

Islamic Religious Education Learning Strategies to Enhance Students' Literacy Enthusiasm in Elementary Schools

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Abstract

This study addresses challenges in elementary students' literacy enthusiasm in Islamic Religious Education (PAI), including low interest in religious reading, the continued use of lecture-and-memorization practices, and the lack of a structured literacy program. It aims to describe PAI learning strategies used to cultivate students' literacy enthusiasm, identify supporting and inhibiting factors, and evaluate their effectiveness at SD Negeri 8 Tampuan, Enrekang Regency. Using a descriptive qualitative approach with theological-normative, pedagogical, psychological, and sociological perspectives, the researchers collected data through passive-participant observation, in-depth interviews with principals, PAI teachers, homeroom teachers, students, parents, and other stakeholders, as well as documentation studies. Data were analyzed using Miles and Huberman's procedures, and validity was ensured through credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Findings show that PAI teachers implement four integrated strategies: contextual inquiry-based learning, digital platforms as a "living library" with digital tabayun, contextual text criticism through a "text-context-reflection" approach, and differentiated instruction producing creative literacy products. Support comes from school policy, teacher creativity, involvement of the school committee and parents, and innovative library management, though limitations remain in teachers' critical digital literacy and declining deep-reading ability due to instant digital content. Overall, the strategies drive behavioral change and generate diverse, spiritually meaningful literacy outputs.

Keywords

Learning Strategy; Islamic Religious Education; Literacy Enthusiasm; Elementary School



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INTRODUCTION

Literacy is the main foundation for the development of civilization and the strengthening of the nation's character. In the context of national education, literacy is no longer interpreted narrowly as the ability to read and write, but rather includes the ability to understand, interpret, and apply information in daily life (Damaianti, 2024; Trilisiana et al.,

2023). This competence is becoming increasingly crucial in the midst of the rapid flow of digital information that requires students to be able to filter, interpret, and communicate knowledge critically (Sarwiji, 2019).

Islam places literacy as a divine gift as well as a religious obligation. The first revelation revealed to the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) in Q.S. Al-'Alaq/96:1-5 explicitly commands the activity of reading (iqra') and places the pen (qalam) as an instrument of transmission of knowledge. Ibn Katsir interprets that the command emphasizes the importance of scientific documentation as a means of preserving and inheriting knowledge across generations (Ibn Kathir, 2003), while Al-Qurthubi emphasizes that the knowledge glorified by Allah SWT. in Q.S. Al-Mujadilah/58:11 is a knowledge that is practiced and useful, so that the pursuit of knowledge must be accompanied by good literacy practices (Al-Qurthubi, 2018). The ability of bayan (expressing and understanding) mentioned in Q.S. Al-Rahman/55:1-4 is also the normative basis that literacy is an essential differentiator between humans and other creatures (Ministry of Religion of the Republic of Indonesia, 2024).

Islamic Religious Education (PAI) as a subject sourced from the treasures of sacred texts, exemplary stories, and Islamic scientific traditions has structural relevance to the development of students' literacy (Jayana & Mansur, 2024). Juridically, this urgency is strengthened by Law Number 20 of 2003 concerning the National Education System, Regulation of the Minister of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology Number 7 of 2022 concerning Content Standards which requires the strengthening of basic literacy in every subject including PAI, as well as Regulation of the Minister of Education and Culture Number 23 of 2015 concerning the Growth of Ethics which gave birth to the School Literacy Movement (GLS) through the habit of reading fifteen minutes before learning (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2019).

These ideal conditions have not been fully realized in the field. SD Negeri 8 Tampaan, Enrekang Regency, as a basic education unit in the mountainous region of South Sulawesi with limited access to learning resources, faces a number of empirical problems: the low interest of students in reading religious literature outside of package books, the dominance of lecture and memorization methods with minimal space for literacy exploration, the limited collection of religious readings in school libraries, the lack of a systematic and sustainable PAI literacy program, the lack of literacy evaluation instruments, the condition of the family environment whose literacy culture has not taken root, and the lack of optimal integration between practical religious activities and literacy activities (Ahmadi & Ibda, 2018; Putra, 2024). In fact, this school has the potential to be optimized, namely competent PAI teachers and basic facilities in the form of a mini library and prayer room that can function as a religious literacy room.

Several previous studies have examined similar themes from different perspectives. Rohmatullah (2020) examines the strategy for developing a literacy culture based on PAI at the junior high school level with a focus on macro-systemic literacy policies and environments. Rosidin et al. (2024) highlight the PAI learning management strategy in general without specific literacy achievement targets. Alfianti (2019) found that the strategy of assigning scientific papers is effective in fostering the literacy of students at the madrasah aliyah level, while Siregar et al. (2024) emphasized media-based digital literacy at the madrasah ibtidaiyah level but is still constrained by infrastructure aspects. These studies generally focus on one specific strategic dimension and have not formulated a PAI literacy

model that combines inquiry-based, digital, text criticism, and learning differentiation approaches in its entirety at the elementary school level, leaving research gaps that need to be followed up.

The urgency of this study is also supported by the unique characteristics of Islamic teachings that are very relevant to the development of literacy, namely the richness of the holy texts of the Qur'an and Hadith, the inspiring stories of the prophets and companions, and the Islamic scientific tradition that upholds reading and writing activities. The event of the first revelation to the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) in the Cave of Hira even though he was an ummi (unable to read) actually ordered the activity of reading, a paradox that teaches that seeking knowledge is a universal obligation for every Muslim without exception. The Islamic scholarly tradition is also enriched by the example of companions such as Ali bin Abi Talib ra. who are known to like to write and document knowledge through shahifah (note sheets), with a famous message to bind knowledge through writing. If the PAI learning strategy is designed appropriately to integrate this kind of literacy activities systematically, PAI learning will not only improve students' religious understanding, but also foster a culture of literacy that is sustainable beyond the classroom walls.

Based on this description, this article is compiled to answer three main problems, namely: (1) how the PAI learning strategy is applied in increasing the literacy spirit of students at SD Negeri 8 Tampuan, Enrekang Regency; (2) what are the supporting and inhibiting factors for the implementation of the strategy; and (3) how effective the PAI learning strategy is in increasing the literacy spirit of students in the school. This study is expected to make a theoretical contribution to the development of a literacy-based PAI learning model as well as a practical contribution for schools, PAI teachers, and subsequent researchers in designing contextual and sustainable religious literacy strategies.

METHODS

This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach that relies on the condition of natural objects with the researcher as the key instrument (Sugiyono, 2017). The qualitative approach was chosen because this study emphasizes the search for meaning, understanding of concepts, and in-depth descriptions of the phenomenon of PAI learning strategies and the spirit of students' literacy as it is in the field (Creswell, 2022). The research was carried out by combining four approaches at once, namely a theological-normative approach to examine the foundations of the Qur'an and Hadith related to literacy, a pedagogical approach to understand the interaction of teachers and students in the learning process, a psychological approach to see the motivational conditions and attitudes of literacy of students, and a sociological approach to analyze the support of the socio-religious environment around the school.

The location of the research was determined purposively at SD Negeri 8 Tampuan, Baraka District, Enrekang Regency, South Sulawesi Province, with consideration of the suitability of the problem, the uniqueness of the geo-social context, and the affordability of data collection (Hardani et al., 2020). The data source consists of primary data obtained directly through interviews with school principals, PAI teachers, classroom teachers, students, parents, school committee administrators, PAI supervisors, and other education personnel, as well as secondary data in the form of school documents, attendance records, and archives of literacy activities (Moleong, 2021).

The main instrument of research is the researcher himself (human instrument) which is equipped with supporting instruments in the form of interview guidelines and observation guidelines which are prepared through the stages of variable identification, subvariable elaboration, indicator formulation, and preparation of instrument items (Arikunto, 2020). The data collection technique was carried out in three ways, namely observation of passive participation in PAI learning activities and literacy activities in schools, in-depth interviews with various informants as mentioned above, and documentation studies of relevant school archives and records.

The selection of informants was carried out purposively by considering the direct involvement of each party in the PAI learning process and school literacy activities. PAI principals and supervisors were interviewed to explore policy and supervision perspectives, PAI teachers and teachers of other subjects to explore the perspective of learning implementation, students from grades III to VI to explore hands-on learning experiences, while parents, school committee chairs, library officers, and local religious leaders were interviewed to explore the perspective of socio-religious environmental support outside the school. The interviews were conducted in stages in the period from January to March 2026 following the development of the PAI learning cycle at the school, so that the data obtained reflected the dynamics of the implementation of the strategy in a sustainable manner, not a snapshot of a moment at a point in time.

Data analysis follows Miles and Huberman's interactive model which consists of data reduction (selecting and focusing data on main things), presenting data in the form of narrative texts, and drawing conclusions/verifications (Sugiyono, 2021). The validity of the data was tested through four criteria, namely credibility through triangulation of sources by comparing observation, interview, and documentation data; transferability through a detailed and systematic description of research results; dependability through an audit of the research process with supervisors; and confirmability through triangulation of sources, increased diligence, peer discussion, and the use of reference materials (Prastowo, 2019).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Research Site Profile

SD Negeri 8 Tampuan is a state-status basic education unit that was established on December 31, 1968 and is located in Banti Village, Baraka District, Enrekang Regency. This school is located in a mountainous area where the majority of the surrounding community works as farmers and small traders, so the literacy culture in the family environment has not been fully rooted. In the current school year, this school fosters 136 students spread across eight study groups from grade I to grade VI, supported by seventeen educators and education personnel with civil servant, PPPK, and honorary personnel status. The literacy support facilities it has include a mini library, prayer room for worship practices, and reading corners that continue to be developed, although the collection of religious readings and digital facilities is still relatively limited compared to the ideal needs.

Islamic Religious Education Learning Strategies in Increasing Students' Literacy Spirit

The findings of the study show that PAI teachers at SD Negeri 8 Tampuan have shifted from the textual-memorization literacy paradigm to the meaningful literacy paradigm that is explicitly integrated into the Learning Goal Flow (ATP). PAI literacy is interpreted not only as the ability to read the Qur'an mechanically, but also the ability to understand, interpret, and practice Islamic values in responding to contemporary problems. This meaning was mutually agreed upon at the district level PAI Teacher Working Group (KKG) forum so that

there is uniformity of direction without neglecting contextualization space for each school, and is strengthened through the supervision of PAI supervisors who encourage teachers to compile ATPs that reflect reflective and critical thinking skills, not just memorization achievements.

Operationally, the learning strategies applied can be mapped into four complementary patterns. First, contextual inquiry-based learning combined with a storytelling approach based on sirah nabawiyah. The teacher invites students to investigate contemporary moral issues, trace the answers from classical sources such as hadith and the book of tafsir, and then compare them with the views of contemporary scholars. This pattern has been proven to encourage students to actively seek additional references in the library independently outside of class hours, and even foster interest across subjects when students choose classic Islamic figures such as Ibn Sina and Al-Ghazali as the subjects of writing in Indonesian lessons.

Second, the use of digital platforms as a "living library" that is strictly curated by teachers before being accessed by students, through educational video channels, digital Qur'an applications, and verified Islamic sites such as the official platform of the Ministry of Religion. This strategy is accompanied by the habituation of digital tabayun, which is the ability to verify the credibility of religious information sources before receiving them, so that students are trained not to swallow religious content that circulates online. Third, critique of text literacy through the simple contextual interpretation method of "text, context, and reflection". Students are invited to understand the verse or hadith textually, trace the context of its descent, then connect the core message with actual phenomena such as environmental issues or social media behavior. This approach is also developed through informal collaboration (team teaching) with teachers of Natural Sciences subjects when the material intersects with kauniyah verses about the creation of the universe, so that students understand that science and Islamic teachings complement each other.

Fourth, differentiated instruction that accommodates students' visual, auditory, and kinesthetic learning styles through a variety of assessment products, such as picture books of prophetic stories, podcast recordings of exemplary stories, short da'wah videos, meaningful calligraphy, and Islamic literacy making projects. The diversity of these products makes PAI learning outcomes no longer measured uniformly, but rather as an authentic reflection of each student's personal understanding. Field practice shows that the four patterns do not stand alone, but rather support each other in a series of learning experiences. In the planning stage, the teacher formulates a spark question that connects the classic treasure with the actual issue; At the implementation stage, students are facilitated to browse sources through libraries and curated digital platforms; And in the closing stage, students are encouraged to pour their understanding into literacy products according to their respective learning preferences. This kind of cyclical pattern makes PAI literacy no longer stop at memorization achievements, but grows into a habit of thinking that is inherent in students' daily lives, both inside and outside the classroom.

The impact of these learning patterns is also seen in changes in the pattern of students' interaction with learning resources. Library staff noted an increase in independent visits by students in grades V and VI outside of PAI class hours, accompanied by a shift in reading preferences from package books to collections of sirah nabawiyah, children's interpretations, and Islamic encyclopedias. This change in preferences indicates that the learning strategy implemented has succeeded in fostering literacy needs that come from within students

(intrinsically driven), not just the encouragement of school assignment obligations.

This finding is in line with the command to read and write in Q.S. Al-'Alaq/96:1-5 which affirms that literacy is the foundation of Islamic civilization as well as the mandate of the Minister of Education and Culture Number 16 of 2022 concerning Process Standards which directs learning in the Independent Curriculum to be student-centered, contextual, and differentiated. Theoretically, these findings reinforce Vygotsky's theory of constructivism which asserts that knowledge is actively constructed by learners through social interaction and teacher scaffolding, rather than through one-way information transfer (Vygotsky in Suprijono, 2021). These results are also correlated with the findings of Wiedarti et al. (2018) in the study of the School Literacy Movement which affirms that literacy culture requires a holistic learning ecosystem, as well as the research of Suyudi (2020) which concludes that the integration of Islamic values into critical literacy-based learning significantly increases the intrinsic motivation of students in exploring Islamic sources.

Supporting Factors and Inhibiting Strategy Implementation

The implementation of the four strategies is supported by multidimensional synergy. The principal set a concrete policy in the form of a "Five Minutes of Reading Verse" program before learning in all classes, the habit of praying in congregation accompanied by a short cult by students in turn, and the placement of Islamic reading corners at a number of strategic points in schools. PAI teachers act as the driving force through the Islamic Literacy Corner initiative which is managed with volunteer students, while the school committee allocates the budget for children's Islamic book donations periodically and initiates the "Friday Literacy Together" program that involves parents voluntarily. Classroom teachers across levels also contribute through the habit of reading daily hadith cards and arranging classroom walls as "Islamic literacy galleries", while library managers rearrange collections and open "Islamic Reading Hours" services on certain days. Facility support is also strengthened through the allocation of a special school budget for the procurement of books and subscriptions to Islamic education digital platforms, as well as moderate book package assistance from the Ministry of Religious Affairs.

However, the study also revealed two fundamental inhibiting factors. First, teachers' critical digital literacy competencies in validating the validity of religious reference sources are not evenly distributed, so teachers must work extra to filter material from the internet in the midst of a busy teaching schedule and the lack of official guidance from the agency related to the list of recommended PAI digital sources. Second, there is a shift in students' cognitive patterns due to the dominance of instant digital content, which has the potential to weaken the ability to read deep (deep reading) to long and complex religious texts.

The two inhibiting factors are interrelated. When teachers find it difficult to provide time to validate digital sources in depth, students tend to be exposed to content that is concise and quickly consumed, so that the habit of reading long texts such as books of tafsir or collections of hadith is gradually replaced by short pieces of information on social media. This condition demands strengthening the capacity of teachers in critical digital literacy as a prerequisite for the sustainability of the entire supporting ecosystem that has been built by schools, as well as emphasizing that the supporting and inhibiting factors in this study are not two separate poles, but two sides of one dynamic literacy ecosystem that continues to move and requires continuous adjustment.

The findings of these supporting factors are relevant to the words of Allah SWT. in Q.S. Al-Mujadilah/58:11 which affirms the elevation of degrees for believers and knowledgeable,

a theological foundation that strengthens the urgency of building a comprehensive literacy support ecosystem. From a regulatory perspective, this condition is in line with the mandate of the Minister of Education and Culture Number 23 of 2015 concerning the Growth of Ethics which requires schools to build an ecosystem literacy culture, as well as Presidential Regulation Number 87 of 2017 concerning Strengthening Character Education which places family and community involvement as an important pillar. Theoretically, these findings strengthen Bronfenbrenner's developmental ecological theory that children's literacy development is influenced by the layered interactions between the micro, meso, and macro environments around them (Bronfenbrenner, in Santrock, 2020). The inhibiting factors are in line with the research results of Koltay (2011) who emphasized that effective digital literacy requires critical guidance from educators who are competent in curating and validating information sources, as well as the findings of Wolf (2018) about the deep reading crisis in the digital era that can be reclaimed through structured interventions and continuous collaboration between schools and families.

The Effectiveness of PAI's Learning Strategy in Increasing the Spirit of Literacy

The effectiveness of the PAI learning strategy at SD Negeri 8 Tampaan cannot be measured solely from cognitive achievements in the form of test scores, but is manifested holistically in three mutually reinforcing dimensions. The first dimension is real behavioral changes in daily life, for example the internalization of the values of honesty, empathy, and morality-based conflict resolution. The second dimension is the growth of intrinsic self-regulated learning motivation, characterized by the habit of students reading and looking for Islamic references without external encouragement, as well as increasing independent visits to school libraries. The third dimension is the birth of a variety of creative literacy products with spiritual value, ranging from picture books, short da'wah videos, mini-podcasts, to meaningful calligraphy, which reflects the internalization of Islamic values authentically.

The most significant indicators of effectiveness were found in the ability of students to apply digital tabayun spontaneously when encountering dubious religious information, changes in perception of religious texts from "heavy and old-fashioned" to "relevant and alive", and the widespread impact of PAI literacy to the family ecosystem, for example through the habit of parents and children to open together Islamic sites recommended by teachers. This good practice has even been recognized by the supervisor of PAI Enrekang Regency as a model that is worthy of replication in other schools in the district. The three dimensions of effectiveness show a gradual pattern of development. Behavior changes initially seem simple, for example, the habit of maintaining environmental cleanliness after associating a hadith about the prohibition of throwing garbage with real conditions around the school, then developed into more independent literacy habits such as searching for additional references without teacher instruction, until it boils down to literacy products that are exhibited and appreciated by the school and family environment. This gradual pattern shows that the effectiveness of the PAI learning strategy at SD Negeri 8 Tampaan is cumulative and mutually reinforcing between dimensions, not just individual achievements at one point in time.

The sustainability of this impact is also supported by the involvement of parents who were initially wary of the use of gadgets for religious purposes, but then turned into active partners who accompany children to access digital Islamic references at home. This shift in parental attitudes strengthens the argument that the effectiveness of literacy-based PAI learning strategies cannot be separated from the continuity of cross-domain mentoring,

starting from the classroom, school library, to students' living rooms.

This finding has a theological foothold in Q.S. Az-Zumar/39:9 which clearly distinguishes the position of the knowledgeable and the unknowledgeable, while affirming that true knowledge is a science that changes the perspective and behavior of its owner. In the regulatory framework, this effectiveness is in line with Permendikbudristek Number 21 of 2016 concerning Content Standards which emphasizes the development of competencies of spiritual and social attitudes as the main dimension of PAI learning, as well as the Decree of the Minister of Religion Number 183 of 2019 which mandates that PAI learning is oriented towards the formation of moderate, critical, and noble character. Theoretically, these findings strengthen Mezirow's transformative learning theory which states that effective learning is learning that changes a person's frame of reference in responding to the world in a more meaningful way (Mezirow, 2000), while correlating with Deci and Ryan's self-determination theory which affirms intrinsic motivation as the strongest predictor of the sustainability of independent learning behavior (Deci & Ryan, 1985). The results of Hattie's (2009) meta-analysis which placed the quality of teacher feedback and active involvement of students as the two factors with the highest effect size on learning achievement were also empirically confirmed in the practice of PAI learning in this school.

Comparisons with previous studies reinforce the position of these findings. If Rohmatullah (2020) emphasizes the macro-systemic literacy culture development strategy at the junior high school level and Alfianti (2019) highlights the assignment of writing as a single strategy at the madrasah aliyah level, this study shows that at the elementary school level, the success of growing the spirit of PAI literacy requires a combination of micro strategies at the grade level that are intertwined with macro policy support at the school level. Similarly, if Siregar et al. (2024) found that media-based digital literacy at the madrasah ibtidaiyah level is still constrained by many technical infrastructure aspects, this study shows that the more fundamental obstacle lies in the competence of curation and validation of content by teachers, not just the availability of devices. This comparison confirms that an effective PAI literacy strategy is contextual and cannot be generalized uniformly across levels or educational units.

Transformative-Integrative PAI Literacy Ecosystem Model

The novelty of this research lies in the identification of a transformative-integrative PAI literacy ecosystem model, which is a model that synergistically combines the three core strategies of contextual inquiry-based learning, creative product-based differentiated learning, and digital tabayun as a life competency into one cohesive framework. This model not only increases students' literacy spirit cognitively, but also results in measurable character changes, intrinsic self-learning motivation, and the expansion of Islamic literacy culture beyond the classroom into family and community ecosystems. As far as the research is concerned, this kind of integrative model has never been fully formulated in the context of PAI learning at the elementary school level, so that it can be a theoretical and practical contribution to the development of the next religious literacy strategy.

Research Limitations

This research has a number of limitations that need to be considered in interpreting the findings produced. First, this study is a single case study on a single basic education unit with specific geographical and socio-cultural characteristics, so the transformative-integrative PAI literacy ecosystem model formulated needs to be further tested for its application in the context of schools with different characteristics, for example schools in

urban areas with more adequate digital access or schools with different socio-economic backgrounds of the community. Second, the research data is fully sourced from a qualitative approach based on observation, interviews, and documentation, so that it does not include quantitative measurements of the improvement of students' literacy abilities in a standardized manner, for example through standard literacy test instruments before and after the implementation of the strategy. Third, the observation time span that lasted for approximately three months allowed this study to capture short-term dynamics in depth, but it could not ensure the sustainability of the impact of learning strategies in the long term along with the change of students and educators. These limitations open up space for further studies of a quantitative, longitudinal, and multi-site nature to strengthen the external validity of the findings.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes three main things. First, the PAI learning strategy at SD Negeri 8 Tampaan is implemented through four integrated patterns, namely contextual inquiry-based learning, the use of digital platforms as a living library accompanied by the strengthening of digital tabayun, text literacy criticism through a text-context-reflection approach, and differentiated learning based on creative products, which together foster the spirit of literacy of students organically. Second, the implementation of the strategy is supported by the synergy of school principals' policies, teacher creativity, committee and parent support, involvement of homeroom teachers across levels, and innovative library management, but it is still hampered by the limitations of teachers' critical digital literacy competencies and declining reading skills due to the dominance of instant digital content. Third, the effectiveness of PAI learning strategies is manifested holistically through real behavioral changes, the growth of independent learning motivation, and the birth of various creative literacy products with spiritual value, which leads to the formulation of a transformative-integrative PAI literacy ecosystem model.

This finding also emphasizes that strengthening religious literacy at the elementary school level cannot be reduced to an additional program that is separate from the core curriculum, but must be internalized into the PAI learning design itself, starting from the formulation of the Learning Goal Flow, the selection of teaching strategies, to the design of assessments. With this perspective, strengthening literacy and strengthening religious understanding are not two competing agendas for limited learning time, but two sides of an educational process that mutually support and enrich each other. Based on these conclusions, it is recommended that schools develop guidelines for curating religious digital resources that are standard for PAI teachers, education offices and ministries of religion offices provide critical digital literacy training on a regular basis, and PAI teachers in other schools can adapt transformative-integrative PAI literacy ecosystem models according to the context of each educational unit. Further research is recommended to test this model quantitatively over a wider school scope to strengthen the generalization of the findings.

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