



Implications of Constructivist Theory in Islamic Religious Education Learning in Elementary School

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ABSTRACT

Islamic Religious Education (PAI) plays an important role in shaping students' character and spirituality. However, at SD Negeri 74 Palembang, learning has tended to remain teacher-centered, so students' active engagement has not been optimal. This study aims to describe the implementation of constructivist theory in PAI learning on the topic of prayer in the third grade, analyze its impact on students' understanding and religious attitudes, and identify the challenges faced by teachers within a context of limited resources. The study employed a descriptive qualitative approach, with data collected through observation, interviews, and documentation. Data were analyzed using the interactive model of Miles and Huberman, while validity was ensured through source and technique triangulation. The findings indicate that the teacher implemented constructivist principles through prayer demonstrations, reflective discussions, direct practice, and experience-based learning. Students became more active, developed a deeper understanding of worship, and demonstrated growth in discipline, concentration in prayer, and responsibility. Despite limited school facilities, teacher creativity enabled learning to remain contextual and meaningful. Thus, the implementation of constructivist theory proved effective in creating active, reflective, and student-centered PAI learning that is relevant for application in elementary schools.

1. Introduction

Islamic Religious Education (PAI) in Indonesia holds a highly strategic position in shaping students' character and moral conduct. According to the National Education System Law No. 20 of 2003, education must be able to develop a nation with noble character and faith in Almighty God (Kementerian Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan, 2003). However, in practice, PAI teaching methods in many schools, including SD Negeri 74 Palembang, still rely on traditional approaches that tend to be teacher-centered. As a result, students merely receive information without actively engaging in the learning process (Majid & Andayani, 2012).

Learning approaches that do not actively involve students may reduce their interest in and understanding of PAI content (Suyono & Hariyanto, 2011). Conventional instruction in PAI provides limited opportunities for students to construct their own understanding of religious teachings, so their comprehension of spiritual values tends to remain cognitive without meaningful internalization (Abdullah, 2015). In contrast, constructivist theory offers a new paradigm in learning by positioning students as active subjects in constructing knowledge and meaning (Piaget, 1972).

Therefore, this study focuses on the implications of constructivist theory in PAI learning for third-grade students on the topic of prayer at SD Negeri 74 Palembang. This theory emphasizes that knowledge is constructed through active interaction between learners and their environment and experiences (Suparno, 1997). Through this approach, students not only memorize but also understand and internalize religious values in their daily lives (Trianto, 2012). Constructivist learning provides a strong foundation for teachers to create student-centered learning environments, in which students become active agents in building their own knowledge (Joyce et al., 2011). Practically, this research is expected to contribute to improving the quality of PAI instruction, particularly in developing students' critical, reflective, and independent thinking skills (Suyono & Hariyanto, 2011).

The application of appropriate learning theories can enhance students' motivation and learning outcomes, which is also central to the constructivist approach, where students are motivated because they actively participate in constructing their own knowledge (Slavin, 2018). Thus, constructivist theory serves as an important foundation for optimizing cognitive principles in meaningful PAI learning (Nurhasanah & Rasyid, 2021). Several studies have demonstrated the effectiveness of constructivist approaches in PAI instruction. For example, research by Nurhasanah & Rasyid (2021) found that implementing a constructivist-based Problem-Based Learning model improved both learning outcomes and religious attitudes of elementary school students. Similarly, Rahmawati (2020) showed that constructivist-based PAI learning fostered students' reflective and critical thinking abilities. While these studies provide important contributions, they primarily focus on quantitative learning outcomes and offer limited insight into the in-depth implementation of constructivist theory in real classroom contexts.

This study is distinctive in that it employs a qualitative descriptive approach to explore in depth the implementation of constructivist theory in PAI learning among third-grade students at SD Negeri 74 Palembang. This approach enables researchers to understand how constructivist principles influence the quality of the learning process, strengthen students' understanding of religious concepts, and support the internalization of spiritual values (Moleong, 2017). SD Negeri 74 Palembang is located in the city center and is known for its strong reputation in religious education. The school has 16 classrooms, one library, and one prayer room with a large yard, although its learning media facilities remain limited. With 850 students and 43 staff members consisting of 28 classroom teachers, 4 PAI teachers, 4 physical education teachers, 4 administrative staff, 2 security personnel, and 1 cleaning staff, learning activities are conducted in two shifts, morning and afternoon, due to limited classroom availability.

SD Negeri 74 Palembang was selected as the research site because it possesses characteristics relevant to the study of constructivist implementation in PAI learning. The school is located in a densely populated residential area with diverse social, economic, and religious backgrounds, creating unique dynamics in the learning process, particularly in instilling religious values and fostering active and meaningful learning as emphasized in constructivist theory (Trianto, 2012). Additionally, as a public school with limited resources and minimal innovative learning materials, the implementation of constructivist theory becomes particularly significant, as teachers are required to be creative in designing learning processes that stimulate students' thinking, help them construct conceptual understanding, and create meaningful learning experiences using available resources (Suryana, 2020).

The selection of third-grade students is also based on psychological and pedagogical considerations. According to Piaget's theory of cognitive development, third-grade students are in the concrete operational stage, making them highly suitable subjects for examining how constructivist approaches help them construct religious concepts through direct experience, discussion, and simple reflection (Piaget, 1972). Through this context, the study aims to provide a comprehensive and contextual understanding of how constructivist theory is implemented in PAI learning in elementary schools with heterogeneous social characteristics and limited resources, while also offering practical contributions for PAI teachers in developing more meaningful learning experiences.

These conditions are clearly reflected at SD Negeri 74 Palembang, which is located in a densely populated environment with heterogeneous student characteristics and limited learning resources. In such circumstances, PAI learning requires an approach that not only focuses on knowledge transfer but also emphasizes students' active involvement in constructing their own religious understanding and experiences (Suparno, 1997). The main problem underlying this research arises from the reality that the implementation of constructivist theory in elementary PAI learning has not yet been fully optimized. Although constructivist theory has conceptually been shown to enhance conceptual understanding, rational thinking ability, and the internalization of religious values (Rahmawati, 2020), its practical implementation still faces challenges such as limited school resources, differences in students' social backgrounds and cognitive abilities, and variations in teachers' understanding of constructivist principles (Nurhasanah & Rasyid, 2021).

This study aims to describe and analyze the implications of constructivist theory in PAI learning in elementary schools. Through a qualitative descriptive approach, the research seeks to understand in depth how PAI teachers implement constructivist principles in the teaching and learning process, particularly in religious topics such as prayer. The study also aims to reveal the extent to which the implementation of constructivist theory improves the quality of the learning process, strengthens students' understanding of religious concepts, and promotes the internalization of spiritual values. Furthermore, the research intends to identify the challenges faced by teachers in implementing constructivist approaches within limited school

resources and to explore strategic efforts undertaken to optimize meaningful and contextual learning for elementary school students (Trianto, 2012).

2. Methodology

This study employs a qualitative approach with a descriptive research design. According to Moleong (2017), qualitative research aims to understand phenomena in depth through direct interaction between the researcher and participants in a natural context, where the researcher serves as the primary instrument in data collection and analysis. This approach is considered appropriate for the research objective, namely to comprehensively understand the implementation and implications of cognitive and constructivist theories in Islamic Religious Education (PAI), particularly on the topic of prayer in the third grade at SD Negeri 74 Palembang. Through this approach, the researcher can examine how teachers apply constructivist theory in instructional practice and its impact on students' conceptual understanding and religious attitudes (Sugiyono, 2017).

This research was conducted at SD Negeri 74 Palembang, an elementary school located in the city center with a diverse social background. The school has begun implementing active and contextual learning, including in PAI subjects. The research site was selected purposively because the third-grade PAI teacher has attempted to integrate a constructivist approach, for example through congregational prayer practice, discussions on the meaning of movements and recitations, and reflection on religious values in daily life. According to Creswell (2014), purposive site selection provides depth of data because it is chosen based on its relevance to the research focus.

The research subjects consisted of the third-grade PAI teacher as the primary subject and third-grade students as supporting subjects. The teacher was selected as the primary subject due to their direct role in designing and implementing constructivist-oriented learning. Meanwhile, students served as an important data source to understand how the implementation of the theory influences learning experiences (Moleong, 2017). Documentation in the form of activity photographs, lesson plans (RPP), prayer practice assessment sheets, and learning outcome records was also used to strengthen field data.

The study on the implementation of constructivist theory in PAI learning on the topic of prayer in the third grade at SD Negeri 74 Palembang used a qualitative approach with three main data collection techniques: observation, interviews, and documentation. Observation was employed to obtain a real picture of how constructivist theory was applied during the learning process. The researcher conducted direct observations in classrooms and the school prayer room to examine how teachers guided students in prayer practice, explained its meaning, and connected it with daily life experiences. This observation was conducted participatively so the researcher could understand behavior and social interaction in a natural context, consistent with Spradley (1980), who states that participant

observation enables researchers to obtain rich and authentic data from real situations.

In addition to observation, in-depth interviews were conducted with the PAI teacher, the school principal, and several third-grade students. These interviews aimed to explore their understanding, experiences, and perceptions regarding the implementation of cognitive and constructivist theories in prayer learning. Interviews were conducted using semi-structured guidelines to allow informants freedom to explain their perspectives. In line with Cohen et al., (2018), qualitative interviews produce reflective, contextual, and meaningful data because they enable participants to express personal experiences within educational social contexts. Documentation was used to complement and verify data obtained from observation and interviews. The analyzed documents included lesson plans (RPP), prayer practice assessment sheets, learning activity photographs, and student learning records. Arikunto (2019) explains that document analysis functions as a secondary data source that strengthens field findings and validates observational results.

Furthermore, the collected data were analyzed using the interactive analysis model of (Miles & Huberman, 1994), which includes three main stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. Data reduction was conducted by selecting, focusing, and simplifying data relevant to the research objectives. The reduced data were then presented in narrative descriptions and simple tables to systematically reveal patterns of findings. The final stage involved drawing conclusions or verification, namely interpreting the meaning of the entire dataset to understand how constructivist theory is implemented in PAI learning.

To ensure data validity, this study employed source triangulation and technique triangulation. Triangulation was conducted by comparing findings from multiple sources and data collection methods to test the consistency of results. Patton (1999) explains that triangulation enhances research credibility by examining data consistency from various perspectives. In this study, source triangulation was conducted by comparing information obtained from teachers, students, and learning documents, while technique triangulation was conducted by comparing results from observation, interviews, and documentation. Sugiyono (2018) emphasizes that triangulation is an effective method for maintaining objectivity, reliability, and credibility in qualitative research. Thus, through the combination of these three data collection techniques and the application of interactive analysis supported by triangulation validity testing, this study provides a comprehensive and in-depth description of the implementation of constructivist theory in PAI learning, particularly on the topic of prayer in the third grade at SD Negeri 74 Palembang.

3. Results and Discussion

General Condition of the School

SD Negeri 74 Palembang is a public elementary school located in Palembang, South Sumatra. The school operates under the national education system and serves

students from diverse socio-economic backgrounds. In general, the school has limited educational facilities, particularly in terms of instructional media and digital technology. However, the school provides basic infrastructure such as classrooms, a teacher's office, a library corner, and a modest prayer room (mushalla) used for religious activities. Religious practices are routinely implemented, especially in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning. Although technological resources are limited, the school maintains a strong culture of religious habituation, including congregational prayer and character education activities. This condition provides a contextual environment for implementing constructivist learning, particularly in worship practices such as prayer.

Research Process and Interview Data Collection

This study employed a qualitative descriptive approach. The research process began with preliminary observations to understand the classroom situation and learning characteristics. After obtaining permission from the school principal and the PAI teacher, the researcher conducted classroom observations during prayer learning sessions in the third grade. Data were collected through three primary techniques: classroom observation, semi-structured interviews, and documentation. Interviews were conducted with one PAI teacher and several third-grade students. The interviews aimed to explore students' learning experiences, their understanding of prayer, and the teacher's instructional strategies. The interview process was carried out after the learning sessions in a relaxed setting to ensure that participants could express their opinions openly. All interview responses were recorded in writing and analyzed through data reduction, categorization, and interpretation to identify themes related to constructivist learning implementation. The detailed interview questions are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Interview Question Guide

No	Interview Questions
1	How do you usually teach prayer movements to third-grade students?
2	Why do you choose direct practice as a learning method?
3	How do students respond to prayer practice activities?
4	Do students understand the meaning of prayer movements after practice?
5	How do you conduct reflection after prayer practice?
6	What challenges do you face in teaching prayer using this approach?
7	How do you assess students' understanding of prayer?
8	(For students) What do you feel after practicing prayer at school?
9	(For students) Do you better understand prayer after practicing it directly? Why?
10	(For students) Do you perform prayer more regularly after learning in class?

Constructivist Theory

Constructivist theory is a learning approach that emphasizes that knowledge is constructed by learners through experience and interaction (Suparno, 1997). In the context of Islamic Religious Education (PAI), this approach is highly important because it helps students understand religious values in depth. According to Piaget, learning is a process in which individuals construct knowledge based on their experiences (Piaget, 1972). This aligns with the principle that students are not

merely recipients of information but active agents in building their own understanding.

Furthermore, Vygotsky asserts that learning occurs through social interaction, where learners develop thinking abilities through collaboration with others (Vygotsky, 1978). In the context of PAI learning, interaction between teachers and students, as well as among students themselves, can deepen the understanding of spiritual and moral values. Constructivist learning encourages students to actively discover, build, and develop their own knowledge through meaningful learning experiences (Trianto, 2012). One advantage of constructivist theory is that it makes learning more meaningful, as students are expected to connect new information with prior experiences (Hasan & Inayati, 2025). However, challenges also exist in implementing this approach, such as the need for more time in the learning process. In addition, school facilities may influence the effectiveness of its implementation. Therefore, PAI teachers need to design flexible, innovative, and contextual learning to implement constructivist theory optimally in the classroom (Trianto, 2012).

Implications of Constructivist Theory in PAI Learning

The research findings indicate that PAI learning on the topic of prayer in third grade at SD Negeri 74 Palembang was implemented through three main patterns: direct practice, reflective discussion, and experience-based evaluation. Data were obtained from classroom observations, teacher interviews, and learning documentation. Observations revealed that the learning process began with the teacher demonstrating prayer movements, followed by congregational practice in the school prayer room. During the practice, the teacher provided individual guidance and encouraged students to correct each other's movements. The PAI teacher stated: "Children understand the meaning of prayer more easily when they see and perform it directly. If it is only explained, they forget quickly, but through practice and discussion they understand better." Observational data also showed active interaction among students. Some students helped peers who had difficulty performing the bowing and prostration movements. This situation indicates the emergence of natural collaborative learning.

Interviews with students revealed changes in their learning experiences. One student stated that he "better understands the meaning of prayer and wants to perform it on time." This finding indicates changes in the affective domain, not only in the cognitive domain. Documentation of prayer practice assessments showed that most students were able to perform the movements in the correct sequence after participating in practice- and reflection-based learning. These findings demonstrate that learning was not focused solely on knowledge transfer but on direct learning experiences and reflection on the meaning of worship. Field data indicate that students constructed understanding through direct experience rather than lectures. Congregational prayer practice functioned as a concrete experience that served as the foundation for forming religious meaning.

Interaction among students during practice reflects a process of social knowledge construction. Peer assistance in correcting prayer movements demonstrates that

understanding is built through collaboration rather than individually. Reflective discussion after practice also played an important role in the process of value internalization. When the teacher asked students about their feelings after prayer, students connected their worship experience with calmness and discipline. This process indicates that spiritual understanding develops through reflective experience. Thus, learning did not stop at procedural mastery of worship but developed into an understanding of meaning and values.

These findings are consistent with the study by (Nurhasanah & Rasyid, 2021) which showed that a constructivist approach improves learning outcomes and students' religious attitudes. However, this study provides a different contribution by presenting the learning process contextually in a school with limited resources. In contrast to Rahmawati (2020), who emphasized students' reflective ability through specific instructional design, this study demonstrates that reflection can emerge naturally through contextual worship practices. The uniqueness of this study lies in the context of SD Negeri 74 Palembang as a public school with limited facilities but strong religious learning practices. This condition indicates that the effectiveness of a constructivist approach does not entirely depend on the availability of educational technology. Therefore, this study extends previous findings by demonstrating that direct experience and social interaction are the primary factors in shaping elementary students' religious understanding.

a. Meaningful Learning Experiences

Based on classroom observations of prayer learning in the third grade at SD Negeri 74 Palembang, the learning process took place through direct practice, reflective discussion, and sharing of students' worship experiences. After the teacher demonstrated the prayer movements, students performed congregational prayer and then discussed the meaning of the movements they had practiced. Observation notes indicate that students connected the practice with personal experiences, such as praying with their families at home. Students' written reflections revealed changes in their learning experiences, including the emergence of feelings of calmness after prayer and a clearer understanding of the sequence and meaning of movements. Documentation of practice assessments showed improvement in movement accuracy and increased discipline during worship activities.

These findings indicate that students' understanding was formed through concrete experiences interpreted reflectively. The learning process did not stop at memorizing procedures but resulted in the construction of religious meaning rooted in students' personal experiences. This condition demonstrates the occurrence of meaningful learning when new knowledge is connected to prior experience. Students' active involvement in practice and reflection strengthened the process of knowledge construction through real experiences. Interaction among students during discussion enriched understanding through social collaboration, making learning experiences more contextual. Thus, worship activities that were previously routine transformed into meaningful experiences through reflection (Saputra & Hafidz, 2025).

These findings are consistent with studies emphasizing that experience-based PAI learning can foster students' spiritual awareness (Suryana, 2020). However, this study shows that meaningful learning experiences can still develop in conditions of limited facilities, indicating that the primary factor of success lies in the teacher's management of learning experiences rather than in educational technology.

b. The Role of the Teacher as Facilitator and Guide

Interviews with the teacher revealed that the primary instructional strategy involved direct practice followed by reflective discussion. The teacher stated that students more easily understand the meaning of prayer when they observe and perform it directly. Classroom observations showed that the teacher did not immediately provide answers to students' questions but guided them to discover meaning through discussion and examples from daily life. Observational data also indicate a dialogical classroom atmosphere in which students actively asked questions and responded to peers' explanations. The teacher provided individual feedback during practice activities.

These findings indicate a shift in the teacher's role from information transmitter to facilitator of learning experiences. The teacher organized learning situations that enabled students to construct meaning through experience and social interaction (Samiha & Fauzi, 2025). Learning occurred in a participatory manner in which students did not merely receive information but developed understanding through dialogue and reflection (Permadi & Achadi, 2025). The teacher's facilitative role also contributed to the development of students' religious awareness, as worship experiences were guided through reflection on meaning rather than solely through procedural explanation (Hasan & Inayati, 2025). The uniqueness of this finding lies in the implementation of a facilitative role within a school context with limited resources, demonstrating that the quality of pedagogical interaction is more decisive than the availability of instructional media (Hidayati et al., 2026).

c. Holistic Assessment

Assessment documentation shows that learning evaluation was conducted through observation of practice, student reflection, and direct feedback from the teacher. The teacher assessed the accuracy of prayer movements, students' attitudes during worship, and their ability to explain the meaning of the movements. Practice observations indicated that students who understood the meaning of movements tended to demonstrate greater concentration and discipline. Student interviews revealed that practice-based assessment helped them understand worship more deeply compared to memorization-based tests alone.

These findings indicate that assessment functioned as part of the process of meaning formation rather than merely as measurement of learning outcomes. Evaluation encompassing cognitive, affective, and psychomotor aspects provided a comprehensive picture of students' religious development (Permadi & Achadi, 2025). Experience-based assessment enabled students to construct understanding through reflection on worship practices. This approach aligns with the objectives of PAI learning, which emphasize the development of faith and moral character in social life (Saputra & Hafidz, 2025). In relation to previous research, these findings

confirm that experience-based evaluation strengthens the internalization of religious values. However, this study demonstrates that holistic assessment can be effectively implemented through direct observation and student reflection even in schools with limited facilities.

4. Conclusion

This study shows that the implementation of constructivist-based Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning on the topic of prayer in the third grade at SD Negeri 74 Palembang produced learning experiences that were meaningful, participatory, and oriented toward the development of students' spiritual awareness. Findings from observations, interviews, and documentation indicate that students' direct involvement in worship practice, reflection on experience, and social interaction in discussion were the main factors shaping understanding that was not only procedural but also interpretative and contextual. Students did not merely learn the procedures of prayer but understood the meaning of the movements and related them to discipline, humility, and responsibility in daily life.

The teacher's role as facilitator proved to be a key element in the success of the learning process. The teacher organized learning experiences through practice, dialogue, and reflection, enabling knowledge construction to occur actively. Holistic assessment encompassing cognitive, affective, and psychomotor aspects supported the internalization of religious values and provided a comprehensive picture of students' development. Academically, this study offers empirical evidence that a constructivist approach in PAI learning can be effectively implemented in elementary school contexts with limited facilities, provided that learning experiences are designed in contextual and reflective ways. These findings reinforce previous research on the importance of direct experience in religious learning while also highlighting the uniqueness of implementation within a school context characterized by minimal resources but strong pedagogical interaction.

This study is limited by the scope of its subjects and its single-school context; therefore, generalization of the findings should be approached with caution. Future research is recommended to examine the implementation of constructivist PAI learning across different grade levels or school contexts and to employ comparative research designs to strengthen the validity of findings. Thus, constructivist-based PAI learning can serve as a relevant pedagogical approach for developing reflective religious understanding, meaningful learning experiences, and the sustained formation of students' spiritual character.

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