Structured Discussion Strategy in Islamic Religious Education: Enhancing Students' Learning Motivation and Conceptual Understanding in Vocational Schools

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Article info	Abstract
	Islamic Religious Education (PAI) is often perceived by students as a theoretical subject that emphasizes memorization rather than meaningful understanding, which may reduce students' learning motivation. Therefore, innovative learning strategies are required to create a more engaging and participatory classroom environment. This study aims to analyze the influence of structured discussion strategies on students' learning motivation, perceptions toward PAI, and conceptual understanding in Islamic Religious Education classes at State Vocational High School 1 Kota Bima. This research employed a qualitative approach using observation, interviews, and documentation to obtain comprehensive data regarding classroom dynamics and learning processes. The findings indicate that the implementation of structured discussion strategies significantly increased students' participation, confidence, and engagement during the learning process. Students' perceptions of PAI shifted from viewing it as a purely theoretical subject to recognizing it as a relevant moral and ethical framework applicable to everyday life and future professional contexts. In addition, students demonstrated deeper conceptual understanding by moving from memorization-based learning toward more analytical and contextual comprehension. These findings suggest that structured discussion strategies can foster a more dialogical, participatory, and meaningful learning environment in vocational secondary schools. However, this study was limited to a single school context and a relatively small number of participants. Future research is recommended to involve broader samples and employ mixed-method approaches to further examine the effectiveness of structured discussion strategies in different educational settings. ***Keywords:** Structured Discussion, Learning Motivation, Islamic Religious Education, Conceptual Understanding*

Abstrak

Pendidikan Agama Islam (PAI) sering dipersepsikan oleh siswa sebagai mata pelajaran yang bersifat teoritis dan lebih menekankan pada hafalan dibandingkan pemahaman yang bermakna, sehingga dapat menurunkan motivasi belajar siswa. Oleh karena itu, diperlukan strategi pembelajaran yang inovatif untuk menciptakan lingkungan belajar yang lebih aktif dan partisipatif. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis pengaruh penerapan strategi diskusi terstruktur terhadap motivasi belajar siswa, persepsi siswa terhadap mata pelajaran PAI, serta kedalaman pemahaman konsep pada pembelajaran Pendidikan Agama Islam di State Vocational High School 1 Kota Bima. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan teknik pengumpulan data berupa observasi, wawancara, dan dokumentasi untuk memperoleh data yang komprehensif

mengenai proses dan dinamika pembelajaran di kelas. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa penerapan strategi diskusi terstruktur mampu meningkatkan keaktifan, kepercayaan diri, dan partisipasi siswa dalam proses pembelajaran. Selain itu, terjadi perubahan persepsi siswa terhadap mata pelajaran PAI dari yang sebelumnya dipandang sebagai mata pelajaran teoritis menjadi pedoman nilai yang relevan dengan kehidupan sehari-hari serta dunia kerja di masa depan. Pemahaman siswa juga berkembang dari pembelajaran berbasis hafalan menuju kemampuan berpikir analitis dan kontekstual. Temuan ini menunjukkan bahwa strategi diskusi terstruktur mampu menghadirkan pembelajaran yang lebih dialogis, partisipatif, dan bermakna dalam konteks sekolah menengah kejuruan. Namun demikian, penelitian ini masih terbatas pada satu lokasi penelitian dengan jumlah partisipan yang terbatas. Oleh karena itu, penelitian selanjutnya disarankan melibatkan sampel yang lebih luas serta menggunakan pendekatan metode campuran untuk menguji efektivitas strategi diskusi terstruktur dalam berbagai konteks pendidikan.

Kata Kunci: Diskusi Terstruktur, Motivasi Belajar, Pendidikan Agama Islam, Pemahaman Konseptual

INTRODUCTION

Islamic Religious Education (PAI) at the vocational secondary school level faces distinctive challenges compared to general secondary education. The characteristics of vocational students, who are primarily oriented toward job readiness and technical competence, tend to shape a pragmatic learning culture focused on practical skills (Harmi, 2022). Within this context, normative subjects such as PAI are often perceived as supplementary components of the curriculum that are less directly connected to professional demands. Such perceptions contribute to limited student engagement, low active participation, and a tendency to attend classes procedurally without strong intrinsic motivation. This condition presents a significant concern, considering that PAI plays a strategic role in fostering religious character, moral integrity, and social responsibility among students (Hanaris, 2023).

The issue of low learning motivation in PAI cannot be separated from instructional practices that remain predominantly teacher-centered. Lecture-based approaches that provide minimal opportunities for interaction position students as passive recipients of information rather than active constructors of knowledge (Musyafak & Subhi, 2023). As a result, the internalization of values tends to occur superficially and fails to generate meaningful learning experiences. At State Vocational High School 1 Kota Bima, this phenomenon is reflected in limited participation during classroom discussions, students' hesitation to express opinions, and minimal critical elaboration of the subject matter. These conditions indicate the urgent need for instructional innovation capable of activating both cognitive and affective engagement simultaneously (Mesra, 2023).

Learning motivation constitutes a crucial factor in determining the quality of both the learning process and its outcomes. Motivation functions as an internal driving force that directs attention, regulates effort, and sustains persistence in achieving

learning goals. In the context of PAI, motivation extends beyond academic achievement, encompassing religious awareness and ethical commitment (Adiyono et al., 2023). Highly motivated students are not only eager to understand concepts intellectually but are also inclined to reflect upon and apply religious values in their daily lives. Conversely, low motivation results in mechanical learning processes that do not lead to meaningful attitudinal or behavioral transformation (Handayani et al., 2022).

Numerous studies have demonstrated that participatory learning approaches are positively associated with increased student motivation. The discussion method is widely regarded as effective because it provides space for dialogue, exchange of ideas, and negotiation of meaning among learners (Susilowati, 2022). Structured discussions encourage students to think critically, articulate arguments, and appreciate diverse perspectives. In PAI classes, discussions enable the exploration of contextual issues such as social ethics, responsibility, and religious practices in the digital era. This process fosters learning experiences that are closely connected to students' real-life contexts, thereby enhancing the potential for intrinsic motivation to emerge (Ariesanti et al., 2023).

Previous research has reported that classroom discussions contribute to improved learning outcomes and student participation across various subjects. Several studies indicate increased interest and attentiveness when students engage in well-organized group discussions (Kartiwan et al., 2023). Other findings emphasize the importance of clearly defined roles, stimulating guiding questions, and reflective sessions to ensure productive interaction. However, most of these studies have focused on general academic subjects or have been conducted in non-vocational educational settings. The specific context of vocational schools, characterized by distinct learning cultures and student orientations, remains underexplored, particularly in relation to Islamic Religious Education (Suwastini et al., 2022).

Moreover, research on PAI frequently concentrates on cognitive achievement or the reinforcement of religious attitudes without positioning motivation as a central variable of analysis. Yet motivation constitutes a foundational prerequisite for the success of any instructional strategy (Yusuf, 2022). Without adequate motivation, even innovative pedagogical approaches may fail to generate substantial impact. This gap underscores the importance of examining the implementation of structured discussions as a means of enhancing learning motivation in PAI within vocational school contexts (Iswanto et al., 2022).

The implementation of classroom discussions in PAI requires systematic design to prevent them from devolving into unfocused conversations. Effective discussions should begin with contextual problem scenarios relevant to students' lived experiences. Group formation should consider heterogeneity to encourage balanced interaction (Daga, 2022). Assigning specific roles such as moderator, recorder, and presenter helps maintain order and collective responsibility. Presentation of group findings followed by whole-class reflection serves to consolidate understanding and provide constructive

feedback. Such structured procedures are expected to create a democratic yet academically directed learning atmosphere (Pane & Nailatsani, 2022).

This study was conducted among tenth-grade students at State Vocational High School 1 Kota Bima who were enrolled in PAI during the ongoing semester. The focus of the investigation centers on changes in students' learning motivation following the implementation of structured classroom discussions (Furroyda et al., 2022). Indicators of motivation include attention to instructional content, perceived relevance of learning materials, confidence in expressing ideas, and satisfaction with the learning experience. The analysis seeks to identify motivational tendencies that emerge throughout the instructional process (Pratama et al., 2022).

The primary objective of this study is to analyze the effectiveness of implementing structured discussions in enhancing students' learning motivation in Islamic Religious Education at State Vocational High School 1 Kota Bima. Additionally, the study aims to describe the structured implementation of classroom discussions and to identify shifts in students' motivational levels following their application. The findings are expected to provide empirical contributions that enrich pedagogical practices in Islamic Religious Education within vocational school settings (As'ari et al., 2023).

The central thesis underpinning this research asserts that systematically designed and contextually grounded discussions can enhance student motivation by fulfilling the need for active participation, social recognition, and meaningful relevance. When students are provided with opportunities to express ideas and engage in collective reflection, they develop a sense of ownership over the learning process. Such experiences strengthen internal drives to learn and deepen their understanding of religious values (Poernomo & Rahminawati, 2022).

The novelty of this study lies in its explicit focus on learning motivation as the primary variable within the context of Islamic Religious Education in vocational secondary education, as well as in its structured design of classroom discussions tailored to vocational student characteristics. By presenting empirical evidence from a vocational school setting in Kota Bima, this study contributes to the limited body of literature addressing motivational dimensions of PAI instruction in SMK contexts. The findings are expected to serve as a reference for educators and educational stakeholders in designing more participatory, relevant, and motivation-oriented Islamic Religious Education practices that support sustainable character development.

METHODS
Research Design and Participants

This study employed a qualitative approach with a case study design to gain an in-depth understanding of the implementation of the discussion method in enhancing students' learning motivation in Islamic Religious Education (PAI). The design was

selected because the research focuses on classroom processes, interaction dynamics, and students' lived learning experiences within a natural educational setting.

The study was conducted at State Vocational High School 1 Kota Bima during the second semester of the academic year. Participants consisted of one PAI teacher and 30 tenth-grade students selected purposively based on their involvement in classroom discussions. The students were aged between 15–16 years and represented diverse vocational backgrounds. Institutional permission was obtained from the school administration prior to the research. Participants were informed about the study's purpose, and confidentiality was ensured through the use of coded identities in data reporting.

Instruments and Data Collection Procedures

The primary instrument was the researcher as the key instrument, supported by observation guidelines, semi-structured interview guides, and learning documentation. Classroom observations focused on motivational indicators such as attention, participation, and self-confidence. Interviews were conducted to explore students' and the teacher's perceptions of the discussion-based learning experience. Documentation included lesson plans and students' group work outputs. Data were collected in stages: preliminary observation, implementation of structured discussions, in-depth interviews, and document review. Credibility was ensured through source and technique triangulation as well as member checking.

Data Analysis Techniques and Ethical Considerations

Data were analyzed using thematic analysis involving data reduction, categorization, and inductive conclusion drawing. Trustworthiness was strengthened through triangulation, peer debriefing, and maintaining an audit trail. Ethical principles including informed consent, confidentiality, and institutional approval were strictly observed in accordance with academic publication standards.
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RESULTS AND DISCUSSION
Results

This section presents and interprets the core findings of the study conducted at State Vocational High School 1 Kota Bima. The findings demonstrate a significant transformation in students' learning motivation, perspectives toward Islamic Religious Education (PAI), and depth of conceptual understanding following the implementation of structured classroom discussions. Rather than merely increasing classroom activity, the intervention reshaped the quality of engagement, indicating meaningful pedagogical impact.

Initial classroom observations revealed that prior to the implementation of structured discussions, learning was predominantly teacher-centered. Students' participation was limited, responses were brief and descriptive, and classroom

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interaction lacked dialogical depth. Many students appeared disengaged and demonstrated minimal initiative in asking questions or expressing opinions. These patterns reflected relatively low intrinsic motivation and a perception of PAI as a theoretical subject with limited relevance to their vocational aspirations.

Following the systematic implementation of structured discussions incorporating contextual problem scenarios, heterogeneous group formation, role assignments, group presentations, and reflective sessions a clear shift in classroom dynamics was observed. Student participation increased substantially. A larger proportion of students actively contributed ideas, responded to peers' arguments, and engaged in collaborative reasoning. The learning atmosphere evolved into a more dialogical and participatory environment.

To illustrate the pattern of motivational change, observational findings were summarized in Table 1 (monochrome format), comparing key motivational indicators before and during the intervention.

Table 1. Changes in Students' Learning Motivation Indicators (Observation Summary)

Motivation Indicator	Before Discussion	During Discussion
Attention to learning material	Low–Moderate	High
Active participation	Low	High
Confidence in speaking	Low	Moderate–High
Persistence in tasks	Moderate	High
Enthusiasm in questioning	Low	Moderate–High

As shown in Table 1, all observed indicators demonstrate consistent improvement. Students displayed greater attentiveness during lessons, likely due to their responsibility within group discussions. Active participation increased markedly, including among previously passive learners. Confidence in expressing opinions improved progressively, particularly after students gained experience sharing ideas in smaller groups before presenting to the entire class.

Importantly, these motivational changes were not superficial. Interview data revealed that students perceived the learning process as more engaging and meaningful. They reported that discussions enabled them to understand the reasoning behind Islamic teachings rather than merely memorizing definitions. This indicates a shift from extrinsic motivation previously driven by academic obligation toward intrinsic motivation grounded in curiosity and perceived relevance. When students recognized connections between PAI content and their vocational futures, their interest and commitment to learning increased naturally.

A notable transformation was also observed in students' perspectives toward PAI as a subject. Before the intervention, several students regarded PAI as largely theoretical and disconnected from vocational competencies. Through discussions centered on contextual themes such as professional ethics in Islam and moral

responsibility in the workplace, students began to reinterpret PAI as a foundational value system relevant to their future careers. This shift in perception significantly contributed to enhanced motivation, as perceived relevance is a critical determinant of sustained engagement.

In addition to motivational growth, improvements were evident in students' knowledge construction. Responses during group presentations became more analytical and argumentative. Students demonstrated the ability to connect theoretical concepts with practical examples and to articulate structured explanations. The discussion process facilitated clarification and peer correction, leading to collaborative knowledge construction. In this sense, motivation and understanding developed simultaneously: heightened motivation encouraged deeper exploration, while improved comprehension reinforced confidence and sustained engagement.

The classroom climate also underwent positive transformation. The role of the teacher shifted from information transmitter to facilitator, guiding discussion flow without dominating it. This redistribution of communicative authority fostered a sense of shared ownership over the learning process. Students exhibited greater responsibility for group tasks and demonstrated mutual respect in responding to differing viewpoints. Such an inclusive learning environment strengthened social motivation, as students felt acknowledged and valued within the academic community.

The dynamics of the discussion and the role of the teacher as a facilitator during learning can be seen in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Implementation of structured discussions in Islamic Religious Education learning at State Vocational High School 1 Kota Bima, demonstrating active student interaction and the teacher's role as a facilitator. Source: Research documentation (2026).

The significance of these findings lies in demonstrating that motivational enhancement is not incidental but can be intentionally cultivated through structured pedagogical design. The integration of contextual problems, clear group roles, and

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systematic reflection proved essential in sustaining meaningful discussions. The results suggest that motivation among vocational students is highly responsive to instructional strategies that emphasize relevance, participation, and dialogical engagement.

Overall, the study reveals substantial changes in students' perspectives, knowledge depth, and learning motivation. Structured classroom discussions fostered a more meaningful, relevant, and reflective learning experience. These findings highlight the potential of dialogical and context-based approaches in Islamic Religious Education to strengthen intrinsic motivation and deepen students' understanding, particularly within vocational secondary school settings.

Discussion

Changes in Students' Learning Motivation

The findings of this study conducted at State Vocational High School 1 Kota Bima indicate a significant transformation in students' learning motivation following the implementation of structured discussion strategies in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) (Qutsiyah et al., 2023). Prior to the intervention, classroom instruction was predominantly teacher-centered. Students tended to act as passive recipients of information, showing limited participation, minimal questioning, and low confidence in expressing their ideas. Their motivation appeared largely extrinsic, driven mainly by academic obligations rather than genuine interest in the subject matter (Maulidia & Prafitasari, 2023).

After the structured discussion model was introduced, substantial improvement was observed across various motivational indicators, including attention to learning materials, active participation, persistence in completing tasks, and willingness to present opinions (Gawise et al., 2022). Students were no longer merely listeners; instead, they became active participants responsible for contributing to group discussions. The assignment of specific roles within discussion groups encouraged accountability and ensured that each student had a meaningful function in the learning process (Widyanto & Vienlentia, 2022).

The interactive nature of structured discussions created a more dynamic classroom atmosphere. Students demonstrated greater enthusiasm during lessons, especially when discussion topics were connected to real-life vocational contexts (Hasyim et al., 2022). When students perceived that Islamic values were relevant to their future careers, their intrinsic motivation increased significantly. This shift suggests that contextualization plays a critical role in strengthening engagement and sustaining learning interest (Astawa, 2022).

Furthermore, the collaborative environment fostered social motivation. Students felt valued when their perspectives were acknowledged by peers and teachers. This recognition enhanced their confidence and encouraged more consistent participation (Sari & Hamami, 2022). Overall, the change in motivation was not superficial; it

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represented a deeper transformation in students' attitudes toward learning, characterized by greater responsibility, engagement, and commitment.

Changes in Students' Perspectives Toward Islamic Religious Education

Another significant finding concerns the transformation of students' perspectives toward Islamic Religious Education. Before the implementation of structured discussions, many students perceived PAI as theoretical, normative, and somewhat disconnected from their vocational studies. This perception contributed to limited emotional engagement and reduced interest in the subject (Putri & Harinaredi, 2023).

Through structured and context-based discussions, students explored themes such as Islamic work ethics, professional responsibility, and moral conduct in industrial settings. These discussions highlighted the practical relevance of Islamic teachings beyond ritual aspects, emphasizing their role as guiding principles in professional and social life. As a result, students began to reinterpret PAI as a foundational value system applicable to their future careers (Syahrijar et al., 2023).

This shift in perspective became evident in the way students articulated their responses. Rather than providing memorized definitions, they began to relate Islamic concepts to concrete examples and real-world situations. Their arguments became more reflective and contextual, indicating a deeper internalization of values. The transformation from viewing PAI as merely a theoretical subject to understanding it as a practical moral framework represents a crucial outcome of the intervention (Sholihah & Amaliyah, 2022).

The reconstruction of students' perceptions significantly influenced their overall learning experience. When students recognized the relevance and applicability of the subject, their engagement naturally improved. Thus, the structured discussion strategy not only enhanced classroom interaction but also reshaped the meaning students attached to the subject itself.

Improvement in Knowledge and Depth of Understanding

In addition to motivational and perceptual changes, the study revealed a significant enhancement in students' knowledge and depth of conceptual understanding. Initially, students' comprehension was largely limited to basic recall and surface-level explanation. Responses were often textual and lacked analytical depth (Mansyur, 2022).

Following the implementation of structured discussions, students demonstrated stronger critical thinking skills. During group interactions, they were required to analyze problems, formulate arguments, and justify their viewpoints based on Islamic principles (Islami & Soekamto, 2022). This process encouraged active knowledge construction rather than passive reception of information. When differing opinions emerged, students engaged in clarification and reasoning, which strengthened conceptual clarity (Ridwan et al., 2023).

Group presentations further deepened understanding. Students needed to organize their ideas systematically and present coherent explanations to the class (Sholeh, 2023). The question-and-answer sessions that followed stimulated broader reflection and comparative analysis. These activities promoted higher-order thinking skills, including interpretation, evaluation, and application of concepts (Rofiq & Nadliroh, 2022).

The improvement in understanding was reflected in the quality of students' responses, which became more analytical, structured, and contextually grounded (Musarwan & Warsah, 2022). They were able to connect theoretical teachings with practical applications in daily and professional life. This shift from memorization-based learning to meaning-based learning indicates a substantial cognitive development.

Overall, the findings confirm that structured classroom discussions significantly enhance students' motivation, transform their perspectives, and deepen their knowledge (Karnia et al., 2023). The intervention successfully shifted the learning process from passive instruction to active, reflective, and meaningful engagement. These results underscore the effectiveness of dialogical and contextual approaches in strengthening Islamic Religious Education within vocational secondary school settings.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of the study conducted at State Vocational High School 1 Kota Bima, it can be concluded that the implementation of structured discussion strategies in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) significantly improved students' learning motivation, transformed their perspectives, and deepened their conceptual understanding. The strategy successfully shifted the learning process from a teacher-centered and passive model to a more student-centered, dialogical, and interactive approach. Students demonstrated greater participation, confidence, and critical as well as contextual thinking skills. Furthermore, their perception of PAI changed from viewing it as merely a theoretical subject to recognizing it as a relevant moral framework for daily life and future professional practice. Therefore, structured classroom discussions proved to be an effective approach in fostering meaningful and reflective learning within the vocational secondary school context.

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