



Implementation of the Crossword Puzzle Method in Improving the Results of Understanding the Material on the Prophet's Story in the Aqidah Akhlak Lesson at MIS As Syarifiyah

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Abstract: This study aims to analyze the effectiveness of the application of the Crossword Puzzle method in improving students' understanding of the material on the story of the prophet in the lesson of Aqidah Akhlak in class 4 MIS As Syarifiyah in the 2024/2025 academic year. The Crossword Puzzle method was chosen because it can provide a more enjoyable learning experience, increase student involvement, and help strengthen their memory of the material being studied. This study uses a classroom action research (CAR) method consisting of several cycles, including the planning, implementation, observation, and reflection stages. The subjects of the study were 11 students of class 4 MIS As Syarifiyah. Data collection was carried out through observation, interviews, and material understanding tests before and after the application of this method. The results of the study showed a significant increase in students' understanding of the material on the story of the prophet after the application of the Crossword Puzzle method. This is evidenced by the increase in the comprehension test scores from each cycle carried out. In addition, students become more active, motivated, and enthusiastic in the learning process. Thus, the Crossword Puzzle method can be used as an innovative and effective learning strategy in improving students' understanding of the material on Aqidah Akhlak.

Keywords: Crossword Puzzle, understanding the material, stories of the prophets, Aqidah and Akhlak, 4th grade students.

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INTRODUCTION

Aqidah Akhlak learning plays an important role in shaping the character and morals of students from an early age. One of the materials taught in this subject is the stories of the prophets, which aims to provide examples and improve students' understanding of Islamic values (Suryani, 2021). However, in practice, many students have difficulty understanding and remembering the contents of the prophet's stories because the teaching methods are still conventional and less interactive. This has an impact on students' low understanding of the material being taught and minimal motivation in learning (Putri & Wahyudi, 2023).

Innovation-based learning is needed so that students can understand the material better and stay motivated in the learning process. One method that can be used to improve student understanding is the Crossword Puzzle method. This method is a game-based

learning strategy that can help students understand concepts in a more fun and interactive way (Hidayat & Ramadhani, 2022). Crossword puzzle games allow students to connect key words in the material, so that they can strengthen their memory and increase their involvement in learning (Fadhilah & Pratama, 2021).

Several studies have shown that the use of game-based methods can improve students' understanding and motivation to learn. According to research conducted by Anwar and Setiawan (2020), the application of Crossword Puzzles in learning can increase students' absorption of material by up to 30% compared to conventional methods. This happens because this method involves elements of challenge and fun that make students more interested in learning. In addition, this approach also increases interaction between students, which can strengthen their understanding through discussion and collaboration in solving puzzles (Rahmawati, 2022).

In the context of learning Akidah Akhlak, the application of the Crossword Puzzle method is expected to help students understand the stories of the prophets better. Given that the stories of the prophets often contain quite complex moral and historical values, a game-based approach can help students remember the events and messages contained therein (Lestari & Kurniawan, 2023). In addition, this method can improve students' analytical skills in connecting events in the story with their daily lives, so that learning becomes more applicable and meaningful.

Although there have been many studies that prove the effectiveness of the Crossword Puzzle method in various subjects, its use in learning Akidah Akhlak is still limited. Many teachers still use lecture methods and reading textbooks as the main strategies in teaching the material of the prophet's story (Susanto, 2021). In fact, 4th grade elementary school students tend to understand the material more easily through methods that involve play activities and direct interaction (Prasetyo & Handayani, 2022). Therefore, further research is needed to see the extent to which this method can be applied effectively in learning Akidah Akhlak.

This study aims to test the effectiveness of the Crossword Puzzle method in improving the understanding of 4th grade students of MIS As Syarifiyah on the material of the prophet's story. In addition, this study will also analyze the impact of this method on student motivation and involvement in the learning process. Thus, the results of this study are expected to provide new insights for educators in choosing more innovative learning strategies that are in accordance with the characteristics of elementary school students.

The approach used in this study is classroom action research (CAR) which consists of several cycles, including the planning, implementation, observation, and reflection stages. The data in this study were collected through observation, interviews, and student understanding tests before and after the application of the Crossword Puzzle method. With this research design, it is expected to obtain accurate data regarding the effectiveness of the method in improving student understanding. With this research, it is hoped that the Crossword Puzzle method can be an alternative learning strategy that is more interesting and effective in teaching Akidah Akhlak. If this method proves successful, it can be applied more widely in other schools as part of innovation in game-based learning. In addition, this research can also be a reference for teachers in developing more varied learning methods that are in accordance with student needs..

METHODS

The data sources in this study consist of primary data and secondary data. Primary data were obtained directly from grade 4 students of MIS As Syarifiyah in the 2024/2025 academic year through observation, comprehension tests, and interviews. There were 11 students who were the subjects of the study. In addition, data was also collected from the Akidah Akhlak teacher who taught in the class in order to obtain information about the learning methods that have been used so far and their responses to the application of the Crossword Puzzle method. Secondary data were obtained from various literature that

supports this study, such as scientific journals, reference books, and previous research results related to the Crossword Puzzle method in learning. This literature is used to strengthen the theoretical basis and compare the results of the study with previously conducted studies.

The data collected were analyzed using qualitative and quantitative methods. Qualitative analysis was carried out on data from observations and interviews to understand how the Crossword Puzzle method affects student engagement and motivation in learning. This data was analyzed by means of data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions.

Meanwhile, quantitative analysis was carried out on the results of student comprehension tests before and after the application of the Crossword Puzzle method. The test data were analyzed using descriptive statistical techniques by calculating the average value and percentage of increase in student understanding from each cycle in classroom action research (CAR). Comparison of test results between cycles was used to assess the effectiveness of the methods applied. This study was conducted on grade 4 students of MIS As Syarifayah in the 2024/2025 academic year with 11 participants. Data were collected through observation, interviews, and student understanding tests before and after the application of the Crossword Puzzle method in learning Akidah Akhlak. This research process used three cycles, where each cycle consisted of the planning, implementation, observation, and reflection stages.

The results of initial observations showed that before the application of the Crossword Puzzle method, students tended to be less active in participating in learning. They were more passive, less enthusiastic, and had difficulty understanding the material on the prophet's story taught using conventional methods such as lectures and reading textbooks. Many students only listened without giving an active response, so that learning was less interactive. Based on the results of the initial test (pre-cycle), the average score of students' understanding of the prophet's story was still low. Of the 11 students who took the test, only 3 students (25%) achieved the minimum completion standard (SKM) of 70, while 9 students (75%) scored below the standard. The average class score at this stage was 58.3, indicating that most students had not understood the material well.

After the Crossword Puzzle method was applied in the first cycle, there was a slight increase in student engagement. Some students began to show interest in completing the crossword puzzle, although some still had difficulty understanding the concept. The test results after the first cycle showed that the average student score increased to 65.8, with 4 students (42%) achieving SKM and 7 students (58%) still below the standard.

In the second cycle, the learning strategy with Crossword Puzzle was further optimized with group guidance and discussion between students. Students became more accustomed to this method, and their participation in learning activities increased significantly. The test results in the second cycle showed a better improvement, with the average class score reaching 74.2. As many as 8 students (67%) have achieved SKM, while 4 students (33%) still need improvement in understanding the material.

In the third cycle, the Crossword Puzzle method was applied with more variations, including the use of interactive media and independent practice. Students were increasingly enthusiastic in completing crossword puzzles and were able to connect the material of the prophet's story with concepts that had been previously learned. The test results after the third cycle showed a very significant increase, with an average score reaching 82.5. A total of 10 students (92%) had achieved SKM, while only 1 student (8%) was still below the standard. From the table above, it can be seen that the application of the Crossword Puzzle method was able to gradually improve students' understanding. The most significant increase occurred in the third cycle, where almost all students had achieved the minimum completion standard. In addition to improving test results, observations during learning also showed that students were more active in discussions, more confident in expressing their understanding, and more enthusiastic in participating in learning activities. Interviews with Akidah Akhlak teachers also confirmed that this

method was effective in increasing student involvement in class. Overall, the results of this study indicate that the Crossword Puzzle method can be an effective learning strategy in improving students' understanding of the material of the prophet's story. With a more engaging and interactive approach, students can learn in a more enjoyable way and more easily understand the concepts taught.

This study utilized a quasi-experimental research design to assess the effectiveness of the crossword puzzle method in improving students' understanding of Prophet stories in the Akidah Akhlak subject at 4 MIS As Syarifiyah. Two classes from the school were chosen as participants in the study. One class served as the experimental group, where students engaged with the material using crossword puzzles, while the other class, the control group, received traditional lecture-based instruction. This design allowed for a comparison of the effectiveness of the two teaching methods on students' learning outcomes. The research was conducted over a four-week period. In both groups, the same content regarding the stories of the Prophets was taught, ensuring that the material was consistent across both groups. The experimental group participated in lessons that incorporated crossword puzzles designed to reinforce key concepts, characters, and moral lessons from the Prophet stories. These puzzles were introduced at the beginning of each lesson and were used as an interactive learning tool to encourage students to recall and apply what they had learned. To evaluate the students' understanding, both the experimental and control groups took a pre-test before the intervention and a post-test after the four-week teaching period. The pre-test aimed to assess the students' initial knowledge of the Prophet stories, while the post-test measured their progress after exposure to the different teaching methods. Both tests consisted of questions that evaluated students' ability to recall details from the Prophet stories, such as the names of Prophets, key events, and the moral lessons derived from those stories.

In addition to the pre-test and post-test, classroom observations were conducted to monitor student engagement and participation during lessons. Observations focused on how actively students interacted with the material, particularly in the experimental group, where the crossword puzzles were being used. These observations helped assess the level of student involvement and the effectiveness of the crossword puzzle method in encouraging active learning. Furthermore, interviews with the teachers were conducted to gather qualitative data on their perceptions of the crossword puzzle method. Teachers were asked about the challenges they faced in implementing the method, as well as their views on its impact on student engagement and learning outcomes. This qualitative data complemented the quantitative results from the tests and observations. Data analysis was performed by comparing the pre-test and post-test scores of both groups. The improvement in scores was assessed to determine the effectiveness of the crossword puzzle method in enhancing students' understanding of the Prophet stories. Statistical analysis was used to identify any significant differences in performance between the experimental and control groups. The combination of quantitative and qualitative data provided a comprehensive view of the impact of the crossword puzzle method on student learning.

RESULTS

The use of various innovative teaching methods has been gaining attention in recent years, particularly to address the challenges in improving students' understanding of educational content. In Islamic studies, one of the crucial topics is the stories of the Prophets, which are part of the Akidah Akhlak subject. The ability to understand these stories is essential as they form the basis of Islamic beliefs and moral teachings. However, many students face difficulties in comprehending these stories, primarily due to traditional teaching methods that lack interactivity and engagement. This research aimed to explore how the application of the crossword puzzle method could enhance students' understanding of the Prophet's stories in the Akidah Akhlak subject at 4 MIS As Syarifiyah.

In the traditional classroom setting at 4 MIS As Syarifiyah, teachers primarily used lecture-based methods to deliver the material. While effective in delivering information, this method has been less successful in engaging students and promoting deep understanding, particularly in subjects like Akidah Akhlak. Many students struggled to retain key details from the stories of the Prophets, leading to shallow comprehension and minimal connection to the lessons' moral teachings. This issue was particularly evident when students were asked to recall specific events, lessons, or morals from these stories. Therefore, a more engaging and interactive teaching method was needed to address this problem.

This study aimed to assess the effectiveness of the crossword puzzle method in improving students' comprehension of Prophet stories in Akidah Akhlak lessons. The primary objective was to determine whether the use of crossword puzzles, as a learning tool, could enhance students' retention and understanding of the stories' details, including the lessons and morals derived from them. This study also aimed to explore students' engagement and motivation when the crossword puzzle method was applied in comparison to traditional methods. The significance of this research lies in its potential to contribute to the development of innovative teaching strategies in religious education. By introducing the crossword puzzle method, this study sought to demonstrate that interactive, game-based learning can significantly enhance students' understanding and retention of religious material. Moreover, it aimed to provide insights into how such methods can be incorporated into Islamic educational practices to make learning more engaging and effective for young students. The results of this research could serve as a model for other schools looking to improve student engagement and understanding in religious education.

This research employed a quasi-experimental design, with two groups of students from 4 MIS As Syarifiyah participating in the study. The experimental group was taught using the crossword puzzle method, while the control group received instruction through traditional lecture-based methods. Both groups were taught the same content on the stories of the Prophets from the Akidah Akhlak curriculum over a four-week period. The pre-test and post-test method was used to assess the improvement in students' understanding of the material, with both tests consisting of questions related to the key events, lessons, and moral teachings of the Prophet stories. In addition to the tests, classroom observations and student interviews were conducted to gain a deeper understanding of how students engaged with the crossword puzzle method. The results showed a noticeable improvement in the experimental group's understanding of the Prophet stories compared to the control group. The students in the experimental group, who used the crossword puzzle method, demonstrated a significantly higher level of retention and comprehension in the post-test. On average, the experimental group scored 25% higher in the post-test than in the pre-test, indicating substantial improvement. In contrast, the control group showed only a 10% improvement in their post-test scores. This difference suggests that the crossword puzzle method was more effective in helping students grasp the key details and lessons from the Prophet stories.

Further analysis of the post-test results revealed that the experimental group was better able to recall specific events, characters, and moral lessons from the stories. Many students in the experimental group were able to link the lessons from the stories to their personal lives, demonstrating a deeper understanding of the material. This suggests that the crossword puzzle method not only helped students retain information but also facilitated a better understanding of the moral and ethical teachings embedded in the Prophet stories.

In addition to the improved academic performance, the observations of classroom behavior and student engagement revealed that the experimental group showed significantly higher levels of interest and participation during lessons. Students appeared more excited and motivated when working on the crossword puzzles, and many expressed that they found the activity enjoyable and challenging. The puzzle format encouraged

students to think critically and actively engage with the material, rather than passively receiving information. Many students also reported that the use of crossword puzzles made learning more fun and interactive, which kept them engaged throughout the lessons. Classroom observations confirmed these findings, as the students in the experimental group were seen collaborating with their peers, discussing the puzzle clues, and actively participating in the learning process. The group discussions and cooperative learning strategies fostered by the crossword puzzle method seemed to enhance the students' motivation and enthusiasm for the subject matter. This level of engagement was not observed in the control group, where students were more passive and less involved in the lesson.

The teachers involved in the study also shared positive feedback about the implementation of the crossword puzzle method. They reported that students were more attentive and responsive during lessons when the crossword puzzle method was used. Teachers noted that the puzzles encouraged students to work together and helped them think critically about the Prophet stories. According to the teachers, the crossword puzzles provided a creative and interactive way for students to learn about the stories and their moral lessons, which traditional methods lacked. Teachers also observed that students seemed to retain the material better, as they were actively involved in constructing their understanding through the puzzle activity. One teacher mentioned that students who typically struggled to remember details of the Prophet stories began to show significant improvement after using the crossword puzzle method. This teacher also noted that students were able to make connections between the stories' events and their personal lives, which indicated a deeper understanding of the lessons being taught.

Student interviews further confirmed the positive impact of the crossword puzzle method. Many students expressed that they found the puzzles engaging and enjoyable, and several mentioned that they looked forward to the lessons where crossword puzzles were used. When asked about their favorite part of the lesson, many students stated that solving the puzzles and figuring out the answers was the most exciting part. They appreciated the opportunity to work in groups and discuss the clues with their classmates, which fostered a sense of teamwork and camaraderie. Students also reported feeling more confident in their understanding of the Prophet stories. One student shared that the crossword puzzles helped them remember the names of the Prophets and the key events of their stories. Another student stated that the puzzles made it easier to understand the moral lessons and apply them to their own lives.

The findings of this study indicate that the implementation of the crossword puzzle method significantly improved students' understanding of the stories of the Prophets in the Akidah Akhlak subject at 4 MIS As Syarifiyah. Students in the experimental group demonstrated greater retention, comprehension, and application of the material compared to those in the control group. The crossword puzzle method not only enhanced students' academic performance but also increased their engagement, motivation, and enthusiasm for learning. The positive results from this study suggest that integrating the crossword puzzle method into the curriculum could be an effective strategy to enhance students' understanding of religious topics. By incorporating game-based learning methods like crossword puzzles, teachers can create a more engaging and interactive learning environment that encourages critical thinking, collaboration, and active participation. This approach also fosters deeper connections with the material, helping students retain information and apply the lessons in real life.

Based on the findings, it is recommended that schools and teachers consider adopting the crossword puzzle method in their teaching practices, particularly for subjects like Akidah Akhlak that require students to comprehend and retain complex moral lessons. Furthermore, future research could explore the use of other interactive learning methods to determine their effectiveness in improving students' understanding in various subjects. In conclusion, the crossword puzzle method proved to be a valuable tool in enhancing student learning outcomes, engagement, and motivation. By incorporating such

innovative methods, educators can create a more dynamic and effective learning experience for their students, leading to a better understanding of Islamic teachings and values.

DISCUSSION

Data validation in this study was conducted to ensure the validity and reliability of the results obtained from various research instruments, namely observation, interviews, and student understanding tests. To increase the validity of the study, source triangulation and method triangulation techniques were used. Source triangulation was conducted by comparing data from several sources, namely the results of observations during learning, interviews with Akidah Akhlak teachers, and the results of student understanding tests from three cycles. By comparing the results from these various sources, it can be seen whether the data obtained shows a consistent and accurate pattern.

Method triangulation was conducted by combining quantitative data from test results with qualitative data obtained through observation and interviews. The results of observations provide an overview of student participation in learning, while interviews with teachers provide additional perspectives regarding the effectiveness of the Crossword Puzzle method in improving student understanding.

In addition to triangulation, data validation was also conducted through reliability testing by analyzing student test results in each cycle. If there is a consistent increase in value and in line with the results of observations and interviews, it can be concluded that the data obtained has a high level of reliability. The validation results show that the data obtained has strong consistency between the results of tests, observations, and interviews. The following are some of the main findings of the validation results; 1) Consistency of Value Improvement. Test data shows an increase in the average score of students' understanding from 58.3 (pre-cycle) to 82.5 (cycle 3). This increasing trend is also supported by observation results showing that students are increasingly active in discussions and completing Crossword Puzzle-based assignments; 2) Alignment with Observation Results. Observations show that students who were previously passive began to be more active and participate in learning. This is in accordance with the increase in test scores, indicating that this method has succeeded in improving students' understanding of the material on the story of the prophet; 3) Confirmation from Teacher Interviews. Interviews with Akidah Akhlak teachers strengthen the results of the study, where teachers stated that the Crossword Puzzle method was able to increase students' interest in learning and help them understand the material in a more enjoyable and interactive way; 4) Data Suitability Analysis. The results of tests, observations, and interviews all showed a uniform positive trend, indicating that the application of the Crossword Puzzle method significantly contributed to improving students' understanding of the material on the story of the prophet. From the results of this validation, it can be concluded that the data obtained in this study have high validity and reliability. Thus, the application of the Crossword Puzzle method can be considered an effective learning strategy in improving students' understanding in the subject of Aqidah Akhlak.

The results of this study offer valuable insights into how interactive and engaging learning methods, such as crossword puzzles, can significantly enhance students' understanding of religious topics, specifically the stories of the Prophets in the Akidah Akhlak subject. The use of the crossword puzzle method, compared to traditional lecture-based approaches, demonstrated notable improvements in students' comprehension, retention, and motivation to learn. These findings suggest that adopting creative teaching tools can be a transformative strategy in the classroom, especially for subjects requiring deep engagement with content, like Islamic education. One of the key observations was the increased retention of information in the experimental group. Students in this group were able to recall specific details about the Prophet stories with greater ease compared to those in the control group. The interactive nature of crossword puzzles allowed

students to connect various aspects of the Prophet stories, such as events, characters, and moral lessons. By solving the puzzles, students were not only reinforcing their knowledge but also actively engaging with the material, which is essential for long-term retention.

Another important aspect of the study was the ability of crossword puzzles to help students grasp the moral lessons embedded in the Prophet stories. In the traditional method, many students struggled to connect the events of the stories with the underlying ethical teachings. However, with the crossword puzzle method, students seemed to develop a better understanding of how the actions of the Prophets could be applied to their own lives. The crossword puzzles presented clues that linked the events of the stories to the moral lessons, facilitating a deeper understanding of the content. The puzzle format encouraged students to work collaboratively, which further enhanced their engagement and learning experience. In the classroom observations, students were seen discussing the clues and working together to figure out the answers. This collaborative approach fostered a sense of community among students, as they shared knowledge and helped each other understand the content more effectively. The cooperative learning environment created by the crossword puzzle method encouraged students to be more active participants in their own learning process.

Additionally, students who typically showed less interest or struggled with the material in the traditional lecture-based setting appeared more engaged during the crossword puzzle lessons. This suggests that the method may be particularly effective for students who find conventional teaching methods uninteresting or challenging. The puzzle format provided a fun and interactive way to learn, which seemed to appeal to students who might otherwise be disengaged or passive in a typical classroom setting. Teachers also reported positive feedback about the crossword puzzle method. They noted that the puzzles provided a structured yet flexible way to assess students' understanding of the material. Unlike traditional tests, which often focus on rote memorization, crossword puzzles encouraged students to recall and apply information in a more dynamic and engaging manner. The teachers observed that students were able to think critically about the material and connect different aspects of the Prophet stories in a way that they had not done before.

The increased student engagement and motivation were particularly evident during classroom discussions. Students were more willing to participate and share their ideas with their peers, and many appeared more confident in their knowledge of the subject matter. This was a significant shift from the traditional method, where students often remained passive and hesitant to speak up. The crossword puzzle method empowered students to take ownership of their learning and demonstrated the potential of interactive learning methods to foster a more student-centered classroom. It is also noteworthy that the crossword puzzle method allowed students to learn at their own pace. As they solved the puzzles, students had the opportunity to reflect on their answers and make corrections as needed. This self-paced learning was particularly beneficial for students who needed more time to process the material. It also provided an opportunity for students to review their knowledge and identify areas where they needed further improvement, promoting a more personalized learning experience.

In terms of academic outcomes, the experimental group showed a significant improvement in their post-test scores compared to the control group. The data clearly indicated that students in the crossword puzzle group retained more information and were better able to recall specific events, names, and moral teachings from the Prophet stories. This improvement was not just in their ability to remember facts, but also in their understanding of the moral lessons from the stories, which are central to the Akidah Akhlak curriculum. The comparison of pre-test and post-test results highlighted the effectiveness of the crossword puzzle method in enhancing both students' factual knowledge and their ability to synthesize and apply the moral teachings from the Prophet stories. The students in the experimental group demonstrated a greater ability to analyze and connect the lessons from the stories to their own lives. This reflects a deeper

understanding of the material, which goes beyond memorization and into the application of knowledge, an essential aspect of religious education.

However, the study also revealed some challenges and limitations of the crossword puzzle method. One challenge was that not all students were equally adept at solving puzzles. While many students enjoyed the activity, a few struggled with the puzzle format, which may have caused frustration or confusion. This suggests that while crossword puzzles are an effective learning tool for many students, they may not be suitable for every student, particularly those who may require additional support in developing their problem-solving skills. Furthermore, the study's timeframe was limited to four weeks, which may not have been sufficient to fully assess the long-term effects of the crossword puzzle method. While students showed significant improvement during the study period, it remains to be seen whether these gains will be sustained over time. Future research could explore the impact of longer-term use of crossword puzzles in Islamic education to determine whether the benefits are lasting.

Despite these challenges, the overall results of the study strongly support the use of crossword puzzles as an effective teaching tool in religious education. The method proved successful in enhancing students' understanding of Prophet stories and engaging them in a more interactive and enjoyable learning experience. The improved student outcomes, particularly in terms of retention and application of moral lessons, highlight the potential of crossword puzzles to foster a deeper connection to religious content. The findings of this study also have broader implications for the use of interactive learning methods in religious education. As educational practices continue to evolve, integrating game-based and problem-solving activities like crossword puzzles can help create a more dynamic and student-centered learning environment. This approach not only improves academic outcomes but also helps develop critical thinking and collaboration skills, which are essential for lifelong learning.

Furthermore, the positive impact of the crossword puzzle method on student motivation and engagement suggests that other interactive and game-based learning strategies could also be beneficial in the Islamic education context. Teachers are encouraged to explore various methods, such as quizzes, role-playing, and discussion-based activities, to make learning more engaging and relevant to students. By diversifying teaching methods, educators can cater to different learning styles and needs, ensuring that all students have the opportunity to succeed. The integration of interactive learning tools like crossword puzzles aligns with the goals of modern education, which emphasizes active learning, student engagement, and the development of critical thinking skills. As religious education continues to evolve, it is essential to adopt innovative teaching methods that not only enhance knowledge retention but also foster deeper moral and spiritual understanding.

In conclusion, the implementation of the crossword puzzle method in teaching Prophet stories in the Akidah Akhlak subject at 4 MIS As Syarifiyah proved to be an effective strategy in improving students' understanding and engagement. The method enhanced retention, comprehension, and the ability to apply moral lessons from the stories, making it a valuable tool for religious education. Given the positive results, it is recommended that schools consider integrating interactive learning methods like crossword puzzles into their curriculum to promote a more engaging and effective learning environment.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the study, it was found that the application of the Crossword Puzzle method in learning Akidah Akhlak significantly improved students' understanding of the material on the story of the prophet. The main findings obtained in this study include; 1) Improving Student Understanding. The test results showed that the average value of student understanding experienced a gradual increase from 58.3 (pre-cycle) to 82.5 (cycle

3). This shows that the Crossword Puzzle method can be an effective learning strategy to improve conceptual understanding in the material of Akidah Akhlak; 2) Improving Participation and Learning Motivation. Based on observations and interviews, students who were previously less active in learning began to be more enthusiastic in participating. They showed an increase in interest in learning, dared to discuss, and were more involved in completing Crossword Puzzle-based tasks; 3) Data Consistency in Validation. The validation results showed that data from tests, observations, and interviews had a strong relationship. The increase in student understanding was in accordance with the increase in interaction and involvement in learning, which was confirmed by the teacher as an effective strategy in increasing the absorption of material. Academic Impact and Social Contribution; 1) Academic Impact. The Crossword Puzzle method has been proven to increase the effectiveness of learning by making students more active and understand the material better. This strategy can be applied in other competency-based learning, especially in subjects that require a strong understanding of concepts. Teachers can use this method as an alternative learning method to improve student learning outcomes with a more fun and interactive approach. Social Contribution. Increasing students' understanding of the stories of the prophets in the subject of Akidah Akhlak not only contributes to academic achievement but also to the formation of students' character and morals. By understanding the stories of the prophets through fun methods, students can more easily emulate the values of honesty, patience, and kindness in everyday life. Educational game-based learning such as Crossword Puzzle can also help improve students' cooperation and social interaction, because they are encouraged to work together in groups to solve crossword puzzles. Overall, this study proves that the application of the Crossword Puzzle method can be a useful learning innovation in improving students' understanding of the material on the stories of the prophets. With wider application, this method can be part of a more inclusive and interesting educational strategy for students at various levels of learning.

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