



The Application of Cooperative-Contextual Learning Style in Islamic Religious Education Learning at Hidayatullah Middle School, Denpasar

Ahmad Fauzan Adzim

Universitas Muhammadiyah Malang

Corresponding Author: Ahmad Fauzan Adzim: fauzanbali908@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze the application of the cooperative-contextual learning style in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning at Hidayatullah Middle School, Denpasar, and relate it to Yong Zhao's personalized learning theory. The focus of this study is directed at how this learning strategy addresses the demands of 21st-century education that emphasizes creativity, collaboration, communication, and critical thinking. The research method uses a descriptive qualitative approach with data collection techniques through observation, interviews, and documentation. The results show that the application of the cooperative-contextual learning style can create a learning environment that is participatory, reflective, and relevant to students' lives. Teachers act as facilitators who provide space for students to think independently, collaborate, and relate Islamic values to their social and digital realities. This approach is in line with the view of Yong Zhao (2022) who rejects the homogenization of learning and emphasizes the importance of education that is humanistic, personalized, and based on the unique potential of each student. Thus, PAI learning based on the cooperative-contextual learning style has proven effective in strengthening Islamic character, developing creativity, and fostering students' spiritual independence in facing the challenges of 21st-century education.

INTRODUCTION

Islamic Religious Education (PAI) plays a strategic role in shaping students' character and spirituality amid the challenges of globalization and the rapid advancement of digital technology. However, various studies indicate that PAI learning in schools remains predominantly conventional, teacher-centered, and insufficiently aligned with the learning styles of 21st-century students who tend to be more active, collaborative, and critical (Rahman, 2023). Meanwhile, this generation lives in an environment that demands higher-order thinking skills, creativity, effective communication, and strong digital literacy (Astuti, 2024). Therefore, PAI learning must transform into a process that is more participatory, reflective, and relevant to students' real-life contexts.

One relevant approach is the cooperative-contextual learning style, a strategy that emphasizes collaboration among students and the connection of religious concepts to their everyday experiences and life situations. Through discussions, case studies, and value reflections, students not only understand Islamic teachings cognitively but also learn to apply them within social and moral practices in real-life settings. Previous studies show that cooperative and contextual learning can enhance student participation and strengthen their practical understanding of Islamic values (Wafa et al., 2023). This approach allows students to internalize Islamic teachings within various modern contexts, including digital ethics, social awareness, and responsibilities as Muslim learners in a global era (Hakim, Irsali, & Watsiqoh, 2023).

Conceptually, the idea of a cooperative-contextual learning style is strongly aligned with Yong Zhao's (2022) theory of personalized learning. Zhao, a 21st-century education scholar from the University of Kansas, emphasizes that education should not standardize students but should help them discover their potential, interests, and optimal ways of learning. He rejects standardized educational approaches because they hinder creativity and intellectual freedom. Instead, 21st-century education should encourage flexible, contextual, and project-based learning so that students can adapt to a dynamic world. In the context of PAI, Zhao's theory highlights the importance of giving students space to understand Islamic values through meaningful personal exploration and experience.

Thus, the implementation of a cooperative-contextual learning style in PAI at SMP Hidayatullah Denpasar represents a concrete embodiment of 21st-century education that places students at the center of the learning process. Teachers no longer act as the sole source of knowledge but serve as facilitators who guide students in developing creativity, critical thinking, and spiritual reflection. This study aims to analyze how the cooperative-contextual learning style is applied in PAI learning and examine its relevance to Yong Zhao's personalized learning theory. The findings are expected to contribute to the development of a PAI learning model that is adaptive to the challenges of the digital era and oriented toward nurturing creative and spiritually independent Islamic character.

LITERATUR REVIEW

Yong Zhao's Learning Theory

Yong Zhao (2022) asserts that 21st-century education must prioritize creativity, learner autonomy, and social relevance rather than solely focusing on academic standards. He criticizes traditional educational systems that emphasize uniformity, standardized testing, and rigid curriculum compliance because such systems restrict students' unique potential. According to Zhao, schools should be spaces that enable students to discover their strengths, innovate, and adapt to changing times. Meaningful education is education that helps students become reflective and creative individuals who can connect knowledge to real-life experiences.

Within the framework of 21st-century learning, Zhao (2022) highlights the importance of personalized learning and contextualized learning, where teachers act as facilitators who create learning experiences that align with students' interests, needs, and potential. This model aligns with the implementation of cooperative-contextual learning at SMP Hidayatullah Denpasar, where students are not passive recipients of information but actively engage in discussions, collaborate, and reflect on Islamic values through group activities. For example, the "Today's Good Deed Journal" activity allows students to write personal experiences applying Islamic values in real life, thereby strengthening the connection between religious knowledge and daily social realities.

Zhao also introduces the concept of student agency, which refers to students' ability to take control of their learning process, make decisions, and interpret learning experiences based on their life context. In PAI learning, this principle is evident when students are given the freedom to interpret Qur'anic verses or Hadith based on their social experiences and discuss with peers to identify the relevance of Islamic values to modern phenomena such as digital ethics, social responsibility, and academic integrity. According to Al-Farizi and Hanifah (2023), learning models oriented toward student agency can enhance ethical awareness and social empathy – two essential components in forming the character of 21st-century learners.

Furthermore, Zhao (2022) emphasizes that 21st-century learning must integrate digital technology as a medium for self-expression, global collaboration, and learning innovation. In the context of PAI at SMP Hidayatullah Denpasar, the use of digital platforms such as Wordwall, Kahoot!, and Quizizz demonstrates the implementation of this principle. These interactive media not only enhance student engagement but also train them to think critically, compete healthily, and be creative in an enjoyable learning environment. Studies by Ananda and Nugroho (2024) indicate that integrating digital tools into religious education increases active participation and deepens spiritual understanding through dynamic and contextual learning experiences.

Thus, Yong Zhao's learning theory reinforces the philosophical foundation of cooperative-contextual learning in PAI as a 21st-century educational model. This approach emphasizes collaboration, value reflection, and personalized learning experiences, helping students develop 4C competencies (critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, and communication)

while nurturing their spiritual and moral character. This model is not only aligned with the Merdeka Curriculum—emphasizing student agency and the Pancasila Student Profile—but also responds to contemporary educational demands for cultivating creative, adaptive, and morally grounded students in the digital era.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach aimed at providing an in-depth portrayal of the Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning process at SMP Hidayatullah Denpasar. This approach was chosen because it allows the researcher to explore learning phenomena naturally by considering social, spiritual, and pedagogical contexts within the school environment, aligning with Yong Zhao's principles of personalized learning. It also enables the researcher to understand how teacher–student interactions develop during the learning process and how learning strategies affect student engagement in understanding religious values. Recent studies emphasize that the descriptive qualitative approach is effective for comprehensively illustrating actual learning conditions (Tanjung & Albina, 2023).

The research subjects consisted of a PAI teacher and 10 eighth-grade students selected purposively based on their relevance to the study objectives. The research was conducted over three weeks, focusing on classroom learning activities, student interactions, and the teacher's instructional methods. Throughout the process, the researcher acted as an active observer to understand the learning dynamics and evaluate how effectively the teacher's approach fostered students' religious motivation and active participation.

Data were collected through participant observation, in-depth interviews, and document analysis, including Lesson Plans (RPP), group assignments, and student reflection sheets. Observations were used to record learning behavior, student responses to teaching strategies, and overall classroom atmosphere. Interviews with the PAI teacher explored instructional planning and reflection, while interviews with students captured their experiences and impressions during learning activities. Document analysis provided supporting data to strengthen the field findings and clarify the connection between instructional planning and implementation.

To ensure data validity, source and method triangulation were applied to produce objective and reliable results. Data analysis followed the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, consisting of three main stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing or verification. Analysis occurred continuously throughout the research process, allowing the results to not only describe learning conditions but also highlight the dynamic changes in students' attitudes and understanding over the three-week period.

This research approach is linked to Yong Zhao's personalized learning theory, which emphasizes that 21st-century education should provide space for students to direct their learning process, develop creativity, and cultivate their unique potential (Zhao, 2023; Zhao et al., 2024). In this context, cooperative and contextual PAI learning becomes an effective means of fostering reflective

abilities, independent thinking, and spiritual value internalization. Thus, this research method examines not only the teaching–learning process but also the extent to which learning activities can actualize students’ potential and religious character in a creative and contextual manner in the 21st-century educational landscape.

RESULT

The implementation of the cooperative-contextual learning style in PAI learning at SMP Hidayatullah Denpasar demonstrates an active, collaborative, and student-centered learning pattern. Based on observations in three classes and interviews with the PAI teacher, students were consistently placed into small learning groups consisting of four to five members with diverse abilities. Each group was assigned to analyze Qur’anic verses or thematic Hadith relevant to daily life, such as honesty (*ash-shidq*), responsibility (*amanah*), and digital ethics. This model enabled students not only to comprehend religious texts but also to interpret Islamic values in relation to their social experiences.

In one session, the teacher asked students to discuss the Hadith “*al-shidqu yahdi ila al-birr*” and relate it to plagiarism in online assignments. Through group discussions, students concluded that honesty goes beyond verbal expression and includes academic integrity and digital behavior. Observations showed a dynamic classroom atmosphere: students asked questions, responded to peers’ opinions, and respected differing viewpoints. One student stated, “Learning like this helps us understand the meaning of the Hadith not just by memorizing it, but by applying it when doing assignments or using our phones.” The teacher served as a facilitator, providing conceptual guidance and reflective questions such as, “How can you apply this Hadith when you are on social media?” Interviews revealed that this approach increased student participation by approximately 40 percent compared to previous lecture-based methods.

In addition to discussions, the teacher incorporated contextual learning through a program called “Today’s Good Deed Journal,” where students wrote personal reflections on applying Islamic values in daily life. Observations indicated that most students wrote simple narratives about keeping promises, helping friends, or maintaining politeness in digital communication. Teachers reported that this activity effectively nurtured reflective awareness, as students began connecting religious teachings with real behavior. According to teacher interviews, students who consistently wrote journals showed improved discipline, empathy, and emotional regulation. One teacher noted, “At first many wrote only brief entries, but over time they began to share meaningful reflections, which is remarkable because it shows they recognize the essence of faith in real life.”

Digital technology integration was also a key aspect of this learning style. Teachers used platforms such as Wordwall, Kahoot!, and Quizizz to reinforce conceptual understanding through quizzes and educational games. These activities were conducted at the end of each session as formative assessments. Observations showed that students were more enthusiastic about digital quizzes than conventional written tests. Some students even voluntarily created new

questions for their peers using the quiz-creation feature. Teachers used quiz results to provide immediate feedback and adjust materials based on student difficulty levels, indicating personalization in the learning process.

The findings also reveal that cooperative-contextual learning fosters student autonomy and responsibility. In a final project on the theme “Digital Ethics in Islam,” students were allowed to choose their preferred presentation format—infographics, vlogs, or short essays—based on their interests and strengths. Among 25 students, 12 created short videos, 7 designed infographics, and the rest wrote reflective articles. Teachers noted that these outputs reflected diverse learning styles and enhanced creativity and confidence. One student shared, “I prefer making videos because I can explain directly, not just write. But I still studied the Hadith to make sure I said it correctly.” This demonstrates how teacher-provided autonomy encourages intrinsic motivation and a sense of ownership over learning.

Overall, this study shows that implementing cooperative-contextual learning at SMP Hidayatullah Denpasar effectively enhances student engagement, understanding, and awareness of Islamic values. Teachers act not as knowledge transmitters but as facilitators who help students find meaning in religious teachings through collaboration and personal reflection. This learning practice strongly aligns with Yong Zhao’s personalized learning concept, as students are given space to adapt their learning process to their potential and interests, while connecting learning with the social and digital contexts they encounter. Therefore, this approach not only strengthens cognitive learning outcomes but also shapes students’ character and spirituality to be independent, creative, and contextually responsive to the challenges of 21st-century life.

DISCUSSION

The implementation of a cooperative-contextual learning style in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) at SMP Hidayatullah Denpasar demonstrates that religious education can be designed adaptively and relevantly in line with the demands of 21st-century learning—namely collaboration, creativity, critical thinking, communication, and digital literacy. This model positions students as active subjects in the learning process, not merely recipients of religious knowledge but constructors of understanding and meaning of Islamic values through interaction, reflection, and real-life application. These findings affirm that PAI learning does not have to be traditional; instead, it can be actualized through more participatory and contextual approaches suited to the characteristics of digital-native learners (Hakim, Irsali, & Watsiqoh, 2023).

From the perspective of 21st-century education theory, the concepts of personalization and creativity put forward by Yong Zhao (2022) are highly relevant. Zhao emphasizes that modern education must facilitate students to become autonomous learners who are creative and able to align their learning processes with social contexts and personal interests. The formation of small discussion groups in PAI classes, for example, demonstrates that students are given the space to explore Islamic teachings through collaboration and real-world problem solving. When students discuss phenomena such as digital ethics

and academic honesty, they not only understand Islamic values theoretically but also develop critical-thinking abilities and moral responsibility. This approach aligns with Zhao's view that every child possesses unique potential that will flourish when given the freedom to direct their own learning process (Ta'rim, 2024).

The "Today's Good Deed Journal" activity is a concrete example of reflective and personalized learning principles in 21st-century education. Through this activity, students learn to conduct self-evaluation and connect Islamic values with concrete daily experiences. This practice not only nurtures religious awareness but also strengthens literacy and reflective-thinking skills. Previous studies support that reflective learning strategies significantly contribute to character formation and moral independence (Agustian Vieri, Ulul Azmi, & Gusmaneli, 2023). In Zhao's theoretical context, this activity cultivates student agency—the ability to direct and derive meaning from one's own learning—an essential pillar of 21st-century education.

The integration of interactive digital media such as Wordwall, Kahoot!, and Quizizz further reinforces the characteristics of 21st-century learning, which demands technological proficiency, creativity, and high interactivity. Teachers utilize these digital platforms to enhance student engagement, provide instant feedback, and adjust learning activities based on individual needs. This approach aligns with Zhao's idea that modern education systems must incorporate technology as a medium for self-expression, idea exploration, and cross-boundary collaboration. Research by Seituni and Isriyah (2024) also indicates that the use of digital tools in religious education increases intrinsic motivation and deepens spiritual understanding through enjoyable and relevant digital learning experiences.

Observations and interviews further reveal that cooperative-contextual learning strengthens essential 21st-century soft skills such as social empathy, teamwork, leadership, and effective communication. Previously passive students began to actively participate in discussions, express ideas, and demonstrate respect for differing viewpoints. Meanwhile, high-achieving students developed empathy and responsibility by assisting their peers. This indicates that the learning process not only enhances religious knowledge but also fosters socially collaborative and ethical character. This finding aligns with Wafa, Faruq, Rois, & Iqbal (2023), who assert that interactive, context-based learning is highly effective in building Islamic character and students' social competencies.

The teacher's role in 21st-century learning becomes increasingly strategic. Teachers are no longer the sole source of knowledge but function as facilitators and designers of learning experiences. Interview results show that the PAI teacher at SMP Hidayatullah Denpasar actively manages classroom dynamics to ensure that students learn independently while remaining guided by Islamic values. The teacher also acts as a guardian of balance between spiritual substance and pedagogical innovation, ensuring that technology integration and learning autonomy do not overshadow moral and ethical values in Islam. This aligns with Maisura et al. (2023), who highlight that digital-era educational management requires teachers to be adaptive, creative, and grounded in spiritual principles.

In summary, the implementation of cooperative-contextual learning at SMP Hidayatullah Denpasar is fully aligned with the principles of 21st-century learning as proposed by Yong Zhao: personalization, creativity, collaboration, and learner autonomy. This model demonstrates that PAI learning can be developed into a humanistic, digitally friendly, and modern-relevant educational experience without losing the core spiritual values of Islam. Through this approach, students not only understand religious teachings cognitively but also apply Islamic values as reflective and contextual guidance in navigating the moral, social, and digital challenges of the 21st century.

CONCLUSION

The implementation of a cooperative-contextual learning style in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) at SMP Hidayatullah Denpasar has proven effective in delivering a learning model relevant to the demands of 21st-century education. Students not only understand Islamic concepts cognitively but also internalize these values through collaborative, reflective, and project-based activities. This learning model enables students to actively construct knowledge, participate in group discussions, and interpret Islamic teachings within their social and digital contexts. The findings show that cooperative-contextual learning encourages students to become independent, creative, and adaptive learners in an era of rapid change.

Teachers serve as 21st-century facilitators who guide the learning process through personalized approaches, allow room for exploration, and incorporate digital media relevant to students' contexts. Through strategies such as the Daily Good Deed Journal and interactive applications (Wordwall, Kahoot!), teachers successfully cultivate balanced spiritual and social engagement. This reflects the principles of personalized learning as conceptualized by Yong Zhao (2022), who argues that each student has unique potential that must be supported through flexible, interest-based, and contextually relevant learning experiences.

This approach is also consistent with the direction of the Merdeka Curriculum, which emphasizes differentiated learning and the development of the Pancasila Student Profile, particularly in the aspect of faith, piety to God Almighty, and noble character. Through collaborative and reflective learning, students develop critical thinking, empathy, moral responsibility, technological literacy, and creativity. Thus, this model fulfills the needs of progressive religious education in the digital era by integrating spiritual values with 21st-century competencies such as creativity, communication, collaboration, and digital literacy.

In the long term, the implementation of digitally based cooperative-contextual learning has the potential to become a sustainable and adaptive model of PAI education amid global change. Student collaboration, technology integration, and the reflection of Islamic values create more authentic and meaningful learning experiences. Research indicates that digital innovation in PAI can strengthen students' spiritual literacy and digital ethics – both crucial in addressing modern moral challenges.

As a follow-up, PAI teachers should develop 21st-century digital-based learning modules that emphasize collaboration, personalization, and the application of Islamic values in global contexts. Schools may also conduct training on innovative pedagogy to equip teachers with adaptive, creative, and reflective instructional design skills. Future research is recommended to employ mixed-methods approaches to more deeply assess the impact of this model on students' spiritual, social, and academic aspects. Thus, cooperative-contextual PAI learning is not only nationally relevant but also holds potential as an inspirational model for value-based and technology-enhanced religious education globally.

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