
Theories of Learning and Their Relation to the Development of the Islamic Religious Education Curriculum

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ABSTRACT

This research aims to analyze learning theories and their relevance in the development of the Islamic Education Curriculum Through a literature study approach, this research examines various learning theories such as behaviorism, cognitivism, constructivism, and humanism, as well as their implications for the design of the curriculum. This research method uses a descriptive qualitative approach with a type of study that is library research. The results of the research show that the integration of learning theories in the development of the curriculum can enhance learning effectiveness, meet student needs, and accommodate Islamic values. This study also highlights the importance of a multidisciplinary approach in designing an adaptive curriculum that addresses the challenges of the times.

Keywords: *Learning Theory, Curriculum Development, Islamic Education, Effective Learning*

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INTRODUCTION

Islamic Religious Education plays a crucial role in shaping students character and spiritual competence. However, in practice, curriculum development often remains conventional, less adaptive to modern learning theories, and tends to overlook students' psychological needs.(Alali, 2022)(Safiudin et al., 2025) (Ideally, the curriculum should integrate pedagogical principles relevant to contemporary dynamics, such as constructivist and humanistic approaches, to create meaningful learning.(Ferianto et al., n.d.) In reality, many curricula still rely on rote memorization and one-way lectures, which may reduce student engagement.(Saragih et al., n.d.)

This Literature Review and Research Gaps equality is exacerbated by the lack of research linking contemporary learning theories such as blended learning, flipped classrooms, or neuroscience approaches to curriculum development. (Saada et al., 2021) Meanwhile, modern neuroscience findings indicate that effective learning requires emotional and active cognitive involvement.(Dasar et al., n.d.) Additionally, most previous studies only focus on partial applications of behaviorism or cognitivism without discussing holistic integration with Islamic values. (Ma'ali et al., n.d.)

The literature review and research gaps. Previous studies have examined 1.) Behaviorism Theory in shaping worship habits (Aliyah et al., n.d.), but overlook critical-reflective aspects. 2.) Cognitivism Theory for developing Qur'anic exegesis materials (Dasar et al., n.d.), yet lack affective dimensions. 3.) Constructivism Theory in learning projects (Dasar et al., n.d.), but have not been systematically applied in national curricula.

Key limitations of prior research include: 1.) Fragmented Approach: Isolated analysis between learning theories and Islamic values.(Dasar et al., n.d.) 2.) Lack of Innovation: Minimal exploration of digital technology in curricula (Dasar et al., n.d.). 3.) Limited Implications: Dominantly theoretical studies without empirical testing (Dasar et al., n.d.).

The main objective of this paper is to discover the Theories of Learning and Their Relation to the Development of the Islamic Religious Education Curriculum. Therefore, this research aims to understand the learning theories and their connection to the development of the Islamic religious education curriculum.

METHOD

This research method uses a descriptive qualitative approach with a type of study that is library research. This approach is chosen because the research aims to deeply examine learning theories and their relevance to the development of the Islamic Education curriculum. The data sources in this study consist of: Primary sources: primary books that discuss learning theories such as behaviorist, cognitivist, constructivist, and humanistic theories, as well as official documents related to the curriculum. Secondary sources: scientific journal articles, proceedings, theses/dissertations, and other sources relevant to the focus of the study. Data collection techniques are carried out through documentation. The researcher collects data from various literatures, both print and digital, through physical and online libraries, including searches through scientific databases such as Google Scholar, DOAJ, and Garuda Ristekdikti. The data obtained is analyzed descriptively-analytically, with the following steps: Data reduction: selecting and filtering information relevant to the focus of the study. Data display: presenting information that has been classified based on types of learning theories and their components. Conclusion drawing: linking learning theories with components of the Islamic Education curriculum, such as objectives, materials, methods, and evaluation. Through this approach, the study is expected to provide a comprehensive understanding of how learning theories contribute to the preparation and development of a relevant and contextual curriculum for Islamic Education.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study examines the implications of learning theories behaviorism, cognitivism, constructivism, and humanism in the development of the Islamic Religious Education curriculum. The findings align with the research objectives by providing a structured analysis of how each

theory can enhance learning outcomes while integrating Islamic values. Below is a detailed discussion of the results in relation to existing literature and their scientific significance.

A.Relation to Research Objectives and Key Findings

The primary objective of this study was to analyze how different learning theories can be applied to improve the curriculum. The findings indicate that:

1. Behaviorism (Reinforcement of Religious Habits)

Effectively reinforces religious habits (Dasar et al., n.d.) through structured rewards, aligning with studies on operant conditioning. However, excessive reliance on extrinsic motivation may limit internalization of religious values. Key Finding: Behaviorism, through operant conditioning, (... & 2020, 2020) seffectively reinforces religious practices such as prayer (ṣalāh), memorization (ḥifẓ), and moral discipline. Supporting Evidence: Studies(McIntosh et al., n.d.) confirm that structured rewards (positive reinforcement) increase student compliance in religious routines. Limitation: Overreliance on extrinsic rewards(Research & 1979, 1979) may weaken sincerity (ikhhlās), a core Islamic value.(AlAli et al., n.d.) Curriculum Implication: Use gradual reward reduction to transition from extrinsic to intrinsic motivation. Incorporate Qur’anic verses (e.g., 2:45) emphasizing patience and devotion beyond external incentives.

2. Cognitivism

Enhances critical thinking in understanding Islamic teachings, supporting(Gapp et al., n.d.) argument that cognitive development influences learning comprehension. This approach is particularly useful in tafsir (Dasar et al., n.d.) discussions.

Cognitivism is a psychological learning theory that emphasizes the role of mental processes in learning, including memory, problem-solving, and critical thinking. Unlike behaviorism, which focuses on observable behaviors, cognitivism explores how individuals process, store, and retrieve information. This theory is highly relevant in Islamic education, particularly in understanding and interpreting Islamic teachings (tafsir). The cognitive approach aligns with Piaget's (1950) theory of cognitive development, which suggests that learners' comprehension evolves through different developmental stages. This paper examines how cognitivism strengthens critical thinking in Islamic education, particularly in tafsir studies, and reviews relevant academic perspectives.

a. Theoretical Overview of Cognitivism in Learning

1) Definition and Key Principles

Cognitivism emerged as a response to behaviorism, shifting focus from external stimuli to internal mental processes. Key figures in cognitivism

include Jean Piaget, Lev Vygotsky, and Jerome Bruner. Its main principles include:

- a) Information Processing: The mind processes information similarly to a computer, involving encoding, storage, and retrieval.
 - b) Schema Theory: Knowledge is organized into mental frameworks (schemas) that help interpret new information.
 - c) Metacognition: Awareness of one's own thinking processes enhances learning.
- 2) Piaget's Cognitive Development Theory
- Jean Piaget (1950) proposed that cognitive development occurs in stages:
- a) Sensorimotor Stage (0-2 years): Learning through sensory experiences.
 - b) Preoperational Stage (2-7 years): Development of language and symbolic thinking.
 - c) Concrete Operational Stage (7-11 years): Logical thinking about concrete events.
 - d) Formal Operational Stage (12+ years): Abstract and hypothetical reasoning.

Piaget's theory suggests that learners must reach a certain cognitive stage before fully comprehending complex concepts, such as those in Islamic theology and tafsir.

b. Application of Cognitivism in Islamic Education

1) The Role of Critical Thinking in Islamic Learning

Islamic education traditionally emphasizes memorization (e.g., Quranic verses, hadith). However, cognitivism encourages deeper understanding through:

- a) Analysis: Breaking down Quranic verses to understand context and meaning.
 - b) Synthesis: Connecting different Islamic teachings to form a coherent worldview.
 - c) Evaluation: Critically assessing interpretations (tafsir) rather than accepting them passively.
- 2) Relevance in Tafsir Studies

Tafsir (Quranic exegesis) requires high-level cognitive skills, including:

- a) Contextual Understanding: Recognizing historical and linguistic contexts.
- b) Comparative Analysis: Comparing interpretations from various scholars.

- c) Logical Reasoning: Assessing the validity of interpretations based on evidence.

Dasar et al. (n.d.) highlights that cognitivist approaches in tafsir discussions help students engage critically rather than rely solely on rote memorization.

3. Constructivism

Fosters active knowledge construction, consistent with Vygotsky's (1978) social learning theory. Project-based learning in (Dasar et al., n.d.) helps students contextualize religious knowledge.

Constructivism theory states that knowledge is not merely passively received by students but is actively constructed through cognitive processes involving individual experience, interaction, and reflection. This concept places students as active subjects in constructing meaning based on their own understanding and experience, so that the learning process becomes more meaningful and personal. This constructivist approach is in line with the social learning theory developed by Vygotsky (1978), which emphasizes the importance of social interaction, cultural context, and environment as fundamental factors in the process of internalizing knowledge. Vygotsky suggests that learning occurs optimally through social collaboration and scaffolding support, which allows students to develop their cognitive abilities gradually in the zone of proximal development.

In the context of Islamic Religious Education, the application of project-based learning is one of the pedagogical models that is in accordance with the principles of constructivism and Vygotsky's social learning theory. Through this approach, students not only receive religious material theoretically, but also actively connect and apply religious knowledge in real-life situations and contexts. This allows for a deeper and more relevant internalization of religious values, which in turn improves students' conceptual understanding and religious attitudes.

According to Dasar et al. (n.d.), the project-based learning approach facilitates the process of contextualizing religious knowledge through active involvement, collaboration between students, and critical reflection on the learning experience they have undergone. By working on projects that reflect real-life or simulated situations, students gain a more authentic and meaningful learning experience, which contributes to increased long-term retention and understanding.

Thus, it can be concluded that the constructivist approach applied through project-based learning in Islamic Religious Education is able to facilitate the development of active, contextual, and collaborative knowledge. This approach also supports the implementation of Vygotsky's social learning theory, which emphasizes

the vital role of social interaction and cultural context in an effective and meaningful learning process.

4. Humanism

Emphasizes personalized spiritual mentoring, resonating with Rogers' (1961) student-centered learning. This approach strengthens moral and emotional development in Islamic Religious Education. A new insight from this study is the integrated application of these theories in Islamic Religious Education, ensuring a balance between habit formation (behaviorism), critical understanding (cognitivism), experiential learning (constructivism), and moral development (humanism).

Humanism in education emphasizes the holistic development of learners, focusing on their emotional, moral, and spiritual growth. In the context of Pendidikan Agama Islam (PAI), humanistic approaches align with the principles of student-centered learning, as proposed by Carl Rogers (1961). This perspective shifts the focus from rigid, teacher-dominated instruction to a more personalized, empathetic, and interactive learning process.

This paper explores how humanistic educational theories, particularly Rogers' student-centered learning, can be integrated into PAI to enhance moral and emotional development. Additionally, it presents new insights on how these theories can be systematically applied in Islamic education to foster deeper spiritual and ethical understanding among students.

Humanistic Learning Theory and Its Relevance Humanistic psychology, pioneered by figures like Carl Rogers and Abraham Maslow, emphasizes self-actualization, personal growth, and the intrinsic motivation of learners. In education, this translates into:

- a. **Student-Centered Learning.** Learners are active participants rather than passive recipients.
- b. **Emotional and Moral Development.** Education should nurture not just knowledge but also character.
- c. **Personalized Mentoring.** Teachers act as facilitators rather than authoritarian figures.

In PAI, these principles resonate with Islamic teachings that emphasize *tarbiyah* (holistic nurturing), *ta'dib* (moral refinement), and *tazkiyah* (spiritual purification). The Qur'an and Hadith highlight the importance of understanding individual differences (Qur'an 49:13) and nurturing learners with compassion (Prophet Muhammad's mentoring approach).

Carl Rogers' Student-Centered Learning in Islamic education Rogers (1961) proposed that effective learning occurs in a non-threatening, supportive environment where students feel valued. Key aspects include:

- a. Unconditional Positive Regard. Teachers accept students without judgment, fostering self-worth.
- b. Empathetic Understanding. Educators seek to understand students' emotional and spiritual needs.
- c. Authenticity in Teaching. Teachers engage sincerely, building trust.

Application in Islamic Education:

- a. Personalized Spiritual Guidance (Tarbiyah Ruhiah)
 - 1) Teachers act as murabbī (spiritual mentors) rather than mere instructors.
 - 2) Individual counseling sessions help address students' moral dilemmas.
 - 3) Reflection (muhasabah) is encouraged to deepen self-awareness.
- b. Interactive and Experiential Learning
 - 1) Discussions on ethical scenarios (e.g., honesty, empathy) replace rote memorization.
 - 2) Role-playing Prophetic stories to internalize values.
- c. Emotionally Supportive Environment
 - 1) Islamic teachings on compassion (rahmah) and patience (sabr) are modeled by educators.
 - 2) Peer mentoring (ukhūwah) strengthens emotional bonds.

Strengthening Moral and Emotional Development in PAI

Humanistic PAI integrates:

- a. Akhlaq (Character Education). Beyond theoretical knowledge, students practice virtues like honesty (sidq) and justice ('adl).
- b. Emotional Intelligence (EQ) in Islamic Perspective. Self-regulation (mujāhadah al-nafs) and empathy (ta'āthur) are cultivated.
- c. Value Clarification. Students critically reflect on ethical dilemmas using Islamic principles.

Example: Instead of merely teaching "do not lie," students engage in discussions on real-life consequences of dishonesty, supported by Qur'anic verses (e.g., 9:119).

New Insights: Integrated Application of Humanism in PAI. Recent studies suggest that combining humanistic psychology with Islamic pedagogy enhances:

- a. Intrinsic Motivation for Worship. Students pray and fast out of love for Allah, not fear.

- b. Critical Thinking in Faith. Encouraging questions strengthens conviction (īmān).
- c. Mental Health Awareness. Islamic counseling (ifsyā' nafsī) integrates psychological well-being with spirituality.

Case Study: A PAI program in Indonesia implemented Rogers' approach by training teachers in active listening and emotional support, resulting in improved student engagement and reduced behavioral issues.

Challenges and Solutions

- a. Teacher Preparedness. Not all PAI educators are trained in humanistic methods.
Solution: Workshops on counseling skills and mentoring.
- b. Curriculum Constraints. National exams may prioritize memorization over reflection.
Solution: Advocate for balanced assessments (e.g., project-based evaluations).
- c. Cultural Resistance. Some traditional systems favor authoritarian teaching.
Solution: Gradual implementation with evidence of improved outcomes.

B. Scientific Interpretation of Findings

Each finding is interpreted through educational psychology and Islamic pedagogy:

- 1) Behaviorism in Islamic Religious Education: While effective for habit formation, its mechanistic approach may conflict with Islam's emphasis on sincerity (ikhlas). Thus, rewards should transition from extrinsic to intrinsic motivation (Alali, 2022)
- 2) Cognitivism in Islamic Religious Education: Higher-order thinking aligns with Islam's encouragement of tadabbur (reflection) on Qur'anic verses. However, cognitive load must be managed to avoid superficial understanding (Alali, 2022).
- 3) Constructivism in Islamic Religious Education: Active learning mirrors the Islamic tradition of ijihad (independent reasoning), but requires guidance to prevent misinterpretations (Ozdem-Yilmaz et al., 2025)
- 4) Humanism in Islamic Religious Education: Personalized learning supports the Prophetic model of tarbiyah (nurturing), yet must be structured to avoid subjectivity (Psychology & 1963, 1963).

These interpretations are validated through curriculum analysis and pedagogical principles in Islamic education.

C. Consistency and Divergence from Previous Studies

- 1) Consistency

Prior research (McIntosh et al., 2024) confirms that behaviorist techniques improve religious practice repetition. Studies by Hashim (2014) support cognitivism in enhancing Islamic critical thinking.

2) Divergence

Unlike previous works focusing on single-theory applications, this study proposes multi-theory integration for a holistic curriculum. Some studies (McIntosh et al., 2024) overemphasize constructivism, whereas this research highlights the need for structured guidance to align with Islamic orthodoxy.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates the significant role of learning theories—behaviorism, cognitivism, constructivism, and humanism—in shaping an effective and holistic Islamic Religious Education (curriculum). By integrating these theories, educators can foster not only religious habit formation but also critical thinking, experiential learning, and moral-spiritual development in students. The key contributions of this research are: 1. **Balanced Application:** A multi-theory approach ensures that learning is structured (behaviorism), intellectually engaging (cognitivism), contextually relevant (constructivism), and emotionally nurturing (humanism). 2. **Alignment with Islamic Pedagogy:** The findings reinforce that while external reinforcement (behaviorism) aids practice, internal reflection (cognitivism), active exploration (constructivism), and personalized guidance (humanism) deepen faith and understanding in line with Islamic principles. 3. **Advancement Beyond Previous Studies:** Unlike prior works that focus on singular theories, this study proposes an integrated model, addressing gaps in how can simultaneously cultivate discipline, critical thought, creativity, and spiritual growth. For future research, longitudinal studies should assess the long-term impact of this integrated approach on students' religious comprehension, ethical behavior, and spiritual well-being. Additionally, further exploration is needed on how digital learning tools can adapt these theories for modern Islamic education. Ultimately, this study underscores that a dynamic, theory-informed curriculum can bridge traditional Islamic teachings with contemporary educational psychology, producing well-rounded Muslim learners who embody both knowledge ('ilm) and piety (taqwa).

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