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The Theory of Multiple Intelligences and Its Implications for Islamic Religious Education Learning

Nur Aziza*, M Sirozi
Postgraduate Master of Islamic Religious Education, Raden Fatah State Islamic University, Palembang, 30126, Indonesia

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* *Corresponding author:*

E-mail:
nuraziza_24052160032@radenfatah.ac.id

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A B S T R A C T

This study examines the application of Howard Gardner's Multiple Intelligences (MI) theory to Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning in Indonesia. MI theory asserts that intelligence consists of various types, such as linguistic, logical-mathematical, visual-spatial, musical, kinesthetic, interpersonal, intrapersonal, and naturalistic. The research method used was a qualitative literature study approach, analyzing literature related to the integration of MI in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning to develop students' holistic potential. The results show that the application of MI enables teachers to design more varied, interactive, and student-centered learning, tailored to individual learning styles. However, obstacles remain, such as limited teacher understanding and pedagogical skills and an education system that emphasizes cognitive outcomes over affective and psychomotor aspects. Therefore, continuous teacher professional development, the provision of creative learning tools, and a more comprehensive assessment system are needed. Overall, the application of MI theory in PAI contributes significantly to increased learning motivation, character development, and spiritual awareness among students, making religious education more meaningful, enjoyable, and contextualized in everyday life.

1. Introduction

Education is a fundamental process that determines the direction of a nation's development. Through education, humans are equipped not only with knowledge and skills, but also with values, attitudes, and character that will shape them into holistic individuals (Yunarti, 2014). In the Indonesian context, education, based on Pancasila and the 1945 Constitution, aims not only to master knowledge but also to develop a generation of faithful, pious, and noble characters. One subject that plays a significant role in achieving these goals is Islamic Religious Education (PAI). Islamic Religious Education holds a crucial position because it addresses not only theological and religious issues but also social, moral, and character-building aspects. Through Islamic Religious Education (PAI), students are guided to

understand Islamic teachings comprehensively, from faith and sharia to morals (Sumiati & Mumtahanah, 2025). The primary goal of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) is to shape Muslims capable of fulfilling their roles as servants of Allah and caliphs on earth, balancing the spiritual, intellectual, emotional, and social dimensions. Therefore, Islamic Religious Education (PAI) is not simply delivered cognitively through memorization of verses, hadith, or religious theories; it must also enable students to internalize Islamic values into their real lives (Kartina et al., 2024).

However, the reality of education shows that Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning often remains conventional. Teachers tend to use lecture methods, memorization assignments, and written exams as evaluation methods. While this approach is effective in transferring information, it often ignores the diverse potential of students (Zuhri Dwi Apriansah et al., 2024). It's not uncommon for students to feel bored, unmotivated, or even fail to grasp the essence of religious values because the methods applied don't align with their learning styles. This situation is exacerbated by the old paradigm that assumes student intelligence can only be measured through logical-mathematical and language abilities, resulting in students with other types of intelligence being underappreciated (Yanti, 2017). Yet, every student possesses diverse potential. Some students enjoy speaking and expressing ideas verbally, others prefer learning through images and visual symbols, and still others find it easier to understand lessons through hands-on practice or group work (Zakia, 2024). This diversity demonstrates that teachers cannot use the same teaching methods for all students. On the other hand, teachers must be creative in designing varied learning and be able to accommodate the various intelligences of students so that each individual can develop according to their potential.

Howard Gardner, a developmental psychologist from Harvard University, introduced the Multiple Intelligences (MI) theory in 1983, revolutionizing the educational world's perspective on the concept of intelligence (Nuradilah, n.d.). Gardner emphasized that intelligence is not a single ability related only to logic and language, but rather consists of eight different but complementary types of intelligence: linguistic, logical-mathematical, visual-spatial, musical, kinesthetic, interpersonal, intrapersonal, and naturalist. Every individual possesses a combination of these intelligences, although the level of development and dominance of each intelligence varies from person to person (Mariana, 2018).

This theory has strong relevance to Islamic Religious Education learning. For example, linguistic intelligence can be utilized to hone students' ability to understand the Quran and Hadith through discussions, storytelling, or writing religious reflections. Logical-mathematical intelligence can be applied to analyzing Islamic jurisprudence laws, calculating zakat, or understanding the regularity of nature as a sign of God's greatness. Visual-spatial intelligence can be developed through the use of visual media such as maps of the Prophet's missionary journey, illustrations of worship procedures, or learning videos. For students with musical intelligence, learning can be enriched by reciting Quranic verses, nasyid, or shalawat. Meanwhile, students with kinesthetic intelligence can be facilitated with

direct practice, such as prayer procedures, ablution, or drama-based religious activities. Interpersonal intelligence supports students in learning through group work, discussion, and collaboration in religious activities, while intrapersonal intelligence can be cultivated through reflection, prayer, and self-reflection. Finally, naturalistic intelligence can be instilled through Islamic teachings about protecting nature, environmental cleanliness, and using God's creation wisely.

The application of Multiple Intelligences theory in Islamic Religious Education not only makes learning more engaging and enjoyable, but also provides space for each student to learn according to their best potential (Mohtarom, 2016). Thus, students are no longer viewed as uniform, but rather valued for their differences. Teachers who understand this diversity will be more open in choosing learning methods, avoiding being fixated on lectures and memorization, but also employing a variety of strategies that activate students' various intelligences. Furthermore, the application of this theory aligns with Islamic principles that emphasize respect for human potential. In the Qur'an, Allah affirms that humans were created in the best form (ahsani taqwim), meaning that each individual possesses their own unique strengths and strengths (Priatna et al., n.d.). Therefore, an educator's task is not to standardize, but rather to guide students to discover, develop, and optimize their potential. This becomes increasingly relevant in the modern context, where the world of education is required to produce a generation that is not only intellectually intelligent, but also possesses emotional, social, and spiritual intelligence, as well as adequate life skills.

Thus, it is important to examine the theory of Multiple Intelligences and its implications for Islamic Religious Education (ISE). This study is expected to provide a theoretical foundation and practical guidance for teachers in developing more varied, creative, and inclusive learning. By applying this theory, Islamic Religious Education (ISE) learning can be more effective in instilling religious values, increasing student motivation and engagement, and developing a generation of intelligent, moral Muslims capable of facing the challenges of the times while adhering to Islamic values. Ultimately, this approach supports the achievement of the holistic goal of Islamic education, namely to produce perfect human beings with a balance between cognitive, affective, psychomotor, and spiritual aspects.

2. Methodology

This article uses a qualitative approach with library research (Adlini et al., 2022). Data were obtained through analysis of relevant literature, such as educational theory books, scientific journals, and previous research on Multiple Intelligences and its application in Islamic Religious Education (ISE) learning. The analysis was conducted by examining concepts, theories, and expert findings to produce a synthesis that can serve as a basis for developing Islamic Religious Education (ISE) learning strategies based on Multiple Intelligences. This analysis process involves identifying the main ideas from each source, comparing the theories with each other, and connecting the study results to the context of ISE learning in schools and madrasas. Furthermore, the researchers classified various forms of intelligence

relevant to ISE learning methods and then assessed the extent to which their application could improve student motivation, interest, and learning outcomes. This step was followed by drawing conclusions through an interpretive approach, so that conceptual theories could be contextualized in real-life learning practices. Thus, this research not only presents the theory descriptively, but also attempts to integrate various expert views to find practical implications that are applicable for teachers in developing innovative, varied learning methods, according to the characteristics of student intelligence, and in line with the objectives of Islamic Religious Education which emphasizes the balance of cognitive, affective, and psychomotor aspects.

3. Results and Discussion

Basic Concepts of Multiple Intelligences Theory

The theory of Multiple Intelligences (MI) proposed by Howard Gardner in 1983 in his book Frames of Mind: The Theory of Multiple Intelligences is one of the major breakthroughs in the world of modern education. Gardner rejected the traditional view that intelligence can only be measured through logical and language abilities (IQ). Instead, he emphasized that humans have various types of intelligence that work dynamically and complement each other. According to Gardner, there are eight main types of intelligence: (1) linguistic, (2) logical-mathematical, (3) visual-spatial, (4) musical, (5) kinesthetic, (6) interpersonal, (7) intrapersonal, and (8) naturalist (Bornstein & Gardner, 1986). In its development, some experts also added existential and spiritual intelligence as complements.

The concept of Multiple Intelligences is highly relevant to modern education because it provides a new perspective that every student has different potential, abilities, and learning styles. No two individuals are exactly alike in terms of thinking styles, interests, or how they understand material. Therefore, students cannot be treated equally in a single, uniform learning model. Each student requires an approach tailored to their intelligence characteristics for optimal learning (Auralia et al., 2025). Teachers play a crucial role in recognizing and understanding these differences. A student's learning success cannot be measured solely by cognitive aspects, such as the ability to memorize, answer questions, or achieve high scores on exams.

Affective aspects, such as attitudes, values, and motivation, as well as psychomotor aspects, such as skills and concrete actions, are also essential parts of a holistic educational process. Through this understanding, teachers are expected to be able to design varied, creative, and adaptive learning that meets students' needs. In the context of Indonesian education, the theory of Multiple Intelligences serves as a strong foundation for the implementation of student-centered learning. This is very much in line with the spirit of "Independent Learning" launched by the government, namely providing freedom for students to develop their unique potential according to their respective interests, talents, and intelligence, so that education truly

becomes a means to foster excellence and a complete personality (Syaifulloh, 2025).

The Relevance of Multiple Intelligences Theory in Islamic Education Learning

Islamic Religious Education (PAI) aims not only to transfer religious knowledge but also to shape Islamic character, morals, and personality. Therefore, the application of Islamic Religious Education (MI) theory in PAI is crucial to prevent monotonous learning and emphasize solely memorization or cognitive aspects. Through this approach, teachers can accommodate students' diverse learning styles, allowing for deeper and more meaningful absorption of Islamic values. (Musbaing, 2024). For example, students with linguistic intelligence can be encouraged to write reflective essays about the meaning of faith or write inspiring stories about the Prophet Muhammad's exemplary behavior. Meanwhile, students with musical intelligence can express Islamic values through religious songs, nasyid, or recitations of poetry containing moral messages. For students with kinesthetic intelligence, teachers can use project-based learning methods such as religious dramas, educational games, or simulations of worship activities. This helps them understand religious concepts through direct experience.

Furthermore, students with interpersonal intelligence can be facilitated through group discussions, social collaboration, or religious mentoring programs. Meanwhile, those with strong intrapersonal intelligence can be guided to engage in self-reflection, spiritual journaling, or Quranic recitation exercises. Meanwhile, students with naturalist intelligence can be encouraged to understand the greatness of Allah SWT through nature-based learning, such as observing God's creation and relating it to the values of monotheism. Thus, Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning is not only theoretical but also contextual and applicable to everyday life.

Implementation of Multiple Intelligences Theory in Islamic Education Learning Strategies

Implementation of MI theory in Islamic Education learning can be done through several strategic approaches (Ramayanti et al., 2023). First, teachers need to map students' intelligence from the outset. This can be done using simple instruments such as learning style questionnaires or observing student behavior in class. This mapping will help teachers design learning that aligns with each student's potential. Second, teachers can develop varied learning models by integrating various activities according to intelligence types. For example, in morals, teachers can combine discussion activities (interpersonal), reflective writing (intrapersonal), and drama performances (kinesthetic).

Meanwhile, in teaching the Quran and Hadith, teachers can use audiovisual media (spatial and musical), as well as memorization methods based on rhythm and intonation to increase student learning interest. This approach not only creates a more lively classroom atmosphere but also encourages active student involvement in the learning process. Third, it's crucial for teachers to create an inclusive and flexible learning environment, where every student feels valued for their uniqueness

and potential. Islamic Religious Education (PAI)-based learning prioritizes the value of rahmatan lil 'alamin (blessing for the universe), which values diversity as a gift from Allah SWT. Teachers no longer act as information centers but as facilitators, helping students find the best learning methods according to their individual intelligence (Wahyudi, 2024).

Challenges and Solutions in Implementing MI in Islamic Religious Education Learning

Although conceptually, the theory of Multiple Intelligences (MI) is ideal for application in education, the reality of implementing this theory in Indonesia, particularly in Islamic Religious Education (PAI), still faces various complex challenges. One of the main obstacles is teachers' limited knowledge, insight, and skills in understanding and applying the principles of MI theory to classroom learning practices (Rofiqi, 2024). Many teachers remain trapped in the old paradigm, focused solely on academic achievement and exam results, leaving other aspects such as emotional, social, and spiritual intelligence under-represented. Consequently, learning tends to emphasize cognitive abilities without considering the diverse potential of students. Furthermore, the current educational evaluation system generally focuses on numerical assessments and written tests, thus failing to fully reflect student development holistically. Limited school facilities, a crowded curriculum, and administrative pressures also hinder the optimal application of this theory in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning.

The implementation of Multiple Intelligences (MI) in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning faces various challenges, such as the difficulty for teachers in accurately identifying each student's multiple intelligences and the limited time to develop learning methods appropriate to various types of intelligence. Furthermore, resources and learning media supporting MI implementation are often limited, resulting in a less than optimal learning process. Some teachers also find it difficult to effectively manage classes with diverse intelligences. To address this, special training for teachers is crucial so they can recognize and utilize the strengths of each student's individual intelligences. The development of varied and innovative learning media can also help adapt methods to various types of intelligence. Furthermore, collaboration between teachers and students in designing learning activities can increase student engagement and deepen student understanding. With the right strategy, the implementation of MI in PAI can significantly improve student learning motivation and learning outcomes.

To overcome these obstacles, strategic and sustainable steps are needed from various parties, especially educational institutions and the government. Islamic Religious Education teachers need to receive intensive training and professional mentoring to understand the basic principles of MI theory, including how to identify students' intelligence types and integrate them into teaching and learning activities. Furthermore, schools need to provide adequate supporting facilities and infrastructure, such as creative learning media, art expression spaces, religious laboratories, and co-curricular activities that can foster students' diverse intelligences. These efforts need to be accompanied by a shift in the paradigm of

learning evaluation that is more comprehensive, not only assessing the final results in the form of test scores, but also assessing the learning process, active participation, attitudes, and creativity of students. Thus, Islamic religious education can truly become a means of developing a holistic personality that is not only intellectually intelligent, but also emotionally, socially, and spiritually mature.

Implications of Multiple Intelligences Theory for Islamic Education Learning

The application of the Multiple Intelligences (MI) theory has very significant implications for Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning, both in terms of approach, method, and expected learning outcomes (Sabang et al., 2024). In terms of approach, the application of this theory encourages teachers to place students more at the center of learning, rather than simply objects receiving information. Learning becomes more humanistic and participatory, as each student is viewed as a unique individual with varying intelligence, learning styles, and potential. In this case, teachers act as facilitators who guide and help students develop their best potential according to their preferred type of intelligence. This concept also aligns with Islamic values that respect the diversity of Allah SWT's creation, as stated in QS. Al-Hujurat verse 13, which emphasizes that humans were created into tribes and nations so that they may know one another (Firdaus et al., 2025).

Thus, MI theory teaches that differences are not barriers, but rather essential assets in building a fair, inclusive, and respectful learning environment. In terms of learning methods, teachers are required to be more creative, innovative, and adaptive in designing learning activities that accommodate students' diverse intelligences, for example by using visual, auditory, kinesthetic, or collaborative approaches. The learning process is no longer monotonous or lecture-centered, but is developed into an active, interactive, and enjoyable activity for all students.

Meanwhile, in terms of learning outcomes, MI theory has implications for increasing students' intrinsic motivation because they feel valued and facilitated according to their individual potential and interests. When students are given the opportunity to learn in a way that best suits their intelligence, they will demonstrate greater enthusiasm and responsibility for the learning process. Students who were previously passive in conventional learning can become more active when given space to express themselves through projects, discussions, artwork, or reflective activities relevant to Islamic Religious Education.

Furthermore, the application of MI in learning also has an impact on strengthening the internalization of Islamic values, because learning does not stop at the mere transfer of religious knowledge, but also fosters spiritual awareness and noble morals. The learning process, based on real experiences and self-reflection, helps students understand Islamic teachings more deeply and apply them to their daily lives. Thus, the learning outcomes achieved are not only improved cognitive abilities but also the formation of character, religious attitudes, and devotion to Allah SWT, the primary goals of Islamic religious education.

4. Conclusion

The analysis concludes that the application of Multiple Intelligences (MI) theory in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning is highly relevant and effective for developing students' holistic potential. This theory presents a new perspective, emphasizing that human intelligence is not a single entity, but rather comprises various complementary aspects. With this understanding, the learning process no longer focuses solely on academic ability but also considers the uniqueness and strengths of each individual. Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers are required to adapt learning strategies to students' characteristics, so that each student's potential can be optimally developed. This approach aligns with the principles of Islamic education, which emphasize the balance between reason, heart, and action, and encourages students to recognize themselves as unique and valuable creations of God.

Furthermore, the application of Multiple Intelligences theory in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning not only enhances cognitive understanding of Islamic teachings but also significantly contributes to the development of students' affective and psychomotor aspects. Through this approach, Islamic values can be more deeply internalized through authentic and enjoyable learning experiences. Students not only understand Islamic teachings theoretically but are also able to practice them in their daily lives. In this way, religious education becomes more contextual, meaningful, and applicable in life, so that the main goal of Islamic Religious Education, namely forming individuals who are faithful, have noble morals, and are responsible, can be achieved more effectively and sustainably.

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