Islamic Religious Education Learning Innovation: The Role and Challenges of the Joyful Learning Approach

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Article Info	ABSTRACT
	Islamic Religious Education learning is still largely dominated by lectures and memorization methods, which create a monotonous classroom atmosphere and lack active student engagement. This condition affects learning interest and the effectiveness of internalizing religious values. This study aims to examine the application of Joyful Learning as an innovation in Islamic Religious Education learning. The method used is a literature study with a descriptive qualitative approach with a time span of the last 10 years based on Google Scholar. Data were collected through a review of various relevant scientific literature sources, then analyzed thematically. The results show that Joyful Learning can increase student interest, understanding, and engagement through the use of methods such as educational games, digital media, group discussions, and experiential learning. Despite its great potential, the implementation of Joyful Learning faces various challenges such as limited facilities, teacher readiness, and classroom dynamics. Solutions offered include teacher training, the use of simple media, and collaboration with parents and the school community. The conclusion of this study is that Joyful Learning has a strategic role in reconstructing Islamic Religious Education learning to be more contextual, enjoyable, and meaningful. Students who are not only intellectually intelligent, but also have noble character and love the teachings of Islam. **

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1. INTRODUCTION

Islamic religious education is pivotal in cultivating the religious, moral, and spiritual qualities that underpin students' character development (Dinham & Shaw, 2017; Lahmar, 2020; Irpan & Sain, 2024). In the context of globalization and the significant impact of foreign cultures, Islamic Religious Education has emerged as a crucial tool for reinforcing a moderate and cultured Islamic identity (Sahin, 2018; Saada, 2023; Hanif et al., 2025). Nonetheless, the current situation indicates that the Islamic Religious Education learning process predominantly adheres to traditional methods, focusing on lectures and rote memorization, and is deficient in pedagogical innovation that addresses

the contemporary learning requirements of students. This state frequently results in learning ennui, diminished student engagement, and insufficient assimilation of religious principles (Aripin & Nurdiansyah, 2022).

With the advancement of modern educational methods, there is a growing demand for the creation of more humanistic, interactive, and engaging Islamic Religious Education learning models (Tan et al., 2017; Salamuddin et al., 2025). Numerous research studies indicate that methods promoting positive emotional experiences might enhance student participation in the learning process (Ferreira et al., 2020; Mahmudi & Arief, 2025; Salsabila et al., 2025). An agreeable educational atmosphere greatly enhances student engagement and academic performance in religious studies (Khalid et al., 2020; Purwanti et al., 2025). Moreover, game-based, project-based, and social interaction-based methodologies have demonstrated the capacity to enhance students' affective and psychomotor dimensions (Mubaroq, 2025).

Nonetheless, a deficiency persists in research that comprehensively investigates the systematic design of a joyful learning strategy within the framework of Islamic Religious Education, including practical implementation tactics, obstacles faced in practice, and alternate solutions. Numerous studies concentrate exclusively on a singular feature, such as enhancing motivation, while neglecting the comprehensive integration of this strategy with religious learning results (Mala & Hunaida, 2023; Nasucha et al., 2023; Aseery, 2024). The concept of Joyful Learning is proposed as an alternative strategy that prioritizes joy, purpose, and participation in the learning process (Bhakti et al., 2019; Erwin et al., 2023; Feriyanto & Anjariyah, 2024). This approach is pertinent not only to the requirements of a student-centered independent curriculum but also resonates with the essence of Islamic education, which emphasizes compassion, exemplary figures, and joy in the learning experience as integral to prophetic values.

This article intends to critically and reflectively analyze the function of Joyful Learning as an innovation in Islamic Religious Education. It emphasizes the immediacy of execution, pedagogical tactics for the classroom, and the challenges and solutions pertinent to Islamic education. This study aims to enhance the development of contextual, pleasurable, and relevant pedagogical practices in contemporary religious education amidst ongoing educational transition.

2. METHOD

This research utilized a literature review methodology, concentrating on the search and analysis of data from diverse pertinent scientific literature. The research method commenced with the identification of the issues necessitating the implementation of Joyful Learning in Islamic Religious Education (IRE) instruction. The researcher subsequently gathered credible materials, including reference books, scientific publications, academic journals, and other pertinent documents related to the study issue. Figure 1 illustrates the flowchart of the literature review process.
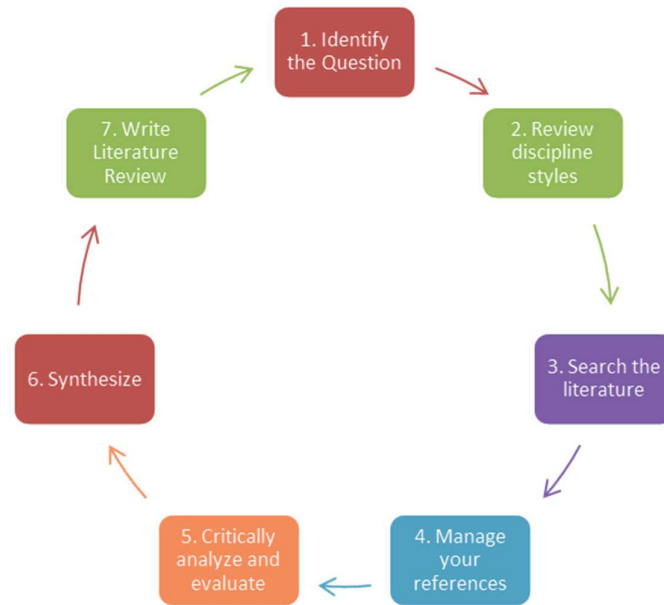
Figure 1. Literature Review Flowchart

The gathered data was thoroughly studied to achieve a comprehensive and precise grasp of the theoretical and practical background of executing the Joyful Learning approach. The information was subsequently categorized and structured according to essential themes, encompassing the concepts of joyful learning, its application within the Islamic Religious Education framework, and its effects on student learning experiences. To expand the analysis, prior research findings were examined for comparative purposes.

The employed analytical method was descriptive qualitative, intended to elucidate patterns and correlations arising from the examined literature. The data was presented narratively to elucidate comparisons between the literature and illustrate the identified conceptual linkages. This methodology enhances academic understanding and provides practical assistance for the proper implementation of Joyful Learning in Islamic Religious Education.

3.   RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

The Urgency of Joyful Learning in Islamic Religious Education

The study of Islamic Religious Education (IRE) is crucial in cultivating students' ethics, character, and spirituality. In actuality, IRE education in several institutions remains predominantly characterized by lecture methods, rote memorization, and conventional normative approaches (Hidayat & Syahidin, 2019; Candira et al., 2025). These strategies frequently render students as passive entities in the educational process, leading to diminished meaningful learning experiences and a deficiency in emotional engagement. The internalization of religious values necessitates an interactive, contextual methodology that profoundly engages the affective domain (Nadirah et al.,

2024; Aeni, 2025). Joyful Learning is founded on positive educational psychology, highlighting the significance of emotional involvement in the learning process (Sukoyo et al., 2024; Andayanie et al., 2025). This method has demonstrated efficacy in improving students' cognitive, emotional, and psychomotor dimensions within religious education.

Joyful Learning significantly impacts pupils, especially within the realm of Islamic Religious Education (Mufidah, 2023; Salsabila et al., 2025). A significant effect is a heightened interest among students in learning. When the educational process is structured in an engaging and interactive environment, such as through educational games, collaborative tasks, or group discussions, students typically exhibit heightened interest in the subject matter being presented. This method fosters a constructive learning environment, enabling students to become emotionally invested and driven to comprehend and investigate religious principles more profoundly (Selian & Rambe, 2022; Tugiah & Asmendri, 2022). This approach fosters a constructive learning environment, enabling students to feel emotionally invested and driven to comprehend and investigate religious principles more profoundly. This strategy not only cultivates curiosity but also enhances student involvement, improves information retention, and promotes a deeper contextual understanding (Feriyanto & Anjariyah, 2024). When students perceive a sense of comfort and worth in the educational experience, they exhibit greater openness to discussion, pose inquiries, and contemplate Islamic beliefs in practical contexts. Joyful Learning offers a remedy to address the stagnation in Islamic Religious Education (IRE) methodologies, which have been excessively teacher-centric and deficient in substantive interaction (Mufidah, 2023).

Strategies for Implementing Joyful Learning in Islamic Religious Education
A Humanistic Environment
Teachers play a crucial role in creating a friendly, enjoyable, and stress-free classroom environment (Haıdarı et al., 2020). Teachers who frequently offer praise, incorporate humor, and foster two-way communication will make students more comfortable and enthusiastic about learning (Purwanti et al., 2025). A positive emotional atmosphere is crucial to the success of joyful learning in Islamic Religious Education.

When the learning atmosphere is filled with supportive and empathetic interactions, students feel valued and are more open to active involvement (Gasser et al., 2018). This conducive psychological environment can facilitate a deeper internalization of religious values and create a meaningful learning experience (Selvia et al., 2024).

Use of Digital Media
Helps simplify abstract religious concepts. Animated videos about the stories of the prophets, infographics on the pillars of faith, and Islamic mobile applications have been shown to significantly improve student understanding (Azkiya & Istiqomah, 2025). An example of this implementation is showing an animated video of the story of the Prophet Moses (peace be upon him) at the beginning of the lesson to arouse interest and open a

discussion about the values of monotheism. Furthermore, the use of digital media opens up opportunities for students to learn independently and more exploratively (Pöntinen & Räty-Záborszky, 2020). Educators can provide access to a variety of Islamic learning resources that can be accessed anytime, from home. Thus, the learning process is no longer confined to the formal classroom but becomes an integrated part of everyday life. Furthermore, the use of this technology allows teachers to apply a variety of learning approaches, creating a dynamic and contextual learning environment (Alam & Mohanty, 2023).

Utilizing Innovative Methods

Utilizing innovative methods in Islamic Religious Education (IRE) is a strategic step to increase the effectiveness of material delivery while fostering active student engagement (Hilman, 2025). Through approaches such as educational games, group-based discussions, and digital media integration, the learning process becomes more dynamic, contextual, and enjoyable, fostering a deeper understanding of Islamic values. Group discussions are also an effective method for encouraging students to think critically and reflectively (Fung et al., 2016; Chen et al., 2019). In groups, students are encouraged to solve problems or discuss Islamic issues relevant to their lives (Hidayati & Dirmaya, 2024).

Contextual Learning and Field Trips

Many studies have shown that a contextual approach to Islamic Religious Education (IRE) learning can strengthen religious understanding by linking subject matter to real-life experiences. The contextual model improves life skills and religious understanding in the era of globalization. Zaid et al. (2025) stated that CTL encourages students to connect lessons to realities outside the classroom. Azmi and Gusmaneli (2025) added that CTL helps shape a reflective and participatory Islamic character.

Connectedness to Students' Lives

One essential characteristic of implementing Joyful Learning is connecting the learning content to the students' real-life contexts (Ashari et al., 2023). This approach emphasizes the importance of presenting situationally relevant material, so that the knowledge gained is not merely abstract but directly connected to their daily experiences.

Challenges and Solutions for Implementing Joyful Learning in Islamic Religious Education

The implementation of Joyful Learning in Islamic Religious Education (IRE) is not without challenges. Several factors contribute to the implementation of Joyful Learning:

Limited Teacher Creativity and Skills

Many educators are unfamiliar with designing interactive learning methods such as educational games or group discussions, resulting in less than optimal implementation of Joyful Learning (Alamsyah & Ahwa, 2020). This unpreparedness is often caused by

a lack of innovation-based pedagogical training and limited experience in managing participatory and enjoyable learning activities. As a result, learning tends to revert to traditional, monotonous, teacher-centered approaches.

Limited Facilities and Learning Media

Some schools lack adequate infrastructure (such as audiovisual aids or digital applications), which limits the variety of interactive methods (Azkiya & Istiqomah, 2025). This situation makes it difficult for teachers to present attractive and contextual learning materials, particularly in conveying religious values visually and practically. As a result, Joyful Learning's potential as an approach to stimulate student interest and participation cannot be fully optimized.

Dynamic classroom management

When using methods such as outbound activities, moving classes, or active games, managing large classes can be challenging, especially for teachers who lack experience in interactive classroom management (Ola & Karim, 2024). Without a well-developed organizational strategy, these activities can lead to noise, lack of focus, and even a decline in discipline. Therefore, teachers are required not only to be creative in planning activities but also to be skilled at organizing classroom dynamics efficiently and conducively.

Strategic Solutions

Joyful Learning-Based Teacher Training

Holding training or workshops for teachers to design and implement creative methods such as role-playing, mind-mapping, and outdoor learning (Alamsyah & Ahwa, 2020). Through this training, teachers not only gain new knowledge but also practical skills in creating an active, enjoyable, and contextual learning environment. This competency development is crucial to support the ongoing effectiveness of Joyful Learning in Islamic Religious Education.

Optimizing the use of simple, free digital media

Teachers can utilize short videos, graphic presentations, and even free Islamic applications for visualization, without the need for expensive equipment (Sanusi, 2024; Azkiya & Istiqomah, 2025). This approach not only overcomes infrastructure limitations but also enhances the appeal of learning through more vibrant and contextual visual displays. With this strategy, the learning process can continue innovatively even under limited resources.

Classroom Management Through Small Groups and Activity Rotation

Dividing the class into small groups and rotating activities provides better control over interactive classroom dynamics (Lintner et al., 2024; Ola & Karim, 2024). This strategy allows teachers to focus more on monitoring the learning process, encourage active participation from each individual, and minimize disruptions that often arise in

movement-based and collaborative activities (Olsen et al., 2021). Furthermore, this approach supports the achievement of learning objectives more equitably because interaction and guidance can be more intensive and personalized.

Stakeholder Collaboration

Inviting parents, supervisors, or the local community to support the effective implementation of Joyful Learning is necessary for a sustainable joyful learning ecosystem. This cross-stakeholder collaboration can strengthen moral, material, and environmental support conducive to innovative learning (Udhma & Minarti, 2025). With the active involvement of various stakeholders, the learning values developed in the classroom will be more easily reinforced in students' daily lives, both at home and in the community.

Discussion
The Urgency of Joyful Learning in Islamic Religious Education

Islamic Religious Education (IRE) develops pupils' morals, character, and spirituality. IRE education at many institutions still emphasises lecture, memorisation, and normative approaches (Hidayat & Syahidin, 2019). These tactics often make pupils inert, reducing meaningful learning and emotional involvement. Integrating religious values requires an interactive, contextual approach that deeply involves the affective domain (Aeni, 2025). Positive educational psychology underpins Joyful Learning, emphasising emotional learning (Sukoyo et al., 2024). This strategy improves religious education students' cognitive, emotional, and psychomotor skills.

Joyful learning affects students, notably in Islamic Religious Education (Salsabila et al., 2025). A major effect is increased student learning interest. Engaging and interactive learning environments, such as instructional games, collaborative assignments, or group debates, usually increase student interest in the subject matter. This strategy creates a positive learning atmosphere that motivates children to understand and explore religious concepts (Selian & Rambe, 2022). Students are emotionally invested and motivated to understand and study religious beliefs in this positive learning environment. This method boosts curiosity, student engagement, information retention, and contextual comprehension. When kids feel comfortable and valued in school, they are more open to conversation, ask questions, and apply Islamic values. Joyful Learning can fix Islamic Religious Education (IRE) methods that are too teacher-centric and lack meaningful interaction.

Strategies for Implementing Joyful Learning in Islamic Religious Education

Teachers are essential to a welcoming, fun, and stress-free classroom. Teachers who applaud, joke, and encourage two-way contact make pupils more comfortable and excited about studying (Purwanti et al., 2025). Joyful learning in Islamic Religious Education requires a positive emotional environment. Students feel valued and participate more in supportive and compassionate learning environments. This

supportive psychological environment might help students internalise religious values and learn meaningfully.

Islamic Religious Education (IRE) should use creative approaches to improve material delivery and student involvement. Educational games, group discussions, and digital media integration make learning more dynamic, relevant, and engaging, helping students grasp Islamic ideals. Group talks can help students think critically and reflectively. Students are encouraged to solve difficulties or discuss life-relevant Islamic concepts in groups. Many studies have indicated that contextualising Islamic Religious Education (IRE) helps improve religious comprehension by connecting subject matter to real-life situations. The contextual approach promotes life skills and religious knowledge in globalisation, according to Isnaniah (2025). Zaid et al. (2025) said CTL helps students apply classroom lessons to real-world situations. Joyful learning requires integrating learning content into students' real-life settings. This method emphasises presenting situationally appropriate material to make learning relevant to daily life.

Challenges and Solutions for Implementing Joyful Learning in Islamic Religious Education

Many instructors lack experience devising interactive learning methods like educational games or group discussions, which hinders Joyful Learning (Alamsyah & Ahwa, 2020). Unpreparedness often results from a lack of innovation-based pedagogical training and expertise in managing fun and engaging learning activities. Thus, learning goes back to boring, teacher-centered methods.

Audiovisual aids and digital apps are lacking in some schools, limiting interactive approaches (Azkiya & Istiqomah, 2025). Teachers find it challenging to offer attractive and contextual learning materials, especially religious principles visually and practically. We cannot maximise Joyful Learning's ability to engage students. Managing large classrooms using outbound activities, changing classes, or active games might be difficult for teachers new to interactive classroom management (Ola & Karim, 2024). Without a successful organisational approach, these activities might cause noise, inattention, and disciplinary issues. Teachers must organise activities creatively and organise classroom dynamics well.

Practical Implications

- Implementation of the Joyful Learning Approach: This research can serve as a reference for implementing the Joyful Learning approach in Islamic Religious Education (IRE) to increase student interest and motivation.

- Development of Learning Strategies: The results of this research can be used to develop more innovative and effective learning strategies to improve student learning outcomes in IRE.

- Improving Learning Quality: This research can help improve the quality of IRE by making the learning process more enjoyable and engaging for students.

Theoretical Implications

- Development of Learning Theory: This research can contribute to the development of more effective learning theories to improve student learning outcomes in IRE.

- Implementation of the Joyful Learning Approach: The results of this research can provide examples of effective implementation of the Joyful Learning approach to increase student interest and motivation in IRE.

- Development of a Joyful Learning-Based Learning Model: This research can serve as a reference for developing a more effective Joyful Learning-based learning model to improve student learning outcomes in IRE.

4.   CONCLUSION

Joyful learning in Islamic religious education improves student interest, understanding, and engagement cognitively and affectively. Fun, participative, and contextual learning makes learning more engaging. This study found that educational games, digital media, group discussions, and experiential learning activities help improve classroom atmosphere and Islamic value internalisation. Joyful Learning implementation relies on teacher readiness, infrastructure, and educational community participation. Thus, Islamic Religious Education must adapt its learning techniques pedagogically, technologically, and collaboratively.

According to this report, educational institutions should train teachers in new and engaging learning methods. Schools are essential for providing relevant and broadly accessible digital and conventional learning media. Future research can empirically test Joyful Learning's effectiveness in improving student competency and develop a local implementation model that is more adaptable to school conditions in different regions.

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