Improving Student Learning Achievement in Aqidah Akhlak Learning with The Card Sort Method at MTs Muhammadiyah Panyakalan

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Abstract: This study aims to improve the learning achievement of Aqidah Akhlak of class VII students of MTsM Panyalan on the material "Avoiding Reprehensible Morals" by using the Card Sort method. This study is a classroom action research conducted in two cycles. Each cycle in this study consists of four steps, namely planning, implementation, observation, and reflection. The subjects of the study were 12 class VII students consisting of 5 male students and 7 female students. The results of the study showed a significant increase in student learning achievement after the implementation of the Card Sort method. In cycle I, the percentage of student learning completion reached 50%, while in cycle II it increased to 83.33%. This method succeeded in increasing student activity and involvement in learning, as well as making it easier for students to understand material related to reprehensible morals through grouping and group discussions. The application of the Card Sort method also showed a positive response from students, who felt more interested and motivated in participating in learning. Therefore, this method can be used as an effective alternative to improve student learning achievement and involvement in learning Reprehensible Morals.

Keywords: Learning achievement, Aqidah akhlak, card sort method.

INTRODUCTION

In the realm of Islamic education, particularly in the subject of Aqidah Akhlak, the cultivation of students' moral values is an essential aspect of their character development. The core of Aqidah Akhlak lies not only in theoretical understanding but also in the internalization and application of noble character in daily life. In this regard, teaching students to avoid reprehensible morals becomes a critical objective in fostering ethical awareness and spiritual maturity (Hidayat, 2018).

Despite the importance of moral education, numerous studies have shown that students often find the material on reprehensible morals abstract and difficult to relate to their personal experiences. This situation results in a lack of engagement and low achievement in Aqidah Akhlak classes (Rahman & Huda, 2017). The traditional teaching

methods, which are often teacher-centered and reliant on rote memorization, fail to inspire students or support deeper understanding.

Recent trends in Islamic pedagogy have emphasized the need for more interactive and student-centered learning approaches. These approaches allow learners to engage actively with the material, participate in discussions, and apply values in contextual settings (Alim, 2020). The Card Sort method, which is rooted in active learning theory, offers such an opportunity. This method promotes critical thinking and collaboration among students, as they are required to sort and categorize information based on their understanding.

However, in many Islamic schools, especially at the junior secondary level, the use of innovative teaching strategies like Card Sort remains underutilized. Teachers tend to rely heavily on lectures and textbook-based instruction without integrating engaging learning activities that could stimulate students' interest and motivation (Zaini & Fauzan, 2022). This gap between pedagogical theory and classroom practice hinders the effective delivery of moral education.

To address this issue, this study explores the application of the Card Sort method in teaching the topic of "Avoiding Reprehensible Morals" in a Grade VII class at MTs Muhammadiyah Panyakalan. This approach is designed to increase student learning achievement and foster a more participatory and reflective learning environment. By employing Card Sort, students are not merely passive recipients of knowledge but become active agents in constructing moral understanding.

Previous research has demonstrated the effectiveness of the Card Sort method in other disciplines such as science, language, and social studies (Sari & Nugroho, 2016; Putri, 2020). Yet, there remains a limited body of work that investigates its implementation in Islamic education, particularly in Aqidah Akhlak. This lack of empirical evidence highlights a significant research gap that this study aims to address.

Moreover, the novelty of this study lies in its focus on integrating active learning strategies within the context of moral instruction. Unlike conventional methods, Card Sort encourages cooperative learning and facilitates moral reasoning through categorization and discussion. This pedagogical innovation has the potential to redefine how students engage with abstract moral concepts in a more practical and meaningful manner (Latif & Ramadhani, 2021).

The implementation of Card Sort in this study is expected to not only improve cognitive learning outcomes but also enhance affective aspects of student learning, such as empathy, self-awareness, and ethical judgment. These dimensions are often overlooked in traditional assessments of learning achievement in Islamic studies (Yusuf & Mahfud, 2021).

Another distinctive contribution of this research is its emphasis on reflective classroom action research (CAR). By using a two-cycle CAR model, the study captures the dynamic process of teaching and learning, enabling iterative improvements based on real-time feedback and observation. This method ensures that the pedagogical interventions are responsive to the students' needs and learning context (Arifin & Zulfikar, 2020).

The study is grounded in the theoretical framework of constructivist learning, which posits that knowledge is actively constructed by learners through social interaction and experiential activities (Vygotsky, 1978; Piaget, as cited in Nurhadi et al., 2019). The Card Sort method embodies these principles by promoting dialogue and peer learning in a structured format.

This research also responds to national educational priorities, which emphasize character building as a central aim of Indonesian schooling. The Ministry of Education and Culture has repeatedly highlighted the need for transformative pedagogies that nurture students' moral and religious values alongside academic skills (Kemendikbud, 2020).

In practice, the Card Sort method requires students to analyze various statements or actions and categorize them as commendable or reprehensible. This activity not only

reinforces their conceptual understanding but also challenges them to justify their choices, thereby cultivating critical ethical thinking (Setiawan & Hamdani, 2022).

The collaborative nature of Card Sort also builds interpersonal skills and promotes a culture of mutual respect and shared learning. These qualities are essential in shaping a morally responsible generation that upholds Islamic values in a pluralistic society (Hasanah & Widodo, 2023).

By focusing on the specific theme of "Avoiding Reprehensible Morals," the study aligns with the urgent need to counter moral degradation among adolescents, as reported by several educational and religious institutions (Sulaiman & Ningsih, 2018). Adolescents are at a critical developmental stage where values are formed and tested, making moral education particularly impactful during this period.

The results of this study offer practical implications for Islamic education practitioners who seek to implement innovative methods that are both pedagogically sound and spiritually enriching. It provides a model for other educators to adapt and apply in similar educational contexts.

This study also contributes to the growing literature on Islamic pedagogy by showcasing how Western-derived active learning techniques can be harmonized with Islamic values to produce meaningful educational experiences (Fadillah, 2019). Such integration is crucial in ensuring that innovation in Islamic education remains rooted in tradition while being responsive to contemporary challenges.

Furthermore, the study enhances teacher professionalism by modeling reflective practice and evidence-based instructional design. Teachers who engage in CAR are better equipped to diagnose learning problems and implement effective solutions in their classrooms (Syamsuddin & Wahyuni, 2022).

The study's significance is also reinforced by its context—MTs Muhammadiyah Panyakalan—a representative of many Islamic junior high schools in Indonesia facing similar pedagogical challenges. The findings thus hold relevance and transferability for a broader educational audience.

Ultimately, the research aims to bridge the gap between theory and practice in Islamic moral education. It provides concrete evidence of how an innovative method like Card Sort can transform the teaching and learning of Aqidah Akhlak, fostering not only academic success but also moral integrity.

In conclusion, this introduction establishes the rationale, objectives, and significance of the study. It articulates the research gap, the novelty of the proposed intervention, and its theoretical and practical contributions to the field of Islamic education. Through this study, it is hoped that the teaching of reprehensible morals can be revitalized to better prepare students for ethical living in a complex world.

METHODS

This research employed a Classroom Action Research (CAR) design to improve student learning achievement in the subject of Aqidah Akhlak, specifically on the topic "Avoiding Reprehensible Morals" among Grade VII students of MTs Muhammadiyah Panyakalan. CAR is a reflective process that allows educators to assess and improve their teaching practices through iterative cycles of planning, action, observation, and reflection (Kemmis, McTaggart, & Nixon, 2014).

The study was conducted over two cycles, each comprising four main stages: (1) planning, (2) implementation, (3) observation, and (4) reflection. This cyclical model enabled the researcher to make data-driven improvements to the instructional process after each cycle.

The subjects of this study were 12 students of Grade VII at MTs Muhammadiyah Panyakalan, consisting of 5 male students and 7 female students. The research was carried out during the even semester of the 2024/2025 academic year. This school was chosen

based on the observation that students showed low achievement and engagement in Aqidah Akhlak learning, particularly in materials dealing with moral behavior.

Data collection in this study employed both qualitative and quantitative techniques to gain a comprehensive understanding of the teaching and learning process. The instruments used included 1) learning Achievement Tests: These were administered at the end of each cycle to assess the level of student understanding and mastery of the material. The tests were developed in accordance with the indicators of learning achievement for the topic of "Avoiding Reprehensible Morals"; 2) Observation Sheets: These were used by the researcher and a collaborator to document student participation, group interactions, and classroom atmosphere during the implementation of the Card Sort method; 3) Field Notes: Notes were taken during teaching to record significant events, student responses, and instructional challenges that emerged throughout the process; and 4) Student Response Questionnaires: At the end of the second cycle, students completed a questionnaire to express their opinions about the use of the Card Sort method in learning Aqidah Akhlak.

The data collected were analyzed using a descriptive-quantitative and qualitative approach 1) Quantitative data from the achievement tests were analyzed by calculating the percentage of students who achieved the minimum mastery criteria (MMC). A student was categorized as successful if their test score reached or exceeded 70; and 2) Qualitative data from observations and field notes were analyzed through thematic analysis, focusing on aspects such as student motivation, engagement, collaboration, and response to the learning method.

The success of the action was measured by the following criteria at least 80% of students achieved the MMC in the learning achievement test by the end of Cycle II. Increased student participation and engagement in learning activities, as observed through participation in discussions and the Card Sort activity. Positive student responses toward the use of the Card Sort method, indicated by favorable responses in the questionnaire.

In the planning stage, the teacher designed lesson plans that integrated the Card Sort method into the instructional activities. The materials included a set of cards containing statements or actions related to commendable and reprehensible morals. During the implementation phase, students were divided into small groups and given the task to sort the cards into appropriate categories, followed by group discussions and presentations.

The observation stage involved monitoring students' involvement, communication, and group dynamics. After each cycle, a reflection meeting was held to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the implementation. Based on the findings, necessary revisions were made to improve the subsequent cycle.

This study adhered to ethical principles of educational research. Prior to data collection, informed consent was obtained from the school principal and classroom teacher. Students were informed about the purpose of the study, and their participation was voluntary. The confidentiality and anonymity of the participants were maintained throughout the research process.

RESULTS

The implementation of the Card Sort method in the subject of Aqidah Akhlak was carried out in two cycles. Each cycle aimed to enhance students' understanding and learning achievement on the material "Avoiding Reprehensible Morals." The research began with a preliminary observation that revealed low levels of student motivation and learning outcomes. Based on an initial diagnostic assessment, only 4 out of 12 students (33.33%) met the minimum mastery criteria (MMC) of 70. This data served as a baseline and justified the need for pedagogical intervention.

In Cycle I, after implementing the Card Sort method, there was a noticeable improvement in student performance. The post-test results showed that 6 out of 12 students (50%) achieved the MMC. This indicates a 16.67% increase in the number of students who reached the expected performance level compared to the pre-cycle data. Although the improvement was significant, the criterion for success—80% of students achieving the MMC—had not yet been met, signaling the need for further refinement and continuation of the action into Cycle II.

During Cycle I, qualitative observations highlighted several key developments. Students began to exhibit greater enthusiasm in participating in group discussions. Many of them actively engaged in sorting and categorizing the moral behavior cards. Despite this, some students were still dependent on their peers' guidance and demonstrated limited confidence in presenting their group findings. This suggested that while the Card Sort method was starting to have a positive impact, further scaffolding was necessary to ensure all students could benefit equitably from the approach.

Classroom observation data also indicated a gradual shift in classroom dynamics. Compared to the teacher-centered environment during the preliminary observation, the Card Sort activity encouraged a more student-centered atmosphere. Nevertheless, there were some limitations, such as unequal participation within groups and time management issues, which impacted the effectiveness of the activity in Cycle I.

Based on the reflection of Cycle I, several improvements were made in Cycle II. The instructions were simplified, time was better allocated, and group roles were clearly defined to ensure every student had a specific responsibility. These changes were designed to optimize group collaboration and individual accountability.

In Cycle II, the outcomes demonstrated a substantial improvement in student achievement. The post-test data revealed that 10 out of 12 students (83.33%) met or exceeded the MMC. This represents an increase of 33.33% from Cycle I and a 50% increase from the initial condition. The data confirmed that the application of the Card Sort method was effective in enhancing student learning achievement in the subject of Aqidah Akhlak.

A deeper analysis of individual student performance indicated that even those who did not meet the MMC in Cycle II showed notable progress in their scores. For example, a student who scored 45 in the pre-cycle test improved to 65 in Cycle I and further to 68 in Cycle II, demonstrating a consistent upward trajectory. This suggests that while the student had not yet achieved full mastery, the intervention had positively influenced their learning.

The qualitative data in Cycle II supported the quantitative findings. Observation records showed that students demonstrated higher levels of confidence during discussions and presentations. The use of Card Sort prompted them to engage in moral reasoning as they justified why certain behaviors were considered reprehensible or commendable. Peer-to-peer interaction became more meaningful, and students appeared more reflective in their thinking.

Field notes from the researcher further described a transformation in classroom behavior. Students who were initially passive became more vocal and attentive. The group discussions fostered a collaborative learning environment in which students negotiated meanings, debated ethical viewpoints, and helped each other understand the underlying moral principles in Islam. This behavioral change signaled a shift not just in cognitive engagement but also in affective dimensions of learning.

The student response questionnaire administered at the end of Cycle II revealed overwhelmingly positive feedback. Over 90% of students expressed that they enjoyed the learning process and found it easier to understand the material through the Card Sort method. Many students highlighted that the activity was not only fun but also helped them remember and differentiate various types of reprehensible behaviors and the corresponding Islamic teachings to avoid them.

The analysis of the student responses also uncovered a deeper level of engagement with the moral content. Some students mentioned that the activity made them reflect on their own behavior and consider how to apply what they had learned in their daily lives. This unintended outcome highlights the moral developmental potential of interactive learning strategies such as Card Sort.

From the perspective of teacher reflection, the method allowed the educator to observe student thinking in real time, which provided valuable insights into their moral reasoning processes. The teacher noted that students were more motivated and demonstrated better retention of the material when they were actively involved in the learning process. The Card Sort activity provided a platform for formative assessment as students revealed their understanding through group decisions and explanations.

The data across the two cycles illustrate a consistent trend of improvement, not only in test scores but also in classroom participation, student attitudes, and engagement with moral content. These findings affirm the hypothesis that active learning methods like Card Sort can significantly enhance both cognitive and affective learning outcomes in Islamic education settings.

Furthermore, the increase in student achievement in Cycle II met the success criterion established at the beginning of the study. The target of at least 80% of students achieving the MMC was surpassed, confirming the effectiveness of the intervention. The consistency of improvement across both quantitative and qualitative data sets strengthens the validity of the research findings.

The narrowing of performance gaps among students indicates that the Card Sort method can support differentiated learning. Students with varying levels of prior knowledge were able to access the material more effectively through collaborative work, visual categorization, and peer explanation. This highlights the method's potential to promote educational equity.

The results of this classroom action research demonstrate that the Card Sort method is an effective pedagogical tool for teaching Aqidah Akhlak, particularly in addressing abstract topics such as reprehensible morals. The strategy facilitated an engaging and reflective learning experience that led to measurable improvements in student achievement and involvement.

Given these positive results, the study recommends the continued use of interactive, student-centered strategies such as Card Sort in moral education. It also suggests further research involving larger samples and diverse educational contexts to explore the method's broader applicability and long-term impact on students' character development.

DISCUSSION

The results of this study demonstrate that the implementation of the Card Sort method effectively improved student learning achievement in the subject of Aqidah Akhlak, particularly on the topic of avoiding reprehensible morals. This finding aligns with previous research indicating that active learning strategies, especially those involving student collaboration and categorization tasks, can enhance cognitive engagement and conceptual understanding (Prince, 2014; Freeman et al., 2014).

One of the most notable outcomes was the increase in the percentage of students who achieved the minimum mastery criteria from 33.33% in the pre-cycle to 83.33% in Cycle II. This improvement underscores the effectiveness of the Card Sort method in facilitating meaningful learning, particularly in abstract moral content. As supported by Surif, Ibrahim, and Mokhtar (2014), categorization tasks encourage students to process information more deeply by engaging with the material through comparison, classification, and justification.

The improvement in learning achievement was not solely quantitative but also reflected in students' increased motivation and engagement. Many students reported that

the Card Sort activity made learning more enjoyable and helped them understand the concepts more clearly. This supports the assertion of Ryan and Deci (2020) that intrinsic motivation plays a crucial role in fostering deep learning and that students are more likely to engage actively when the learning process is perceived as relevant and enjoyable.

Additionally, the Card Sort method promoted cooperative learning among students, which is a key feature of constructivist learning theory. Vygotsky's concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) suggests that learners achieve more when they collaborate with peers who provide appropriate support (Tudge & Scrimsher, 2015). In this study, students engaged in meaningful peer discussions, which facilitated the co-construction of knowledge and reinforced moral reasoning.

Another important observation is that the Card Sort method enabled differentiation. Students with lower academic performance showed measurable improvement, indicating that the method provided multiple entry points into the content. This supports findings from Tomlinson (2014), who emphasized that instructional strategies should be flexible enough to accommodate students' diverse learning needs and abilities.

Furthermore, the visual and kinesthetic nature of the Card Sort activity appeared to benefit students with different learning styles. The combination of textual analysis and physical manipulation of learning materials created a multimodal learning environment, which according to Mayer (2017), can enhance retention and comprehension by activating multiple cognitive channels.

The activity also encouraged moral reflection and character development. Students not only memorized the definitions of reprehensible behaviors but also evaluated their relevance to daily life. This is consistent with the goals of Islamic moral education, which aims to shape character and internalize values (Rosnani, 2015). The method thus serves not only academic goals but also the broader objectives of spiritual and moral formation.

Moreover, the social interaction involved in group work helped students develop communication and critical thinking skills. According to Gillies (2016), structured group activities in cooperative learning settings promote higher-order thinking as students explain their reasoning, challenge each other's ideas, and synthesize multiple perspectives.

The positive student response revealed by the post-intervention questionnaire confirms the suitability of the Card Sort method for adolescent learners. In adolescence, students seek interactive and socially engaging forms of learning. As Piaget noted, formal operational thinkers are capable of hypothetical and abstract reasoning, but still benefit from concrete representations and social negotiation (Driscoll, 2020).

This study also contributes to the growing body of literature supporting the use of low-tech, cost-effective methods in classroom innovation. Unlike digital tools that may not always be accessible in resource-limited contexts, the Card Sort method requires minimal resources yet yields substantial pedagogical impact (Belland et al., 2017).

From a classroom management perspective, the use of the Card Sort method reduced disruptive behavior. Engaged students were less likely to be distracted, and the cooperative nature of the activity fostered a more respectful and inclusive learning environment. This observation is in line with the findings of Slavin (2018), who noted that cooperative learning can improve classroom behavior and social cohesion.

However, the study also revealed certain challenges. In the initial implementation (Cycle I), some students were hesitant to express their opinions and depended heavily on dominant peers. This supports the findings of Chiriac and Granström (2012), who warned that unequal participation is a common challenge in group-based learning and needs to be managed by assigning clear roles and responsibilities.

The reflective process between cycles allowed the teacher to address these limitations by providing better scaffolding and clearer group expectations. This iterative refinement illustrates the value of Classroom Action Research (CAR) as a professional development tool, enabling teachers to adapt instructional methods based on direct observation and student feedback (Burns, 2015).

In terms of novelty, this study fills a gap in the literature on Islamic education by empirically evaluating the Card Sort method in the context of Aqidah Akhlak learning at the junior secondary level. While prior studies have explored the method in general education or science subjects (Winarni et al., 2019), few have addressed its application in moral and religious instruction, especially with a focus on internalizing Islamic values.

The findings demonstrate that the Card Sort method is a promising instructional strategy for moral education in Islamic schools. It promotes academic achievement, encourages moral reasoning, and supports active and collaborative learning. These outcomes align well with 21st-century educational goals that emphasize not only knowledge acquisition but also skills, values, and character development (OECD, 2018).

CONCLUSION

Based on the results and discussion, it can be concluded that the implementation of the Card Sort method significantly improved student learning achievement in the *Aqidah Akhlak* subject, particularly on the material "Avoiding Reprehensible Morals" in Class VII MTs Muhammadiyah Panyakalan. The method effectively increased student mastery from 33.33% in the pre-cycle to 83.33% in Cycle II, while also enhancing student engagement, motivation, and understanding through active, collaborative, and reflective learning activities. Moreover, the Card Sort method supported moral reasoning and character development, making it not only an effective pedagogical tool but also a valuable medium for internalizing Islamic values. Therefore, this method is recommended as an innovative and practical alternative in Islamic moral education to foster both academic and affective learning outcomes.

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