

## Tracing the Footsteps of Learning: A Qualitative Study of the Effectiveness of Active Learning Methods in Improving Student Focus at SDN 09 Tarung Tarung Selatan

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**Abstrac**

This study aims to improve students' understanding of the material "Belief in the Hereafter" at SDN 09 Tarung Tarung Selatan by applying an active learning method based on projects. The study was conducted using the Classroom Action Research (CAR) approach in two cycles. The results showed significant improvement in students' focus and understanding after the implementation of this method. In cycle I, the average score of students increased from 65 (pre-test) to 72 (post-test), with a participation rate of 60%. In cycle II, the average score increased to 82, with participation reaching 85%. The use of structured discussion guides, engaging learning media, and concrete examples helped students relate the material to real-life situations. This study proves that the active project-based learning method is effective in enhancing students' understanding.

**Abstrak**

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk meningkatkan pemahaman siswa terhadap materi "Iman kepada Hari Akhir" di SDN 09 Tarung Tarung Selatan dengan penerapan metode pembelajaran aktif berbasis proyek. Penelitian dilakukan menggunakan pendekatan Penelitian Tindakan Kelas (PTK) dengan dua siklus. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa setelah penerapan metode ini, fokus dan pemahaman siswa meningkat secara signifikan. Pada siklus I, nilai rata-rata siswa meningkat dari 65 (pre-test) menjadi 72 (post-test), dengan tingkat partisipasi 60%. Pada siklus II, nilai rata-rata meningkat menjadi 82, dengan tingkat partisipasi mencapai 85%. Penggunaan panduan diskusi, media pembelajaran menarik, dan contoh konkret membantu siswa mengaitkan materi dengan kehidupan nyata. Penelitian ini membuktikan bahwa metode pembelajaran aktif berbasis proyek efektif dalam meningkatkan pemahaman siswa.

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## INTRODUCTION

Islamic learning at the elementary school level has a very important role in shaping student character. One of the core materials in religious education is the material on faith in the last day, which includes abstract concepts such as life after death, heaven, hell, and the day of reckoning. These concepts are often difficult for students to understand and visualize, especially at an early age, because they cannot be directly seen or felt. This can result in low student focus and interest in learning the material. This problem is a big challenge for educators in creating learning conditions that can bridge these abstract concepts to make them easier to understand and interesting for students.

Islamic Religious Education in Indonesia has a strong foundation based on government regulations and policies. One of the regulations governing this is Minister of Education and Culture Regulation No. 20/2018 on Educational Research. The regulation emphasizes the importance of research oriented towards improving the quality of education, including Islamic religious education. Religious education not only aims to provide theoretical knowledge about religion, but also to shape the character of students who have noble character, in accordance with the values taught in Islam.

In addition, the Merdeka Curriculum implemented in Indonesia provides a strong basis for implementing more active, creative, and student-centered learning. This curriculum prioritizes



student character development as an integral part of learning. The Merdeka Curriculum encourages the application of innovative learning methods that can make students more active, critical, and creative in the learning process. In the context of religious education, active and student-centered learning will be more effective in understanding abstract religious concepts, such as faith in the last day.

However, previous studies have shown that the application of inappropriate learning methods is one of the factors that cause low student focus and interest. Conventional learning methods that are often teacher-centered and monotonous can make students feel bored and less involved in the learning process. According to Slavin (2018), methods that emphasize student interaction and active participation in learning can increase student motivation and understanding. This is also in line with constructivism learning theory developed by Piaget (1972), which states that students better understand concepts through direct experience and social interaction.

Along with the development of 21st century education, where critical, creative, and collaborative thinking skills are highly required, more innovative learning methods are needed. One approach that can be relied upon is Project-Based Learning (PJBL). According to Thomas (2000), PJBL allows students to be directly involved in learning that is more contextual and relevant to their lives. By working on real problem-based projects, students can develop skills that are not only limited to theoretical knowledge, but also practical and collaborative skills.

Project-based learning also supports the development of 21st century competencies that are indispensable in facing the challenges of the modern world. This is in accordance with Jonassen's (1999) opinion that project-based learning not only helps students master the subject matter, but also hones their ability to think critically, work together, and solve problems. In the context of the material on faith in the last day, this method allows students to link abstract concepts with their real experiences, so that their understanding of the material can be deeper and more meaningful.

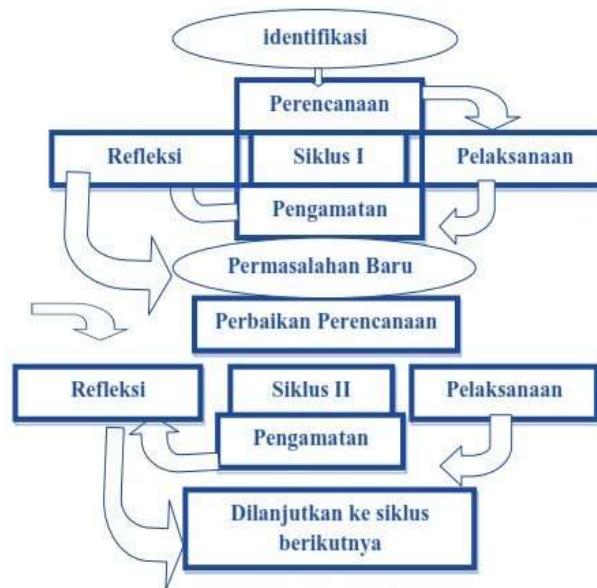
This study aims to explore the application of project-based active learning methods in improving students' focus in understanding the material of faith in the last day. This research was conducted at SDN 09 Tarung Tarung Selatan, which has diverse student characteristics, so it is expected to provide a broader insight into the implementation of this method in Islamic learning. With a focus on class V.A which amounted to 16 students, this study aims to find out how the application of project-based active learning methods can improve student learning outcomes and provide a more meaningful experience in understanding Islamic religious concepts.

Hopefully, the results of this study can not only contribute to improving the quality of Islamic religious education at the primary school level, but also provide recommendations for teachers and educators in other schools to adopt more active and innovative learning methods. It will also be an important reference to strengthen Islamic religious learning in shaping students' character in the future.

## **METHODS**

This Classroom Action Research will include several cycles, each cycle consists of four stages, namely; planning, acting, observing, and reflecting. Conducted in two cycles, based on the description above, the steps of the research procedure can be briefly described in the following scheme:

Figure 1: Classroom Action Research Cycle



This research was conducted in two cycles, with each cycle following a flow consisting of planning, action, observation, and reflection. In Cycle 1, the first step was planning, where the main objective was to identify the problems faced by students in understanding the material "Faith in the Last Day". In this planning, the teacher designed the use of a Problem-Based Learning (PBL) approach that aimed to improve student focus and understanding. The teacher develops a lesson plan that focuses on the material, develops an assessment rubric to assess students' project results, and prepares clear instructions regarding the project and the material to be learned. In the action stage, learning is carried out with the PBL approach in accordance with the plan that has been prepared. The teacher directs students to start a problem-based project related to the material, gives clear instructions, and accompanies students during the project to ensure that each step is carried out properly. Then, in the observation stage, the teacher observed how students worked on the project, interacted with the material, and recorded the level of student engagement. Data is also collected on students' responses to the project and materials, as well as any obstacles they may face in learning. Finally, at the reflection stage, the teacher evaluated the effectiveness of the planning and implementation of cycle 1. The teacher assessed whether the planning went as expected, whether the planned actions could be implemented well, and whether the students' test results showed an increase in understanding after participating in the problem-based project.

In Cycle 2, the steps taken were almost the same as the first cycle, but with some improvements based on the results of the reflection in cycle 1. In the planning stage, the teacher made adjustments and improvements to the previous lesson plan, improved the parts that were still less effective, and ensured that learning was more focused on strengthening understanding of the material "Faith in the Last Day". In the action stage, learning was again carried out with the improved PBL approach. The teacher ensured that the instructions given were clearer, and provided additional guidance if needed to increase student engagement. In the observation stage, the teacher again observed the learning process in the classroom, recorded the level of student engagement, and documented how students overcame the challenges faced. The reflection stage in cycle 2 involved a more in-depth evaluation of the planning and implementation of cycle 2, with a focus on improving student learning outcomes. Teachers assessed whether the changes made had a positive impact on students' understanding and whether students' engagement levels and learning outcomes had improved significantly compared to cycle 1. Test results in cycle 2 were expected to show better progress in students' understanding of the material taught.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### RESULT

This Classroom Action Research (PTK) aims to improve students' focus and understanding of the material "Faith in the Last Day" through the application of the group discussion method. In the planning stage of cycle 1, the teacher designed strategies to overcome the problems found in the initial observation, where students had difficulty understanding abstract concepts such as heaven, hell, and the day of reckoning. Most students tended to be passive listeners during learning, which was dominated by the lecture method. To overcome this problem, the teacher decided to use the group discussion method, where students can interact actively and deeply with their group mates. Groups are formed by considering the diversity of students' academic abilities, and the teacher provides discussion guidelines that focus on questions related to the material "Faith in the Last Day".

At the implementation stage, the teacher starts the lesson with a brief introduction to the material to be discussed. After that, students are divided into small groups to discuss the prepared questions. The discussion process showed variations in the level of engagement between groups. Some groups seemed active and shared their opinions, while other groups experienced difficulties, such as the dominance of certain members or confusion in understanding the questions given. The teacher provided additional directions to help struggling groups, ensuring that every student could actively participate in the discussion.

Observations made during the discussion showed that most students began to show greater interest and engagement compared to the more lecture-based learning. Around 60% of students actively participated in the discussion, although there were still students who were passive listeners. The pre-test and post-test results also showed an increase in the average score from 65 to 72, although most students' answers were still superficial and unable to connect abstract concepts with real life. This shows that despite the improvement, the connection between the material and students' life experiences still needs to be explored further.

Reflection from cycle 1 resulted in some important findings for improvement in the next cycle. First, the discussion instructions that were too general affected students' understanding, so in the next cycle the teacher will simplify and clarify the discussion guide. In addition, some groups experienced domination by one member, so the teacher decided to provide a division of roles in the group, such as discussion leader, note-taker, and presenter, to encourage more even participation. Finally, many students had difficulty understanding abstract concepts without concrete examples, so the teacher planned to insert relevant daily life examples in the next cycle. Overall, the results from cycle 1 show that the group discussion method can improve student engagement, although some adjustments are still needed to achieve more optimal results.

In cycle 2, based on the reflection from the first cycle, teachers designed a number of corrective measures to increase the effectiveness of active learning methods, with the main focus on increasing student participation and engagement. One of the main improvements was the simplification of discussion instructions that were previously unclear. In cycle 2, instructions were given in more detail, based on concrete scenarios, to ensure students understood the purpose of the discussion better and could focus more on the topics discussed. In addition, a division of roles within the group was also introduced to ensure each student had clear responsibilities. This division consisted of discussion leaders, note-takers, and presenters, which aimed to encourage equal participation among students and avoid domination by a few students only.

Another improvement made was the provision of concrete examples relevant to students' daily lives to make it easier for them to relate abstract material, such as heaven, hell and the

day of reckoning, to their real-life experiences. The division of discussion time was also extended, providing more opportunities for students to think deeply and be more focused in group discussions. During the discussion, the teacher circulates around to monitor student engagement and provide direction if needed, while ensuring that each student remains focused on the material.

Observations made during the implementation of cycle 2 showed a significant increase in student engagement and focus. About 85% of students actively participated in group discussions, which is much higher compared to the first cycle, where only about 60% of students were actively involved. The division of roles in the group proved to be effective in ensuring even participation, avoiding domination, and making every student feel like they have a responsibility. The pre-test and post-test results also showed significant improvement, with the average post-test score increasing from 72 in the first cycle to 87 in the second cycle. Many students are now able to explain abstract concepts better, thanks to the use of more relevant concrete examples.

However, despite the significant improvement, some students who previously lacked confidence in speaking in front of the class still showed some hesitation during the presentation. Nonetheless, the number of students who found this difficult was drastically reduced compared to the first cycle, indicating an improvement in students' courage and confidence. Reflection from cycle 2 identified some important findings that need to be considered for further improvement. Clear division of roles within the group proved effective in increasing student focus and participation. More structured and concrete instructions also made it easier for students to understand the purpose of the discussion and focus more on the learning.

## **DISCUSSION**

Analysis of the results of cycle 2 shows the effectiveness of the application of Active Learning Methods, especially through group discussions, in improving students' focus and understanding in class V.A SDN 09 Tarung Tarung Selatan. This is in accordance with the principles of active learning proposed by Barkley (2010), which states that this method can encourage deeper student involvement, increase interaction between students, and strengthen understanding of more abstract concepts. In this study, the improvement of more structured and clear discussion instructions, the division of specific roles in the group, as well as the provision of concrete examples relevant to students' daily lives proved effective in improving students' focus, as described by Bonwell and Eison (1991), who emphasized that active learning can increase students' engagement with the material and improve their understanding.

One important factor in active learning is the use of concrete examples to link abstract material with students' real-life experiences. The results of this study indicate that providing concrete examples helps students in connecting religious concepts, such as heaven, hell and the day of reckoning, with their daily behavior. The theory of constructivism developed by Piaget (1973) supports this, where he argues that learning is more effective when students can connect new knowledge with their existing experiences. The application of the group discussion method that allows students to share opinions and discuss with classmates provides an opportunity to build knowledge collaboratively, which is in accordance with the principles of constructivistic learning.

In addition, the addition of a longer discussion time in cycle 2 provided more opportunities for students to explore the material more deeply. Research conducted by Johnson and Johnson (1994) shows that group discussions that have a longer duration can improve students' understanding because it provides space for them to focus more and deepen their

understanding. However, although extending the discussion time proved to be effective, there are still challenges related to the involvement of students who lack confidence. This leads to the importance of creating a supportive environment, in accordance with Vygotsky's (1978) theory of the zone of proximal development, which states that students can develop better with adequate support from teachers or classmates.

Although active learning is proven to be effective in improving students' focus and understanding, challenges related to students' courage to speak in front of the class still need attention. This is in line with research by Weinstein and Mayer (1986), which shows that students' confidence in speaking in front of the class can have a major effect on their involvement in the discussion. Therefore, strategies to provide more opportunities for shy students to speak in small groups before presenting the results of the discussion in front of the class can help them feel more comfortable and confident.

The implementation of role sharing in groups can also be further optimized by providing further training on the role of each student in the group. This will minimize the confusion that occurs in some groups, as suggested by Cohen (1994), who states that a clear division of roles can improve group collaboration and effectiveness in achieving learning objectives.

## CONCLUSION

Overall, the application of the Active Learning Method in class V.A of SDN 09 Tarung Tarung Selatan has succeeded in improving students' focus and understanding of the material on faith in the Last Day. Clear division of roles, more structured instructions, and the use of concrete examples relevant to daily life proved effective in achieving the learning objectives. However, there are still challenges related to the involvement of less confident students and optimizing the use of discussion time, which can be improved in the next cycle.

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