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TEACHERS' INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES FOR PROMOTING STUDENTS' LEARNING ENGAGEMENT IN AQIDAH AKHLAK EDUCATION: A QUALITATIVE CASE STUDY AT MADRASAH ALIYAH NURUL IMAN, JAMBI CITY

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Kata Kunci:	ABSTRAK
keaktifan belajar; strategi pembelajaran; Akidah Akhlak; pendidikan agama Islam; pembelajaran aktif.	Keaktifan belajar peserta didik merupakan salah satu indikator penting dalam mewujudkan pembelajaran Pendidikan Agama Islam yang efektif karena berpengaruh terhadap keterlibatan, pemahaman, dan pencapaian hasil belajar. Namun, perbedaan kemampuan akademik dan karakteristik peserta didik sering menjadi tantangan bagi guru dalam menciptakan pembelajaran yang aktif dan bermakna. Penelitian ini bertujuan menganalisis strategi guru Akidah Akhlak dalam mengembangkan keaktifan belajar peserta didik di Madrasah Aliyah Nurul Iman Ulu Gedong Kota Jambi, serta mengidentifikasi faktor pendukung, faktor penghambat, dan upaya guru dalam mengatasi hambatan pembelajaran. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan desain studi kasus. Data dikumpulkan melalui observasi, wawancara semi-terstruktur, dan dokumentasi dengan melibatkan guru Akidah Akhlak, kepala madrasah, dan peserta didik yang dipilih menggunakan teknik purposive sampling. Data dianalisis menggunakan model interaktif Miles, Huberman, dan Saldaña melalui tahapan kondensasi data, penyajian data, dan penarikan kesimpulan, sedangkan keabsahan data diuji melalui triangulasi sumber, triangulasi teknik, dan member checking. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa guru menerapkan strategi pembelajaran berupa ceramah interaktif, metode tanya jawab, dan diskusi kelompok yang diintegrasikan secara sistematis sehingga mampu meningkatkan partisipasi, komunikasi, dan kemampuan berpikir kritis peserta didik. Keberhasilan strategi tersebut didukung oleh interaksi positif antara guru dan peserta didik, antusiasme belajar, serta variasi metode pembelajaran, sedangkan hambatan utama berasal dari perbedaan kemampuan akademik dan karakteristik peserta didik. Guru mengatasi hambatan tersebut melalui variasi metode, pemberian motivasi, dan evaluasi berkala. Penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa keaktifan belajar peserta didik lebih efektif dikembangkan melalui integrasi berbagai strategi pembelajaran aktif yang disesuaikan dengan karakteristik peserta didik daripada melalui penggunaan satu metode pembelajaran saja.

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Keywords:

Learning engagement; instructional strategies; Aqidah Akhlak; Islamic Religious Education; active learning.

ABSTRACTS

Students' learning engagement is an important indicator of effective Islamic Religious Education learning, as it is related to students' involvement, understanding, and learning outcomes. However, differences in students' academic abilities and individual characteristics often pose challenges for teachers in creating active and meaningful learning experiences. This study aims to analyze Aqidah Akhlak teachers' instructional strategies for promoting students' learning engagement at Madrasah Aliyah Nurul Iman Ulu Gedong, Jambi City, Indonesia, while also identifying supporting factors, inhibiting factors, and teachers' efforts to address learning challenges. This study employed a qualitative approach with a case study design. Data were collected through classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis involving Aqidah Akhlak teachers, the madrasah principal, and students selected through purposive sampling. Data were analyzed using the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña through data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing, while data trustworthiness was ensured through source triangulation, methodological triangulation, and member checking. The findings reveal that teachers implemented interactive lectures, question-and-answer activities, and group discussions as an integrated sequence of instructional strategies. This sequence was observed to support students' participation, communication, and critical thinking by providing conceptual scaffolding, opportunities for comprehension checking and dialogue, and collaborative knowledge construction. Supporting factors included positive teacher-student interactions and variations in instructional methods, while the main challenges were differences in students' academic abilities and individual characteristics. Teachers addressed these challenges through instructional variation, motivational support, and regular evaluation. The study concludes that students' learning engagement is supported by the systematic integration of multiple active learning strategies adapted to students' characteristics rather than by reliance on a single instructional method.

A. INTRODUCTION

Education constitutes a strategic process for developing human resources equipped with academic competence, strong character, and the capacity to adapt to the evolving demands of society. Within the implementation of the *Merdeka Curriculum*, the learning paradigm has shifted from teacher-centered instruction to a student-centered approach, positioning learners as active agents who construct knowledge through meaningful learning experiences. This paradigm shift requires teachers to design instructional strategies that extend beyond the mere delivery of content by fostering students' active engagement, critical thinking, and collaborative skills. Consequently, instructional strategy has become a fundamental determinant of both the quality of the learning process and students' learning outcomes (Amrullah et al., 2026; Nurlaili et al., 2024).

Learning activeness is a key indicator of successful instruction, as it reflects students' intellectual, emotional, and social engagement throughout the learning process. Students who actively participate in learning tend to demonstrate higher learning motivation, stronger critical thinking skills, and a deeper understanding of the subject matter. Conversely, low levels of learning activeness often result in passive classroom participation, thereby hindering the achievement of intended learning outcomes. Research has consistently shown that (Rahmawati & Hamidi, 2024) Empirical evidence indicates that the implementation of the Questions Students Have (QSH) strategy increased students' learning activeness from 39% to 84%, demonstrating that the effective use of instructional strategies plays a significant role in enhancing the quality of *Aqidah Akhlak* instruction.

In the context of Islamic education, the *Aqidah Akhlak* subject possesses distinctive characteristics that differentiate it from other disciplines, as it is oriented not only toward the acquisition of cognitive knowledge but also toward the internalization of Islamic values and the development of students' character. Consequently, *Aqidah Akhlak* teachers are expected to employ instructional strategies that effectively integrate knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors through active, contextual, and student-centered learning. Previous research has shown that (Amrullah et al., 2026) Empirical studies have shown that the implementation of the I2M3 instructional strategy characterized by interactive, inspiring, enjoyable, challenging, and motivating learning when integrated with an inquiry-based approach, significantly enhances students' engagement and fosters the development of critical thinking skills in *Aqidah Akhlak* education.

A number of previous studies have examined teachers' instructional strategies in *Aqidah Akhlak* education from various perspectives. A study by (Pratama & Ridwan, 2024) found that exemplary role modeling, active learning, emotional approaches, and social approaches contribute significantly to the development of students' character in *Madrasah Aliyah* (Islamic senior high schools). Another study (Hakim et al., 2024). Another study also revealed that the use of diverse instructional strategies effectively reduced students' learning boredom through effective classroom management, positive teacher-student communication, and continuous motivational support throughout the learning process. Meanwhile, a study by (Fauzan et al., 2025). emphasized that teachers' instructional strategies play a crucial role in addressing students' learning difficulties by providing individualized guidance, strengthening learning motivation, and adapting instructional methods to accommodate students' diverse characteristics.

A study by (Mahmudah et al., 2022) demonstrated that *Aqidah Akhlak* teachers who implemented the Discovery Learning and Problem-Based Learning (PBL) models were able to enhance students' engagement through the effective use of diverse instructional media, the formulation of measurable learning objectives, and the implementation of authentic assessment. These findings suggest that successful instruction is determined not only by the selection of appropriate teaching methods but also by teachers' ability to systematically design the entire instructional process, encompassing planning, implementation, and evaluation. This highlights that instructional strategy is a comprehensive and integrated process in which each component is interconnected and collectively contributes to the effectiveness of learning.

Another study conducted by (Marlina & Safriadi, 2023) revealed that active classroom management is a critical factor in enhancing students' learning engagement in *Aqidah Akhlak* education. Teachers fostered a supportive learning environment by providing continuous motivation, incorporating educational humor, promoting two-way interaction, and creating a conducive classroom atmosphere, thereby encouraging students to participate more confidently in questioning, discussions, and the expression of their ideas. Consistent with these findings, (Danuwara & Maghribi, 2023) reported that the implementation of active learning strategies significantly increased students' participation when supported by diverse instructional methods, collaborative learning activities, and opportunities for students to construct concepts independently.

In addition to active learning approaches, several studies have emphasized the importance of employing more specific instructional techniques to enhance students' engagement. (Arianto et al., 2025) found that the True or False Active Learning strategy positively influenced students' learning outcomes by encouraging critical thinking and promoting their direct involvement in the learning process. Meanwhile, (Roslaini et al., 2026) reported that the implementation of structured questioning fostered more equitable classroom participation while simultaneously enhancing students' higher-order moral reasoning in *Aqidah Akhlak* learning. These findings indicate that different instructional strategies contribute in distinct ways, depending on students' characteristics and the specific learning objectives to be achieved.

Beyond the implementation of active instructional strategies, students' character development is also influenced by teachers' ability to integrate role modeling, habituation, and value reinforcement throughout the learning process. (Padli & Darlis, 2023) emphasized that *Aqidah Akhlak* education plays a strategic role in developing well-rounded students through the application of various instructional methods, including dialogue, discussion, exemplary role modeling (*uswah hasanah*), habituation, and the provision of rewards and positive behavioral reinforcement. Accordingly, the success of *Aqidah Akhlak* instruction should not be assessed solely on the basis of students' academic achievement but also through observable changes in their attitudes and behaviors as evidence of the internalization of Islamic values.

The implementation of active instructional strategies has also been supported by various empirical studies conducted in *madrasahs*. (Agustin & Hidayat, 2025) explained that the application of active learning in *Aqidah Akhlak* instruction encourages students to engage in discussions, peer teaching, question-and-answer activities, and group inquiry, thereby creating more meaningful learning experiences. The findings indicated that students' active engagement contributes not only to a deeper

understanding of concepts but also to the development of greater responsibility for their own learning process. Accordingly, teachers are expected to serve not merely as transmitters of knowledge but as facilitators who guide students in constructing their own understanding through collaborative learning experiences.

Similar findings were reported by (Khoiruddin, 2024) who demonstrated that the implementation of active learning in *Aqidah Akhlak* instruction is most effective when supported by appropriate instructional media, active student participation, and teachers' competence in classroom management. The study also identified several challenges, including the heterogeneity of students' abilities and the limited availability of instructional resources. Meanwhile, (Roifa et al., 2026) found that integrating digital media into active learning significantly enhanced students' learning motivation, memorization skills, and moral practice through more interactive learning activities. These findings suggest that instructional strategies should be continuously adapted to technological advancements and the evolving characteristics of today's learners.

Despite these findings, the existing literature leaves several aspects insufficiently explained. Most previous studies have examined the implementation or outcomes of individual instructional models, such as active learning, problem-based learning, inquiry-based learning, or specific classroom techniques, without examining how teachers combine and sequence different strategies in response to students' diverse learning characteristics. As a result, the existing literature provides limited insight into how instructional strategies function as an adaptive and interconnected process rather than as isolated teaching methods. Furthermore, limited attention has been given to the relationship between instructional strategies, supporting and inhibiting factors, and teachers' adaptive responses within a single analytical framework. Empirical studies examining these aspects in the context of Madrasah Aliyah, particularly in Jambi Province, Indonesia, also remain limited. Therefore, a contextualized qualitative investigation is needed to understand not only what instructional strategies teachers employ, but also how these strategies are integrated, adapted, and supported within the classroom context to promote students' learning engagement.

In response to these research gaps, the present study aims to analyze how *Aqidah Akhlak* teachers integrate and adapt instructional strategies to promote students' learning engagement at Madrasah Aliyah Nurul Iman Ulu Gedong, Jambi City, Indonesia. The study also examines the supporting and inhibiting factors encountered during the implementation of these strategies and the adaptive efforts undertaken by teachers to address classroom challenges. The novelty of this study lies in conceptualizing teachers' instructional strategies as an adaptive and interconnected sequence rather than as isolated teaching methods. By examining the integration of instructional strategies alongside supporting and inhibiting factors and teachers' adaptive responses, this study provides a contextualized understanding of how active learning practices are organized to support students' engagement in *Aqidah Akhlak* education.

B. METHOD

This study employed a qualitative approach using a case study design to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the instructional strategies employed by *Aqidah Akhlak* teachers to enhance students' learning engagement at *Madrasah Aliyah Nurul Iman Ulu Gedong*, Jambi City, Indonesia. A qualitative approach was selected because it

enables researchers to explore the meanings, experiences, and processes underlying a phenomenon from the participants' perspectives within their natural setting. This approach facilitates an in-depth understanding of how instructional strategies are planned, implemented, and evaluated by teachers in their efforts to promote students' active engagement in learning. Meanwhile, the case study design was adopted because the research focused on a single case examined intensively, allowing for a holistic and contextualized portrayal of instructional practices within the *madrasah* environment (Creswell, J. W., & Poth, n.d.).

The study was conducted at *Madrasah Aliyah Nurul Iman Ulu Gedong*, Jambi City, Indonesia, which was purposively selected based on the consideration that the institution actively implements *Aqidah Akhlak* instruction through various strategies aimed at enhancing students' learning engagement. The selection of the research site also took into account data accessibility, institutional support, and the alignment of the *madrasah*'s characteristics with the objectives of the study. Research participants were selected using purposive sampling, a technique that identifies participants based on their knowledge, experience, and involvement in the phenomenon under investigation (Campbell et al., 2020). The participants consisted of *Aqidah Akhlak* teachers as the primary informants, the *madrasah* principal as a supporting informant, and students enrolled in *Aqidah Akhlak* classes. The inclusion of these three participant groups was intended to obtain multiple perspectives, thereby generating more comprehensive data and providing a holistic understanding of the implementation of instructional strategies.

Data were collected through classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis. Classroom observations were conducted during instructional activities to identify the strategies employed by teachers, examine the patterns of teacher–student interaction, and assess students' levels of learning engagement throughout the learning process. The observed aspects included students' participation in asking and answering questions, expressing opinions, engaging in discussions, completing learning tasks, and collaborating in group activities. Subsequently, semi-structured interviews were conducted with all participants using an interview protocol developed in accordance with the research objectives. This interview format was selected because it provided the researcher with the flexibility to explore participants' perspectives in greater depth while ensuring that the predetermined key topics were systematically addressed. In addition, document analysis served as a complementary source of data through the examination of teaching modules, instructional materials, lesson plans (*Rencana Pelaksanaan Pembelajaran* [RPP] or teaching modules), student attendance records, photographs of classroom activities, and other documents relevant to the implementation of *Aqidah Akhlak* instruction. The use of multiple data collection methods was intended to generate rich data while enhancing the credibility of the findings through data triangulation.

The participants in this study consisted of one *Aqidah Akhlak* teacher, Drs. M. Din Rusli, and two student participants from Grade X at *Madrasah Aliyah Nurul Iman Ulu Gedong*, Jambi City, Indonesia. The teacher was selected because of his direct involvement in teaching *Aqidah Akhlak*, while the two student participants were selected purposively based on their roles in the classroom community. The student participants were Assy Fadliansyah, the Chairperson of the Student Council (OSIS), and

Miftahurrosyidin, the Grade X male class leader. The madrasah has a total of 180 students distributed across six classes.

Data were collected through two classroom observations and three semi-structured interview sessions. The first observation was conducted on November 10, 2025, to familiarize the researcher with the school environment and classroom setting. The second observation was conducted on January 28, 2026, focusing on the learning process and instructional practices. The fieldwork was conducted for approximately three months, from November 10, 2025, to January 31, 2026.

The semi-structured interviews were conducted in three sessions on January 3, January 11, and January 30, 2026, with each session lasting approximately 30 minutes. The interviews focused on the teacher's instructional strategies, students' learning engagement, supporting and inhibiting factors, and the teacher's efforts to address challenges in the learning process.

The researcher served as the primary research instrument (*human instrument*), while observation guidelines, interview protocols, and document review checklists functioned as supporting instruments. As the primary instrument, the researcher was responsible for designing the study, selecting participants, collecting and analyzing the data, and interpreting the research findings. All supporting instruments were developed based on indicators derived from the research objectives to ensure a systematic data collection process while allowing sufficient flexibility for the researcher to identify and explore emerging issues throughout the course of the study.

Data trustworthiness was established through the application of source triangulation, methodological triangulation, and member checking. Source triangulation was conducted by comparing information obtained from teachers, the *madrasah* principal, and students to ensure data consistency. Methodological triangulation was implemented by comparing the findings from observations, interviews, and document analysis regarding the same phenomenon, allowing the collected information to reinforce one another. Furthermore, member checking was conducted by reconfirming interview transcripts and data interpretations with the participants to ensure that the findings accurately represented their experiences and perspectives. These procedures were implemented to enhance the credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability of the research findings, thereby ensuring a high level of trustworthiness (Nowell et al., 2017)

Data analysis was conducted interactively by referring to the model developed by (Miles et al., n.d.) The analysis process began during the data collection phase and continued systematically throughout the completion of the study. The first stage involved data condensation, which refers to the process of selecting, focusing, simplifying, and organizing data obtained from observations, interviews, and document analysis in accordance with the research objectives. The second stage was **data display**, in which the collected data were organized into descriptive narratives, matrices, and tables to facilitate the identification of patterns, relationships, and emerging trends among the data. The final stage involved drawing and verifying conclusions, where the researcher interpreted the research findings based on the identified categories and themes, followed by continuous verification through comparisons among observation results, interview data, and document analysis findings. Through these stages, the study generated systematic and credible findings that addressed the research objectives concerning *Aqidah Akhlak* teachers' instructional strategies in enhancing students'

learning engagement at *Madrasah Aliyah Nurul Iman Ulu Gedong*, Jambi City, Indonesia.

C. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Instructional Strategies Employed by *Aqidah Akhlak* Teachers to Enhance Students' Learning Engagement

The findings of this study indicate that *Aqidah Akhlak* teachers at *Madrasah Aliyah Nurul Iman Ulu Gedong*, Jambi City, Indonesia, do not rely on a single instructional method but instead integrate interactive lectures, question-and-answer sessions, and group discussions within a single instructional sequence. Based on the results of observations and interviews, these three strategies are implemented sequentially, beginning with the delivery of concepts through interactive lectures, followed by question-and-answer activities to identify students' prior understanding, and concluding with group discussions as a means of deepening comprehension while developing students' critical thinking and collaborative skills. This pattern demonstrates that teachers adapt their instructional strategies to the characteristics of *Aqidah Akhlak* content, enabling students not only to receive information but also to actively construct their understanding through interaction during the learning process.

These findings suggest that students' learning engagement is developed through the integration of multiple instructional strategies rather than through the application of a single method. At the initial stage, interactive lectures function as a form of scaffolding by providing a conceptual foundation for the learning material. Subsequently, question-and-answer sessions are utilized to establish two-way communication and identify students' levels of understanding. After students acquire initial comprehension, teachers facilitate learning through group discussions, providing opportunities for students to exchange ideas, present arguments, and solve problems collaboratively. Therefore, each instructional strategy serves a distinct function while complementing one another in enhancing students' learning engagement.

These findings support the study by (Toha, 2018a) which demonstrated that the implementation of **active learning** in Islamic Religious Education (*Pendidikan Agama Islam*) enhances students' engagement by providing broader opportunities for interaction and active participation during the learning process. However, this study provides a more specific insight by revealing that instructional effectiveness is not solely determined by the implementation of active learning in general, but also by teachers' ability to combine various instructional strategies according to different stages of learning. In other words, interactive lectures, question-and-answer sessions, and group discussions serve different pedagogical functions; therefore, their integrated implementation produces a more optimal impact on students' learning engagement.

These findings are also consistent with the research conducted by (Ilmawan & Tumin, 2024) which stated that small group discussions can improve the quality of Islamic Religious Education learning by increasing students' participation in the learning process. Nevertheless, unlike the previous study, which focused on the effectiveness of group discussions as an individual instructional strategy, this study reveals that group discussions generate more optimal outcomes when preceded by interactive lectures and question-and-answer activities. Thus, group discussions do not function independently but rather constitute an integral component of an interconnected instructional strategy.

The findings of this study further support the research conducted by (Supriadi et al., 2025) in *Edukasi Islami*, which emphasized that the implementation of active learning contributes to improving students' learning outcomes in Islamic education. However, this study provides a new perspective by demonstrating that the success of active learning is not solely determined by the types of instructional methods employed, but also by teachers' ability to manage transitions between instructional strategies, ensuring that students remain actively engaged throughout each stage of the learning process. These findings highlight that teachers serve as facilitators who guide the learning process progressively, beginning with conceptual understanding and extending toward the development of students' critical thinking and collaborative skills.

Based on the overall findings, it can be understood that the strategies employed by *Aqidah Akhlak* teachers to enhance students' learning engagement do not merely involve the application of various instructional methods, but rather the construction of an active learning cycle consisting of concept delivery, reinforcement through dialogue, and knowledge construction through collaboration. This model represents a significant contribution of the present study, as it demonstrates that students' learning engagement emerges from the systematic integration of multiple instructional strategies designed in accordance with the characteristics of the learning material and students' needs.

Supporting Factors in Teachers' Strategies for Enhancing Students' Learning Engagement

The findings of this study indicate that the success of *Aqidah Akhlak* teachers in enhancing students' learning engagement is influenced not only by the instructional strategies implemented but also by several interrelated supporting factors. Based on the results of interviews and observations, these factors include the establishment of positive teacher student interactions, students' enthusiasm for participating in learning activities, and the implementation of diverse instructional strategies. These three factors contribute to creating a conducive learning environment, enabling students to become more confident in asking questions, expressing opinions, and participating in classroom discussions.

One of the primary supporting factors is the development of positive communication between teachers and students. Throughout the learning process, teachers provide opportunities for all students to ask questions, express their opinions, and respond to the learning materials being discussed. This approach encourages students to feel valued, thereby increasing their confidence to participate actively in classroom activities. Teachers also attempt to create an open classroom atmosphere by providing constructive feedback on students' responses. This condition demonstrates that strong interpersonal relationships between teachers and students constitute an essential factor in enhancing learning engagement. This finding is consistent with previous studies on active learning, which indicate that teacher-student interaction is a fundamental element in fostering learning engagement and improving learning outcomes in Islamic Religious Education.

Another supporting factor is students' enthusiasm during the learning process. Based on classroom observations, most students demonstrated high levels of interest when teachers implemented question-and-answer activities and group discussions. Students actively expressed their ideas, responded to their peers' opinions, and

participated in completing collaborative tasks. This enthusiasm emerged because students were not merely positioned as recipients of information but were provided with opportunities to construct knowledge through more interactive learning experiences. This condition illustrates that students' emotional and cognitive engagement strengthens the effectiveness of the instructional strategies implemented by teachers. These findings are supported by previous research demonstrating that active learning can enhance student engagement through students' involvement in discussions, presentations, and collaborative activities.

Furthermore, variations in instructional strategies also serve as an important supporting factor. Teachers do not rely on a single instructional method but combine interactive lectures, question-and-answer sessions, and group discussions according to learning objectives and the characteristics of the subject matter. Such variations in instructional strategies help reduce students' learning boredom while providing opportunities for students with different learning preferences to participate actively. Students who tend to be passive during lecture-based activities may become more engaged during group discussions or question-and-answer sessions. Therefore, the implementation of varied instructional strategies provides space for all students to demonstrate their engagement throughout the learning process. This finding aligns with the study conducted by (Duhita & Rohman, 2025) which concluded that activity-based group learning strategies can enhance students' participation, collaboration, and confidence in expressing their opinions, thereby creating more meaningful learning experiences.

Based on these findings, it can be understood that the supporting factors underlying the success of teachers' instructional strategies are not limited to the selection of particular teaching methods but also involve teachers' ability to establish positive relationships with students, foster learning enthusiasm, and effectively manage diverse instructional strategies. These three factors complement one another in creating a participatory learning environment that encourages students to actively engage throughout the *Aqidah Akhlak* learning process. This finding reinforces the perspective that the success of active learning in Islamic Religious Education is influenced by the synergy between teacher competence, student engagement, and adaptive instructional strategy management.

Challenges in Implementing Teachers' Strategies to Enhance Students' Learning Engagement

The findings of this study indicate that although teachers have implemented various instructional strategies aimed at enhancing students' learning engagement, their implementation still encounters several challenges. Based on the results of interviews and observations, the main challenge identified was the diversity of students' academic abilities and individual characteristics. These differences influence students' learning pace, confidence in expressing opinions, and levels of participation throughout the learning process. Consequently, teachers are required to adjust their instructional strategies to ensure that all students can participate in learning activities optimally.

Differences in academic abilities were reflected in the fact that some students were able to comprehend the learning materials quickly, while others required more detailed explanations and gradual guidance. This condition required teachers to repeat explanations or provide additional examples to ensure that all students achieved a

similar level of understanding. During group discussion activities, students with higher academic abilities tended to dominate the discussion, whereas students with lower abilities often preferred to remain passive listeners. Such situations may limit opportunities for all students to participate actively in the learning process.

In addition to academic ability, differences in students' personal characteristics also influenced their learning engagement. Classroom observations revealed that some students demonstrated high levels of self-confidence, enabling them to actively ask questions and express their opinions, while others tended to remain passive due to uncertainty about the accuracy of their responses. These differences resulted in unequal levels of participation, despite teachers providing equal opportunities for all students. This condition indicates that learning engagement is not solely determined by the instructional strategies employed but is also influenced by students' psychological and social factors. This finding is consistent with previous research emphasizing that individual characteristics represent a significant factor in the successful implementation of active learning, as students possess different levels of learning readiness and self-confidence (Toha, 2018b)

These challenges also affected the effectiveness of group discussion implementation. The findings revealed that teachers still encountered unequal participation within groups, where only several students actively contributed ideas, while other members tended to follow the outcomes of discussions without making meaningful contributions. This condition demonstrates that collaborative learning does not always operate effectively when teachers are unable to accommodate differences in students' abilities and characteristics. Therefore, teachers need to manage group composition and interaction patterns appropriately to ensure that each student receives equal opportunities to participate. This finding is supported by (Ilmawan & Tumin, 2024) who stated that the success of small group discussions is strongly influenced by teachers' ability to manage group dynamics and ensure the active involvement of all group members throughout the learning process.

The findings of this study further demonstrate that challenges in enhancing students' learning engagement should not be interpreted as weaknesses in the instructional strategies implemented by teachers. Instead, these challenges highlight that the implementation of active learning requires teachers' ability to accommodate the diverse characteristics of students. Therefore, teachers are not only expected to master various instructional methods but also to possess pedagogical competence in identifying individual learning needs and adapting instructional strategies flexibly. This finding strengthens the results of (Duhita & Rohman, 2025) who emphasized that successful student engagement is influenced by teachers' ability to create inclusive learning environments and provide equitable learning opportunities for all students.

Overall, this study demonstrates that differences in students' academic abilities and personal characteristics represent the primary challenges in developing learning engagement in *Aqidah Akhlak* instruction. Nevertheless, these challenges do not diminish the effectiveness of the instructional strategies implemented by teachers; rather, they serve as a basis for teachers to adapt their approaches according to students' diverse learning needs. Therefore, the success of active learning is determined not only by the selection of instructional methods but also by teachers' ability to pedagogically manage student diversity, ensuring that all learners can participate optimally throughout the learning process.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that *Aqidah Akhlak* teachers at *Madrasah Aliyah Nurul Iman Ulu Gedong*, Jambi City, Indonesia, employ various instructional strategies to enhance students' learning engagement, including interactive lectures, question-and-answer methods, and group discussions. These three strategies are not implemented separately but are integrated systematically throughout the learning process. Interactive lectures function to provide conceptual understanding, question-and-answer activities are utilized to establish interaction and assess students' comprehension, while group discussions serve as a medium for developing critical thinking, communication, and collaboration skills. The integration of these strategies has been proven effective in creating a more active, participatory, and student-centered learning environment.

The successful implementation of these instructional strategies is supported by positive teacher–student communication, students' high levels of enthusiasm, and teachers' ability to vary instructional methods according to the characteristics of learning materials and students' needs. Nevertheless, this study also identified challenges related to differences in students' academic abilities and personal characteristics, which influence their levels of participation during learning activities. To address these challenges, teachers employ various efforts, including implementing diverse instructional methods, providing learning motivation, and conducting regular evaluations to ensure that all students receive equal learning opportunities.

The main contribution of this study lies in the finding that students' learning engagement is not merely influenced by the application of a single instructional method, but rather by the systematic and adaptive integration of multiple instructional strategies aligned with students' characteristics. This finding reinforces the importance of teachers' roles as facilitators who not only deliver learning materials but also manage interaction, collaboration, and students' involvement throughout the learning process. Therefore, this study recommends that Islamic Religious Education teachers continue to develop innovative and flexible instructional strategies to create more active and meaningful learning experiences. Future studies are encouraged to investigate the implementation of active learning strategies in different *madrasah* contexts or employ quantitative and mixed-methods approaches to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing students' learning engagement.

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approving the final version of the manuscript and agreed to be accountable for all aspects of the work.

Data availability: The data supporting the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request. The data are not publicly available to protect the privacy and confidentiality of the research participants.

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