWT says: "So it is by mercy from Allah that you are gentle with them. If you had been harsh and harsh-hearted, they would have withdrawn from around you." (QS. Āli 'Imrān: 159). This verse emphasizes the importance of gentleness and a compassionate approach in the communication and education process. Islamic education teachers are expected to be able to create a comfortable and motivating learning environment, so that students not only understand the material but also grow emotionally and spiritually.

Solutions from Teachers and Students

Learning Islamic Cultural History (IS) in grade VII of MTsN 1 Bengkalis faces challenges in terms of students' understanding of narrative, chronological material that is often considered monotonous. To overcome this, teachers need to implement a fun and participatory learning approach. Approaches such as group discussions, role - playing, and project-based learning enable students to be more active in constructing the meaning of learning. This is in accordance with Jerome Bruner's view, which emphasizes that learning will be more effective if students are actively involved in constructing their own knowledge (Pramana et al., 2024). In addition to methods, the use of digital media is a strategic solution in bridging the gap between abstract historical material and students' concrete understanding. According to Adi, learning media can increase students' absorption because it accommodates various learning styles, especially visual and auditory (Adi et al., 2025). Teachers can use historical documentary videos, interactive animations, or technology-based learning applications to arouse students' interest and focus. According to Dale in the Cone of Experience, students will remember material better if they see and hear it directly rather than just reading or hearing it (Hulaimi, 2019).

The preparation of the Lesson Implementation Plan (RPP) also needs to include the integration of Islamic character values into the Islamic Education (SKI) material. When discussing the story of the Prophet and his companions, for example, teachers can emphasize the values of honesty, trustworthiness, patience, and courage in the context of modern life. As stated by Kaharuddin, character education must be integrated into all subjects so that students are not only academically intelligent but also have strong morals (Kaharuddin et al., 2024). Teachers also need to accommodate the diversity of student learning styles through a multiple intelligences approach (Nur et al., 2020). Howard Gardner stated that every child has multiple intelligences such as linguistic, logical-mathematical, musical, spatial, kinesthetic, interpersonal, intrapersonal, and naturalistic. Therefore, teachers should design learning that facilitates this variety of potential so that all students can engage and develop according to their learning styles. Students' awareness of independent learning is the main solution in understanding Islamic Education (SKI) material. Students should conduct pre-learning, namely reading and understanding the material before the lesson begins. According to Gagne, learning will be more effective if students have a pre-existing cognitive structure that they can relate to new material. With this habit, students will more easily understand the lesson content and be able to actively ask questions during the learning process.

Developing a reading habit is also crucial. According to Ki Hadjar Dewantara, learning is not just about acquiring knowledge, but also fostering interest and a desire to seek knowledge independently (Mursak et al., 2024). Therefore, students are encouraged to not rely solely on textbooks but also to enrich their references with popular historical articles, Islamic documentaries, and trusted digital sources. An open and supportive learning environment is also a crucial factor in supporting

successful Islamic literacy learning (Fuad et al., 2023). Lev Vygotsky emphasized the importance of social interaction in the learning process, as it is through interactions with peers and teachers that students can develop within their zone of proximal development (ZPD). Therefore, teachers need to create a conducive, safe learning climate that supports active student participation (Panjaitan et al., 2025).

Furthermore, the role of parents in supporting students' learning process should not be overlooked (Mursak et al., 2024). Collaboration between teachers and parents can strengthen students' motivation to learn at home and at school. Joyce Epstein revealed that parental involvement in their children's education contributes significantly to students' academic achievement and social-emotional development. Finally, teachers need to conduct comprehensive evaluations, not only on cognitive aspects, but also affective and psychomotor aspects. Alternative evaluations such as portfolios, projects, and learning reflections can provide a comprehensive picture of student progress. Such assessments, according to Wiggins and McTighe, encourage authentic assessment that reflects students' true understanding of the material (Grant Wiggins & Jay McTighe, 2005). With these comprehensive strategies and solutions, it is hoped that the problems of Islamic Education (IS) learning in grade VII of MTsN 1 Bengkalis can be effectively addressed. Collaboration between teachers, students, and parents, along with the use of varied and innovative methods and media, will make IS learning more lively, relevant, and meaningful in shaping students' character and Islamic insight.

Alternative Learning Process

The teaching of Islamic Cultural History (ISH) in seventh grade at MTsN 1 Bengkalis faces significant challenges, particularly in terms of student understanding. ISH material, which encompasses historical facts, important figures, and cultural and moral values from the past, is often perceived as abstract and difficult for students to grasp. Observations and interviews with students and teachers revealed that many students struggle to understand the chronology of historical events, identify key figures, and absorb the meaning of the values of Islamic struggle and culture taught. This directly impacts student learning motivation and results in unsatisfactory evaluations.

One of the main factors causing this problem is the learning method, which is still dominated by conventional approaches such as lectures and reading assignments. This method is less able to accommodate various student learning styles, resulting in monotonous and boring material. In the context of SKI learning, which requires a contextual and applicable understanding of history, this one-way approach causes students to tend to memorize without truly understanding the essence of the material. This condition is exacerbated by the lack of interactive and creative learning media, so students are less interested in digging deeper. Given this reality, it is crucial for teachers to innovate in their SKI learning approaches.

An active learning approach can be a key solution for increasing student engagement and understanding. Through group discussions, interactive Q&A sessions, simulations, and presentations, students can learn more dynamically and exchange ideas. This approach also helps students develop critical and analytical thinking skills, which are essential for understanding history. Furthermore, implementing the Project - Based Learning (PjBL) model provides a more meaningful learning experience. Creative projects such as creating posters of

Islamic historical figures, documentary videos of important events, or historical dramas not only hone students' creative skills but also make the material more concrete and memorable. Project activities also provide space for students to express themselves and collaborate with their peers, thus developing their social and emotional aspects.

The application of technology in the SKI learning process is a crucial solution to addressing various emerging challenges. The use of media such as instructional videos, interactive infographics, and digital quiz platforms like Quizizz and Kahoot can present material in a more engaging and accessible way. These various digital media also support both independent and collaborative learning and adapt to various learning styles, both visual and kinesthetic. Therefore, technology acts as a bridge connecting SKI content to the real lives of students in the modern era.

Cooperative learning strategies are also highly relevant for implementation in the context of SKI. Methods such as jigsaw, think-pair-share, and group discussions facilitate collaborative learning, where students teach and discuss the material they have learned. This process not only deepens understanding but also builds social skills, such as communication, cooperation, and empathy. For example, the jigsaw method allows each student to become an "expert" in a specific area and then share their knowledge with other group members, thereby growing their confidence and responsibility.

The thematic-integrative approach is also an effective strategy for connecting Islamic studies material with other subjects or students' daily experiences. For example, discussions about Islamic civilization in Andalusia can be integrated with geography, art, or local culture lessons. Meanwhile, the leadership values of Islamic figures can be linked to character education and ethics. This kind of integration makes Islamic studies material more relevant, lively, and applicable to students' lives, so they learn history not only as abstract knowledge but also as a source of practical inspiration. Storytelling techniques are also very effective in addressing the challenges of understanding Islamic studies material. By presenting historical stories in an engaging and expressive narrative, teachers can bring them to life, making them feel real and touching students' emotions (Yolanda et al., 2024). A well-crafted story can leave a lasting impression and make it easier for students to remember historical facts. Furthermore, storytelling can connect students with the moral and spiritual values contained in Islamic history, making learning more meaningful.

Strengthening the affective and spiritual aspects of Islamic history learning is also a crucial and often overlooked key. Teachers need to instill the idea that learning Islamic history is not just about knowing facts, but also about emulating the attitudes and character of exemplary Islamic figures, such as honesty, steadfast faith, courage, and a love of knowledge (Baluwa et al., 2022). By emphasizing these values, Islamic history learning becomes a vehicle for developing students' holistic character, which is crucial for developing a young generation with noble morals. In addition to developing methods and media, learning evaluation must also be updated. Written-based evaluation alone is insufficient to measure students' comprehensive understanding. Teachers can use project-based assessments, portfolios, presentations, and self-reflection, which assess not only cognitive aspects but also students' attitudes and skills. Such evaluations provide a comprehensive picture of students' abilities and motivate them to learn actively and creatively.

Overall, the challenges faced by Islamic Studies (IS) learning in seventh-grade students at MTsN 1 Bengkalis, related to difficulties in understanding the material, can be addressed by combining various innovative approaches and contextual learning media. Teachers need to transform from mere presenters of material to learning facilitators who can inspire students to explore and deeply understand Islamic history. In this way, IS learning will not only produce students who understand history but also those who are able to draw lessons and values from it for their future lives.

Conclusion

Based on the analysis of the Islamic Cultural History (IS) learning process in grade VII of MTsN 1 Bengkalis, it was found that learning still faces several fundamental challenges that affect the effectiveness of student understanding. The main obstacle lies in the narrative and informative nature of the material, which requires chronological and reflective thinking skills, but is not fully facilitated by the applied learning methods. These results confirm that the research objective of identifying obstacles and analyzing pedagogical approaches in IS learning has been achieved. The dominant lecture method, minimal interaction, and limited learning media are the causes of low student engagement. Students tend to have difficulty connecting historical events to contemporary life, especially when evaluations emphasize memorization rather than critical understanding. This has implications for the suboptimal formation of students' character and historical awareness as expected from IS subject. This study suggests the need for the implementation of innovative learning models such as Project-Based Learning, Cooperative Learning, and Discovery Learning, which can activate students' roles in the learning process. In addition, the integration of educational technology such as videos, infographics, and interactive applications is essential to make learning more contextual and engaging for digital native students. This study's limitations lie in its limited scope, which was confined to one madrasah. Therefore, further research is recommended, encompassing schools with different characteristics, to obtain broader generalizations and to evaluate the effectiveness of technology-based learning models in the context of SKI learning in greater depth.

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