

# Research-Based Pedagogy in Islamic Religious Education: Insights from Madrasah Aliyah Salafiyah Menganti Gresik

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**Abstract**

The learning process is a fundamental component of educational success, facilitating meaningful interaction between facilitators and students. In today's dynamic educational landscape, research-based learning has emerged as a progressive method adopted by various schools, including MA Salafiyah Menganti Gresik. This study explores the implementation of research-based Islamic Religious Education (PAI) at the school, focusing on four key areas: planning, implementation, evaluation, and challenges. Using a qualitative descriptive approach, data were collected through observation (both overt and covert), structured interviews, and documentation, and analyzed using an interactive model comprising data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The findings reveal that research-based PAI learning is planned through the development of syllabi or lesson plans (RPP), the provision of learning media, and the allocation of specific instructional hours across grades 10 to 12. Its implementation incorporates inquiry-based and problem-based learning (PBL) models to foster critical thinking and problem-solving skills through discussions and interactive questioning. Evaluation is conducted through daily assessments and a final munaqosyah session where students present and defend their research. However, several challenges remain, particularly regarding limited infrastructure, access to references, and the scope of the learning environment.

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**Abstrak**

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Proses pembelajaran merupakan komponen mendasar dari keberhasilan pendidikan, yang memfasilitasi interaksi yang bermakna antara fasilitator dan siswa. Dalam lanskap pendidikan yang dinamis saat ini, pembelajaran berbasis penelitian telah muncul sebagai metode progresif yang diadopsi oleh berbagai sekolah, termasuk MA Salafiyah Menganti Gresik. Penelitian ini mengeksplorasi implementasi Pendidikan Agama Islam (PAI) berbasis penelitian di sekolah tersebut, dengan fokus pada empat bidang utama: perencanaan, implementasi, evaluasi, dan tantangan. Dengan menggunakan pendekatan deskriptif kualitatif, data dikumpulkan melalui observasi (baik yang terbuka maupun yang tersembunyi), wawancara terstruktur, dan dokumentasi, dan dianalisis menggunakan model interaktif yang terdiri dari reduksi data, tampilan data, dan penarikan kesimpulan. Temuan penelitian mengungkapkan bahwa pembelajaran PAI berbasis penelitian direncanakan melalui pengembangan silabus atau rencana pelajaran (RPP), penyediaan media pembelajaran, dan alokasi jam pelajaran khusus di seluruh kelas 10 hingga 12. Implementasinya menggabungkan model pembelajaran berbasis penyelidikan dan pembelajaran berbasis masalah (PBL) untuk menumbuhkan pemikiran kritis dan keterampilan memecahkan masalah melalui diskusi dan pertanyaan interaktif. Evaluasi dilakukan melalui penilaian harian dan sesi munaqosyah akhir di mana mahasiswa mempresentasikan dan mempertahankan hasil penelitiannya. Namun, masih terdapat beberapa tantangan, terutama terkait keterbatasan infrastruktur, akses ke referensi, dan cakupan lingkungan belajar. .

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## INTRODUCTION

The learning process is one of the most crucial elements in achieving educational success. It is during this process that meaningful interactions occur between facilitators and students (Muali et al., 2021). Through such interactions, facilitators can recognize the unique characteristics and capabilities of each learner (A'yunin et al., 2022; Huda et al., 2022). Likewise, students are given the opportunity to develop their full potential. Education today is no longer merely about providing stimuli; rather, it is a conscious effort to nurture and empower learners to build their own knowledge through active learning experiences.

Based on interviews conducted by the researcher, MA Salafiyah Menganti Gresik has participated in scientific writing competitions and even won awards, earning recognition from the Ministry of Religious Affairs of Gresik as a "research-based school." In contrast, learning processes in many educational institutions still tend to be teacher-centered. Students are often passive – merely listening to the teacher, reading textbooks, and memorizing content without experiencing the learning material directly (Arif, 2025). They are taught abstract ideas without being exposed to real-life applications. This traditional approach often leads to boredom and disengagement among students. During field observations in several primary schools in Ponorogo and Magetan, the researcher found such methods still being practiced widely (Abdillah & Jannah, 2024).

At MA Salafiyah Menganti, however, a research-based learning model is applied where students are taught how to produce scientific research papers (Karya Tulis Ilmiah). In each research-based session, students explore real-world topics and integrate them into academic writing. A single research theme often covers multiple fields of knowledge, allowing students to gain diverse insights not only from their own investigations but also from their peers' research.

The research-based learning model is implemented from grades 10 through 12 and is conducted both individually and in groups, with facilitators acting as guides and mentors. According to interviews with staff and teachers, specific hours are allocated each week exclusively for research-focused learning to ensure students remain focused and undistracted (Abdussalam, 2021; Adi, 2021).

Observation data also revealed that the implementation of this model requires students to be disciplined in completing assignments and to collaborate actively when sourcing references for their research papers. The cultivation of these soft skills is as important as the content knowledge they acquire. The issues that prompted this study emerged from the researcher's observations during internships (PPL), community service programs (KKN), and teaching experiences in different educational settings. In many cases, students were not given the opportunity to think creatively or to explore multiple solutions to a

given problem. Students were treated uniformly, with standardized thinking models and homogenized learning processes, leaving little room for intellectual independence.

As for the targets and challenges in implementing research-based PAI learning (Abidin et al., 2022; Arif et al., 2025), the primary objectives include improving writing skills, encouraging habitual reading of journals and academic articles, expanding knowledge and literacy, and enhancing problem-solving abilities. On the other hand, the challenges encountered include limited media resources, students' lack of background knowledge, underdeveloped vocabulary, insufficient reading habits, and difficulties in processing and articulating their ideas effectively.

## **RESEARCH METHOD**

This study on the implementation of research-based Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning at MA Salafiyah Menganti Gresik employed a qualitative research method. Qualitative research is often referred to as naturalistic research because it is conducted in a natural setting. Despite its flexible and contextual nature, qualitative research remains systematic and scientific, similar to quantitative research in its rigor and structure (Arif et al., 2021; Jesica Dwi Rahmayanti & Muhamad Arif, 2021).

In this study, data and information were gathered from respondents using interviews and observations as primary data collection techniques. Once the data were collected, they were presented descriptively and then analyzed in depth (Yin, 2018). The research design adopted was a qualitative case study approach, chosen because the research problem required a detailed exploration of the actual conditions and practices in the field. This approach enabled the researcher to describe, explain, and interpret how research-based learning is truly implemented in the context of MA Salafiyah Menganti Gresik.

## **RESEARCH RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Research-Based PAI Learning Planning at MA Salafiyah Menganti Gresik**

The planning of research-based learning in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) at MA Salafiyah Menganti Gresik is structured into four essential components: (1) the development of syllabus and lesson plans (RPP), (2) the provision of learning media, (3) the involvement of students from grades 10 through 12, and (4) the allocation of specific learning hours for research instruction. These components serve as the foundational elements that support the successful implementation of a research-oriented pedagogy within a religious educational context.

The most critical aspect of this planning phase is the preparation for students to produce scientific research papers (Karya Tulis Akhir or KTA), which serve as both a learning process and a graduation requirement. Mrs. Lailatul Fadillah, a PAI teacher, explained:

“Planning for research-based learning begins with ensuring that each class has a structured syllabus and an RPP aligned with research competencies. We don't want the concept of research to be abstract – we want it to be embedded from the start.”

Mr. Dwi Rahmanto, a teacher and curriculum coordinator, added:

“We dedicate weekly sessions solely to research development. These are not regular classes; they are workshops where students are coached on writing, referencing, and academic integrity.”

Ms. Fitria Hapsari, a grade 12 homeroom teacher, stated:

“The media and materials we prepare, such as journals, digital tools, and PowerPoint templates, help students visualize how real research works. These resources are essential scaffolding for their academic journey.”

### **Implementation of Research-Based Learning in PAI**

The implementation of research-based learning in PAI is grounded in authentic problem-solving derived from students' lived experiences. Students are encouraged to identify issues from their daily lives and analyze them through religious, ethical, and academic lenses. This process culminates in the writing of research papers, where students are trained to be disciplined, collaborative, and critical in their thinking.

From grade 10 onwards, students are gradually introduced to research concepts, with increasing complexity in grade 11 (qualitative and quantitative methods) and full execution of research projects in grade 12. The atmosphere in the classroom promotes peer collaboration in seeking references, exchanging ideas, and giving constructive feedback.

Mr. Hasan Alwi, a senior research mentor, observed:

“The moment students are asked to relate PAI concepts to real problems like social harmony, tolerance, or digital ethics they suddenly become more engaged. They see the relevance, and they want to contribute.”

Mrs. Nur Azizah, a grade 11 research supervisor, shared:

“The culture of research has made students more disciplined. Even when deadlines are tight, they collaborate, stay after class, and help each other. That's not something we used to see before.”

Mr. Rizky Maulana, a grade 12 student, noted:

“Writing the KTI taught me how to question things. It wasn't just about copying texts but learning how to explore and write something meaningful, with real data and religious insight.”

## **Evaluation of Research-Based PAI Learning**

Evaluation in the research-based PAI learning model at MA Salafiyah Menganti Gresik consists of daily formative assessments and a final summative evaluation known as munaqosyah. Teachers assess students daily to monitor the development of their research knowledge and ensure timely progress in writing their KTA. Each group of students is assigned a mentor teacher to guide the writing process and ensure academic quality.

The munaqosyah session is held for students who have completed their KTA and accompanying journal article. In this evaluation, students present their work using PowerPoint and defend their findings in front of a panel of teachers, closely simulating an academic thesis defense. Mrs. Ratna Dewi, a teacher evaluator, emphasized:

"Munaqosyah is more than a test. It's a celebration of how far they've come. You can see how proud they are when they can explain their topic confidently in front of the panel."

Mr. Yudha Setiawan, one of the assessors, noted:

"Our assessments are holistic. We evaluate not just the final product but also their consistency, collaboration, and attitude during the entire research process."

Ms. Rina Kurniasari, a grade 12 student, reflected:

"It was nerve-wracking to present, but it made me feel like a real researcher. The feedback from the teachers made me realize how much I had learned."

## **Challenges in Implementing Research-Based Learning**

Despite its strengths, the implementation of research-based learning at MA Salafiyah Menganti Gresik faces several challenges, particularly in the areas of infrastructure, reference availability, and access to digital resources. The limited number of laptops, the lack of a comprehensive digital library, and restricted internet access – available only in select classrooms – pose significant barriers for students, especially those residing in the boarding school environment.

The narrow scope of their research references, often confined to the immediate environment, limits their ability to conduct broader, comparative analysis. These limitations could affect not only the quality of student outputs but also the overall learning experience. Mr. Faiz Ramadhan, ICT support staff, explained:

"The lack of Wi-Fi in most classrooms slows down research. Students often queue just to download an article or upload their drafts."

Mrs. Diyanah Lestari, a research supervisor, said:

"They're motivated, but their tools are limited. We need a dedicated research room, more digital access, and reference books. Otherwise, we're limiting their potential."

Ms. Zahra Aminah, a student, remarked:

"Sometimes we can't finish on time because we have to share laptops. Or we can't find enough sources because we don't have digital journal access. We need more support if we're expected to think like researchers."

## DISCUSSION

The implementation of research-based learning in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) at MA Salafiyah Menganti Gresik reflects a well-organized and innovative educational practice aimed at equipping students with critical thinking skills, research literacy, and an inquiry-driven mindset. This approach begins with careful planning, progresses through meaningful and contextualized learning experiences, and is concluded with rigorous and authentic assessments.

The planning phase is initiated with the development of lesson plans (RPP) and syllabi that integrate research-based objectives into the learning outcomes (Abdurrahmansyah, 2017; Andini et al., 2020). Teachers, particularly those assigned as research instructors, such as Mrs. Nanda and Mrs. Adinda, emphasize the importance of using structured teaching materials including modules (Abdulkhaleq et al., 2021; Achmad et al., 2023), PowerPoint presentations, and samples of scholarly journals and books. These resources are designed to enhance students' understanding and engagement in the learning process. The planning also considers the allocation of dedicated instructional time for research activities, ensuring that students receive proper theoretical grounding before embarking on independent inquiry.

Implementation occurs across all grade levels grades 10, 11, and 12 with a progressive structure. Grade 10 students are introduced to the fundamentals of research, including how to develop research questions and write introductory sections of research papers. Grade 11 students delve deeper into qualitative and quantitative methodologies, while grade 12 students are required to complete full scientific papers as part of their graduation requirements. This culminates in a formal academic defense or *munaqosyah*, where students present and defend their work before a panel of evaluators, mirroring thesis defenses at the university level (Diana & Azani, 2024).

Teachers adopt Problem-Based Learning (PBL) and Inquiry-Based Learning models to stimulate students' analytical and investigative capabilities (Djazilan & Hariani, 2022; Ernawati et al., 2021). Students are encouraged to explore real-world problems, particularly those rooted in religious and social contexts, and are guided to develop evidence-based solutions. Observations reveal that students demonstrate enthusiasm and motivation, particularly during the final stages of their research projects. Collaboration is fostered through peer support systems where students work together in seeking references, brainstorming ideas, and refining their arguments.

Evaluation is conducted through daily formative assessments and the summative *munaqosyah* session (Agus et al., 2023; Arif, 2024). The former monitors students' daily progress, comprehension, and participation, while the latter serves as a capstone evaluation of their research competencies. Students must submit a research paper and an academic journal article before presenting their work using digital media

(e.g., PowerPoint slides) (Marlina et al., 2020). This comprehensive evaluation method ensures that students not only meet academic standards but also gain experience in scholarly communication.

However, several challenges were identified. The primary obstacles include limitations in infrastructure such as inadequate access to digital resources (Bohari, 2024; Fauzi, 2012), limited internet connectivity, and a narrow range of available references, particularly for boarding students whose exposure to external resources is restricted. These constraints hinder students' ability to conduct in-depth research and expand their knowledge beyond the immediate environment.

Despite these challenges, the research-based approach has cultivated essential soft skills among students (Diana & Azani, 2024), such as discipline, cooperation, and critical thinking. It has also instilled in them a heightened awareness of their social and religious surroundings. Teachers act more as facilitators and mentors rather than traditional instructors, guiding students through the research process and encouraging reflective, student-centered learning (Achmad et al., 2023; Arif et al., 2025).

In conclusion, the research-based Islamic Religious Education model implemented at MA Salafiyah Menganti Gresik represents a promising pedagogical innovation. It not only aligns with 21st-century education demands but also prepares students for academic life beyond secondary school (Abdullah & Ahmad, 2019). With improved infrastructure and increased access to scholarly resources, this model has the potential to be scaled and adapted to other Islamic educational institutions aiming to merge faith-based learning with academic inquiry.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, MA Salafiyah Menganti Gresik has implemented research-based Islamic Religious Education (PAI) by integrating structured lesson planning (RPP), using digital learning media such as laptops, PowerPoint presentations, and journal examples. The learning process follows inquiry-based and problem-based learning (PBL) models, promoting critical thinking and problem-solving through discussion and interactive dialogue. Formative evaluation is conducted throughout the learning process, both at the beginning and during instruction. Despite challenges such as limited infrastructure, the school demonstrates a strong commitment to equipping students with research skills, broadening their perspectives, and enhancing their academic writing abilities ultimately shaping students who are more literate, technologically competent, and intellectually independent.

Theoretically, this study enriches the discourse on constructivist and inquiry-based approaches in Islamic education, offering a concrete example of how faith-based schools can adopt research-oriented pedagogy. However, the research is limited by its single-institution focus and reliance on qualitative data. Nonetheless, the in-depth field engagement and triangulation of data sources

enhance its credibility. Future research should expand to include comparative and longitudinal studies across diverse educational contexts, and integrate quantitative methods to assess the long-term impacts of research-based learning on students' academic growth and personal development.

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