

# Contextual Learning Innovations In Islamic Education Textbooks at Muhammadiyah Elementary School Grade IV

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### **ABSTRACT**

This article aims to analyze the instructional methods used in textbooks to increase understanding of Islam at the primary education level in Indonesia, namely Islamic Education for 6<sup>th</sup> grade of Muhammadiyah Elementary School published by Muhammadiyah Executive Board of Primary and Secondary Education. This textbook research was conducted using a qualitative method, with a content-analysis approach to the instructional methods used in the book. The results of the study showed that this Al-Islam Education textbook innovated by applying contextual teaching and learning (CTL) methods. In the end, this Islamic Education textbook published by Educational Council of Central Board of Muhammadiyah can serve as a good example of the openness of Islamic educational institutions to apply CTL-based instructional methods in Islamic education, in order to increase students' understanding and practice of Islam while at the same time improving the quality of Islamic religious education in Indonesia in general

Keywords: Islamic Education, Textbook, Contextual teaching and learning, Elementary School

### **INTRODUCTION**

Improving the quality of learning methods at the education level is an important agenda to improve the quality of children's education in the

midst of their growing physical, intellectual and emotional abilities. Normative, non-contextual, and teacher-centered learning methods are less effective in providing benefits for them.<sup>1</sup> In the context of religious education, this method is also less effective in helping students understand and practice religion in their daily lives.

One of the methods in religious learning that can be applied to improve understanding and experience of religion is contextual teaching and learning (CTL).<sup>2</sup> This model is very important to consider because it integrates real-world situations into learning and teaching in the classroom, so that the lessons delivered are not just abstract concepts but are accompanied by concrete examples of everyday life.<sup>3</sup> Contextual learning methods encourage teachers to teach with various methods by considering the stages of the development of cognitive, affective, psychomotor, and identity of students.<sup>4</sup>

This is in line with a number of problems that still often occur in the implementation of Islamic religious education in schools. First, there is a gap between religion understanding and practice. The concept of honesty is understood, but lacking the application.<sup>5</sup> Second, not a few teachers teach al-Islam subject with a teacher and text-centered approach.<sup>6</sup> Teachers only transfer knowledge monotonously, and rarely relate the material to examples of its implementation in the real socio-cultural environment in society.<sup>7</sup> Third, the cognitive aspect becomes the main indicator of student success.<sup>8</sup> The emphasis of religious education is on theory and memorization, but lacks inspiration and emphasis on implementation.<sup>9</sup>

In fact, Islamic education demands understanding and practice at the same time. Religious education does not only teach faith, but also educates commendable behavior or morals.<sup>10</sup> Religious education not only helps to know Islam but also applies the values of progress such as honesty, trustworthiness, intelligence, discipline, forward orientation, responsibility, and so on.<sup>11</sup>

In order to overcome this problem, a number of scholars encourage the use of contextual learning in Islamic education.<sup>12</sup> The contextual approach is suitable to be applied at the basic education level for two

reasons. First, this approach allows teachers to innovate in delivering material in class, not just fixating on one learning method. Second, on the other hand, students also avoid the boredom of learning because they become active subjects and experience many learning methods.<sup>13</sup> The implementation of contextual learning is proven to increase students' motivation and achievement.<sup>14</sup>

This contextual learning model allows the learning atmosphere in the classroom to be fun. This allows teachers and students to explore a variety of learning resources. This also motivates students to have experience in forming and finding knowledge with appropriate methods. When studying religion, students do not just memorize the material, but relate it to more contextual everyday phenomena.<sup>15</sup> Unfortunately, the application of contextual learning often faces challenges such as the lack of teacher competence and the availability of textbooks with contextual learning methods.<sup>16</sup>

Textbooks are important learning materials, which play a significant role in helping and directing teachers in class, explaining the knowledge standards to be achieved, and reflecting the learning objectives of a curriculum. Therefore, this study aims to analyze the instructional method in the Al-Islam Education textbook published by Muhammadiyah Central Executive Board of Primary and Secondary Education.

### **Research Method**

This article is in form of research on textbooks. Textbooks are important learning media. It provides an overview of a teacher's teaching methods as well as student activities in learning. Thus, a textbook describes the design of learning in the classroom.<sup>17</sup> This is a qualitative research with content analysis approach.<sup>18</sup> Content analysis is carried out by reviewing and analyzing the entire textbook, both in terms of content and instructional methods. This is to explore what information is conveyed and the types of activities that are expected to be carried out by teachers and students (indicators of learning success, learning objectives, learning steps, as well as various pretest and posttest activities) in order to achieve the learning objectives.

## Discussion

### Contextual Learning in Islam

CTL requires the connection of ideas with real experience, the union of ideas (thoughts) and actions, the elimination of dualism between the abstract and the concrete, and between the concept and practice. All accumulated ideas, concepts, information, and knowledge are related to the dimensions of action practices in everyday life, in real situations and problems of everyday life.<sup>19</sup> In order to make students able to capture the meaning of the learning they receive, learning materials in the classroom need to be linked to the context and social situation in which students live. Therefore, as an effort to connect the class with the "real-life situation," it is necessary to make a number of activities such as determining what projects will be carried out, identifying problems, making choices, accepting responsibility, seeking information, seeking conclusions, actively asking questions, and connecting them with the real world.<sup>20</sup>

Jean Piaget, the founder of CTL, argues that knowledge is built as a result of active interactions that take place continuously between structures in the human brain and their environment.<sup>21</sup> Knowledge is useless when it is not interacted with the realities of the world.<sup>22</sup> In a contextual classroom, the task of the lecturer or teacher is to be a "guide" for students, or to help students achieve their goals. A teacher or lecturer will have more to do with methods, rather than information. So, the contextual aspect is only related to learning methods. Along with other learning methods, contextual is developed with the aim that the learning process runs more productively and meaningfully. Philosophically, constructivism was born as a response to the previous schools, namely empiricism and rationalism.<sup>23</sup>

The application of the CTL method in the Islamic tradition is not new. Ibn Khaldun has long held the view that religious education should be able to instill *aqidah* and faith in students, as evidenced by children showing good morals in everyday life.<sup>24</sup> In terms of religious teaching methods, it can be done with a habituation approach, repetition of designing scientific activities such as inviting students to make direct observations in the field that can trigger students to understand religion,

and of course, it is important for a teacher not to make students bored in learning.<sup>25</sup> Meanwhile, according to al-Ghazali, we can teach moral education by various teaching methods such as making direct observations with full accuracy, experiential methods, and trials.<sup>26</sup>

Islamic pedagogy has rich and varied methods for fostering religious understanding and practice. The classical Islamic education figure, Imam Al-Zarnuji, stated that a student not only learns by rote, but also understands, introduces methods of discussion and problem solving. A teacher poses a problem to students, students discuss in groups with their friends to find solutions, then present them and then the teacher gives responses and conclusions.<sup>27</sup>

Al-Qur'an-hadith and the classical tradition of Islamic scholarship actually provide many very rich teaching methods such as memorization, role-playing, role models, discussions, problem solving, advice, concepts of reward and punishment, stories, discovery of knowledge with experience, as well as debate and argumentation and critical thinking by combining rationality and revelation.<sup>28</sup>

Thus, contextual learning methods are not new in Islam. If we look deeper, the contextual learning method is designed to bring students to a more meaningful learning situation; to understand and practice their religion using various methods including inquiry (discovering knowledge and wisdom from learning), questioning (interactive question and answer), community learning, modeling, and reflection.<sup>29</sup>

The Qur'an introduces the inquiry method by inviting humans to make honest observations of the surrounding environment such as animals, sky, water, plants. Then, Qur'an asks people to think whether they created the animals, raised the sky, sent down rainwater, and grew plants, or whether it was Allah who did it all. With this observation method, God wants to invite people to find the essence of truth. In that context, a teacher tries to contextualize lessons in the daily lives of students and uses materials that are familiar with the environment of students' lives. By making direct observations of natural phenomena, the Qur'an invites humans to have a cognitive structure that is built based on their own new experience.<sup>30</sup>

*Pesantren* (Islamic boarding school) also applies this inquiry method through *bahtsul masail*. *Santri* (students in Islamic boarding school) are trained to look for problems that occur in the community and find legal answers in the “yellow book” (*kitab kuning*) find strong arguments to serve as guidelines for the community.<sup>31</sup> Islam also places a role model as a method of education. Another method that can instill religious values is the exposure of inspirational stories contained in the Qur'an. The story is contextualized with the environment and students' experiences in their daily lives. After that, the teacher can ask questions related to the competencies being discussed in class. With this approach, students can learn and imitate the nature of these characters.<sup>32</sup>

An Islamic religion teacher needs to enrich his teaching methods, combining teaching methods extracted from Islamic traditions and other new teaching methods that are developing today,<sup>33</sup> so that it can help to facilitate a pleasant learning atmosphere and discovery of knowledge for students in the classroom.<sup>34</sup>

### **Contextual Learning in Islamic Education Textbooks at Muhammadiyah Elementary Schools**

It is very important to place Islamic education books at Muhammadiyah Elementary School level with Muhammadiyah education missions as follow: a) to provide superior and advanced basic education with a strong foundation of faith and piety to produce Muslim cadres who excel in science, Islam and personality. b) To organize holistic-integrative basic education, which develops the potential of the mind, heart, sense of initiative, and skills that are comprehensive, balanced, and in integrated manner.<sup>35</sup> Assessment of ISMUBA subjects includes attitudes, knowledge, and skills.<sup>36</sup> From the description, it appears that the purpose of providing religious education is not only aimed to increase students' knowledge or cognition, but is also directed at the affective, behavioral, and religious dimensions, so that it is expected to form the main personality.

Islamic Education lessons are part of the ISMUBA subject group and are a special feature of Muhammadiyah educational institutions. At the elementary education level, ISMUBA is delivered through five subjects:

Islamic Education, Worship Practices, Al-Qur'an (Tahsin Tilawah and Tahfiz), *Kemuhammadiyah*, and Arabic. For this basic level, the duration of the ISMUBA study is given differently. First and second grades of elementary school are given a load of 10 hours of lessons per week and for third grade, they are given 11 hours per week. Meanwhile, for fourth to sixth grades, 12 hours per week are given.<sup>37</sup>

Muhammadiyah Central Executive Board of Primary and Secondary Education published this Islamic Education book in June 2018, as a guide for students and teachers in learning Islamic education and *Kemuhammadiyah*, to improve the quality of educational processes and outcomes, by implementing the 2013 Ministry of Education and Culture curriculum.<sup>38</sup> The main material in this book includes the Qur'an, *aqidah*, morals, worship, and *tarikh* (Islamic history). Of the five main topics, this article will be limited to an analysis of aspects of *aqidah* and morals in the first semester. The intention of *aqidah* lesson is to strengthen the students' *aqidah Islamiyah*, while the aim of moral lesson is to strengthen the formation of noble character. In chapter 2, the first semester of *aqidah* material discusses *shirk* and *munafiq* (hypocrisy).

Each discussion material begins with a description of the indicators of learning success, learning objectives, material summaries, and learning steps that serve as signs for teachers. Then, entering the content section, the delivery of material begins by mentioning the main propositions of each discussion that students must memorize. After memorizing, students are asked to observe phenomena related to the topics discussed through picture stories. In this case, the picture presented shows the phenomena of polytheism and hypocrisy. After that, students are asked to read the definition of *shirk* covering the various types of *shirk* and its risk. Then it explains the meaning of hypocrisy, mentions the signs of a hypocrite, and explains the risk of being hypocrisy, such as: being put into the deepest hell, harming self because a hypocrite is no longer trusted by society, causing mutual suspicion in society, and that the hypocrite's life is always filled with anxiety and restlessness.<sup>39</sup>

After the material is delivered, the teacher is directed to conduct an evaluation to check students' understanding. First, students are asked to discuss with their friends so that there is interaction and exchange of ideas, experiences and increase opportunities for the formation of new understandings and meanings by students. Gaining understanding and meaning with the method of mutual interaction between students is one of the characteristics of CTL-based learning. Students write down the results of the discussion and collect it to the teacher. Second, the teacher give students an individual task of observing the phenomenon of hypocrisy that exists in their environment, providing an explanation of why the action is categorized as hypocrisy. Third, the teacher gives group assignments to discuss the causes of hypocritical behavior, as well as ways to avoid hypocrisy. Then the teacher gives a summary, a sentence of wisdom, and ends the lesson with a competency test in the form of ten multiple choices questions and five essay questions. After that, the teacher asks students to make reflections and feedback whether students can understand the material or not.<sup>40</sup> Evaluation is an important part in the implementation of the CTL concept to see whether students have understood the material or not.

From this explanation, it appears that the teaching approach used in this book already applies the CTL method. This book directs teachers to use a number of instructional methods such as discovery learning, inquiry learning, and problem-based learning for teaching and learning in the classroom. The CTL method does require teachers to apply teaching methods that are not monologues, which are operationalized by considering learning objectives and optimizing student potential.<sup>41</sup>

The moral material discussed in Chapter 3 is about studying, positive thinking, and broad-mindedness. This chapter begins with the description of indicators, learning objectives, material summaries, and learning steps that will guide teachers to the goals to achieve and what methods we can use to help students learn in the classroom. After that, the teacher invites students to understand the main arguments for the importance of studying based on Quran Surah al-Mujadilah, verse 11, which students must memorize. Before delivering the material, the

teacher invites students to observe pictures of children in remote areas who are struggling hard to go to school. With this assignment, students are expected to realize the importance of studying.

After observing, the teacher invites students to read topics about studying and have broad insights, ranging from understanding, etiquette for studying, the benefits of people who like to study, and examples of behavior in the spirit of studying. The teacher also invites students to read positive thinking material, including its understanding, the wisdom of positive thinking, and examples of positive thinking. When it comes to discussing broad-minded material, the teacher explains the meaning of broad-minded, namely having adequate knowledge and experience, so that they can learn lessons from every incident. The proposition or verse used is the Quran Surah ar-Ra'd, verse 19. Then, the teacher continues by explaining the wisdom or benefits of having broad insight. Among them are being able to solve problems with the best solutions, being able to be useful and helping others with the knowledge they have, not feeling inferior when hanging out with other people, being able to take lessons from events experienced and gain success in the hereafter. After the explanation above, it is followed by an example of Hasyim's character who likes to read. Because of his love of reading, he has broad insight and is often asked for help by his friends to solve problems.<sup>42</sup> Religious education in this book is thus taught through an approach that combines *heteronomous morality and autonomous morality* continuously.

There are three tasks given to students to deepen the material. The first is a group discussion about the characteristics of a broad-minded person and tips for having broad insight. The second is an individual task by mentioning a person or friend who always motivates the spirit of learning, as well as writing down motivational sentences. The third is a group task in the form of an order to make different motivational sentences in order to motivate oneself to become a broad-minded person. To check students' understanding, the teacher gives students a competency test in the form of 10 multiple choice questions, 5 essay questions, and asks them to make reflections and feedback that includes what lessons they have learned from the material, and which parts they

have mastered and which parts has not been mastered. The teacher also asked them to write down their experience of changing good habits after studying the material.<sup>43</sup>

The evaluation model applied in this textbook has applied a contextual learning approach, where the evaluation method includes a number of assessment aspects such as daily behavior, test instruments (true and false multiple choice, matching, free and limited descriptions), non-test instruments such as the teacher makes a scale of change in attitudes that can be observed in students.<sup>44</sup> Since questions and reflections are an important part of the concept of contextual learning,<sup>45</sup> assigning students to answer questions and make reflections clearly demonstrates how the principles of CTL are included in this book.

From the description above, it appears that the roles of teachers and students are quite balanced. There is no teacher domination or vice versa, teacher passive attitude, in learning. So far, there has been an error in viewing CTL as a *student-centered instruction* method, so that a teacher's role is ignored. The expertise or expertise of a teacher is no longer needed. In fact, contextual learning requires a balance between *teacher- and student-centered learning* and requires the active role of educators in the learning process.<sup>46</sup> Explicitly, the instructions contained in this book are in line with the provisions of the contextual learning.

## CONCLUSION

Based on the explanation above, we can see that this Islamic Education textbook has implemented the principles and methods of contextual teaching and learning. First, as illustrated in this textbook, it appears that the teacher does not dominate learning. The space for students' creativity is widely open with a variety of learning activities that can increase their understanding of the subject. However, this Islamic Education textbook still does not leave the central position of religious texts. It still uses religious texts in the form of verses of the Qur'an, Sunnah, and the words of the companions of the Prophet as the basis for explanations, complemented by examples and phenomena that exist in society in everyday life. This is understandable, considering that the

Qur'an and Sunnah are the primary sources of Islamic education. The implementation and innovation of the concept of contextual learning or CTL does not necessarily leave the characteristics of Islamic religious education, which still maintains revelation as one of the foundations of science construction.

Second, the teacher gives students a wide space with various learning activities that can help students discover and improve their understanding and practice of religion, complete with the use of a number of evaluation methods that serve as guidelines for teachers to check whether students are able to form an understanding of the material or not. The role of the teacher as an educator still gets a good proportion. However, it is necessary to encourage teachers or students not to make this book the only source of learning, because if they are content with this textbook then learning will return to its traditional pattern, which is of course contrary to the objectives of contextual learning itself.

In the end, this Islamic Education textbook can serve as a good example of innovation and the implementation of contextual learning applied in Islamic religious education, so that Islamic religious education becomes more qualified. In the future, further researcher need to follow up the findings of this study with further observations on the implementation by teachers and students in the classroom.

### ENDNOTES

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