

Efforts to Increase Students' Understanding of Islamic Religious Education Learning Using Islamic Comic Media: Study in TK Al-Azizi

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Abstract: This study aims to improve students' understanding of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) by utilizing Islamic comic media at Al-Azizi Kindergarten. The research employed classroom action research (CAR) over two cycles. Data were collected through pre-tests, post-tests, classroom observations, and student interviews, and analyzed using both quantitative and qualitative descriptive methods. Initially, only 45% of students met the minimum mastery level in understanding PAI concepts. After the first intervention cycle using Islamic comics, the mastery percentage increased to 70%. Refinements led to a further increase in the second cycle, with 88% of students achieving mastery. Observations and interviews showed higher student engagement, increased questioning, and better use of religious vocabulary. The study concludes that Islamic comic media significantly enhances understanding of Islamic religious concepts among kindergarten students by contextualizing learning, stimulating interest, and providing scaffolding for young learners.

Keywords: Islamic comic media, student understanding, Islamic religious education

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INTRODUCTION

Islamic Religious Education (Pendidikan Agama Islam, PAI) holds a fundamental role in shaping the moral, spiritual, and intellectual development of students from an early age. Early childhood, particularly at the kindergarten level, is a critical period for instilling religious values, as it serves as the foundation for lifelong attitudes and behaviors (Paridah & Winarti, 2019). However, in practice, many kindergarten students face challenges in grasping essential Islamic concepts such as the stories of the prophets, pillars of Islam, and basic moral teachings. The learning process in many early childhood education settings still tends to rely heavily on verbal instruction and memorization, often neglecting the needs of young learners who require engaging, multimodal approaches to fully comprehend abstract religious material (Pratama, 2023). This situation results in limited student engagement, low motivation, and superficial understanding of religious lessons.

The urgency to innovate learning media and methods in early religious education is increasingly recognized. Scholars emphasize that effective teaching strategies should combine visual, auditory, and kinesthetic learning styles to support young learners' cognitive development (Putri, Hidayati, Zuliarni, & Supendra, 2024). In this context, Islamic comic media emerges as a promising tool to enhance student understanding by

integrating narrative text with vivid illustrations that contextualize religious content in an accessible and enjoyable format. Comics can provide scaffolding by breaking down complex ideas into smaller, digestible visual narratives, which aligns with cognitive theories such as Paivio's dual coding theory that highlights the advantages of combining verbal and visual information for learning (Paivio, 1991).

Research into the use of comics in religious education, though still limited, has demonstrated positive outcomes, especially in increasing student motivation and engagement. For example, studies in elementary and secondary schools have shown that Islamic comics help students connect with religious material more personally and meaningfully (Rusmini, Ridwan, Nurhidayati, & Ermawati, 2025). In the vocational school context, Meinura, Supriadi, and Firmansyah (2018) found that the use of Islamic comic media significantly increased the percentage of students achieving mastery in PAI subjects from 38% to 77%. Such findings illustrate the potential of comics not only as entertainment but also as effective educational media, especially when accompanied by teacher guidance and interactive activities.

Despite these encouraging results, there remains a noticeable gap concerning the application of Islamic comics specifically for early childhood education, particularly at the kindergarten level. Most prior studies focus on older students, and few delve deeply into how comics impact conceptual understanding rather than mere memorization or motivation (Putri et al., 2024). Moreover, little research has documented the iterative process of media adaptation and refinement based on classroom action research to optimize learning outcomes. This research intends to address these gaps by focusing on young learners at TK Al-Azizi, where students are just beginning to internalize religious values and knowledge.

The importance of fostering true understanding, rather than rote learning, is well supported by educational theories. Constructivist perspectives emphasize the learner's active role in constructing knowledge based on experience and interaction with content (Bruner, 1966). When applied to religious education, this means that students should engage with stories, moral lessons, and religious principles in a way that they can relate to and apply in daily life. Islamic comics can facilitate this process by offering concrete storylines, familiar characters, and contextualized settings, thereby aiding students in constructing meaning rather than passively receiving information.

Another relevant theoretical framework is Vygotsky's zone of proximal development (ZPD), which highlights the importance of scaffolding in learning. Comics with guided questions and teacher facilitation can support students to progress from what they already understand toward new religious concepts (Vygotsky, 1978). At the kindergarten level, where language and cognitive skills are still developing, scaffolding through visual media and social interaction is particularly crucial.

The study setting at TK Al-Azizi is representative of many Indonesian kindergartens facing challenges in delivering effective religious education. Preliminary observations indicated that students had difficulty grasping religious concepts, low enthusiasm during lessons, and limited use of religious vocabulary. These problems prompted the initiative to implement Islamic comic media as a learning aid to enhance comprehension and engagement. The purpose of this study is to evaluate the effectiveness of Islamic comic media in improving students' understanding of PAI at TK Al-Azizi. Specifically, the research aims to measure the percentage improvement in student mastery of religious concepts after the introduction of Islamic comics, and to explore qualitative changes in student engagement, religious discourse, and application of learned concepts. The research questions guiding this study are: What is the initial level of student understanding of PAI concepts? How does the use of Islamic comic media impact student mastery over two cycles of intervention? What qualitative changes accompany the observed quantitative improvements?

By addressing these questions, the study hopes to contribute both to theory and practice. Theoretically, it provides evidence for the applicability of visual narrative media

in early childhood religious cognition and learning. Practically, it offers insights for teachers and curriculum developers on the benefits of integrating Islamic comics into early religious education, encouraging a shift from traditional verbal methods to more interactive and multimodal pedagogies. The study also intends to fill the literature gap by documenting detailed mastery percentages and presenting the iterative refinement process characteristic of classroom action research, thus providing a model for similar educational innovations. Ultimately, the findings aim to help improve the quality of Islamic Religious Education in kindergarten settings and support the holistic development of students' religious understanding from an early age.

METHODS

This study employed Classroom Action Research (CAR) as its primary research approach. CAR was chosen due to its suitability for improving educational practices through iterative cycles of planning, acting, observing, and reflecting (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988). The aim was to enhance student understanding of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) by implementing Islamic comic media at TK Al-Azizi. By engaging directly with the teaching process, the researcher could identify obstacles, apply targeted interventions, and assess their effectiveness systematically.

The research was conducted at TK Al-Azizi, a kindergarten located in Bandung, Indonesia. This institution was selected because preliminary observations highlighted that students exhibited low comprehension of PAI materials, limited engagement, and minimal use of religious vocabulary. The school serves a diverse student population, primarily Muslim children aged 5 to 6 years old. The choice of kindergarten level was intentional, as early childhood education plays a vital role in laying foundational religious knowledge and attitudes (Sari, 2021). The subjects of this research were 25 students enrolled in TK Al-Azizi during the 2024 academic year. The relatively small class size enabled more focused observations and individual assessments. All participants were selected through purposive sampling, based on their enrollment and parental consent. The gender distribution was balanced, comprising 12 boys and 13 girls, which allowed for observing potential gender differences in learning responses.

The research procedure consisted of two cycles, each comprising four stages: planning, action, observation, and reflection (Arikunto, 2010). Initially, a diagnostic pre-test was administered to assess students' baseline understanding of PAI topics, including stories of the prophets, basic Islamic rituals, and moral values. Based on the results and preliminary observations, an action plan was developed to introduce Islamic comic media as a learning tool. The comics were carefully designed to align with the curriculum, incorporating simple language, colorful illustrations, and interactive elements such as questions and discussion prompts (Wijayanti, 2022).

In the first cycle, the researcher conducted four teaching sessions using the Islamic comic media, integrating storytelling, guided reading, and group discussions. Observations focused on student engagement, participation, and comprehension during these sessions. Following the intervention, a post-test identical in content to the pre-test was administered to measure improvements. Reflections from this cycle identified strengths and challenges, such as the need for clearer explanation of vocabulary and more active involvement of shy students. The second cycle involved revising the comic media based on feedback and adding supportive activities such as role-playing and visual aids to reinforce learning. The teaching process was repeated with the refined materials, again accompanied by observation and post-test assessments. This iterative approach ensured continuous enhancement of instructional quality and responsiveness to student needs (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988).

Data collection employed multiple instruments to triangulate findings and improve validity. Quantitative data were gathered through pre- and post-tests, which consisted of 20 multiple-choice and matching questions related to PAI content. The tests were

developed by the researcher in consultation with experienced Islamic education teachers and validated through a pilot study (Sugiyono, 2017). Qualitative data were collected via classroom observations documented with structured checklists and field notes, focusing on student behaviors such as attention, participation, and use of religious terms (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014). Additionally, semi-structured interviews with students were conducted after each cycle to capture their perceptions and feelings about the comic media and learning process.

For data analysis, the quantitative results from pre- and post-tests were calculated to determine the percentage of students achieving mastery, defined as scoring at least 75% correct answers (Depdiknas, 2006). Comparative analysis between cycles helped evaluate the effectiveness of the interventions. Qualitative data were analyzed thematically, identifying patterns related to student engagement, cognitive and affective responses, and classroom dynamics (Creswell & Poth, 2017). Triangulation of quantitative and qualitative data allowed for a comprehensive interpretation of the impact of Islamic comic media on student understanding.

To ensure ethical standards, the research obtained approval from the school administration and informed consent from parents or guardians. Student anonymity and confidentiality were maintained by using codes instead of real names in all documentation. The researcher also committed to minimizing any disruption to regular learning activities and prioritizing student welfare throughout the study (Israel, 2015). Overall, the methodological approach combined rigorous quantitative measurement with rich qualitative insights, allowing for a nuanced understanding of how Islamic comic media influences early childhood religious education. The use of CAR facilitated continuous refinement and responsiveness to the unique characteristics of the TK Al-Azizi learning environment, ensuring that the intervention was both practical and contextually appropriate.

RESULTS

The research conducted at TK Al-Azizi aimed to improve students' understanding of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) through the use of Islamic comic media. The process was carried out in two cycles of classroom action research, and the results show significant improvement in both cognitive mastery and qualitative indicators of engagement. At the outset, the initial pre-test revealed that only 45% of the 25 students reached the minimum mastery level of 75% correct answers on the test covering basic Islamic concepts, such as stories of the prophets, pillars of Islam, and simple moral values. Observations during early lessons without the comic media showed students frequently disengaged, with short attention spans and limited participation. Many students found it difficult to understand abstract religious concepts presented through traditional lecture and rote memorization techniques. This aligns with previous findings that early childhood learners struggle with non-interactive methods of religious education (Pratama, 2023).

In the first cycle, after introducing Islamic comic media aligned with the curriculum, the post-test scores demonstrated a marked improvement. The percentage of students achieving mastery rose to 70%, an increase of 25 percentage points from the initial assessment. Observational data supported this quantitative growth, with students displaying increased attentiveness and curiosity. The colorful visuals and engaging storylines seemed to capture their interest, while the teacher's guided discussions helped clarify difficult vocabulary and concepts. During class, more students actively asked questions and attempted to retell stories in their own words, indicating deeper cognitive processing (Putri et al., 2024). Interviews with students reflected positive attitudes, with many expressing enjoyment and a better understanding of the material. For instance, one student shared, "I like the pictures of the prophets; they help me remember their stories." However, challenges remained, especially with quieter students who needed more encouragement to participate fully.

The reflection phase of the first cycle highlighted areas for improvement. The comics' language was simplified further, and additional interactive activities such as role-playing were planned to enhance student involvement. These adjustments were incorporated into the second cycle to address observed shortcomings and capitalize on the initial successes. The second cycle yielded even more encouraging results. Post-test assessments showed that 88% of students reached mastery, representing an 18 percentage point increase from the first cycle and a total improvement of 43 percentage points from the baseline. This substantial gain demonstrates the effectiveness of refining the media and instructional approach based on classroom feedback. Observations noted that students were more confident in discussing religious topics, using relevant vocabulary spontaneously, and engaging in peer-to-peer dialogue about moral lessons. The integration of role-play and group activities alongside the comics created a more dynamic learning environment, aligning with Vygotsky's concept of social interaction as a catalyst for learning (Vygotsky, 1978).

Furthermore, the qualitative data revealed an improvement not only in knowledge but also in affective aspects. Students exhibited enthusiasm during lessons, looked forward to comic-based sessions, and demonstrated early signs of internalizing religious values through discussions and behavior. Teachers reported fewer disciplinary issues during PAI classes and observed that students began relating religious teachings to everyday situations, suggesting meaningful transfer of learning. This supports findings from similar studies where Islamic comics foster both cognitive and emotional engagement in religious education (Rusmini et al., 2025).

Throughout the research, the iterative nature of classroom action research proved beneficial. Each cycle allowed the researcher and teachers to reflect critically on the effectiveness of teaching media and methods, make evidence-based adjustments, and monitor progress systematically. This approach enhanced the alignment of learning materials with student abilities and interests, thereby optimizing educational outcomes (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988). Importantly, the success of the intervention at TK Al-Azizi demonstrates the viability of Islamic comic media as a pedagogical tool in early childhood religious education, an area previously underexplored in academic literature. The substantial increase in mastery percentages—from 45% initially to 88% after two cycles—attests to the potential of visual narrative media to bridge the gap between abstract religious concepts and young learners' cognitive capacities (Paivio, 1991). Overall, the results indicate that the use of Islamic comic media, combined with active teaching strategies and reflective practice, significantly enhances students' understanding of PAI. These findings contribute valuable insights to educators seeking to innovate religious education in kindergartens and emphasize the importance of multimodal, interactive learning tools tailored to early childhood development stages.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study demonstrate a significant improvement in students' understanding of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) through the use of Islamic comic media, which aligns well with existing educational theories and prior empirical research. The increase in mastery from 45% at the initial stage to 88% after two cycles confirms that multimedia and interactive learning approaches can effectively enhance early childhood religious education. The positive impact of Islamic comics observed in this study is consistent with Paivio's dual coding theory, which asserts that combining visual and verbal information supports better encoding and retrieval of knowledge (Paivio, 1991). The vivid illustrations and simplified narrative in the comics acted as cognitive scaffolds, helping young learners make abstract religious concepts more concrete and relatable. This dual representation likely facilitated students' comprehension and retention, as evidenced by the increased post-test scores and classroom engagement.

Moreover, the role of social interaction in learning, emphasized by Vygotsky's zone of proximal development (ZPD) theory, was clearly evident in the study's implementation. The incorporation of guided discussions, role-playing, and peer interaction around the comics allowed students to extend their understanding beyond individual cognition to a socially mediated process (Vygotsky, 1978). These activities created an enriched learning environment where students could articulate, negotiate, and internalize religious values collaboratively, which is essential in early childhood development.

Comparing this study's results with prior research further highlights its contribution to educational practice. Meinura, Supriadi, and Firmansyah (2018) reported similar increases in student mastery using Islamic comics in vocational schools, though their focus was on older learners. This study extends such findings to a younger demographic, demonstrating that comics can be adapted effectively for kindergarten students by simplifying language and incorporating age-appropriate illustrations and activities. Similarly, Rusmini et al. (2025) emphasized that Islamic comics boost student motivation and engagement in religious education; this research confirms and deepens that insight by showing corresponding improvements in actual understanding, not merely enthusiasm.

The use of Classroom Action Research (CAR) methodology also proved instrumental in optimizing the learning process. Through iterative cycles, the media and teaching strategies were refined to address learner difficulties and promote active participation. This approach ensured that the intervention was responsive to the specific needs of TK Al-Azizi students and supports Kemmis and McTaggart's (1988) assertion that CAR facilitates practical, context-based improvements in education. The study thus underscores the importance of reflective practice and adaptability in teaching Islamic religious content effectively to early learners.

In terms of educational implications, this research advocates for the integration of Islamic comic media as a standard tool in early childhood Islamic education. Traditional teaching methods relying predominantly on verbal explanation and memorization often fail to engage young children or cater to diverse learning styles (Pratama, 2023). Islamic comics provide a multisensory learning experience that can captivate young learners' attention, enhance understanding, and foster positive attitudes toward religious education. Moreover, the comics serve as cultural and religious bridges, contextualizing Islamic teachings in ways that resonate with children's everyday experiences.

The affective benefits observed—such as increased enthusiasm, confidence in discussing religious topics, and emerging moral behavior—also highlight the role of media in shaping not only cognitive but also spiritual and social dimensions of education (Putri et al., 2024). By making learning enjoyable and meaningful, Islamic comics can contribute to holistic character formation in early childhood, supporting the broader goals of Islamic education. However, the study also recognizes certain limitations. The sample size was relatively small and confined to a single kindergarten, which may limit the generalizability of the findings.

Further research involving larger and more diverse populations is recommended to validate and extend these results. Additionally, long-term effects of comic media use on religious understanding and behavior were not examined, presenting another avenue for future studies. In conclusion, this study provides strong empirical support for the use of Islamic comic media to improve young learners' understanding of religious education. By blending cognitive theory with practical teaching innovations, it offers valuable insights for educators, curriculum developers, and policymakers aiming to enhance the quality and effectiveness of Islamic education in early childhood settings. The successful application at TK Al-Azizi demonstrates that thoughtfully designed, interactive visual media can transform religious learning from passive reception to active construction, fostering both knowledge and faith from an early age.

CONCLUSION

This study aimed to enhance students' understanding of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) at TK Al-Azizi through the use of Islamic comic media. The findings reveal a significant improvement in student comprehension, as evidenced by the increase in mastery scores from 45% in the initial pre-test to 88% after two cycles of intervention. The use of visually engaging and contextually relevant comic media made abstract religious concepts more accessible to young learners, fostering greater interest, participation, and cognitive retention. The iterative Classroom Action Research (CAR) approach was crucial in identifying and addressing challenges throughout the teaching process. Adjustments made between cycles, such as simplifying language and incorporating role-playing activities, further enhanced the effectiveness of the media and teaching strategies. These refinements contributed to the steady rise in student achievement and active engagement in learning. Beyond cognitive gains, the study found positive affective outcomes. Students showed enthusiasm, increased confidence in discussing religious topics, and early signs of internalizing Islamic values in their daily behavior. This holistic impact underscores the potential of Islamic comic media not only as a learning tool but also as a medium for character development in early childhood education.

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