

TEACHERS' STRATEGIES FOR ENHANCING STUDENTS' KNOWLEDGE THROUGH GROUP DISCUSSION-BASED LEARNING AT SMAN 3 MAGETAN

¹Wahyu Nur Ikhsan Suwarno, ²Nurul Iman, ³Syamsul Arifin, ⁴Alfi Zahrotuz Zakiyyah, ⁵Din Silmi

Rahmawati, ⁶Azzamuddin Syahpala

^{1,2,3,4,5,6}Universitas Muhammadiyah Ponorogo

Email: wahyunur@gmail.com¹, suwarno@gmail.com², cahayaiman@gmail.com³, syamsul888@gmail.com⁴, Alfiz@gmail.com⁵, azamuddinsyahpa@gmail.com⁶

Abstract

Islamic Religious Education requires instructional strategies that actively engage students in constructing and deepening their understanding of learning materials. This study aims to analyze the implementation of group discussion as an instructional method used by Islamic Religious Education teachers, identify the challenges encountered during its implementation, and examine its contribution to enhancing students' knowledge at SMAN 3 Magetan. This study employed a qualitative phenomenological approach, with data collected through observation, interviews, and documentation and analyzed through data organization, coding, categorization, narrative presentation, and triangulation. The findings show that group discussion was implemented through lesson and objective planning, group formation, teacher guidance, facilitation, presentation, and evaluation. Its implementation faced challenges related to limited learning resources, differences in student participation, uncontrolled gadget use, group management, and limited instructional time, which teachers addressed through clear guidance, proportional task allocation, monitoring, motivation, and continuous assistance. The method contributed to students' ability to understand and explain learning materials, think critically, express opinions, ask questions, and connect Islamic Religious Education concepts with everyday life. These findings indicate that group discussion can strengthen active participation and collaborative knowledge construction in Islamic Religious Education.

Keywords : Teacher Strategies; Student Knowledge; Group Discussion; Islamic Religious Education; SMAN 3 Magetan

Abstrak

Pembelajaran Pendidikan Agama Islam memerlukan strategi pembelajaran yang mampu melibatkan siswa secara aktif dalam membangun dan memperdalam pemahaman terhadap materi. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis penerapan metode diskusi kelompok oleh guru Pendidikan Agama Islam, mengidentifikasi tantangan dalam pelaksanaannya, serta mengkaji kontribusinya terhadap peningkatan pengetahuan siswa di SMAN 3 Magetan. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan jenis penelitian fenomenologis. Data diperoleh melalui observasi, wawancara, dan dokumentasi, kemudian dianalisis melalui pengorganisasian data, pengodean, kategorisasi, penyajian naratif, dan triangulasi. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa diskusi kelompok diterapkan melalui perencanaan materi dan tujuan pembelajaran, pembentukan kelompok, pemberian arahan, pendampingan, presentasi, dan evaluasi. Pelaksanaannya menghadapi tantangan berupa keterbatasan sumber belajar, perbedaan tingkat keaktifan siswa, penggunaan gawai yang kurang terkontrol, pengelolaan kelompok, dan keterbatasan waktu pembelajaran. Guru mengatasinya melalui penguatan arahan, pembagian tugas secara proporsional, pemantauan, motivasi, dan pendampingan berkelanjutan. Metode ini berkontribusi terhadap kemampuan siswa memahami dan menjelaskan materi, berpikir kritis, mengemukakan pendapat, mengajukan pertanyaan, serta mengaitkan konsep Pendidikan Agama Islam dengan kehidupan sehari-hari. Temuan ini menunjukkan bahwa diskusi kelompok dapat memperkuat keterlibatan aktif dan konstruksi pengetahuan siswa secara kolaboratif dalam pembelajaran Pendidikan Agama Islam.

Kata Kunci: Strategi Guru; Pengetahuan Siswa; Diskusi Kelompok; Pendidikan Agama Islam; SMAN 3 Magetan

INTRODUCTION

Islamic Religious Education (IRE) plays a strategic role in developing students' religious understanding while cultivating moral awareness and the capacity to apply Islamic values in everyday life. Achieving these objectives requires instructional practices that move beyond one way transmission of knowledge and create opportunities for students to think, communicate, and construct understanding through interaction. In this context, teachers' instructional strategies become particularly important because the effectiveness of IRE depends on the alignment between teaching methods, students' characteristics, classroom conditions, and learning objectives. Recent research emphasizes that IRE strategies should respond to students' needs and learning environments rather than rely on uniform instructional practices (Harmita et al., 2022). Accordingly, group discussion offers a relevant participatory approach because it positions students as active contributors to the learning process through exchanging ideas, responding to arguments, and explaining their understanding.

However, implementing group discussion does not automatically guarantee meaningful learning. Differences in students' participation, confidence, learning ability, and access to learning resources can create unequal involvement, while limited instructional time and classroom management may further constrain discussion quality. Recent studies indicate that discussion-based IRE can increase students' motivation, enthusiasm, participation, and learning outcomes, but its effectiveness depends substantially on how teachers organize and facilitate the learning process (Rosna, 2022; Ridwan et al., 2023). These findings suggest that the central issue is not merely whether discussion is used, but how teachers design, manage, monitor, and evaluate discussion so that participation contributes to knowledge development. This distinction is important in senior high school IRE, where students are expected not only to recall religious concepts but also to explain, question, exchange, and contextualize their understanding.

Research conducted in different educational settings provides complementary evidence regarding the potential of discussion-based learning. Rosna (2022) found that discussion in IRE increased student's motivation, classroom participation, and learning outcomes, while Ridwan et al. (2023) reported that discussion could strengthen students' learning enthusiasm through opportunities to exchange ideas and engage in critical thinking. More recent

research at SMA Negeri 1 Maron demonstrated that discussion created a more dynamic, dialogical, and inclusive IRE environment while supporting student's participation, critical thinking, communication, and collaboration (Septantiningtyas et al., 2025). Similarly, Sari and Kasduri (2025) showed that group discussion could improve students' understanding of IRE materials, particularly by addressing low participation associated with conventional teacher-centered learning. Collectively, these studies establish that discussion can support cognitive and social dimensions of IRE, but they largely emphasize outcomes or general effectiveness rather than the detailed teacher strategies underlying successful discussion management.

The emerging literature also reveals that teacher facilitation is a decisive component of discussion-based learning. Yusri and Naimi (2025), for example, found that alternating group discussions could improve cognitive, affective, and social dimensions of IRE learning, while challenges involving passive students, group dominance, and limited time required role distribution, turn-taking rules, and preparatory materials. Likewise, Septantiningtyas et al. (2025) emphasized the importance of teacher management in creating active and inclusive discussion. Ulfa (2024) further demonstrated that group discussion supported improved IRE learning outcomes and student involvement when accompanied by interactive presentation media. These studies answer important questions about the benefits and practical requirements of discussion, yet a contextual gap remains: limited attention has been given to how IRE teachers themselves strategically plan, implement, monitor, and evaluate group discussions to develop students' knowledge within a specific senior high school context.

This study addresses that gap by focusing not simply on the effectiveness of group discussion, but on the teacher's strategic management of the method as an integrated instructional process. Its novelty lies in examining how the IRE teacher at SMAN 3 Magetan connects lesson planning, group formation, guidance, monitoring, presentation, and evaluation while responding to challenges involving learning resources, student participation, gadget use, group management, and instructional time. The study therefore shifts the analytical focus from the general claim that discussion improves learning toward understanding the concrete strategies through which teachers make discussion productive for knowledge construction. Such a focus is particularly relevant because previous research has established the potential of discussion but provides less contextualized explanation of how teachers negotiate the practical

conditions that shape students' participation and understanding (Sari & Kasduri, 2025; Yusri & Naimi, 2025).

Against this background, this study aims to analyze the implementation of group discussion as an instructional strategy used by IRE teachers in Grade XI at SMAN 3 Magetan, identify the challenges encountered in its implementation, and examine its contribution to students' knowledge development. Specifically, the study examines how teachers organize and facilitate group discussions, how they respond to differences in student participation and classroom conditions, and how students' knowledge development is reflected in their ability to understand and explain learning materials, exchange information, express opinions, ask questions, and connect IRE concepts with the issues discussed. By linking instructional strategy, implementation challenges, and knowledge development within one analytical framework, the study seeks to provide a more context-sensitive understanding of group discussion in senior high school Islamic Religious Education.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a qualitative approach with a phenomenological design to examine teachers' and students' experiences of group discussion in Islamic Religious Education (IRE) at SMAN 3 Magetan. The design was selected to obtain an in-depth understanding of participants' experiences and meanings within the actual learning context (Creswell & Poth, 2023). The study was conducted at SMAN 3 Magetan during the implementation of group-discussion-based IRE learning. Participants comprised IRE teachers and Grade XI students who were directly involved in the learning activities. Participants were selected purposively based on their direct involvement and relevance to the research focus.

Data were collected through participatory observation, semi structured interviews, and documentation of learning activities and instructional materials. The researcher served as the primary research instrument. Data analysis involved data organization, coding, categorization, thematic interpretation, narrative presentation, and verification of conclusions in accordance with the qualitative research framework (Creswell & Creswell, 2023). The analysis focused on teacher strategies, implementation challenges, and the contribution of group discussion to students' knowledge development.

Data credibility was established through source and technique

triangulation, member checking, and cross-verification among observation, interview, and documentary evidence. These strategies strengthened the credibility and confirmability of interpretations by ensuring that findings were supported by convergent evidence from multiple sources (Creswell & Poth, 2023).

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Teacher-Mediated Group Discussion as an Active Learning Strategy

The findings indicate that group discussion at SMAN 3 Magetan was not implemented as a stand-alone classroom technique but as a teacher mediated instructional strategy involving lesson planning, group formation, task allocation, facilitation, presentation, and evaluation. Teachers selected discussion according to learning objectives and encouraged students to search for information, exchange ideas, and relate Islamic Religious Education (IRE) materials to everyday situations. During discussion, teachers functioned primarily as facilitators by monitoring groups, clarifying difficult concepts, prompting questions, and ensuring that students remained engaged. This pattern reflects a shift from teacher centered transmission toward participatory knowledge construction, in which students become active contributors while teachers retain responsibility for instructional direction. Similar findings were reported by Rohman et al. (2024), whose phenomenological study found that discussion in IRE encouraged students to think critically and systematically, make decisions, and respect alternative viewpoints.

The present findings, however, extend this previous understanding by showing that the effectiveness of discussion was closely connected to how the teacher managed the method, rather than to the use of discussion itself. The teacher's role included balancing student autonomy with instructional control students were allowed to investigate and exchange information independently, but the teacher intervened when students encountered conceptual difficulties or when participation became uneven. This finding is consistent with Septantiningtyas et al. (2025), who found that discussion in IRE could promote active participation, critical thinking, communication, and collaboration when supported by appropriate teacher facilitation. Unlike studies that primarily evaluate whether discussion improves learning outcomes, the present study highlights teacher mediation as the mechanism connecting the discussion format with meaningful student engagement. Its specific contribution is therefore the conceptualization of group discussion as a managed instructional process, rather

than merely a participatory teaching method.

Flexible Classroom Management as a Response to Unequal Student Participation

A second major finding concerns the challenges associated with heterogeneous student participation. The data show that large groups sometimes allowed highly active students to dominate the work while less active students depended on their peers. Some students also experienced shyness, limited confidence, or difficulty identifying the main points of the material. Teachers responded by reducing group size, distributing responsibilities among members, asking less active students to answer questions or present ideas, and providing individual assistance when necessary. These practices demonstrate that collaborative learning does not automatically produce equal participation. Instead, participation needs to be deliberately structured through teacher intervention. The finding corresponds with Sari and Kasduri (2025), whose study at SMA PAB 4 Sampali reported that group discussion supported students' understanding of IRE materials, while the effectiveness of the method depended on students' involvement in the learning process.

The findings also complement Yusri and Naimi (2025), who examined alternating group discussions at SMA Negeri 1 Panai Tengah and reported the importance of organizing participation within discussion activities. The similarity lies in recognizing that discussion requires deliberate classroom management; the difference is that the present study identifies flexibility in group composition and differentiated task allocation as central teacher responses to participation inequality. This suggests that the teacher's strategy cannot be standardized across all classes because group dynamics are shaped by students' social relationships, confidence, and learning characteristics. Rather than interpreting passive participation simply as a student deficit, the findings position it as a classroom-management issue requiring pedagogical adjustment. The specific contribution of this study is therefore the identification of flexible grouping and distributed responsibility as practical mechanisms for converting unequal participation into more balanced engagement.

Resource and Digital Constraints as Conditions Shaping Discussion Effectiveness

The third theme concerns the material and technological conditions surrounding group discussion. The study found that the number of textbook copies was not always sufficient for the number of students, encouraging

students to use mobile phones to obtain additional information. Although digital access potentially expanded learning resources, it simultaneously created a distraction because some students used their devices for games or social media rather than learning. Consequently, technology functioned ambivalently it could broaden access to information, but without teacher supervision it could weaken concentration. This finding is important because it challenges the assumption that greater access to digital resources automatically improves collaborative learning. The effectiveness of technology depends on the teacher's ability to integrate it with learning objectives and regulate its use. Recent research on IRE similarly emphasizes the importance of teacher competence in managing instructional resources and technology rather than treating digital tools as inherently transformative (Sholeh et al., 2024).

This condition also provides a useful distinction from studies that report primarily positive outcomes from discussion-based learning. For example, Ulfa (2024) found that group discussion supported improved IRE learning outcomes when accompanied by interactive presentation media, while Rohman et al. (2024) associated discussion with the development of critical thinking. The present study adds a more contextualized explanation by showing that the availability of technology can simultaneously function as a learning resource and a source of distraction. Thus, the contribution is not simply to reaffirm the value of digital support, but to demonstrate that resource adequacy must be accompanied by pedagogical regulation. In the context of IRE, teachers therefore need to distinguish between providing students with access to information and ensuring that such access contributes to the construction of relevant knowledge.

From Discussion Participation to Knowledge Construction

The fourth theme concerns the contribution of group discussion to students' knowledge development. The findings show that students did not merely receive explanations from teachers; they read learning materials, searched for information, exchanged ideas, answered questions, formulated conclusions, presented their findings, and related IRE concepts to everyday situations. These activities were reflected in students' ability to explain learning materials in their own words, ask questions, express opinions, and connect religious concepts with problems encountered in daily life. The findings therefore suggest that knowledge development occurred through a combination of individual preparation and social interaction. This interpretation is consistent with Rohman et al. (2024), who found that discussion in IRE supported critical and systematic

thinking and enabled students to consider different viewpoints.

The findings further indicate that discussion contributed to knowledge development beyond simple recall because students were required to interpret information and communicate their understanding. This pattern is also consistent with research by Sari and Kasduri (2025), which found that group discussion could improve students' understanding of IRE material. Similarly, research on problem based group discussion in IRE at SMA Negeri 1 Suralaga reported stronger understanding, active participation, and critical-thinking abilities among students participating in discussion based learning. However, the present study differs in its emphasis it does not claim a statistically measured increase in achievement, because the research is qualitative. Instead, it interprets knowledge development from observable changes in students' ability to understand, explain, question, exchange information, and contextualize learning. This distinction strengthens the qualitative contribution of the study by showing how knowledge is constructed through interaction, rather than merely demonstrating that test scores increase.

An additional finding is that presentation after group discussion strengthened students' opportunities to articulate and defend their understanding. Students who were previously less active could receive opportunities to speak, while the presentation stage provided a visible indication of whether the group had understood the material. This finding is compatible with research demonstrating that discussion-based learning can support communication and critical thinking development (Rohman et al., 2024; Septantiningtyas et al., 2025). Nevertheless, the present study identifies an important condition: presentation is productive only when preceded by adequate teacher guidance and equitable task distribution. Without these supports, discussion can reproduce unequal participation, with some students completing the intellectual work while others merely follow the group's conclusions. The contribution of this finding lies in connecting discussion, presentation, and teacher monitoring as a continuous knowledge construction cycle, rather than treating them as separate classroom activities.

Integrated Interpretation

Taken together, the four themes demonstrate that the contribution of group discussion to IRE learning at SMAN 3 Magetan cannot be explained simply by the presence of a particular teaching method. Its effectiveness emerged from the interaction between teacher facilitation, flexible classroom management,

resource regulation, and opportunities for students to construct and communicate knowledge. This extends earlier studies that have generally established positive relationships between discussion and motivation, understanding, participation, or critical thinking (Ridwan et al., 2023; Rohman et al., 2024; Sari & Kasduri, 2025; Septantiningtyas et al., 2025). The distinctive contribution of the present study is its explanation of the conditions and teacher practices through which discussion becomes productive in a senior high school IRE classroom. The findings consequently suggest that group discussion should be understood not as an automatically effective method, but as a pedagogical strategy whose contribution to students' knowledge depends on purposeful planning, balanced participation, continuous teacher facilitation, appropriate resource use, and opportunities for students to explain and contextualize what they have learned.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the implementation of group discussion in Islamic Religious Education at SMAN 3 Magetan was systematically organized through learning objectives and material selection, group formation, teacher guidance, facilitation, presentation, and evaluation. Theoretically, the findings extend the understanding of group discussion as a teacher mediated learning strategy in which active participation, peer interaction, and guided knowledge construction are closely connected to students' understanding, critical thinking, confidence in expressing ideas, and ability to relate Islamic Religious Education concepts to everyday life. Practically, the study indicates that the effectiveness of group discussion depends not only on the use of the method itself but also on teachers' ability to manage unequal participation, limited learning resources, inappropriate gadget use, group dynamics, and instructional time through clear guidance, equitable task distribution, monitoring, motivation, and continuous assistance. This study is limited by its phenomenological focus on one school context, which restricts the transferability of the findings to other educational settings. Future research should examine group discussion across multiple schools and compare different grouping and facilitation strategies to identify practices that most consistently support students' knowledge development.

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