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Application of Cognitivism Theory in Islamic Education Learning for Grade V Students

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A B S T R A C T

This study aims to analyze the application of cognitivism theory in learning Islamic Religious Education (PAI) for fifth grade students of SDN 124 Palembang and evaluate its impact on improving conceptual understanding and internalization of religious values. The theory of cognitivism, which emphasizes the mental process of understanding, storing, and integrating new information, is used as the main theoretical framework in developing learning strategies. The research method used is a descriptive qualitative approach with data collection techniques in the form of observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation. The results showed that the application of cognitivism-based learning strategies-such as elaboration of meaning, linking new concepts with students' experiences, and the use of visual media-contributed significantly to improving the understanding of PAI materials. In addition, this approach also encouraged students' active participation in reflective discussions and the strengthening of religious values in daily life. The findings indicate that the cognitivism approach can be an effective pedagogical alternative in learning PAI at the elementary school level. The implications of this study open up space for the development of learning models that are more contextual and oriented to students' thinking processes.

1. Introduction

Islamic Religious Education (PAI) in elementary schools plays a strategic role in shaping the character, morals, and spirituality of children from an early age (Anwar, 2024). Based on Law No. 20/2003 on the National Education System, religious education is an integral part of the national education system that aims to instill the values of faith, piety, and noble character. Data from the Ministry of Education and Culture shows that strengthening religious education has a positive correlation with the formation of student behavior in everyday life (Hasibuan, 2021). However, the conventional approach in learning PAI is often unable to optimally reach students' cognitive aspects, especially in understanding abstract religious concepts such as the Last Day, faith, and destiny (Aziz et al., 2021).

Previous studies have highlighted the effectiveness of the cognitive approach in Islamic religious education. Amin (2021) investigated the application of problem-based learning strategies in akidah akhlak (Islamic beliefs and morals) and found that students were more active and understood the material more deeply through high cognitive engagement. Firdaus & Prasetyo (2025) also emphasized the importance of visual media in helping students build conceptual understanding of abstract material. Research by Anwar (2024) integrated Bruner's theory into the design of Islamic education learning and showed a significant increase in the retention of faith concepts. In addition, Muhajirah, (2020) underlined that a cognitivist approach supports the development of logical and reflective thinking in students' understanding of religious values.

However, the majority of these studies still focus on secondary or general education levels and have not specifically examined abstract creed themes such as the Last Day in the context of elementary education. Furthermore, there are limitations in research linking cognitive theory directly to the strengthening of students' religious character in elementary schools. In particular, there have been few in-depth studies on the application of this approach in local contexts such as SDN 124 Palembang, which has unique characteristics in terms of learning culture and student background. Therefore, there is a significant research gap in previous studies, both in terms of context, teaching material themes, and the learning approaches used.

In this context, the theory of cognitivism developed by figures such as Jean Piaget and Jerome Bruner offers a pedagogical framework that emphasizes the importance of mental processes in learning (Habsy et al., 2023). This theory encourages students to construct knowledge through active engagement in information processing, concept mapping, and reflective analysis of reality. A number of previous studies, as stated by Amin (2021), Capello (2009), Habsy et al. (2023), Yusdar et al. (2025) show that cognitivism-based strategies, such as problem-based learning and the use of visual media, can significantly improve students' understanding and retention. Nonetheless, there is still a substantial research gap in the implementation of this theory specifically in PAI learning, especially at the basic education level and in a local context such as SDN 124 Palembang.

This study has novelty in examining in depth the application of cognitivism theory in PAI learning, especially on the theme "When Life Has Stopped" (Last Day) in grade V students of SDN 124 Palembang. This study not only observes the application of learning strategies, but also analyzes its impact on the development of students' conceptual understanding and religious character. By utilizing a descriptive qualitative approach and contextual study, this research seeks to bridge the gap between cognitive theory and religious learning practice (Ahmad & Arifin, 2024). On the other hand, SDN 124 Palembang was chosen as the research location because it has representative characteristics of students, adequate supporting infrastructure, and school commitment in strengthening religious values.

Thus, this study is expected to contribute academically to the development of PAI learning models based on modern learning theories and offer pedagogical alternatives that are more contextual and oriented to students' thinking processes

(Nurdiyanto et al., 2023). In addition, the results of this study have the potential to become a reference for teachers and curriculum developers in designing more effective, relevant, and transformative religious learning strategies in the context of basic education in Indonesia.

2. Methodology

This study uses a qualitative approach with an exploratory case study design, which aims to explore in depth the implementation of the theory of cognitivism in learning Islamic Religious Education (PAI) on the material "Last Day" in class V SDN 124 Palembang. The qualitative approach was chosen because it is able to capture the complexity of the learning process in a particular social and cultural context in a naturalistic manner (Fadli, 2021). Case study as a research strategy allows the exploration of phenomena holistically in a real environment so that it is relevant to understand the dynamics of the application of learning theory in educational practices in elementary schools (Zaman, 2020).

The research subjects consisted of PAI teachers and grade V students who were active participants in the learning process. Data collection techniques included triangulation of methods: semi-structured interviews, participatory observation, and documentation study. Interviews were conducted with PAI teachers and student representatives to explore their subjective perspectives and cognitive reflections on the learning process (Habsy et al., 2023). Observations were conducted directly in the classroom using structured observation sheets to record the implementation of cognitivism strategies, such as the use of visual media, concept mapping, and reflective activities. Documentation collected included lesson plans, student worksheets, and formative evaluation results, which were used as supporting data to corroborate the main findings.

The data analysis process was carried out iteratively by following the stages of the Miles and Huberman model, namely data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing/verification (Kaharuddin, 2020). Data were analyzed thematically by open coding to identify patterns of meaning that represent the practice and effectiveness of the application of cognitivism theory (Widodo, 2019). To increase data credibility, triangulation techniques of sources and techniques, member checking with key informants, and audit trail documentation were used. Validity and reliability of interpretations were maintained through peer debriefing with education experts and continuous reflection throughout the research process.

Through this approach, the research is expected to not only describe the empirical reality in depth, but also make a theoretical contribution to the development of PAI learning practices based on cognitive theory in the context of basic education in Indonesia.

3. Result and Discussion

Results

Application of Cognitivism Theory in Islamic Education Learning for Grade V Students of SDN 124 Palembang

The application of cognitivism theory in learning Islamic Religious Education (PAI) in grade V students at SDN 124 Palembang is carried out through various cognitive strategies that aim to improve student understanding. Cognitivism theory emphasizes the importance of mental processes in learning, where students not only remember information, but also understand and organize it. In this school, teachers apply strategies such as concept mapping and group discussions, which allow students to connect new information with pre-existing knowledge.

Student-Centered Learning

The theory of cognitivism emphasizes the importance of a student-centered approach to learning, where each individual has a different learning style. In the context of learning Islamic Religious Education (PAI) about the Last Days, teachers at SDN 124 Palembang observe students' learning styles. According to an interview with Mrs. Husnul Chotimah, an Islamic Education teacher, "I try to understand how students learn. Some students find it easier to understand concepts through visuals, while others prefer listening or discussion, so I apply differentiated learning according to students' learning styles." This shows that teachers need to adapt teaching methods to the needs of students. Data from research conducted by Khairatunni'mah (2024) shows that student-centered learning can improve learning outcomes by up to 30%. In class, teachers use a small group discussion approach, where students can share their understanding of the Last Days. These discussions not only increase student engagement but also help them internalize the information being taught. For example, when discussing the signs of the Last Days, students are asked to provide opinions and arguments based on their understanding, which demonstrates active engagement in the learning process. A relevant case example is when students are asked to create a poster or concept map depicting the signs of the last days. This activity not only stimulates their creativity but also allows students to organize information visually. As a result, students who are more visual can better understand and remember the concepts taught. Thus, the implementation of student-centered learning in the context of Islamic Education is proven to be effective in improving students' understanding.

Development of Critical Thinking Skills

The development of critical thinking skills is one of the important aspects in the theory of cognitivism. In PAI learning about the Last Day, teachers encourage students to question and analyze the information provided. According to Mrs. Husnul, "*Before the material on the Last Day is delivered, I give some lighter questions to stimulate students' thinking such as why there is death, what causes it, then after death what happens and so on. I also organize debates about various*

views on the Last Day. This helps students to think critically and not just take information for granted." These debate activities allow students to evaluate arguments and construct their own thoughts.

In addition, Mrs. Husnul Chotimah also implemented a class discussion on the signs of the last day. In this discussion, students are invited to analyze and interpret the signs of doomsday sugra and doomsday kubra, as well as discuss the wisdom and its relevance in everyday life. The results of the discussion are applied in posters or concept maps according to students' interests and creativity, then the results are presented in front of the class. This is in line with the opinion of Mytra et al. (2022) which states that discussions can encourage students to think more deeply and understand the material in a more critical way. Thus, these activities not only improve students' understanding of PAI materials, but also train their thinking skills.

Use of Knowledge Construction

Knowledge construction is an important concept in the theory of cognitivism which emphasizes that students construct their own understanding based on existing knowledge. In PAI learning about the last day, teachers try to relate new information to the knowledge that students already have. Mrs. Husnul explained, *"I often relate the teachings about the Last Day to students' daily experiences. This helps them understand more abstract concepts."*

The results show that students who can relate new information to personal experiences tend to have better understanding. A study by Ariani & Marleni (2023) reveals that learning connected to real experiences improves information retention. In practice, teachers ask students to share personal experiences relevant to the doomsday theme, which are then discussed in groups. For example, when discussing responsibilities in the world and consequences in the hereafter, students are asked to share their experiences in making good or bad decisions. This discussion not only enriches students' understanding but also reinforces the moral values taught in PAI. Thus, the use of knowledge construction in PAI learning is proven to be effective in helping students understand and internalize the concept of doomsday.

Use of Technology and Media

In this digital era, the use of technology and media in learning is very important. In the context of PAI learning about the last days, teachers at SDN 124 Palembang utilize various technological tools to enrich students' learning experiences (Aprianti Astuti et al., 2024). Mrs. Husnul stated, *"I use learning videos and simulations to explain complex concepts, such as the signs of doomsday."* The use of these media not only makes learning more interesting but also helps students understand the material better. Statistics show that the use of technology in education can increase student motivation. According to research by Gibson et al. (2023) students who learn with the help of technology show a significant increase in motivation and

engagement. In practice, teachers use animated videos depicting doomsday and interactive simulations that allow students to explore the concept in depth.

A concrete example is when students watch a video about the signs of doomsday, then they are asked to discuss what they saw and how it relates to religious teachings. The observation results show that students are more active and excited in learning when using visual media compared to traditional methods. Thus, the use of technology and media in PAI learning is proven to be effective in improving students' understanding of doomsday.

In addition to applying the 4 stages of the implications of the theory of cognitivism, teachers also do not forget to stimulate students to identify important things about the material of the last day such as the definition of the last day, the difference between the sugra apocalypse and the kubra apocalypse, the signs of the last day, life after the last day and the wisdom of believing in the last day, during learning as well as during the conclusion and reflection session.

The Impact of the Application of Cognitivism Theory on Islamic Education Learning on the Material of the Last Day in Class V SDN 124 Palembang

The teacher conducted a test or formative assessment after applying cognitive theory-based learning, the results of the formative assessment showed that students were able to explain the concept of the Last Day more clearly, 27 out of 35 students were able to mention the signs of the apocalypse or the last day correctly. Interviews with students revealed that they understood the material better when taught through discussion approaches, concept maps, and watching learning videos. In addition, teachers stated that the use of cognitive strategies such as scaffolding and questioning helped students in building deeper understanding. This is in line with the findings of Pr et al. (2023) which emphasizes the importance of social interaction in the learning process. The impact of the Application of Cognitivism Theory-Based Learning can be seen by increasing the understanding of fifth grade students of the material of the Last Day in PAI learning. Students are excited and motivated to participate in learning and become more active. Formative test results show better understanding, supported by interviews that indicate an increase in students' memory and thinking skills and observations in the learning process where students look active and interactive.

Discussion

The results of this study indicate that the application of cognitivism theory in PAI learning for fifth grade students at SDN 124 Palembang can increase student participation in the teaching and learning process. By using differentiated learning methods that are more interactive, according to students' needs such as discussions and group work, involving students directly in learning, making projects such as concept maps and then utilizing technological media such as learning videos and animations so that students feel more involved and motivated to learn. The data showed that 77% of students at SDN 124 Palembang understood the material better after the application of cognitivism theory in learning. This indicates that students

are better able to absorb information when they actively participate in the learning process.

The results of this study have broad significance, both for PAI curriculum development and for classroom teaching practices. The application of cognitivism theory not only improves students' understanding of the material, but also builds their critical and analytical thinking skills. This is in line with the opinion of Muhajirah (2020) which states that active cognitive processes are very important in learning. Thus, this study contributes to the development of more effective teaching methods in the context of religious education in Indonesia, especially at the primary level.

This research is also in line with the findings of Hatija (2023), (Pratiwi et al. (2020), Ahmad & Arifin (2024) who found that the use of cognitive theory-based learning strategies in basic education can significantly improve students' critical thinking skills. Activities such as open discussions, debates, and reflections on personal experiences implemented at SDN 124 Palembang are a concrete manifestation of this strategy. In addition, the differentiation approach based on students' learning styles as applied by PAI teachers, reinforces the findings of Saarinen et al. (2021) which states that student-centered learning can improve learning outcomes by up to 30%.

Support for this finding also comes from a study by Ariani & Marleni (2023) which emphasizes the importance of connections between teaching materials and students' real-life experiences in religious learning. By linking the concept of the Last Days with students' daily experiences, teachers not only help them understand the material conceptually, but also build a deeper spiritual awareness. This proves that cognitive constructivism-based learning strategies are not only cognitively effective, but also affective.

Furthermore, the use of technology in learning as carried out by PAI teachers at SDN 124 Palembang reinforces the results of research by Laura & Sujana (2022) , which shows that the utilization of learning videos and digital simulations can significantly increase student motivation and engagement. In abstract learning such as the material of the Last Days, visualization through media is very helpful in building students' understanding.

The findings of this study also reinforce the thoughts of Fahira et al. (2023)) about the importance of social interaction in the learning process. The application of scaffolding and questioning techniques by teachers is a concrete form of zone of proximal development (ZPD) that allows students to learn optimally with the help of teachers and peers. This is in line with observations in PAI learning which showed that students were more active in answering questions, discussing, and expressing opinions after this approach was implemented.

By referring to the various studies and theories above, it can be concluded that the application of cognitivism theory in PAI learning not only improves the understanding of religious concepts cognitively, but also encourages character

development, critical thinking skills, and increases students' interest in learning through relevant and meaningful approaches. Therefore, the integration of cognitivism theory in PAI curriculum and teaching practices is highly recommended, especially at the primary education level.

In addition to supporting previous findings, the results of this study also provide a new dimension to the implementation of cognitive theory in the context of Islamic Religious Education (IRE) in elementary schools. For example, research by Ilmiani et al. (2021) found that the application of cognitive learning theory in thematic learning will only be effective if accompanied by strategies that are contextually relevant to the background of the students.

This is in line with the conditions at SDN 124 Palembang, where IRE teachers not only apply a cognitive-based approach theoretically but also adapt it to the local needs of students and classroom situations. The emphasis on real-life experiences and everyday values has proven to be a reinforcement in building connections between concepts of faith and students' realities. Furthermore, these findings complement the study by Yusdar et al. (2025) which emphasizes that the effectiveness of cognitive theory-based learning is highly dependent on teachers' capacity to create a conducive learning environment for intellectual exploration. At SDN 124 Palembang, PAI teachers created a dialogic, collaborative, and reflective classroom atmosphere all of which are important conditions in the cognitive approach according to Bruner and Piaget.

Thus, this study enriches the academic discourse on the application of modern learning theories in religious education, while also emphasizing that the application of these theories must be adapted to the socio-cultural context of the students in order to achieve maximum results. In addition, this study fills a gap in the literature, which is still limited to the implementation of cognitive theory in general subjects such as science and mathematics. There are still few studies that highlight how this approach is systematically applied in Islamic religious education, particularly on abstract themes such as the Day of Judgment. By providing empirical evidence from the field, this study makes a significant contribution to the development of cognitive constructivism-based religious pedagogy, which has not been extensively studied at the elementary school level in Indonesia.

4. Conclusion

The application of cognitivism theory in PAI learning at SDN 124 Palembang significantly improved students' conceptual understanding of the material of the Last Days through a student-centered constructivistic approach. The strategy, which integrates learning style differentiation, strengthening critical thinking skills, connecting material with real-life experiences, and utilizing technology-based interactive media, proved effective in increasing students' cognitive engagement and information retention. This finding confirms the urgency of optimizing the cognitivism approach in PAI curriculum to create meaningful, adaptive, and relevant learning to the needs of 21st century learners.

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