

CONTEXTUAL TEACHING AND LEARNING IN ISLAMIC EDUCATION: A COMPARATIVE STUDY AT TWO PESANTREN BASED SCHOOLS

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Abstract

The Contextual Teaching and Learning (CTL) model emphasizes the integration of academic content with real-life contexts, allowing students to better comprehend and apply knowledge in their daily lives. This study adopts a qualitative approach with a comparative case study design at two pesantren-based junior high schools: SMP Islam Nurul Fattah and SMP Nurul Jadid. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, participatory observations, and document analysis, and were analyzed using Miles and Huberman's interactive model. The findings reveal that CTL enhances students' active participation in learning, fosters critical thinking and problem-solving skills, and promotes collaborative engagement. Consequently, CTL offers a promising pedagogical alternative for cultivating a more dynamic and interactive learning environment within Islamic-based educational institutions.

Keywords: *Islamic Pedagogy; Experiential Learning; Religious Education.*

Abstrak

Model Pembelajaran dan Pengajaran Kontekstual (CTL) menekankan hubungan antara isi akademik dan konteks dunia nyata, yang memungkinkan siswa untuk lebih memahami dan menerapkan pengetahuan dalam kehidupan sehari-hari. Penerapan model CTL bertujuan untuk meningkatkan pemahaman konseptual, keterampilan berpikir kritis, dan motivasi belajar siswa melalui instruksi yang bermakna dan kontekstual. Studi ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan desain studi kasus komparatif pada dua sekolah berbasis pesantren, yakni SMP Islam Nurul Fattah dan SMP Nurul Jadid. Data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara mendalam, observasi partisipatif, dan analisis dokumen, kemudian dianalisis menggunakan model interaktif Miles dan Huberman. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa CTL dapat meningkatkan keterlibatan aktif siswa dalam pembelajaran serta menumbuhkan kemampuan kolaborasi dan pemecahan masalah. Akibatnya, CTL menghadirkan alternatif yang efektif untuk menumbuhkan lingkungan belajar yang lebih dinamis dan interaktif dalam lingkungan pendidikan berbasis Islam.

Kata Kunci: *Pedagogi Islam; Pembelajaran Eksperiensial; Pendidikan Agama.*



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A. Introduction

The Contextual Teaching and Learning (CTL) model comprises seven core components: constructivism, inquiry, questioning, learning community, modeling, reflection, and authentic assessment. These components collectively support the integration of students' individual experiences with academic content, thereby facilitating the development of meaningful understanding (Rachman et al., 2025; Samsudin et al., 2024; Thamrin et al., 2024). CTL is not solely focused on conceptual comprehension but also aims at the development of character and social attitudes in learners (Hyun et al., 2020; Suryawati & Osman, 2017).

This approach further enables interdisciplinary integration, demonstrating that the combination of science education and social values through CTL can yield holistic and applicable learning outcomes (Sabarudin et al., 2023; Thamrin et al., 2024). Within the context of Islamic Religious Education (Pendidikan Agama Islam/PAI), the CTL approach is particularly relevant, given the applied nature of Islamic values that require not only cognitive understanding but also emotional engagement and practical implementation. Wibowo & Pradana, (2022) reaffirming Kismatun (2021), emphasize the applicability of the seven CTL components in the context of PAI instruction. For instance, under the principle of constructivism, students are provided opportunities to construct the meaning of religious teachings through real-life practices, such as congregational prayers and participation in social-religious activities (Ismail, 2021; Muhsam & Lestado, 2020). This aligns with the pedagogical principle that religious education should be oriented toward the development of religious character, rather than merely the transfer of knowledge.

CTL emphasizes its seven key components—constructivism, inquiry, questioning, learning community, modeling, reflection, and authentic assessment—which can be effectively applied to PAI instruction (Dhani & Rahayu, 2023; Fauziah & Nurita, 2019; Sarwari & Kakar, 2023). For example, through constructivism, students are guided to derive meaning from religious teachings based on real-life experiences, such as practicing congregational prayers or participating in charitable activities. This approach is consistent with pedagogical principles that religious learning should emphasize character formation rather than solely cognitive acquisition.

This study builds upon and differentiates itself from previous research on the implementation of the CTL model across various educational settings. First, studies have shown that CTL in inclusive education supports students in addressing real-life problems and serves as an adaptive alternative for learners with special needs (Lotulung et al., 2018). Second, Syamsuddin & Utami (2021) found that CTL effectively enhances instructional mathematical understanding while fostering

creativity and connections between academic knowledge and students' real-life contexts. Third, research by Paskalia Yasinta et al., (2020) highlighted the capacity of CTL to enhance mathematical critical thinking skills, particularly in analyzing and formulating problem-solving strategies. Fourth, Fikriyatus et al., (2019) applied CTL in Civic Education (PKN) through a blended learning approach, resulting in significant improvements in student achievement and increased teacher engagement in developing similar strategies. Fifth, Muhsam & Lestado, (2020) demonstrated the effectiveness of CTL in science education (specifically on the topic of force) at the primary level, with learning mastery improving from 38.46% in the first cycle to 92% in the second.

From these five studies, it can be concluded that the CTL approach has been proven effective across multiple subjects and educational levels. However, few studies have specifically explored the implementation of CTL in the context of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) within pesantren-based schools (Fatimah & Budi Waluya, 2024). This study, therefore, occupies a strategic position in addressing this gap, particularly in strengthening religious values through a contextual learning approach.

Conceptually, CTL places learning experiences at the center of meaning-making. 21st-century education demands a transformation from teacher-centered to student-facilitated learning approaches. Consequently, CTL presents a strategic alternative for developing critical thinking, problem-solving skills, and the reinforcement of learners' values and attitudes (Maryam et al., 2022). Rooted in constructivist theory, CTL is supported by the educational philosophies of thinkers such as John Dewey, Piaget, and Vygotsky, who emphasize the importance of experience, social interaction, and reflection in the learning process.

Empirical findings underscore the urgency of adopting more contextualized approaches, particularly in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) instruction (Nazhimah & Faqihulhikam, 2023). At SMP Islam Nurul Fattah Sukorejo, students come from diverse religious backgrounds, often with limited foundational understanding, which impacts their academic motivation. In response, the school has adopted CTL through practical methods, including simulations of religious practices, social observation, and thematic discussions of Islamic values aligned with students' daily lives (Fatmawati et al., 2023). This illustrates a pressing need to integrate religious content with real-life contexts to make learning more meaningful and to foster Islamic character.

Meanwhile, at SMP Nurul Jadid Paiton—an institution affiliated with a prominent pesantren with a long tradition in Islamic education—CTL provides a solution to emerging challenges posed by Generation Z learners, who tend to be

more active, visual, and collaborative. Signs of declining motivation in PAI subjects suggest the need for contextual learning models like CTL (Nazhimah & Faqihulhikam, 2023). Educators must therefore master CTL and similar models to enhance both student motivation and comprehension.

The implementation of Contextual Teaching and Learning based on Global Citizenship aims to improve conceptual understanding and critical thinking skills in elementary school education. This study contributes significantly to the theoretical and practical development of Islamic Religious Education, particularly within the unique cultural and value framework of pesantren environments.

At SMP Islam Nurul Fattah, the findings enrich our understanding of CTL's effectiveness in reinforcing foundational Islamic values in a manner that is both practical and relevant to students' lived experiences. Learning linked directly to students' realities has been shown to increase engagement and deepen appreciation for key aspects of Islamic faith, worship, and ethics. At SMP Nurul Jadid, CTL has contributed to a renewed approach in teaching *fiqh* by emphasizing contextual practice, social projects, and reflection on Islamic law in daily life. These findings expand the methodological horizon of *fiqh* instruction, which traditionally leans towards normative-theoretical teaching, by making it more participatory and experience-based. Therefore, this study not only advances the contextual application of PAI and *fiqh* instruction but also offers a transformative Islamic pedagogical model that is responsive to the learning dynamics of Generation Z within the pesantren educational system.

B. Research Methods

This study employed a qualitative approach to explore the implementation of the Contextual Teaching and Learning (CTL) model in Islamic Religious Education (Pendidikan Agama Islam/PAI) within two Islamic junior high schools. The research was conducted on December 5, 2024, at SMP Islam Nurul Fattah for the PAI subject, and on December 11, 2024, at SMP Nurul Jadid, focusing on *fiqh* instruction. The aim of this study was to examine how CTL enhances student motivation and learning outcomes in PAI, particularly in pesantren-based educational environments.

A case study design was selected to enable an in-depth and intensive investigation of the CTL model's application in its natural setting. This design was deemed appropriate as it allows contextual exploration of students' learning experiences and teachers' instructional strategies in real-life settings at the two pesantren-based schools. The choice of a qualitative case study method was aligned with the exploratory objectives of this research, which sought to capture the processes, dynamics, and subjective meanings experienced by participants.

Data collection was carried out using three primary methods: in-depth interviews, participant observation, and document analysis. In-depth interviews were conducted with school principals, Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers, and seventh-grade students from both schools. These interviews aimed to gather detailed insights into participants' perspectives and experiences regarding the implementation of the CTL model in PAI instruction. In addition, the researcher conducted participant observations both in classrooms and across the school environments to obtain direct insights into the ongoing learning processes. These observations focused on how teachers applied the seven core components of CTL and how students responded and engaged in context-based learning activities.

To supplement the data, document analysis was also carried out, including an examination of lesson plans (RPP), student work, and school policies related to teaching and learning implementation. This document analysis provided additional insights that supported the interview and observation data, and helped the researcher to understand the framework for CTL implementation in a more comprehensive and systematic manner. This study utilized purposive sampling to select informants with direct experience in CTL-based learning and snowball sampling to identify active students involved in the implementation process.

The collected data were analyzed using a thematic approach, focusing on the seven key components of CTL: constructivism, inquiry, questioning, learning community, modeling, reflection, and authentic assessment. The analytical process followed the stages of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing, in accordance with the interactive model proposed by Miles and Huberman. To ensure the credibility and consistency of the findings, validation was conducted through source and method triangulation, thereby ensuring the scientific rigor of the results. This analysis facilitated a deep understanding of both teachers' and students' experiences in applying contextual learning in the two pesantren-based schools.

C. Result and Discussion

Research Findings

This study found that the implementation of the Contextual Teaching and Learning (CTL) model in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) at SMP Islam Nurul Fattah and SMP Nurul Jadid had a significant positive impact on students' engagement, comprehension, and spiritual awareness. The CTL approach proved effective in transforming learning processes—traditionally theoretical and teacher-centered—into participatory, applicable, and transformative experiences.

At SMP Islam Nurul Fattah—a traditional pesantren-based Islamic junior high school—teachers implemented CTL by directly integrating Islamic values with

students' everyday lives. Activities such as zakat management simulations, daily worship training (e.g., prayer, ablution, dhikr), and thematic discussions on moral values served as primary means to contextualize Islamic teachings. Observations revealed that students did not merely acquire religious knowledge cognitively, but also internalized spiritual and social values through real-life experiences embedded in their communal learning environment. This reinforced the dual social-spiritual function of religious education.

An interview with a PAI teacher (G-NF-1) indicated that every lesson plan (RPP) was systematically designed based on the seven key components of CTL. The teacher facilitated learning through open discussions, value-based social projects, and regular reflective journaling. Student journals and portfolios provided concrete evidence of their growing spiritual awareness and internalization of values. One student (S-NF-02) stated that the lessons became easier to understand because they were directly related to real-life situations, making religious practices more meaningful beyond mere ritual obligations.

At SMP Nurul Jadid—a modern pesantren that integrates digital technology and 21st-century education—CTL was implemented in a more innovative and collaborative manner. Learning activities extended beyond conventional face-to-face sessions, incorporating digital platforms such as dakwah video blogs, online religious journals, and group-based Islamic social projects that explored contemporary issues from an Islamic legal perspective. Teachers acted as facilitators, guiding students through collaborative exploration, basic research, and interactive presentations.

Observations revealed that these activities not only enhanced students' understanding of Islamic legal concepts but also fostered critical thinking, communication, and teamwork—key competencies for 21st-century learners. A student (S-NJ-05) shared that learning became more enjoyable and relevant, as students were encouraged to express their views, explore real-life cases (e.g., the fiqh of online transactions or ethical use of social media), and formulate religious insights that resonated with current social dynamics. Documentation of the learning process also showed integration of digital media through interactive modules, digital worksheets, and student-created dakwah videos shared via internal school platforms.

Discussion

The findings confirm that the CTL model plays a strategic role in creating meaningful learning environments, particularly in the context of Islamic Religious Education which requires cognitive, affective, and psychomotor engagement.

Grounded in constructivist theory, CTL positions students as active agents in constructing meaning through direct interaction with their social, spiritual, and experiential realities.

At SMP Islam Nurul Fattah, CTL offered pedagogical solutions amid limited infrastructure by optimizing local resources and community-based activities. Practices such as zakat simulations, mutual cooperation (*gotong royong*), and thematic discussions on Islamic social values nurtured *ukhuwah Islamiyah* (Islamic brotherhood), collective responsibility, and the spirit of *amar ma'ruf nahi munkar* (enjoining good and forbidding evil). These practices align with the framework of *contextual religious learning* (Wibowo & Pradana, 2022a), which emphasizes the interconnectedness of religious teachings and daily life. Students' involvement in real worship experiences served as a bridge between normative religious concepts and the practical embodiment of values in daily conduct.

Conversely, at SMP Nurul Jadid, CTL was optimized within a modern pesantren setting through the integration of digital technology and value-based project learning. This approach aligns with *holistic Islamic education* (Alkouatli, 2018; Kasim et al., 2021; Komariah & Nihayah, 2023), which advocates not only for the transmission of religious knowledge but also for character development, moral awareness, and global citizenship grounded in Islamic values. The combination of project-based strategies, technological engagement, and collaborative learning provided students with opportunities to reflect critically and explore contemporary Islamic discourses in ways that were both personally and socially meaningful.

Moreover, the implementation of CTL in Islamic education resonates with the *purpose-driven learning* model proposed by Carol S. Dweck (2024), where learning is motivated not solely by academic obligations but also by a deeper understanding of personal and spiritual purpose (Dweck, 2024; Komariah & Nihayah, 2023; Sahin, 2018). When students perceive that Islamic education is directly relevant to their lives—as individuals, family members, and members of a larger community—they develop stronger and more sustainable intrinsic motivation to learn.

Another strength of the CTL model is its responsiveness to the characteristics of Generation Z learners—who are predominantly visual, digital-native, and inclined toward interactive and contextual learning. CTL effectively addresses these learning preferences while preserving the core values of Islamic teachings. By promoting exploration, reflection, and collaboration, the model makes religious education not only relevant but also transformative.

This study contributes to the field by offering a novel perspective on the application of CTL in PAI learning within pesantren-based educational contexts—an area that has received limited attention in prior research. The use of a comparative

case study design provides a richer understanding of how socio-cultural environments, educational systems, and technological readiness influence the implementation and effectiveness of CTL. These findings offer valuable insights for the development of contextual, value-based instructional design in Islamic education and reinforce the strategic role of PAI in character formation.

D. Conclusions

This study concludes that the implementation of the Contextual Teaching and Learning (CTL) model significantly enhances the quality of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) in pesantren-based junior high schools. The findings demonstrate that CTL fosters active student engagement, contextual understanding of religious values, and the development of critical thinking and problem-solving skills. At SMP Islam Nurul Fattah, CTL created an experiential learning environment through religious practice projects and social activities, which led to increased student motivation and internalization of Islamic values. Despite facing limitations in resources, the strategy of connecting instructional content with students' social contexts proved effective in improving learning outcomes. Meanwhile, SMP Nurul Jadid utilized its strong institutional structure to implement CTL systematically, resulting in the strengthening of students' religious character and social competencies within the framework of a modern society.

Theoretically, this study contributes to the growing body of literature on contextual learning in the field of religious education. It specifically demonstrates that the CTL approach is not only effective for cognitive mastery of subject matter, but also instrumental in shaping students' character and spiritual values. As emphasized by Carol S. Dweck, when students understand the meaningful reasons behind learning activities—particularly those linked to social or spiritual contributions—their motivation becomes more enduring and intrinsically driven. Within the context of CTL-based PAI, the integration of Islamic values into students' real-life experiences serves as a form of purpose-driven learning internalization. This approach not only enhances cognitive achievement but also reinforces students' moral identity and resilience.

Thus, CTL functions not merely as a pedagogical method, but also as a strategic model for character formation and the cultivation of an Islamic life orientation. The study illustrates that contextual religious education is capable of shaping students who not only comprehend Islamic teachings at a theoretical level but are also motivated to apply them meaningfully in their social lives. Future research is recommended to quantitatively assess the effectiveness of CTL and to expand its integration into other levels of education. Such studies should include specific

measurements of student grit, purpose, and spiritual engagement, aligned with Carol S. Dweck's theoretical framework.

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