



Implementation of Discovery Learning Method in Islamic Religious Education Learning: A Qualitative Study in Madrasah

Dewi Anisatur Rohmah*, Aminatus Zahroh

Universitas Islam Syarifuddin Lumajang, Indonesia

Email : agusnabil629@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

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*Corresponding Author

This study aims to analyze the implementation of Discovery Learning in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning and examine its contribution to improving student engagement, understanding, and character development. This research employed a qualitative approach with a descriptive design. Data were collected through observation, semi-structured interviews, and documentation, while data analysis involved data condensation, data display, and conclusion verification. The findings reveal that Discovery Learning was implemented through systematic stages, including stimulation, problem identification, data collection, data processing, verification, and generalization. The implementation encouraged students to actively participate, develop independent learning skills, improve conceptual understanding, and strengthen Islamic character values such as responsibility, cooperation, confidence, and discipline. The study also identifies several challenges, including limited learning time, differences in student abilities, and the need for continuous teacher development. The implication of this research highlights that Discovery Learning can serve as an effective alternative strategy for creating meaningful, student-centered, and contextual PAI learning. This study contributes to strengthening innovative practices in Islamic education by demonstrating the integration of cognitive development, active learning experiences, and character formation.

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INTRODUCTION

Education plays a fundamental role in preparing individuals to face rapid social, technological, and cultural transformations. The importance of this research lies in the need to develop learning approaches that are relevant to contemporary educational demands, particularly in Islamic Religious Education (PAI). Innovative learning models are essential because conventional teacher-

centered practices are often insufficient to develop students' critical thinking, independence, and meaningful understanding. Previous studies emphasize that Islamic education must continuously adapt to changes in society and technological development to maintain its relevance (Jailani et al., 2021; Basir et al., 2024; Rohman et al., 2023). Therefore, improving PAI learning strategies becomes a crucial effort to ensure that students not only acquire religious knowledge but also internalize Islamic values in their daily behavior. Consequently, the exploration of innovative approaches such as Discovery Learning is important for strengthening the quality and effectiveness of Islamic education.

The urgency of this research is also related to the broader challenge of developing students' competencies in the twenty-first century. Modern education requires learners to actively construct knowledge, solve problems, and participate in meaningful learning experiences rather than merely memorize information. In the context of Islamic education, learning should integrate cognitive, affective, and spiritual dimensions to produce students with intellectual abilities and moral character. Research shows that curriculum innovation and appropriate learning strategies contribute significantly to improving educational quality and student development (Dhani, 2020; Lisah & Baharun, 2025; Wijaksono & Affan, 2026). Furthermore, the implementation of the Islamic education curriculum requires continuous improvement to respond to globalization and changing learner characteristics (Novriantoni & Dewi, 2024; Yusriadi et al., 2026). Thus, investigating Discovery Learning in PAI becomes important because it represents an effort to transform religious learning into a more active, contextual, and student-centered process.

Despite these developments, Islamic education still faces several problems that influence the effectiveness of learning outcomes. One major problem is the tendency of PAI learning to emphasize memorization and theoretical understanding rather than encouraging students to discover, analyze, and apply religious concepts in real-life situations. This condition may reduce students' engagement and weaken the internalization of Islamic values. Previous discussions highlight that curriculum development in Islamic education requires integration between learning objectives, materials, teaching methods, and evaluation systems to achieve comprehensive educational goals (Jailani et al., 2021; Firmansyah et al., 2025; Nurhaida & Asdiqoh, 2026). Moreover, the separation of Islamic subjects and limited integration of religious values into daily practices remain challenges in madrasah education (Novriantoni & Dewi, 2024; Surur et al., 2026). These problems indicate the necessity of implementing innovative learning methods that can bridge religious knowledge with practical experiences.

The phenomenon observed in Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Nurul Islam 02 Sememu demonstrates that PAI learning requires continuous adaptation to students' diverse characteristics and learning needs. Although the institution has attempted to improve educational quality, several challenges remain, including variations in students' abilities, limited learning resources, and the dominance of conventional instructional approaches. These conditions require teachers to develop strategies that encourage active participation and accommodate learner diversity. Discovery Learning provides an alternative because it positions students as active participants who explore information, identify problems, and construct understanding through investigation processes. Previous research indicates that Discovery Learning can improve student involvement and learning achievement in PAI contexts because students are encouraged to independently find and understand religious concepts (Mulyadi, 2023; Alfiza et al., 2023). Therefore, its implementation in madrasah settings requires further empirical examination.

Several previous studies have examined Discovery Learning in educational contexts, including Islamic Religious Education. Mulyadi (2023) found that Discovery Learning improved PAI learning outcomes among elementary students by increasing student activity and participation. Similarly, Alfiza et al. (2023) explained that Discovery Learning encourages students to become active learners who construct religious understanding through exploration and discovery processes. Another study by Nurlailatus and Istiyana (2024) demonstrated that Discovery Learning positively influenced PAI achievement in an Islamic elementary school environment. These studies provide valuable evidence regarding the effectiveness of Discovery Learning; however, most previous research primarily focuses on measuring learning outcomes or explaining conceptual strategies. Limited attention has been given to the detailed implementation process, classroom dynamics, teacher preparation, and student responses within specific madrasah contexts.

Furthermore, previous research has not sufficiently explored the integration between Discovery Learning and differentiated learning approaches in PAI classrooms. Studies such as Dewi Lukitawanti et al. (2023) demonstrate that integrating Discovery Learning with differentiated instruction can optimize students' problem-solving abilities. However, this research was conducted in science learning contexts rather than Islamic education. Meanwhile, research on differentiated learning in PAI has emphasized the importance of adapting instruction to students' needs and characteristics (Hakim & Mu'id, 2025; Mutia et al., 2025). The existing literature indicates a research gap regarding how Discovery Learning can be implemented in PAI learning at the madrasah level while considering students' diverse learning conditions. Therefore, this study

contributes by examining the practical implementation of Discovery Learning in PAI and explaining how this approach supports more adaptive and meaningful Islamic learning.

The novelty of this research lies in its focus on analyzing Discovery Learning implementation within the specific environment of Madrasah Ibtidaiyah, where religious education plays a central role in shaping students' knowledge, attitudes, and character. Unlike previous studies that mainly measure effectiveness through academic achievement, this research emphasizes the learning process, teacher strategies, student involvement, and contextual factors influencing implementation. This perspective provides a more comprehensive understanding of how innovative learning approaches operate in Islamic educational institutions. Furthermore, this research is important because madrasah education requires models that are not only academically effective but also capable of strengthening religious values, creativity, independence, and character formation. The findings are expected to provide practical insights for teachers and educational institutions in developing more responsive and inclusive PAI learning practices.

Based on these considerations, the research problem addressed in this study is how Discovery Learning is implemented in PAI learning and how its implementation contributes to improving the quality of student learning experiences in Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Nurul Islam 02 Sememu. This research argues that Discovery Learning can become an effective strategy for transforming PAI learning from a teacher-centered approach into a student-centered learning process that encourages exploration, reflection, and meaningful understanding. The contribution of this study is to provide empirical evidence regarding the implementation of Discovery Learning in Islamic elementary education while offering recommendations for teachers and madrasah stakeholders in designing innovative learning practices. Through this research, PAI learning is expected to become more adaptive, engaging, and capable of producing students who possess both religious competence and positive character development.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employed a qualitative research design with a descriptive approach to explore the implementation of Discovery Learning in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) at the elementary madrasah level. A qualitative design was selected because the study aimed to understand learning processes, teacher strategies, student experiences, and contextual factors that cannot be adequately explained through numerical measurements. Qualitative research emphasizes the interpretation of phenomena based on participants' perspectives and natural classroom settings, making it appropriate for investigating educational practices

in depth. Previous studies on Islamic education innovation have emphasized that understanding learning transformation requires examining not only learning outcomes but also the processes, interactions, and educational contexts that shape student development (Kistoro et al., 2023; Mintasih et al., 2024). Therefore, this approach was considered suitable for analyzing how Discovery Learning supports active, meaningful, and student-centered PAI learning.

The research was conducted at Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Nurul Islam 02 Sememu, located in Pasirian District, Lumajang Regency, East Java, Indonesia. This location was purposively selected because the madrasah represents an Islamic elementary education institution that actively seeks to improve the quality of PAI learning through innovative instructional strategies. The participants of this study consisted of the fifth-grade PAI teacher and fifth-grade students who experienced the implementation of Discovery Learning in classroom activities. Data were collected through three techniques: observation, semi-structured interviews, and documentation. Observation was conducted to examine the real implementation of Discovery Learning stages during PAI lessons, including student participation and classroom interactions. Interviews were conducted with teachers and students to obtain deeper information regarding learning strategies, challenges, and responses toward the method. Documentation was used to support primary data through lesson plans, learning materials, and learning activity records. This data collection strategy aligns with previous research emphasizing the importance of examining teacher competence, learning practices, and contextual implementation in Islamic education innovation (Alfiza et al., 2023; Wedi et al., 2025).

Data analysis was conducted using an interactive qualitative analysis model consisting of data condensation, data display, and conclusion verification. Data condensation involved selecting, simplifying, organizing, and focusing the collected information from observations, interviews, and documents related to Discovery Learning implementation. After condensation, the data were displayed in narrative descriptions and thematic categories to identify patterns regarding teacher practices, student engagement, and learning outcomes. The final stage involved verification and drawing conclusions by continuously comparing emerging findings with the collected evidence to ensure the credibility of the results. This analytical process was chosen because qualitative educational research requires systematic interpretation of complex classroom phenomena. Previous studies in Islamic education research demonstrate that systematic analysis is essential to reveal relationships between curriculum implementation, learning strategies, and educational outcomes (Sabil et al., 2023; Nurdin et al., 2024). Through this process, the study provides a comprehensive understanding of Discovery Learning implementation in PAI learning at Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Nurul Islam 02 Sememu.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Implementation of Discovery Learning in Islamic Religious Education Learning at MI Nurul Islam 02 Sememu

This study reveals that the implementation of Discovery Learning in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) at MI Nurul Islam 02 Sememu was conducted systematically through structured learning stages. Data obtained from interviews, observations, and documentation indicate that Discovery Learning encouraged students to actively participate in discovering, understanding, and constructing Islamic knowledge. In this learning model, the teacher no longer became the only source of information but acted as a facilitator who guided students throughout the learning process. Students were positioned as active learners who explored information, discussed problems, and developed their own understanding of Islamic concepts. The implementation of Discovery Learning transformed PAI learning from a teacher-centered approach into a more interactive and meaningful learning experience.

The implementation process consisted of several main stages, namely stimulation, problem statement, data collection, data processing, verification, and generalization. In the stimulation stage, the teacher provided initial stimuli to develop students' curiosity and encourage critical thinking. The teacher used contextual questions, audiovisual media, and Islamic stories related to the learning materials. For example, students were given questions such as why Islam prohibits dishonesty, why Muslims are required to perform prayers, and why Prophet Muhammad SAW is considered an exemplary figure. These activities encouraged students to think critically before entering the exploration stage.



Figure 1. Students' Collaborative Activities during Discovery Learning Implementation

The classroom documentation shows that students actively participated in group-based learning activities during the implementation of Discovery Learning. Students were involved in discussions, exchanging ideas, and completing learning tasks collaboratively. The learning atmosphere demonstrated that students were not only receiving information from the teacher but also actively constructing knowledge through interaction with peers and learning resources.

The second stage was problem statement, where students were guided to identify and formulate problems related to Islamic learning materials. After receiving stimulation from the teacher, students discussed various questions that emerged from the learning topics. For example, after watching a video about dishonest behavior, students discussed the consequences of cheating and Islamic perspectives regarding honesty. In this process, the teacher did not directly provide answers but encouraged students to develop questions and seek solutions independently.

The third stage was data collection, in which students searched for information related to the problems they had identified. Students used various sources, including PAI textbooks, the Qur'an, Hadith, learning modules, and digital resources recommended by the teacher. Through this activity, students learned how to explore religious information independently. One student explained that learning through Discovery Learning was more enjoyable because they could discuss with friends, watch learning videos, and search for Qur'anic verses related to the learning topic. This activity made students feel like "Islamic detectives" who searched for answers through exploration.



Figure 2. Students' Group Discussion Activities in PAI Learning Using Discovery Learning

The documentation also confirms that Discovery Learning created a collaborative classroom environment. Students worked together in groups to analyze learning materials and solve problems. This activity encouraged communication, cooperation, and responsibility among students. The teacher continuously guided students during the discussion process to ensure that the information obtained was relevant to the learning objectives.

The fourth stage was data processing, where students organized and analyzed the information collected. Students discussed their findings and presented them through summaries, diagrams, mind maps, or comparison tables. The teacher guided students to understand the meaning behind the information rather than simply copying learning materials. This stage trained students' higher-order thinking skills, including analyzing, interpreting, and connecting Islamic concepts with everyday life.

The fifth stage was verification, where students presented their findings and received feedback from the teacher and classmates. Through classroom discussions, students were encouraged to provide arguments, questions, and additional information. The teacher functioned as a validator who clarified misconceptions and strengthened students' understanding of Islamic teachings. The final stage was generalization, where students formulated conclusions and reflected on the Islamic values obtained from the learning process. Students were encouraged to apply these values in their daily lives, such as practicing honesty, performing prayers regularly, and respecting others.



Figure 3. Interview Process with the Head of Madrasah and Curriculum Coordinator

The interview process with the head of madrasah and curriculum coordinator provided additional information regarding institutional support for the implementation of Discovery Learning. The interviews revealed that the

madrasah supported innovative learning approaches to improve the quality of PAI instruction. The information obtained from school leaders complemented classroom observations by explaining the role of curriculum management and institutional encouragement in supporting learning innovation.

Overall, the implementation of Discovery Learning at MI Nurul Islam 02 Sememu demonstrates that this approach provides opportunities for students to learn actively, independently, and meaningfully. The learning process does not only focus on cognitive achievement but also supports the development of moral awareness and spiritual values. Through Discovery Learning, PAI becomes a learning experience that integrates knowledge acquisition, character formation, and religious practice.

Outcomes of Discovery Learning Implementation in Islamic Religious Education Learning

The implementation of Discovery Learning produced significant changes in the learning process, student participation, and students' understanding of Islamic Religious Education materials. The findings indicate that this learning model successfully created a more active, exploratory, and reflective learning environment. Students were not only able to understand Islamic concepts but also developed awareness of applying religious values in their daily activities.

Before the implementation of Discovery Learning, PAI learning was mainly dominated by conventional teaching methods, particularly lectures and teacher explanations. In this condition, students tended to become passive learners who mainly listened and recorded information. However, after Discovery Learning was implemented, classroom interaction changed significantly. Students became more active in discussions, searching for information, asking questions, and expressing their opinions. The teacher's role also changed from being the primary information provider into a facilitator who guided students in discovering knowledge independently.

The improvement in classroom activities was reflected in students' participation during learning activities. Observation results showed that the number of active students increased significantly. Previously, only around 35–40% of students actively participated in learning activities, while after the implementation of Discovery Learning, student participation increased to more than 80%. Students showed greater enthusiasm in completing worksheets, searching for Islamic references, discussing learning problems, and presenting their ideas.

Furthermore, Discovery Learning improved students' learning independence. Students began to search for information from various sources, including PAI textbooks, Qur'anic verses, Hadith, and digital learning resources

provided by the teacher. Some students also showed increased curiosity by reading Islamic stories outside classroom activities and asking deeper questions related to religious practices.

In addition to cognitive development, Discovery Learning also contributed to students' religious character formation. The findings show that students demonstrated positive behavioral changes, including increased confidence, responsibility, cooperation, honesty, and discipline. Students became more open in expressing opinions and more responsible in completing group assignments. The learning process also encouraged students to internalize Islamic values, such as honesty and discipline in performing prayers.

The implementation of Discovery Learning therefore influenced not only students' academic understanding but also their affective and spiritual development. Through exploration, discussion, reflection, and application, students were able to understand Islamic teachings more meaningfully. This finding demonstrates that Discovery Learning can serve as an effective approach for improving the quality of PAI learning in madrasah environments because it integrates knowledge, values, and character development.

Discussion

The findings of this study demonstrate that the implementation of Discovery Learning in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) at MI Nurul Islam 02 Sememu successfully transformed learning into a more student-centered process. This finding is consistent with Alfiza et al. (2023), who stated that Discovery Learning encourages students to actively construct understanding through exploration and investigation. Similarly, Mulyadi (2023) found that Discovery Learning improved PAI learning outcomes by increasing student participation. However, this study extends previous findings by highlighting the complete implementation process of Discovery Learning stages, including stimulation, problem identification, data collection, verification, and generalization within a madrasah context. Therefore, the contribution of this research lies in explaining how Discovery Learning operates practically in Islamic elementary education rather than only measuring its effectiveness.

The findings also indicate that teachers' roles changed from knowledge transmitters into facilitators who guided students during the discovery process. This result supports Kistoro et al. (2023), who emphasized that experiential learning approaches in PAI provide meaningful experiences by involving students directly in learning activities. In addition, Maulisa et al. (2025) explained that learning methods in the Merdeka Curriculum encourage active student participation and contextual learning experiences. Unlike previous studies that mainly discuss innovative methods conceptually, this research reveals how

teachers manage classroom interactions, provide learning stimuli, and facilitate student exploration. This finding highlights that successful Discovery Learning implementation depends not only on the method itself but also on teachers' ability to design meaningful religious learning experiences.

The improvement of student activity found in this study confirms previous research showing that Discovery Learning can increase engagement and learning motivation. Nurlailatus and Istiyana (2024) reported that Discovery Learning improved PAI learning achievement in Islamic elementary education, while Dewi Lukitawanti et al. (2023) showed that Discovery Learning combined with differentiated learning strengthened students' problem-solving abilities. However, this study differs because it focuses specifically on PAI learning, where students' exploration is connected with religious values and character formation. The novelty of this finding is that Discovery Learning in madrasah education does not only develop cognitive skills but also supports students in understanding and practicing Islamic teachings through meaningful classroom experiences.

The findings further reveal that Discovery Learning contributed to students' character development, including responsibility, cooperation, confidence, and appreciation of Islamic values. This result aligns with Arifin et al. (2023), who emphasized the importance of integrative learning models in developing akhlak karimah values among students. Similarly, Masturin (2023) highlighted that Islamic education materials based on religious moderation contribute to character formation. Nevertheless, previous studies have rarely examined how a learning model directly facilitates character development through classroom discovery activities. Therefore, this research contributes by demonstrating that innovative pedagogical approaches in PAI can integrate intellectual development with spiritual and moral education.

The implementation of Discovery Learning in this study also responds to challenges in contemporary Islamic education, particularly the need for adaptive and innovative learning strategies. Mintasih et al. (2024) emphasized that digital and innovative learning approaches require teachers' competence to create meaningful educational experiences. Meanwhile, Wasehudin et al. (2023) explained that Islamic education transformation requires learning practices that combine traditional Islamic values with modern educational approaches. This study supports these perspectives by showing that Discovery Learning can become a bridge between maintaining Islamic educational objectives and responding to modern learning demands. The contribution of this research is providing empirical evidence from a madrasah context where innovation is implemented without separating religious values from pedagogical development.

Although Discovery Learning provides positive impacts, this study also identifies several challenges, including limited instructional time, differences in students' abilities, and the need for teacher preparation. These findings complement Hakim and Mu'id (2025), who emphasized that differentiated approaches are necessary in Islamic education to accommodate diverse student characteristics. Furthermore, Nurdin et al. (2024) highlighted that curriculum implementation in inclusive Islamic education requires flexibility and adaptation. The present study contributes by showing that Discovery Learning requires contextual adjustment, especially in madrasah environments where students have different levels of readiness. Therefore, effective implementation requires continuous teacher development, institutional support, and appropriate classroom management strategies.

Overall, this study confirms that Discovery Learning is an effective alternative approach for improving PAI learning quality at the madrasah level. The findings strengthen previous studies by showing that Discovery Learning improves student participation, conceptual understanding, and Islamic character development simultaneously. The main novelty of this research lies in presenting a comprehensive explanation of Discovery Learning implementation and its educational implications within an Islamic elementary school setting. Unlike previous research that mainly focuses on learning outcomes, this study emphasizes the relationship between learning processes, student experiences, and character formation. Future studies may expand this research by examining long-term impacts, comparing different educational levels, or integrating Discovery Learning with other innovative approaches in Islamic education.

CONCLUSION

This study reveals that the implementation of Discovery Learning in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) at MI Nurul Islam 02 Sememu Pasirian provides an important lesson that meaningful religious learning can be achieved when students are positioned as active participants in constructing knowledge through exploration, investigation, and reflection. The findings indicate that Discovery Learning not only improves students' understanding of PAI concepts but also strengthens their engagement, confidence, responsibility, collaboration, and appreciation of Islamic values in daily life. The main contribution of this study lies in providing empirical insight into the practical implementation of Discovery Learning within the context of Islamic elementary education, particularly by highlighting the relationship between innovative learning strategies and the development of students' cognitive, affective, and character dimensions. However, this study has several limitations, including its focus on a single madrasah context and limited participants, which may restrict the broader

generalization of the findings. Therefore, future research is encouraged to examine the long-term impact of Discovery Learning, explore its implementation in different educational levels and subjects, and investigate its integration with other innovative approaches to strengthen the quality of Islamic education.

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