

INNOVATION IN ISLAMIC RELIGIOUS EDUCATION LEARNING USING THE STORYTELLING METHOD TO STRENGTHEN CHARACTER IN HISTORY OF ISLAMIC CULTURE (SKI) LEARNING AT MDTA MUHAMMADIYAH 37 MEDAN

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Abstract: *This study aims to analyze innovations in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning through the application of storytelling methods in strengthening students' character in Islamic Cultural History (SKI) learning at MDTA Muhammadiyah 37 Medan. The background of this study is based on the low internalization of character values in SKI learning which has tended to be textual and teacher-centered. This study uses a qualitative approach with a descriptive-exploratory method. The research subjects included PAI/SKI teachers and students, with data collection techniques in the form of direct observation of learning, in-depth interviews, and documentation. The results of the study indicate that the application of the storytelling method can create a more lively, contextual, and meaningful learning atmosphere. Through stories of Islamic figures and historical events conveyed narratively, students showed an increased understanding of character values such as religiosity, honesty, responsibility, discipline, and exemplary behavior. In addition, this method also contributed to increased active participation, imagination, and emotional involvement of students in the learning process. This study concludes that the storytelling method is an effective learning innovation in SKI learning to strengthen the character of students at the MDTA level, and is relevant to be developed as a pedagogical strategy in Islamic Religious Education learning oriented towards character building.*

Keywords: *Storytelling, Character strengthening, History of Islamic culture*

Introduction

Islamic Religious Education plays a strategic role in shaping students' character based on Islamic, moral, and social values. In the context of basic religious education, particularly at Madrasah Diniyah Takmiliyah Awaliyah (MDTA), Islamic Religious Education (PAI) is not only directed at mastering cognitive aspects, but also at internalizing values and cultivating religious attitudes in daily life. One subject with significant potential for character formation is Islamic Cultural History (SKI), as it contains exemplary stories of Islamic figures and historical events rich in moral and spiritual values. (Rozi et al., 2021).

However, the reality of Islamic Studies (SKI) learning in various religious educational institutions shows that the learning process still tends to be textual, informative, and teacher-centered. Historical material is often presented in the form of memorizing facts and chronologies of events without being contextually linked to students' lives. This condition results in the character values contained in the SKI material not being optimally internalized, resulting in less

meaningful learning and less able to shape students' attitudes and behavior in real terms. This phenomenon was also found in Islamic Studies (SKI) learning at MDTA Muhammadiyah 37 Medan, as initial observations showed low levels of active participation and emotional involvement of students in the process of learning Islamic cultural history. (Ida Lestari & Fitriani, 2021).

Therefore, learning innovations are needed that can bring Islamic cultural history material to life and bridge the cognitive and affective aspects of students. One method considered relevant is storytelling. This method emphasizes delivering material through coherent, expressive, and meaningful stories, thereby building students' imagination, empathy, and emotional engagement. In the context of Islamic cultural history learning, storytelling allows teachers to convey the stories of the prophets, companions, and Islamic figures in a more vivid and contextual way, allowing students to grasp character values such as honesty, responsibility, discipline, and exemplary behavior more deeply.

A number of previous studies have shown that the storytelling method has a positive contribution in learning Islamic religious education and character education (Zalnur & Kosim, 2020). Several studies have concluded that storytelling can increase students' interest in learning, understanding of the material, and religious attitudes. Other research also confirms that story-based learning is effective in instilling moral and social values in early childhood and elementary school students. However, most of this research focuses on increasing learning motivation or general understanding of the material, and has not specifically examined the role of storytelling in strengthening character in SKI subjects in MDTA environments.

Furthermore, previous research has generally been conducted in elementary schools (SD/MI) or early childhood education settings, using quantitative or limited experimental approaches. Studies that delve deeply into the process, dynamics, and experiences of storytelling learning in the context of non-formal religious education such as MDTA are still relatively limited. Therefore, research on how storytelling methods are implemented in SKI learning and how these methods significantly contribute to strengthening student character in MDTA remains lacking. (Mardiyanto, 2024).

Therefore, this research is crucial. This research not only examines the effectiveness of the storytelling method in general but also provides an in-depth analysis of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning innovations through storytelling in strengthening student character in Islamic Education (SKI) learning at MDTA Muhammadiyah 37 Medan.

Thus, the researchers hope this research can provide theoretical contributions to the development of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning studies, particularly character-based Islamic Religious Education (SKI), as well as practical contributions for teachers and religious education institutions in developing innovative, contextual, and character-building-oriented learning strategies. Furthermore, the results of this study are also expected to serve as a reference for developing more humanistic and meaningful Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning policies and practices.

Literature Riview

Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning is primarily focused on character development in students through the internalization of Islamic values in the learning process. Within the framework of character education, Islamic Religious Education (PAI) emphasizes not only mastery of religious material but also the development of religious attitudes, honesty, responsibility, discipline, and exemplary behavior. Therefore, the learning approach used in PAI is required to address both the cognitive and affective domains so that these values can be continuously internalized in students. (Rakyat, 2023).

Islamic Cultural History (SKI) is a religious education (PAI) subject with significant potential for character building, as it encompasses the history of Islam, exemplary figures, and significant events imbued with moral and spiritual values. Conceptually, Islamic Cultural History (SKI) material is highly relevant as a means of character development for students. However, various studies indicate that Islamic Cultural History (SKI) instruction is often delivered textually and memorization-oriented, resulting in students not fully understanding the meaning and exemplary values contained in historical events.

In this context, the storytelling method is seen as a relevant and innovative learning strategy. Storytelling emphasizes the delivery of material through coherent, contextual, and communicative narratives, thereby building emotional engagement and imaginative power in students. Through stories, students not only understand historical events factually but also grasp the character values reflected in the attitudes and behaviors of the characters depicted. Thus, storytelling serves as an effective pedagogical medium for bridging the cognitive and affective aspects of Islamic Cultural History (SKI) learning.

Based on the literature review, a research gap can be identified regarding the application of storytelling methods in Islamic Religious Education learning in non-formal religious educational institutions, particularly Madrasah Diniyah Takmiliah Awaliyah. Research that comprehensively examines how storytelling is used as an innovation in Islamic Religious Education learning to strengthen students' character is still relatively limited. Therefore, this study seeks to fill this gap by analyzing the application of storytelling methods in Islamic Religious Education learning and its contribution to strengthening students' character, as reflected in the learning process and student responses. (Agustina et al., 2024).

Method

This study uses a qualitative approach with a descriptive-exploratory approach. This approach was chosen because the study aims to deeply understand the process of implementing the storytelling method in Islamic Cultural History learning and its contribution to strengthening student character. The qualitative approach allows researchers to explore learning phenomena in a natural, contextual, and holistic manner based on the experiences of the research subjects. (Sugiyono, 2020).

The research was conducted at MDTA Muhammadiyah 37 Medan, which was selected purposively based on the consideration that the institution has implemented the storytelling method in Islamic Education learning. The research subjects included Islamic Education teachers and MDTA students. Teachers were chosen as primary informants because they play a direct role in planning and implementing learning, while students were chosen as supporting informants to obtain data on responses, involvement, and character changes that emerged during the learning process. Data collection techniques in this study included observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation.

Result and Discussion

One of the key findings of this study is that the application of storytelling is not merely a variation in teaching methods, but has developed into an innovation in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning within the context of Islamic Studies (SKI) learning. This innovation lies in the way teachers package Islamic history material, transforming it from merely informative and rote learning to a meaningful learning experience oriented toward character development. The following are innovations in the application of storytelling to strengthen student character :

1. Transformation of Material Delivery

Transforming the delivery of Islamic Education material from factual narrative to reflective narrative. In conventional learning, historical stories are often presented as a series of events and characters. However, through storytelling, teachers go beyond the storyline, but consciously highlight the conflicts, character attitudes, and moral values contained within. Students not only learn "what happened" in Islamic history but are also encouraged to understand "why the character's attitude is important" and "how those values can be applied in everyday life." This transformation makes is a medium for character education, not just a history subject. (Agustin, 2024).

2. Integration of Character Values

Values such as religiosity, honesty, responsibility, discipline, and exemplary behavior are not conveyed through direct advice, but are presented through historical figures and events. This approach allows students to accept the values more naturally, without feeling patronized. Based on the researchers' analysis, this implicit approach is actually more effective because students tend to imitate and identify with the figures they admire in the stories. (Nabihasnah & Alhayyu, 2025).

3. Shifting Roles of Teachers

The teacher's role shifts from conveyor of material to facilitator of values. In storytelling-based learning, the teacher acts not only as a storyteller but also as a guide for reflection. Teachers help students draw lessons from the story through simple questions and light-hearted discussions. This role strengthens the teacher's pedagogical function in Islamic Religious Education (PAI), namely as a character educator who guides the process of internalizing values, not simply as a teacher of material.

4. Emotional Strengthening

Storytelling leverages emotions as a gateway to learning. When students are touched by the stories of struggles or the exemplary behavior of Islamic figures, they more easily remember the stories and their values. Research findings show that this emotional engagement directly contributes to changes in students' attitudes and behavior, particularly in terms of religiosity and responsibility. (Herliyanto, 2023).

Based on this, it can be concluded that the innovation in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning through storytelling in this study lies not solely in the method, but rather in how the method is consciously implemented to strengthen character in Islamic Religious Education learning. This innovation distinguishes this study from previous research, which generally only positions storytelling as a technique for attracting attention or increasing learning motivation. Reflectively, these findings suggest that Islamic Religious Education learning will be more effective if designed as a process of instilling values, rather than simply conveying history. Storytelling provides a space for students to learn through stories, emulate figures, and reflect on values in their daily lives. Thus, this innovation contributes to the development of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning that is more humanistic, contextual, and oriented toward character building.

Based on observations and interviews during the research process, the application of storytelling methods in Islamic Cultural History learning demonstrated significant changes, both in the learning process and in student attitudes. learning the history of Islamic culture, which previously tended to be one-way and focused on teacher explanations, began to evolve into a more lively and communicative format. The coherent and expressive delivery of Islamic historical stories created a more fluid classroom atmosphere, allowing students to feel more comfortable and open to participating in the learning process.

The teacher delivered Islamic Education (SKI) material through stories of Islamic figures, using a simple narrative style that was relatable to the students' world. The stories were not presented as a series of historical events, but rather linked to their everyday experiences. This approach made it easier for students to understand the story's content and grasp its moral message. Throughout the lesson, students appeared more focused, actively asked questions, and demonstrated curiosity about the stories being told. (Islam et al., 2021).

The researchers' observations also showed that the storytelling method can foster emotional engagement in students. When listening to stories of the struggles, honesty, and exemplary behavior of Islamic figures, students not only understood the stories cognitively but also responded emotionally. Some even spontaneously expressed opinions or simple reflections regarding the characters' attitudes. This demonstrates that stories have a powerful influence on students' emotions and shape their perspectives.

In terms of character strengthening, the research results show the development of religious attitudes, honesty, responsibility, discipline and role models in students (Elektronik, 2025). Religious values are evident in students' increasing awareness of participating in religious activities and showing respect to teachers. Honesty and responsibility are beginning to be evident in students' habits of completing assignments and admitting mistakes without coercion. Meanwhile, the values of discipline and exemplary behavior are developed through the process of emulating the Islamic figures described in the stories, which are then used as examples in everyday behavior.

Teachers and students at MDTA Muhammadiyah 37 Medan reported that the storytelling method helped them understand SKI lessons in a more accessible and enjoyable way. Teachers assessed that stories facilitated the delivery of character values because students could directly see concrete examples through historical figures and events. Meanwhile, students felt that SKI learning was less boring and more memorable than learning that focused solely on textbooks. The storytelling method serves not only as a method of delivering material but also as a means of internalizing values. Through stories, students indirectly learn about good attitudes and behavior, without feeling patronized. This process makes character values easier to accept and has the potential to be more enduring in students.

The results of this study demonstrate that storytelling can make Islamic Religious Education learning more meaningful and humane. Learning is no longer simply about conveying Islamic history but also provides a platform for instilling character values naturally. These findings confirm that storytelling is a relevant innovation in Islamic Religious Education learning that deserves development, particularly in the context of non-formal religious education such as MDTA.

Integration of SKI Material in Storytelling Innovation

The innovation in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning through storytelling in this study is also evident in the selection and packaging of Islamic Religious Education materials, tailored to the goal of character building. The materials used are not randomly selected, but rather selected from IS themes that are close to the students' lives and rich in exemplary values. Thus, the IS material serves not only as historical content but also as a means of shaping attitudes and behavior. (Anwar et al., 2023).

One of the materials used is the story of the example of the Prophet Muhammad SAW, especially regarding the qualities of honesty (*ṣidq*), trustworthiness and responsibility. This story is told through a simple story about the Prophet's life before and after his appointment as an apostle. In telling the story, the teacher emphasized how the Prophet's honesty in trading made him trusted by the community. Through this story, students not only get to know the Prophet

Muhammad SAW as a historical figure, but also understand the meaning of honesty and trust in everyday life, such as being honest with parents and teachers.

Other materials used include stories of the Prophet's companions, such as Abu Bakr al-Siddiq and Umar ibn al-Khattab, which demonstrate the values of courage, justice, and responsibility. These stories are presented by emphasizing the companions' firm yet fair leadership and decision-making. Within the context of learning, teachers relate these stories to student behavior in the madrasah environment, such as being fair to friends and being responsible for assigned tasks. (Siregar et al., 2025).

Furthermore, material from important events in Islamic history, such as the Prophet Muhammad's migration (hijrah), is also used as storytelling material. The hijrah is not simply described as a change of location, but is interpreted as a demonstration of patience, steadfast faith, and discipline in carrying out God's commands. Through this story, students are encouraged to understand that success does not come instantly, but requires effort, patience, and obedience.

Character strengthening becomes more effective when SKI material is delivered in the form of stories that focus on values and wisdom, not on complex chronological details (Kalsum & Taufiq, 2025). Students find it easier to remember the moral message of a story than to memorize the year and name of an event. This confirms that storytelling innovation lies not only in the method but also in the way we select and simplify SKI material to suit the development of MDTA students.

Thus, the Islamic Religious Education material in storytelling-based learning serves as a medium for reflecting on values. Students not only learn about Islamic history but also learn to become religious, honest, disciplined, and responsible individuals. This integration of material and methods strengthens storytelling's position as a relevant and applicable Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning innovation at MDTA Muhammadiyah 37 Medan.

Conclusion

The storytelling method is an effective Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning innovation in Islamic Cultural History (SKI) to strengthen students' character. By presenting material in the form of exemplary stories of the Prophet, his companions, and important events in Islamic history, the values of religiosity, honesty, responsibility, discipline, and exemplary behavior can be internalized more meaningfully. This integration of methods and materials makes SKI learning more lively, contextual, and relevant to the character education goals at MDTA Muhammadiyah 37 Medan.

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