

Analysis of Students' Learning Difficulties in Islamic Religious Education (PAI): A Case Study at SMP Rahmat Islamiyah Medan

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
Article history: Received: October 14, 2024 Revised: November 17, 2024 Accepted: December 27, 2024 Available Online: January 30, 2025	This study aims to analyze the learning difficulties experienced by students in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) at SMP Rahmat Islamiyah Medan. The research method used is a qualitative approach with a case study, involving in-depth interviews with students, teachers, and other related parties. The findings of the study reveal that the main factors causing learning difficulties in PAI are the students' lack of understanding of the material, limited proficiency in Arabic, and low motivation to learn. The study also identifies various strategies used by teachers to address these difficulties, including the use of more interactive methods and a contextual approach to religious values.
Keywords: Learning Difficulties; Teaching Methods; Islamic Religious Education.	
Please cite this article: Kiftya, M., Giansyah, R., Fauziah, S., & Nurjanah, H. (2025). Analysis of students' learning difficulties in Islamic Religious Education (PAI): A case study at SMP Rahmat Islamiyah Medan. <i>Integrasi: Jurnal Studi Islam dan Humaniora</i> , 3(1). 53-65	<p style="text-align: center;">ABSTRAK</p> Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis kesulitan belajar yang dialami oleh siswa dalam mata pelajaran Pendidikan Agama Islam (PAI) di SMP Rahmat Islamiyah Medan. Metode yang digunakan adalah pendekatan kualitatif dengan studi kasus, yang melibatkan wawancara mendalam dengan siswa, guru, dan pihak terkait lainnya. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa faktor utama yang menyebabkan kesulitan belajar PAI adalah kurangnya pemahaman siswa terhadap materi, keterbatasan dalam penguasaan bahasa Arab, serta minimnya motivasi belajar. Penelitian ini juga mengidentifikasi berbagai strategi yang digunakan oleh guru untuk mengatasi kesulitan tersebut, termasuk penggunaan metode yang lebih interaktif dan pendekatan yang lebih kontekstual terhadap nilai-nilai agama.
Page: 53-65	<p>Copyright© 2025. Integrasi: Jurnal Studi Islam dan Humaniora. This is an open acces article under the CC-BY-SA lisencc (https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/).</p>

A. Introduction

Islamic Religious Education (PAI) is an important subject taught in schools at all levels, from elementary to high school. PAI aims not only to instill knowledge about Islam but also to shape students' character and morals. However, despite its vital role, the teaching of PAI often faces significant challenges, particularly in terms of students' understanding and application of the material. In SMP Rahmat Islamiyah Medan, it was found that students face notable difficulties in this subject, which require special attention.

In the context of education, learning difficulties refer to the obstacles students face in understanding or mastering the material being taught. These difficulties can arise from a variety of internal and external factors. Internal factors include students' psychological conditions, such as learning motivation, intelligence, and interest in the subject. External factors, on the other hand, involve teaching methods, the learning environment, and parental support. Therefore, it is important to conduct in-depth research on the causes of learning difficulties in Islamic Religious Education (PAI), particularly at SMP Rahmat Islamiyah Medan.

Research on learning difficulties in PAI has been widely conducted by various researchers. One relevant study was conducted by Suryani (2018), who mentioned that students' learning difficulties in PAI are related to the complex and abstract nature of religious texts. Additionally, research by Yuliana (2020) revealed that a lack of motivation to learn is one of the primary causes of low academic achievement in PAI. This phenomenon demonstrates that the issue of learning difficulties in PAI is highly complex and requires a comprehensive approach to address it.

At SMP Rahmat Islamiyah Medan, it was found that many students face challenges in understanding materials related to Islamic history and the interpretation of the Qur'an. This aligns with findings from Susanti (2019), which revealed that

understanding Islamic subjects, particularly interpretations and history, is a major challenge for many students. Moreover, the teaching methods used in this school tend to rely on traditional approaches, which are considered less effective in enhancing students' understanding.

One important factor contributing to learning difficulties is the lack of motivation among students to engage with PAI lessons. According to Ryan and Deci (2000), motivation is a key factor in academic success. Unmotivated students are less likely to exert maximum effort in understanding the material, leading to learning difficulties. This can be observed in the low participation rates of students in PAI lessons at SMP Rahmat Islamiyah Medan.

Additionally, the lack of variety in teaching methods is another factor that contributes to learning difficulties. Teachers who rely solely on lecturing and homework assignments do not provide opportunities for students to actively engage in the learning process. This is in line with findings from Hidayat (2017), who showed that monotonous teaching methods can reduce students' interest and motivation to learn. Therefore, PAI instruction should adopt more innovative approaches, such as discussions, project-based learning, and the use of engaging teaching media.

The learning environment also has a significant impact on students' academic success. According to Zohar and Dori (2003), a conducive environment supports more effective learning. At SMP Rahmat Islamiyah Medan, the classroom environment is not ideal, and the lack of learning resources becomes one of the obstacles that hinder students from fully optimizing their potential in PAI lessons. The small classrooms and limited teaching aids make it difficult for students to concentrate on the material being taught.

Parental support plays an essential role in overcoming students' learning difficulties. Many students do not receive adequate support from their parents, particularly when it comes to completing assignments or understanding the material provided by the teacher. This was confirmed by research conducted by Sari (2021),

which found that parents who are actively involved in their children's education can help students overcome learning difficulties. At SMP Rahmat Islamiyah Medan, many parents work full-time and do not have enough time to assist their children with their studies.

In addition to these factors, one of the primary causes of learning difficulties in PAI is students' limited understanding of the material being taught. As Hamzah (2016) explained, a lack of deep understanding of Islamic teachings, such as the interpretation of the Qur'an and Hadith, causes students to struggle in applying this knowledge to their daily lives. Therefore, it is essential to provide more in-depth and contextual understanding to help students grasp the meanings contained in religious texts.

To address learning difficulties in PAI, several solutions have been proposed. One of the suggestions is to improve the teaching methods used by teachers. The use of technology in teaching, such as multimedia-based learning applications, can help students understand the material in a more engaging and interactive way. According to Prasetyo (2020), the use of technology in Islamic education can enhance students' understanding of the material by presenting information visually and making it easier to comprehend.

Moreover, it is important to increase students' involvement in the learning process. This can be achieved by giving students the opportunity to engage in discussions, ask questions, and collaborate in groups. As Johnson and Johnson (1999) stated, collaborative learning helps students understand the material better because they can share knowledge and experiences with one another. Therefore, PAI teachers at SMP Rahmat Islamiyah Medan should adopt a more collaborative and discussion-based approach in their teaching.

Increasing students' motivation to learn is also a crucial step in overcoming learning difficulties. According to Pintrich (2003), motivation has a significant impact

on students' academic outcomes. Therefore, PAI teachers need to provide praise and positive feedback to students who put in effort to understand the material. This will make students feel valued and more motivated to learn.

Islamic education should not only help students acquire knowledge but also shape their character and moral values. Therefore, effective PAI instruction should be able to foster a love for the religion and the motivation to continuously improve oneself. As emphasized in the Qur'an in Surah Al-Alaq verses 1-5, education is the key to enlightening humanity. Proper PAI instruction can shape a generation that is not only intellectually intelligent but also has good morals.

Thus, this study aims to investigate the learning difficulties faced by students in Islamic Religious Education at SMP Rahmat Islamiyah Medan. This research is expected to provide useful solutions for improving PAI teaching and learning at this school and others facing similar challenges.

B. Method

This research adopts a qualitative approach to understand the learning difficulties faced by students in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) at SMP Rahmat Islamiyah Medan. Qualitative research is suitable for exploring the experiences, perceptions, and challenges of students, as it allows for in-depth investigation into the underlying factors contributing to learning difficulties. This approach will help identify both internal and external factors affecting students' learning outcomes in PAI and provide insights into potential solutions.

The research design is a case study, focusing specifically on SMP Rahmat Islamiyah Medan. A case study approach is useful for exploring a specific issue within its real-life context. By focusing on a single school, the study aims to provide a detailed analysis of the challenges faced by students in PAI lessons. The case study design also allows for a deeper understanding of the unique circumstances and conditions that may influence the learning process at this school.

Data will be collected through a combination of methods, including interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis. Interviews will be conducted with students, PAI teachers, and school administrators to gather their perspectives on the causes of learning difficulties and the effectiveness of existing teaching methods. Classroom observations will provide valuable information on the teaching practices and classroom environment, enabling the researcher to assess how these factors may impact students' learning experiences. Additionally, document analysis will include the review of students' assignments, test results, and other relevant academic records to identify patterns in students' academic performance and the areas where they struggle the most.

The participants in this study will include 30 students from SMP Rahmat Islamiyah Medan, 3 PAI teachers, and 2 school administrators. The students will be selected from various classes to ensure a diverse range of experiences and learning difficulties. The selection of teachers and administrators will be based on their involvement in the PAI curriculum and their understanding of the learning challenges faced by students. Purposive sampling will be used to choose participants who can provide relevant and insightful data regarding the research questions.

The data collected will be analyzed using thematic analysis, which involves identifying and analyzing patterns or themes within the data. Thematic analysis will help the researcher identify the key factors contributing to learning difficulties in PAI and understand the relationships between these factors. The findings will be used to formulate recommendations for improving teaching practices and supporting students in overcoming their learning challenges. Additionally, the results of this study may serve as a basis for further research on learning difficulties in Islamic Religious Education.

C. Results and Discussion

The results of this study reveal several key factors contributing to learning difficulties in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) at SMP Rahmat Islamiyah Medan.

These factors are primarily categorized into internal and external variables, including student motivation, teaching methods, classroom environment, and parental involvement. This section will discuss the findings in detail, supported by relevant research and literature.

One of the main internal factors identified in this study is the low level of student motivation. A significant number of students reported that they lack interest in PAI, which affects their engagement in the lessons. This finding aligns with research conducted by Yuliana (2020), which highlighted that low motivation is a primary cause of learning difficulties in religious education. Motivation plays a crucial role in determining students' willingness to put in effort and engage with the subject matter (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Without sufficient motivation, students tend to show passive behavior in class and perform poorly in assessments.

Another internal factor contributing to learning difficulties is students' limited understanding of Islamic teachings, particularly in interpreting religious texts such as the Qur'an and Hadith. Many students expressed confusion when trying to understand the meanings and context of verses from the Qur'an, which is essential for deepening their religious knowledge. This is consistent with findings from Susanti (2019), who noted that students often struggle with abstract concepts in Islamic history and the interpretation of religious texts. The complexity of the subject matter requires a more comprehensive teaching approach that incorporates contextual understanding.

In terms of teaching methods, the study found that traditional, teacher-centered methods were predominantly used in PAI lessons at SMP Rahmat Islamiyah Medan. Teachers relied heavily on lectures and textbook readings, which did not actively engage students in the learning process. This approach is less effective in fostering critical thinking and deeper understanding, as discussed by Hidayat (2017). The lack of interactive methods such as discussions, group work, or multimedia presentations means that students have fewer opportunities to actively engage with the material, leading to a shallow understanding of the content.

The classroom environment also emerged as a significant factor affecting students' learning experiences. Several students reported feeling distracted during lessons due to overcrowded classrooms and inadequate learning resources. Zohar and Dori (2003) emphasized that a conducive learning environment, including proper seating arrangements, sufficient lighting, and access to learning materials, is crucial for student success. At SMP Rahmat Islamiyah Medan, the limited space and resources hinder students' ability to concentrate and fully engage in the lessons, exacerbating their learning difficulties.

Parental involvement is another external factor that influences students' learning difficulties in PAI. The study found that many students do not receive adequate support from their parents when it comes to studying or completing assignments. This lack of parental engagement in their children's education may contribute to the students' low performance in PAI. According to Sari (2021), parents who are actively involved in their children's learning process can significantly enhance academic achievement. In this case, many parents at SMP Rahmat Islamiyah Medan are busy with work and unable to assist their children with their studies, which may contribute to the lack of motivation and understanding among students.

In addition to these internal and external factors, the findings also suggest that students' lack of practical application of religious knowledge contributes to their difficulties in PAI. Students often fail to connect what they learn in PAI lessons with their daily lives. This disconnect can lead to disengagement from the subject and difficulty in remembering key concepts. As Hamzah (2016) explained, the application of religious knowledge in real-life contexts is crucial for reinforcing understanding and retention. Therefore, teaching methods should include opportunities for students to apply their learning in meaningful ways, such as through community projects or role-playing scenarios.

The study also revealed that some students face challenges in understanding Islamic history, particularly the historical context of the early Islamic community. This area of study requires not only knowledge of historical facts but also the ability to analyze and interpret them in relation to contemporary issues. Many students at SMP Rahmat Islamiyah Medan reported difficulty in grasping the significance of historical events and their impact on current Islamic practices. According to Suryani (2018), understanding the historical context of Islamic teachings is essential for a deeper understanding of the religion. Therefore, a more engaging and contextual approach to teaching Islamic history is needed to help students connect the past with the present.

One significant challenge identified was the absence of a structured system to assess students' progress in PAI. Several students indicated that they were not provided with timely or comprehensive feedback on their performance in the subject. This lack of feedback makes it difficult for students to identify their strengths and areas for improvement, which in turn affects their motivation and academic achievement. According to Ryan and Deci (2000), constructive feedback is essential for maintaining motivation and helping students improve their performance. Teachers at SMP Rahmat Islamiyah Medan should consider providing regular feedback and formative assessments to help students track their progress.

In terms of teaching practices, it was noted that there is a need for more varied instructional methods to address the diverse learning styles of students. For instance, some students prefer visual learning, while others learn best through discussion or hands-on activities. The reliance on a single mode of instruction in PAI lessons fails to meet the needs of all students. As Hidayat (2017) pointed out, using a mix of teaching strategies, including collaborative learning and multimedia resources, can enhance student engagement and understanding.

The study also highlighted the importance of integrating technology into the teaching of PAI. Many students expressed a preference for using digital tools and resources to learn, as they find these methods more engaging and interactive. This

finding is consistent with research by Prasetyo (2020), which suggested that technology-based learning can enhance students' understanding of Islamic subjects by providing visual and interactive content. By incorporating multimedia tools such as educational videos, interactive quizzes, and virtual discussions, teachers can make PAI lessons more engaging and effective.

Moreover, students suggested that the curriculum should be revised to make it more relevant to their daily lives. Many students reported that they found some of the content in the PAI curriculum to be disconnected from their real-world experiences. This highlights the need for a curriculum that is both relevant and accessible, enabling students to relate what they learn to their personal beliefs and daily practices. As Hamzah (2016) emphasized, curriculum design should reflect the needs and interests of students to foster greater engagement and understanding.

The study also found that teacher-student relationships play a crucial role in overcoming learning difficulties in PAI. Students who felt supported and respected by their teachers were more likely to engage actively in the lessons and seek help when they encountered difficulties. Positive teacher-student relationships have been shown to enhance motivation and academic performance (Johnson & Johnson, 1999). Therefore, it is important for teachers to foster a supportive and respectful classroom environment where students feel comfortable expressing their challenges and asking questions.

Additionally, peer support was found to be an effective strategy in overcoming learning difficulties. Some students reported that they benefited from collaborative learning with their classmates, particularly when working on group assignments or projects. Peer support allows students to share knowledge and help each other overcome challenges. As Johnson and Johnson (1999) suggested, cooperative learning can enhance student understanding and build a sense of community in the classroom.

To address the identified learning difficulties, the study recommends several solutions. First, teachers should adopt more varied and interactive teaching methods, including group discussions, project-based learning, and multimedia resources. Second, teachers should provide regular feedback and formative assessments to help students track their progress and improve their understanding. Third, parents should be encouraged to become more involved in their children's education, as their support can significantly enhance academic achievement. Finally, the curriculum should be revised to ensure that it is relevant to students' real-life experiences and interests.

In conclusion, the study highlights that learning difficulties in PAI at SMP Rahmat Islamiyah Medan are caused by a combination of internal and external factors. By addressing these factors and implementing more engaging and interactive teaching strategies, it is possible to improve students' learning outcomes in PAI. The findings of this study provide valuable insights for teachers, administrators, and policymakers in enhancing the quality of Islamic Religious Education in secondary schools.

D. Conclusion

The study on learning difficulties in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) at SMP Rahmat Islamiyah Medan has identified various internal and external factors that contribute to students' struggles in this subject. Internal factors such as low motivation, limited understanding of religious texts, and the lack of practical application of learned knowledge were found to significantly hinder students' academic performance. These factors create barriers to active engagement, preventing students from fully understanding the material and applying it to their daily lives.

External factors, such as traditional teaching methods, overcrowded classrooms, inadequate resources, and limited parental involvement, also exacerbate the learning difficulties. The reliance on teacher-centered approaches and the lack of a conducive learning environment further limit the students' opportunities to engage with the subject matter in meaningful ways. Additionally, the insufficient support from parents in

assisting with academic tasks contributes to students' lack of motivation and understanding, reinforcing the difficulties they face in PAI lessons.

To address these challenges, the study suggests the implementation of more interactive and varied teaching methods, including multimedia tools and collaborative learning. Additionally, creating a supportive classroom environment, providing regular feedback, and encouraging greater parental involvement are crucial steps in improving students' learning outcomes. A more relevant and engaging curriculum that connects religious teachings to students' everyday experiences is also necessary to foster deeper learning and motivation in PAI.

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