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Strategies of Islamic Education Teachers in Enhancing Students' Learning Interest

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Article Information

Abstract

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This study aims to explore the strategies used by Islamic Religious Education teachers to enhance students' interest in learning at SMP Negeri 5 Sojol, a coastal school with limited resources. Using a qualitative approach with an intrinsic case study design, data were collected through participatory observation, in-depth semi-structured interviews with Islamic Religious Education teachers and students, and documentation of learning materials. Data analysis employed Miles' interactive model with stages of data condensation, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. In contrast, data validity was maintained through source and method triangulation, member checking, and an audit trail. The research findings identified ten integrated strategies implemented by Islamic Religious Education teachers, including active student engagement, icebreaking, consistent motivation, cooperative learning, practice demonstration, exemplary conduct and habituation, creative, simple media, formative evaluation, collaboration with parents and community, and differentiated learning. These strategies successfully stimulated students' learning interest, as evidenced by high enthusiasm, active participation, consistent learning, effective time management, strong curiosity, seriousness in completing assignments, positive behavioral changes, and strong self-reflection. This research has limitations, including its single-case focus and context-specific findings, which may not be directly generalizable to other settings. The originality of this study lies in revealing how pedagogical creativity and contextual understanding can compensate for limited facilities in coastal schools, challenging the assumption that adequate infrastructure is a prerequisite for quality education. This research provides theoretical contributions by demonstrating that pedagogical creativity and contextual understanding are more determinative of learning success than facility availability,

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and practical contributions to achieving SDGs 4 and 10 through an inclusive learning strategy model applicable to schools with limited resources to narrow the educational quality gap between urban and rural areas.

Penelitian ini bertujuan mengeksplorasi strategi guru Pendidikan Agama Islam dalam meningkatkan minat belajar peserta didik di SMP Negeri 5 Sojol, sebuah sekolah pesisir dengan keterbatasan sumber daya. Menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan desain studi kasus intrinsik, data dikumpulkan melalui observasi partisipatif, wawancara mendalam semi-terstruktur dengan guru PAI dan peserta didik, serta dokumentasi perangkat pembelajaran. Analisis data menggunakan model interaktif Miles dengan tahapan kondensasi data, penyajian data, dan penarikan kesimpulan, sementara keabsahan data dijaga melalui triangulasi sumber dan metode, member checking, serta audit trail. Hasil penelitian menemukan sepuluh strategi terintegrasi yang diterapkan guru PAI meliputi pelibatan aktif siswa, ice breaking, motivasi konsisten, pembelajaran kooperatif, demonstrasi praktik, keteladanan dan pembiasaan, media sederhana kreatif, evaluasi formatif, kolaborasi dengan orang tua-masyarakat, dan diferensiasi pembelajaran. Strategi-strategi ini berhasil membangkitkan minat belajar peserta didik yang termanifestasi dalam antusiasme tinggi, partisipasi aktif, konsistensi belajar, manajemen waktu baik, rasa ingin tahu besar, keseriusan mengerjakan tugas, perubahan perilaku positif, dan refleksi diri yang kuat. Penelitian ini memiliki keterbatasan pada fokus kasus tunggal dan temuan yang bersifat kontekstual sehingga mungkin tidak dapat langsung digeneralisasi ke setting lain. Orisinalitas penelitian ini terletak pada pengungkapan bagaimana kreativitas pedagogis dan pemahaman kontekstual dapat mengompensasi keterbatasan fasilitas di sekolah pesisir, menantang asumsi bahwa infrastruktur memadai merupakan prasyarat bagi pendidikan berkualitas. Penelitian ini memberikan kontribusi teoretis dengan membuktikan bahwa kreativitas pedagogis dan pemahaman kontekstual lebih menentukan keberhasilan pembelajaran dibanding ketersediaan fasilitas, serta kontribusi praktis bagi pencapaian SDGs tujuan keempat dan kesepuluh melalui model strategi pembelajaran inklusif yang applicable untuk sekolah dengan keterbatasan sumber daya guna mempersempit kesenjangan kualitas pendidikan antara wilayah urban dan rural.

I. INTRODUCTION

Educational quality in coastal and remote areas of Indonesia continues to face significant challenges related to limited infrastructure, accessibility, and resources (Tham, 2014). According to data from the Ministry of Education, Culture, research, and Technology, schools in coastal regions often experience

gaps in facilities, qualified teachers, and learning media compared to urban schools (OECD, 2015). These conditions are assumed to be major obstacles to achieving optimal learning outcomes, particularly in subjects that require deep internalization of values, such as Islamic Religious Education (Malik, 2018). The conventional paradigm in education literature suggests that adequate facilities, modern technology, and complete infrastructure are prerequisites for creating quality and effective learning. However, this assumption needs to be re-examined through empirical studies exploring alternative practices that may challenge this dominant view (Mokgwathi & Villiers, 2023).

SMP Negeri 5 Sojol, located in Towiora Village, Sojol District, Donggala Regency, Central Sulawesi Province, presents an interesting phenomenon to study. As a school situated in a coastal area with geographical and socio-economic limitations, this school faces various challenges, including limited access to modern learning technology, students predominantly from fishing and farming families with lower-middle economic backgrounds, and minimal learning support facilities compared to urban schools (Sirin, 2005). According to preliminary observations, most students come from families whose main livelihoods are fishing and farming with daily incomes that are uncertain and highly dependent on natural conditions. The school is located approximately 45 kilometers from the district capital, with road access that is not always smooth, limiting access to educational resources and teacher training. Learning facilities such as projectors, computers, and internet access are very minimal, and the school library has a limited collection of books, particularly for Islamic Religious Education reference materials (Patrinos & Donnelly, 2021).

Despite these limitations, initial observations indicate interesting phenomena regarding students' interest in learning Islamic Religious Education subjects at this school. Students appear enthusiastic about learning, actively involved in class discussions, consistent in participating in religious activities, and demonstrate positive behavioral changes reflecting the internalization of Islamic values in daily life (Schindler et al., 2017). This condition seems paradoxical in light of the theoretical assumption that quality learning requires adequate infrastructure

support (Raihani, 2017). This phenomenon raises fundamental questions about the factors that enable the emergence of high learning interest under resource limitations, and about the strategies implemented by Islamic Religious Education teachers to ensure learning runs effectively and transformatively. This gap between theoretical expectations and field reality provides an important entry point for exploring in greater depth the learning practices at SMP Negeri 5 Sojol.

Ideally, achieving high learning interest in Islamic Religious Education learning requires comprehensive support encompassing the quality of teachers' pedagogical competence, adequate learning facilities, strong institutional support, and supportive socio-economic community conditions. According to research by Sinaga et al. (2025), developing students' learning interest requires systematic, sustainable strategies supported by adequate educational infrastructure to achieve optimal results. Furthermore, Mikamahuly et al. (2023) assert that enhancing students' learning interest requires the development of innovative, technology-based learning media that are not always available in schools in remote areas or those with budget constraints. In the context of religious character formation, Afifah & Syihabuddin (2025) explain that Islamic religious education teacher strategies in forming moderate character require special training and a deep understanding of students' developmental psychology, ideally obtained through continuous professional development programs. Meanwhile, Berlian & Masrufa (2022) reveal that enhancing student learning motivation is highly dependent on teachers' ability to apply various learning methods, which, in theory, requires qualified academic credentials and teaching experience. Moreover, (Azimi, 2022) states that strategies for enhancing students' noble character ideally require educational ecosystem support involving all stakeholders including families, communities, and government in creating a conducive and sustainable learning environment.

The gap between ideal conditions and field reality raises important questions about how SMP Negeri 5 Sojol can achieve maximum success in enhancing students' learning interest despite various limitations that, in theory, should be significant obstacles. This school is located in a coastal area with limited access to

modern learning technology. The majority of students come from families with lower-middle-class backgrounds, and it has fewer learning support facilities than urban schools. Ideally, according to various literature, these conditions should be barriers to achieving high learning interest and strong religious character formation. However, in reality, Islamic Religious Education teachers at this school have successfully developed effective, contextually relevant learning strategies without depending entirely on advanced technology or luxurious facilities, instead relying on creativity, dedication, and a deep understanding of students' characteristics and needs.

This gap indicates the existence of unique strategic practices developed by Islamic Religious Education teachers at SMP Negeri 5 Sojol that have not been comprehensively identified in existing educational literature. The fundamental question is: what specific strategies do Islamic Religious Education teachers use to transcend contextual limitations and achieve maximum learning outcomes, and how do these strategies effectively sustain students' long-term learning interest? An in-depth exploration of this phenomenon is important to identify best practices that can be adapted by other schools facing similar challenges, while providing theoretical contributions to the development of contextual and effective Islamic Religious Education learning strategies in Indonesia, particularly in areas with challenging geographical and socio-economic characteristics.

Previous studies have explored various aspects of Islamic Religious Education teacher strategies in improving learning quality and student character formation from diverse perspectives and contexts (Berlian & Masrufa, 2022; Fitriani, 2018; Khodijah & Halili, 2023; Salman Sahuri et al., 2023; Zukin, 2020). These studies have made important contributions to understanding the role of Islamic Religious Education teachers in increasing student learning activity, forming religious character, enhancing learning motivation, and addressing various learning problems at the secondary school level. Several studies have also identified factors influencing students' learning interest and specific strategies used by Islamic Religious Education teachers in the context of Islamic religious learning (Afifah et al., 2025; Azimi, 2022; Kamaliah et al., 2021; Laelasari et al., 2023; Lestari,

2015). However, most previous studies tend to focus on urban school contexts or schools with adequate facilities and use approaches that emphasize normative and theoretical aspects, without deeply exploring the contextual practices successfully implemented in schools with limited resources.

The identified research gap shows that there has been no comprehensive study specifically exploring Islamic Religious Education teacher strategies in enhancing students' learning interest in schools located in coastal areas with unique socio-cultural and economic characteristics such as at SMP Negeri 5 Sojol (Abnisa, 2017; Farida et al., 2023; Hanafi et al., 2020; Ramli, 2015). Previous studies have not detailed how Islamic Religious Education teachers adapt learning strategies under limited facility conditions while still achieving maximum results, nor how the interaction among teacher strategies, student characteristics, and local context contributes to learning success. This research comes to fill that gap by examining in depth the strategic practices developed by Islamic Religious Education teachers at SMP Negeri 5 Sojol, identifying unique patterns that differentiate them from common practices, and analyzing how these strategies successfully enhance students' learning interest in theoretically challenging conditions, so that this research does not merely repeat previous findings but provides new contextual and applicative perspectives.

The novelty of this research lies in the in-depth exploration of Islamic Religious Education teachers' strategic practices, developed contextually in coastal-area schools with limited resources yet successfully achieving maximum levels of students' learning interest, which has not been extensively studied in contemporary Islamic education literature. This research reveals unique learning-strategy adaptation mechanisms in which Islamic Religious Education teachers integrate local coastal community wisdom, local socio-cultural values, and pedagogical creativity without relying on advanced technology or luxurious facilities, yet still create meaningful and transformative learning. The findings of this research are expected to provide alternative models of Islamic Religious Education learning strategies applicable to schools in remote areas or with similar geographical and socio-economic conditions, while enriching the theoretical

literature on contextual pedagogy in Islamic religious education responsive to the diversity of local contexts in Indonesia.

The urgency of this research lies not only in its academic contributions to the development of Islamic education science but also in its practical implications for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly the fourth goal, which concerns quality, inclusive, and equitable education for all. Identifying and documenting the effective strategies implemented by Islamic Religious Education teachers at SMP Negeri 5 Sojol is important as empirical evidence that quality education can be achieved even in schools with limited facilities, and it can serve as a reference for education policymakers in designing contextual, sustainable programs to improve learning quality. Furthermore, this research supports the achievement of SDGs' tenth goal regarding inequality reduction, because by identifying best practices from coastal area schools that successfully enhance student learning interest, the educational quality gap between urban and rural schools can be narrowed through the adoption and adaptation of proven effective strategies, so that every child has equal opportunities to obtain quality and transformative religious education regardless of their geographical location and socio-economic conditions.

Based on the gap between ideal conditions and field reality, and the research gaps identified in previous studies, this research formulates two research questions that serve as the main focus of the study. The first question is how Islamic Religious Education teachers implement strategies to enhance students' learning interest at SMP Negeri 5 Sojol, exploring specific practices, learning methods, pedagogical approaches, and unique techniques developed by teachers to address the challenges posed by limited facilities and the socio-economic conditions of the coastal community. The second question is how students' learning interest at SMP Negeri 5 Sojol develops as a response to the strategies implemented by Islamic Religious Education teachers, which examines the manifestation of learning interest in the form of enthusiasm, active participation, learning consistency, and its impact on the formation of students' religious character in the context of their daily lives.

II. METHOD

This study employed a qualitative approach (Creswell & Poth, 2018) to explore in depth and contextually Islamic Religious Education teachers' strategies for enhancing students' learning interest at SMP Negeri 5 Sojol. The research type is a case study (Yin, 2018), with SMP Negeri 5 Sojol as a single case that possesses uniqueness as a coastal school with limited resources yet achieving maximum results. Data collection techniques included participatory observation of the Islamic Religious Education learning process in classrooms, in-depth semi-structured interviews with Islamic Religious Education teachers and students, and documentation of learning materials and school activity records.

Data analysis used an interactive model (Miles et al., 2014) through three stages: data condensation to summarize important information from the field, data presentation in the form of descriptive narratives and matrices, and conclusion drawing to identify learning strategy patterns. Data validity testing used four criteria (Lincoln & Guba, 1985): credibility through source and method triangulation and member checking; transferability through detailed context description; dependability through audit trail documentation of the research process; and confirmability through maintaining the objectivity of interpretation based on empirical data.

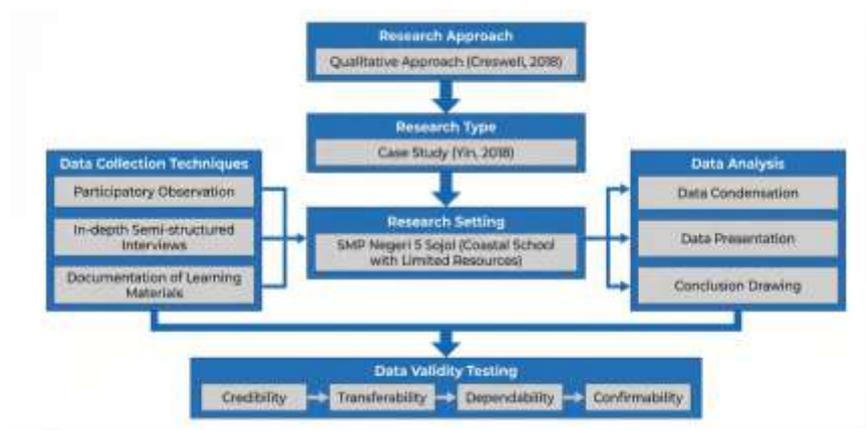


Figure 1. Research framework

III. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Teacher Strategies of Islamic Religious Education in Enhancing Students' Learning Interest

Based on field findings, Islamic Religious Education teachers at SMP Negeri 5 Sojol implement diverse, creatively and contextually developed learning strategies to enhance students' interest in learning despite limited facilities and resources. The first strategy, which is key to success, is the active involvement of students at every stage of the learning process. Teachers do not merely position themselves as material deliverers, but rather act as facilitators who encourage students to be directly involved in the exploration and construction of knowledge. In practice, Islamic Religious Education teachers begin learning by posing contextual questions related to the daily lives of students as a coastal community, such as connecting the concept of honesty in Islam with the practice of buying and selling marine products, or linking the value of mutual assistance with the tradition of gotong royong among fishermen (Teacher-1, 2025). This approach proves effective in arousing students' curiosity because they find direct relevance between the learning material and their life experiences (Fredricks et al., 2019; Wigfield et al., 2015).

The second strategy implemented is the use of icebreaking methods tailored to students' characteristics (Teacher-2, 2025). Islamic Religious Education teachers routinely open learning sessions with enjoyable, light activities such as educational games based on Islamic values, religious motivational chants, or inspirational stories about Islamic figures that connect to the local context. Icebreaking is not only conducted at the beginning of learning but also in the middle of the process when teachers notice a decrease in students' concentration or signs of boredom. These activities are carried out spontaneously and flexibly, without requiring special equipment, but rather relying on teachers' creativity in utilizing classroom conditions and the surrounding environment. As a result, the learning atmosphere becomes more relaxed and enjoyable, students do not feel pressured, and their learning energy can be maintained throughout the lesson (Dewaele & Li, 2021).

The third strategy is to provide consistent and personal motivation. Islamic Religious Education teachers not only deliver motivational lessons in class but also provide individual support to students who show signs of declining learning interest. Motivation is given in various forms, ranging from verbal praise for even the smallest achievements to symbolic rewards such as achievement stars or simple certificates, to personal counseling to understand the obstacles students face (Student-1, 2025; Teacher-1, 2025). Teachers also actively communicate the goals and benefits of studying Islamic Religious Education not only for academic grades but also for character formation and life provision. This motivation is reinforced by providing concrete examples of how Islamic values learned can help them face life challenges, particularly in a dynamic coastal community characterized by complex social interactions (Ryan & Deci, 2020).

The fourth prominent strategy is the implementation of cooperative learning adapted to the collaborative culture of coastal communities. Islamic Religious Education teachers strategically form heterogeneous study groups that take into account students' academic abilities, family backgrounds, and personality traits. In these groups, students are given collaborative tasks such as material discussions, simple presentation creation, worship practice simulations, or small projects related to the application of Islamic values in life (Student-2, 2025). This cooperative learning not only enhances understanding of the material through peer teaching but also builds students' social skills, empathy, and communication skills. Teachers act as supervisors and guides who move among groups, provide direction when needed, and ensure every group member participates actively (Gillies, 2016).

The fifth strategy is the use of demonstration and direct practice methods in learning. Given limited access to digital learning media, Islamic Religious Education teachers maximize learning through direct practice that engages all students' senses. For practical materials such as ablution procedures, prayer, Quranic recitation, and the practice of morals in daily life, teachers not only explain verbally but also directly demonstrate and ask students to practice (Documentation-1, 2025; Observation-1, 2025). This method is very effective

because students can learn through direct experience, errors can be corrected immediately, and understanding deepens because it involves kinesthetic memory. Teachers also utilize the school environment and its surroundings as a learning laboratory, such as practicing purification in the school prayer room or observing social behavior in the community environment (Kolb & Kolb, 2022).

The sixth strategy, equally important, is the inculcation of values through exemplary conduct and habituation. Islamic Religious Education teachers at SMP Negeri 5 Sojol are highly aware that character education is not sufficient only through knowledge transfer, but must be through modeling and habituation. In practice, teachers consistently demonstrate behavior in accordance with the Islamic values taught, such as arriving on time, dressing modestly and neatly, speaking politely, showing patient and empathetic attitudes toward students, and being active in school religious activities (Student-1, 2025; Teacher-2, 2025). This exemplary conduct is reinforced by structured habituation programs such as greeting and shaking hands when meeting teachers, praying together before and after lessons, performing congregational midday prayer, reciting the Quran before lessons begin, and regular Friday charity. This habituation is carried out consistently and involves periodic supervision and evaluation to ensure that students do not merely perform it as an empty routine but truly internalize the values behind it (Anwar et al., 2025a).

The seventh strategy is the utilization of simple yet creative learning media. Despite limited access to digital technology and projectors, Islamic Religious Education teachers continue to develop interesting learning media using materials available around the school. The media used include educational posters made independently or with students, flashcards for memorizing short verses or hadiths, simple teaching aids made from cardboard or paper to explain abstract concepts, and the maximum utilization of the blackboard with interesting visualizations such as mind mapping or colored schemes (Documentation-1, 2025). Teachers also use dramatic, engaging stories to convey moral values (Teacher-2, 2025). These simple media can attract students' attention and make learning more varied, thereby preventing it from becoming monotonous (Schindler et al., 2017).

The eighth strategy is the implementation of formative and educative evaluation. Islamic Religious Education teachers not only use evaluation as a tool to measure students' cognitive achievement, but also as an instrument to understand learning development and provide constructive feedback (Teacher-1, 2025; Teacher-2, 2025). Evaluation is conducted in various forms such as spontaneous oral questions during learning, light quizzes, individual and group assignments, worship practice observations, assessment of daily attitudes and behavior, and written tests at the end of the material. Evaluation results are not only used to assign numerical grades; they are also always discussed with students to identify which parts are well understood and which still need improvement. Teachers also provide remedial and enrichment opportunities according to individual student needs, so that every student feels valued and motivated to continue developing (Black & Wiliam, 2018).

The ninth strategy is building harmonious communication and collaboration with parents and the community. Islamic Religious Education teachers recognize that religious education cannot stand alone in school but must be supported by the family and community environments (Observation-1, 2025; Student-2, 2025). For this purpose, teachers actively communicate with parents through regular meetings, home visits for students with problems, or informal communication during community meetings. Teachers also involve local religious figures in several learning activities or religious lectures at school to strengthen the credibility and relevance of the material taught. This collaboration creates a mutually supportive educational ecosystem, where values taught at school are reinforced with practices at home and accepted as part of the community's social values (Black & Wiliam, 2018).

The tenth strategy is differentiated learning that considers the diversity of students' abilities and characteristics. Islamic Religious Education teachers do not treat all students the same, but make adjustments based on a deep understanding of each student's condition (Observation-1, 2025; Teacher-1, 2025). For students with high academic ability, teachers provide additional challenges such as simple research assignments, giving responsibility as peer tutors, or opportunities to lead

religious activities (Student-2, 2025). Meanwhile, for students experiencing learning difficulties, teachers provide extra attention through special guidance outside class hours, material simplification, or the use of more concrete methods. This differentiation makes every student feel supported according to their needs, with no one left behind or feeling bored (Smale - Jacobse et al., 2019).

Research findings indicate that Islamic Religious Education teachers at SMP Negeri 5 Sojol implement ten main strategies that are mutually integrated in enhancing students' learning interest, namely active student engagement, the use of ice breaking, consistent motivation provision, cooperative learning, demonstration and direct practice methods, exemplary conduct and habituation, utilization of simple media, formative evaluation, collaboration with parents and community, and differentiated learning. These strategies align with the theory proposed by Sinaga et al. (2025), which holds that the development of students' learning interest requires systematic and sustainable strategies. Yet, this research makes new contributions by showing that systematic strategies do not always require adequate infrastructure support, as assumed in ideal theory (Afifah et al., 2025; Mikamahuly et al., 2023).

Islamic Religious Education teachers at SMP Negeri 5 Sojol have successfully developed an effective learning system by leveraging creativity and a deep understanding of the local context, rather than relying on modern facilities. This enriches the theoretical understanding that learning systems are more determined by teachers' pedagogical competence in adapting learning principles to contextual conditions rather than merely the availability of infrastructure.

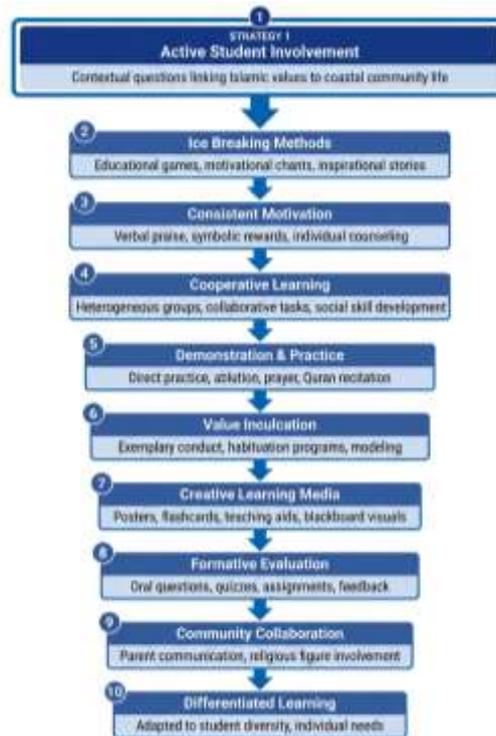


Figure 2. *Teacher strategies of Islamic education*

Students' Learning Interest

Students' learning interest at SMP Negeri 5 Sojol shows a very positive development in response to various strategies implemented by Islamic Religious Education teachers. The manifestation of this learning interest is visible from various indicators observed during the research process. The most prominent indicator is students' strong enthusiasm to participate in Islamic Religious Education. This is evident from students' willingness to arrive early for class, cheerful, enthusiastic facial expressions when they know that the Islamic Religious Education class is about to begin, and active responses to every learning activity offered by teachers. Unlike some other subjects that sometimes make students appear lethargic or unenthusiastic, Islamic Religious Education has become a moment eagerly awaited by most students (Observation-1, 2025; Student-1, 2025). This pattern reflects strong behavioral engagement, which is widely recognized as a key predictor of academic achievement and sustained learning motivation. Moreover, according to self-determination theory, when students experience autonomy-supportive teaching environments, their intrinsic motivation increases significantly.

This enthusiasm is also reflected in students' active participation in various learning activities. When teachers provide opportunities to ask questions, discuss, or express opinions, most students show the courage to participate without fear or shyness. They do not hesitate to raise their hands to answer questions, share personal experiences relevant to the material, or even pose follow-up questions that demonstrate their high curiosity. In group discussion activities, students appear serious and focused as they discuss assigned tasks, exchange opinions, and strive to produce the best output from their groups. This participation is not only dominated by certain students, but is distributed almost evenly throughout the class, indicating that inclusive learning strategies successfully reach the diversity of student characteristics (Ryan & Deci, 2020).

The second indicator of high learning interest is students' consistency in reviewing and deepening material outside class hours. Based on interviews with several students and observations of their learning behavior, it was found that many students independently allocate time to re-read Islamic Religious Education material at home, memorize verses or hadiths they have learned, or practice worship taught. Some students even form informal study groups outside school to help each other understand material or memorize the Quran. This consistency shows that Islamic Religious Education learning is not only considered an academic obligation to be fulfilled to obtain grades, but has also become a personal need felt to be important for self-development (Observation-1, 2025; Student-2, 2025).

Students' ability to manage study time also demonstrates a strong interest in the Islamic Religious Education subject. Although most students have responsibilities at home, especially those from fishing or farming families, they are still able to set aside special time to study Islamic Religious Education. Several students reported that they have a routine of reviewing Islamic Religious Education lessons every night before sleep, or using free time in the afternoon to read the Quran and practice recitations learned. This awareness of the importance of time management does not emerge spontaneously. Still, it is the result of the internalization of values of discipline and responsibility instilled by Islamic Religious

Education teachers through various learning strategies and habituation. These behaviors indicate the development of self-regulated learning, where students actively control their learning process beyond teacher supervision. Research on self-regulated learning confirms that metacognitive awareness, time management, and independent study habits significantly predict academic success (Panadero et al., 2017).

High curiosity becomes the third indicator that is very clearly visible in students. Students are no longer passive recipients of information from teachers; they actively seek additional knowledge from various sources to which they have access. Several students are seen diligently borrowing religious books from the school library, asking religious figures in their environment, or discussing religious issues they are learning with friends and family. This curiosity also encourages students to pose critical questions during learning, such as how to apply Islamic values in certain situations, what wisdom lies behind the commands and prohibitions of religion, or how to resolve conflicts between religious teachings and practices they observe in society. Such questions show that students are not only learning superficially, but are striving to understand deeply and contextually (Teacher-2, 2025). Curiosity represents cognitive engagement, a dimension of student engagement involving deep processing and meaning-making. Meaningful learning occurs when students connect new knowledge with prior experiences and social realities. This aligns with contextual and transformative approaches in Islamic education (Fredricks et al., 2016).

The manifestation of learning interest is also evident in students' behavior when completing tasks assigned by teachers. Most students show seriousness and responsibility in completing tasks, both individual and group tasks. They do not merely complete tasks carelessly to fulfill obligations; they strive to produce the best work by drawing on creativity and maximum effort. In project assignments such as creating posters on Islamic values or presentations on Islamic figures, students demonstrate high dedication by seeking additional materials, designing their work attractively using the resources they have, and presenting with full confidence. Timeliness in task submission also demonstrates a high level of

commitment, with very few students found to be late in submitting tasks without clear reasons (Documentation-1, 2025; Observation-1, 2025). This reflects strong academic commitment and task persistence, which are central indicators of motivated learning. Formative classroom environments that emphasize constructive feedback significantly enhance responsibility and achievement (Black & Wiliam, 2018).

Changes in students' attitudes and behavior in daily life also serve as important indicators of high learning interest and successful internalization of Islamic Religious Education values. Based on observations and interviews with other teachers and homeroom teachers, there is a significant improvement in students' morals and behavior. Students become more polite in communicating with teachers and friends, more concerned about the cleanliness and tidiness of the school environment, more honest in various situations, including during exams, and more tolerant of differences among themselves. Many students spontaneously apply Islamic etiquette, such as greeting when meeting, asking permission before passing in front of elders, helping friends in difficulty, or sharing food with friends who do not bring provisions (Teacher-1, 2025). These behavioral changes do not emerge from coercion or fear of punishment, but rather from awareness and a deep understanding of the importance of these values, successfully instilled through the learning process (Anwar et al., 2025b).

Students' active participation in school religious activities also demonstrates a strong interest in Islamic Religious Education. Activities such as congregational midday prayer, morning Quran recitation, Islamic holy day commemorations, or other religious social activities receive very positive responses from students. They no longer need to be reminded or forced to participate in these activities; they come with their own awareness, sometimes even earlier than the designated time. In the implementation of activities, students show seriousness and solemnity, such as when performing congregational prayer, striving to maintain order and focus, or when reciting the Quran, striving to read properly and correctly according to the tajweed learned. Some students even take the initiative to become prayer

imams, lead prayers, or coordinate religious activities without being asked by teachers.

Another aspect that demonstrates high learning interest is students' awareness of the practical benefits of Islamic Religious Education learning for their lives. In interviews, many students expressed that they feel Islamic Religious Education is very helpful in addressing various life problems, such as providing peace of mind during difficulties, guidance in making sound decisions, and spiritual strength to withstand temptations and negative pressures from the environment. Students also realize that values such as honesty, responsibility, and hard work taught in Islamic Religious Education are highly relevant to their lives as part of a coastal community that relies on trust in economic and social interactions. This awareness of relevance and benefits makes students increasingly motivated to study Islamic Religious Education seriously, as they see direct impacts on their lives.

High learning interest is also reflected in students' willingness to continue developing and improving themselves. When teachers provide feedback or corrections on their mistakes, students accept it with an open mind and strive to improve without feeling offended or discouraged. They demonstrate a growth mindset, viewing mistakes as part of the learning process and an opportunity to develop, not as embarrassing failures. Students who receive less satisfactory grades do not give up; instead, they try harder by requesting additional explanations from teachers, studying more diligently, or asking friends who understand better for help. This attitude of resilience shows that their learning interest is not merely momentary enthusiasm but a long-term commitment to continued learning and development (Student-2, 2025). These behaviors reflect a growth mindset, in which mistakes are seen as opportunities for growth. Growth mindset research demonstrates strong correlations with resilience and academic achievement (Claro et al., 2016).

Positive social interactions among students in the context of Islamic Religious Education learning also become an important indicator. Students with high learning interest not only focus on their own achievement but also care about their

friends' development. There is a visible culture of mutual assistance among students, where those who already understand gladly help those who do not yet understand, those who have memorized verses help those still struggling to memorize, or those who already read the Quran fluently patiently guide those still hesitant. There is no arrogant or condescending attitude among students; instead, a mutually supportive cooperative learning atmosphere is created. This shows that Islamic Religious Education has not only succeeded in increasing individual learning interest but also in forming a solid and supportive learning community (Student-1, 2025).

Self-reflection conducted by students also demonstrates the depth of their learning interest in Islamic Religious Education. Several students revealed that they often reflect on the material they have learned, evaluate their own behavior to see whether it is in accordance with Islamic teachings, and consider how to apply the values they have learned in concrete situations they face. This reflection shows that Islamic Religious Education learning has touched students' affective and spiritual dimensions, not only stopping at the cognitive level alone. Students experience internal transformation, becoming more aware of their religious identity and striving to live in accordance with the values they believe in. Teachers also facilitate this reflection process through sharing sessions or reflective discussions that provide students with space to express their thoughts and feelings about their Islamic Religious Education learning journey (Gillies, 2016).

The research findings indicate that the learning interest of students at SMP Negeri 5 Sojol is manifested in various interrelated indicators, including high enthusiasm in participating in learning, active participation, consistency in reviewing materials, ability to manage study time, great curiosity, seriousness in completing assignments, positive changes in attitude and behavior, participation in religious activities, awareness of the practical benefits of learning, willingness to develop, positive social interaction, and self-reflection ability (Afifah et al., 2025; Mikamahuly et al., 2023).

This comprehensive manifestation of learning interest aligns with the theory of Sinaga et al. (2025), which states that students' learning interest encompasses

integrated cognitive, affective, and conative dimensions. The findings of this research strengthen the theory by providing empirical evidence that, when learning strategies are designed holistically and contextually, the three dimensions of learning interest can develop simultaneously and mutually reinforce one another. However, this research also found additional dimensions that have not been extensively explored in previous theories, namely the social-communal dimension of learning interest reflected in positive social interaction and a culture of mutual assistance among students, as well as the spiritual-reflective dimension evident from students' ability to conduct self-reflection and awareness of their religious identity.

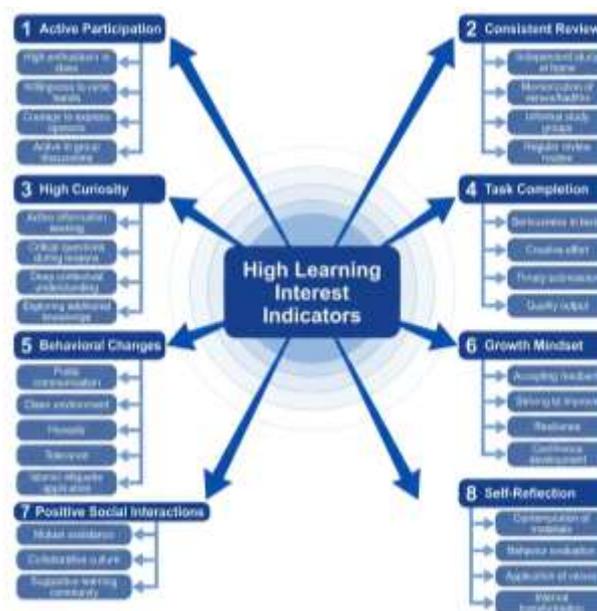


Figure 3. Students' learning interest

IV. CONCLUSION

This study concludes that Islamic Religious Education teachers at SMP Negeri 5 Sojol have successfully developed and implemented ten integrated, contextual, and adaptive learning strategies that effectively enhance students' learning interest despite significant infrastructural and socio-economic limitations. Through active student involvement, contextual icebreaking, sustained motivational support, cooperative learning, practical demonstrations, exemplary conduct and habituation, creative use of simple media, formative and educative assessment, collaboration with parents and the community, and differentiated instruction,

teachers created a meaningful and engaging learning environment. These pedagogical practices fostered high enthusiasm, active participation, consistent independent learning, effective time management, strong curiosity, responsibility in completing tasks, observable positive behavioral transformation, reflective awareness, and the internalization of religious values in students' daily lives. The findings demonstrate that learning quality is not solely dependent on advanced facilities, but can be achieved through pedagogical creativity, relational engagement, and contextual sensitivity. Consequently, this study contributes to the advancement of Sustainable Development Goal 4 (quality and inclusive education) and Goal 10 (reduced inequalities) by providing an empirically grounded model of resource-sensitive yet high-impact instructional strategies that can be replicated in remote or under-resourced schools to help narrow the educational gap between rural and urban contexts in Indonesia.

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