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IMPLEMENTATION OF THE TEACHING AT THE RIGHT LEVEL (TaRL) APPROACH IN IMPROVING STUDENTS' LEARNING INTEREST IN PAI SUBJECTS: A CASE STUDY AT SDN CIPEUYEUM 04 CIANJUR

Wati Irnawati[1*], Danabillah Ilmiah[2]
STAI Al-Azhary, Cianjur, Jawa Barat, Indonesia
watiirnawati@yahoo.com1,sainsdanabillah@gmail.coma
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ABSTRACT

This research is motivated by the phenomenon of low emotional involvement and interest of students in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning, especially in students who experience a lag in understanding the material compared to their peers. The purpose of this study is to describe in depth how the implementation of the Teaching at the Right Level (TaRL) approach is implemented and analyze the dynamics of changes in student learning interest after this approach is implemented. This research uses a qualitative method with a case study type at SDN Cipeuyeum 04 Cianjur. The research subjects were selected purposively, including PAI teachers and fifth grade students who have varying learning abilities. Data collection techniques were carried out through participant observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation, with data analysis using the Miles and Huberman interactive model. The results of the study show that: (1) The implementation of TaRL changes interaction patterns in the classroom to be more inclusive through ability-based grouping; (2) Students' learning interest grows due to a sense of psychological safety, where students no longer feel embarrassed or afraid of making mistakes; (3) Personalization of materials eliminates cognitive pressure, thereby changing passive students into participatory ones.

Keywords:interest in learning; pie; case study; teaching at the right level.

INTRODUCTION

Islamic Religious Education (PAI) plays a strategic role in the national education system, not only as a vehicle for the transfer of theological knowledge but also as a fundamental instrument in shaping students' character, morality, and spirituality. In the modern educational paradigm, PAI learning is ideally designed to deeply engage students' affective dimensions, so that religious values become more than just cognitive memorization but are internalized into intrinsic religiosity. However, empirical reality often reveals a wide gap between curriculum ideals and classroom learning practices.

A classic problem that still dominates classrooms in Indonesia, including at the research site of SDN Cipeuyeum 04 Cianjur, is the implementation of a uniform or "one-size-fits-all" learning model. In this approach, teachers tend to pursue complete syllabus material while ignoring disparities in students' initial abilities. Yet, each

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student has a unique learning trajectory. This imposition of the same competency standards on students with varying learning readiness creates the phenomenon of "pseudo-learning," where students are physically present but mentally absent.

Initial observations indicate that the root cause of low interest in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) is not solely due to difficult material, but rather to an inappropriate level of instruction. Referring to Vygotsky's constructivism theory, effective learning only occurs when the material falls within the student's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), the area where students are able to learn with assistance. When students who are not yet fluent in reading the Quran are forced to learn complex verses far beyond their ZPD, what occurs is cognitive overload, which leads to frustration, anxiety, and loss of self-confidence. These students then withdraw, become passive, and lose interest because they feel "alienated" from the learning process in their own class.

To respond to this learning crisis, radical yet humane pedagogical interventions are needed. One approach that has proven effective globally is Teaching at the Right Level (TaRL). This approach, originally developed by Pratham in India, offers a paradigm shift from "teaching according to the curriculum" to "teaching according to students' abilities." TaRL emphasizes the importance of diagnostic assessments to map students' actual abilities and group them based on their ability levels, rather than age or formal grade.

Several previous studies have documented the effectiveness of TaRL. Research by Rahmawati (2020) and Septianingrum & Nurhabibah (2020) found that TaRL significantly improved understanding of mathematical concepts and basic literacy. Similarly, Kurniawan (2021) highlighted the positive impact of adaptive learning on learning motivation. However, the majority of these studies focused primarily on cognitive aspects (learning outcomes) and on general subjects such as Mathematics or Language. There is still limited literature specifically exploring how the TaRL approach affects psychological dimensions—particularly learning interest—in the context of Islamic Religious Education, which has unique material characteristics.

This research aims to fill this gap in the literature (gap analysis). It is highly relevant because it highlights the humanistic aspects of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning. Its novelty lies in its in-depth analysis of the dynamics of student learning recovery through the TaRL approach. The basic hypothesis of this research is that when cognitive barriers are removed through material adjustment (TaRL), psychological barriers (fear, shame, and boredom) will also disappear, allowing learning interest to naturally revitalize.

Therefore, this study aims to comprehensively describe the implementation of the Teaching at the Right Level (TaRL) approach at SDN Cipeuyeum 04 Cianjur and analyze its impact on increasing student learning interest. Through this case study, it is hoped that an inclusive, adaptive, and student-centered Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning model can be proposed, capable of restoring the joy of learning to students who have previously been marginalized.

RESEARCH METHODS

A. Research Approach and Design

This research uses a qualitative, descriptive-analytical approach. This approach was chosen because the primary objective of the study was to understand the phenomenon of student learning interest in its natural setting in depth and comprehensively, rather than simply measuring the relationships between variables through numbers. The focus of the research lies in the meaning behind student behavior and interactions that occur during the implementation of the Teaching at the Right Level (TaRL) method.

The type of research used is a case study. The case study design was chosen to explore a bounded system, namely the implementation of Islamic Religious Education learning with the TaRL approach in grade V at SDN Cipeuyeum 04. The case study allows researchers to dig into in-depth details about "how" and "why" changes in learning interest occur along with changes in learning strategies implemented by teachers.

B. Research Background and Subjects The research was conducted at SDN Cipeuyeum 04, Cianjur Regency. This location was chosen because the school is facing significant challenges due to heterogeneity in student abilities post-pandemic, necessitating adaptive learning interventions.

The determination of research subjects was carried out using a purposive sampling technique. The key informant in this study was the Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teacher, Mr. Ahmad Fadli, S.Pd.I, who acted as the direct implementer of the TaRL approach. Meanwhile, the main informant was a fifth-grade student. Student selection was not done randomly, but rather a representation of three variations of ability was selected based on the results of the initial diagnostic assessment, namely: (1) students with basic abilities (low achievers); (2) students with intermediate abilities; and (3) students with advanced abilities. This aims to capture the dynamics of changes in diverse interests from various spectrums of abilities.

C. Data Collection Techniques To obtain valid and comprehensive data, researchers use three main data collection techniques:

1. **Participant Observation:**Researchers went directly into the field to observe the Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning process. Observations focused on three main aspects: (a) the implementation of TaRL learning syntax by teachers, including grouping and instruction methods; (b) social interactions between students in level groups; and (c) student affective indicators, such as enthusiasm, courage to ask questions, focus of attention, and facial expressions during the learning process. Researchers used field notes to record important events that occurred in real time.
2. **In-depth Interview:**Interviews were conducted in a semi-structured manner to uncover information that was not visible through observation.
    - For teachers, the interview aims to understand the rationale for student grouping, classroom management challenges, and teacher perceptions of student development..
    - For students, interviews were conducted using a persuasive approach to explore their feelings, psychological barriers experienced before the

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intervention, and changes in self-perception (self-efficacy) after learning with the TaRL method.

3. **Documentation:**A documentation study was conducted to strengthen the primary data. The documents collected included: Teaching Modules/Lesson Plans modified according to TaRL, data from initial diagnostic assessments (Quran reading ability mapping), student progress notes, and photographs of activities documenting student engagement in learning.

D. Data Validity To ensure data validity, this study uses triangulation techniques.

1. **Source Triangulation:**Compare the data from teacher interviews with the data from student interviews to see if the information matches.
2. **Engineering Triangulation:**Compare what students say (interviews) with what they do in class (observations) to ensure consistency between words and actions.

E. Data Analysis Techniques Data analysis was conducted inductively using the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña. The analysis stages included:

1. **Data Reduction:**Researchers sorted raw field data, discarding irrelevant data, and focused on data related to "TaRL implementation" and "learning interest indicators." Coding was conducted to group findings by theme (e.g., sense of security, participation).
2. **Data Presentation (Data Display):**The reduced data is arranged in the form of a systematic descriptive narrative text, supported by interview quotes and a table of student ability classifications, to facilitate understanding of the flow of changes in interest.
3. **Conclusion Drawing/Verification:**Researchers draw initial conclusions based on the patterns found, then verify them again with field data to ensure that the conclusions are solid and supported by empirical evidence.

RESEARCH RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section comprehensively describes field findings related to the implementation of the Teaching at the Right Level (TaRL) approach at SDN Cipeuyeum 04 Cianjur and its impact on students' learning interest in Islamic Religious Education (PAI). The analysis is conducted by reconstructing the learning process, student psychological dynamics, and the transformation of teachers' roles in creating a humanistic learning ecosystem.

A. Reconstruction of the Learning Paradigm: Changing "One Size Fits All" Towards Humanistic Differentiation

The reality of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning at SDN Cipeuyeum 04 before the intervention showed alarming stagnation among some students. Conventional learning practices tended to adopt a one-size-fits-all approach, or a leveling of abilities. In this old paradigm, the curriculum was the central authority, while students were forced to adapt to the curriculum's pace regardless of their cognitive readiness. This phenomenon created a sharp gap; students with slower abilities felt left behind, passive, and lost interest.

The fundamental problem found in the field is not simply low academic grades, but rather a more fundamental aspect: the loss of student enthusiasm because the material being taught is beyond their grasp or zone of proximal development. When a fifth-grade student who is not yet fluent in reciting the Quran is forced to follow the same curriculum targets as those who are already proficient, what results is psychological pressure and feelings of inferiority.

The implementation of Teaching at the Right Level (TaRL) presents an antithesis to these practices. This approach does not reject the curriculum, but rather radically adjusts the starting point of learning, centering it on students' actual abilities. Research findings indicate that TaRL works through the mechanism of deconstructing traditional classrooms toward inclusive ones.

Urgency and Mechanism of Comprehensive Diagnostic Assessment

A fundamental step in implementing TaRL at SDN Cipeuyeum 04 was a comprehensive diagnostic assessment. Islamic Religious Education teacher, Mr. Ahmad Fadli, S.Pd.I., shifted the evaluation method from simply reviewing report card grades to personally assessing students' actual abilities.

This assessment process is conducted in-depth. Teachers test their ability to read the Quran one by one, listen for accurate pronunciation of letters, and understand basic worship. Field findings confirm that this assessment serves as a primary navigation tool. Without it, learning would be a one-way, ineffective transfer process. Based on the assessment results, a natural classification of students into three learning groups was formed:

- **Basic Level:**This group focuses on introducing the hijaiyah letters and understanding basic worship. This group is dominated by students who previously tended to be quiet in class due to their inability to follow complex material.
- **Intermediate Level:**Consisting of students who are technically fluent in reading, but need to deepen their understanding of meaning and tajweed.
- **Advanced Level:**A group of students who are ready to accept the challenge of contextual case study analysis in Islamic Religious Education material.

This grouping strategy creates a safe learning space, where students learn with peers of similar abilities, thereby minimizing feelings of isolation.

B. Psychological Dynamics: Restoring a Sense of Safety (Psychological Safety) as a Gateway to Interest

In-depth analysis of qualitative data shows that increased student learning interest is strongly correlated with their psychological recovery. The implementation of TaRL successfully shifted students' emotional spectrum from negative emotions (fear, anxiety, shame) to positive emotions (comfort, courage, and confidence).

1. Eroding Emotional Barriers (Fear and Anxiety)

Before the implementation of TaRL, Islamic Religious Education classes were often a daunting experience for elementary-level students. Many felt anxious when asked to recite the Quran in front of the class. Interview data revealed a strong narrative of "fear of making mistakes" and "shame" dominating students'

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minds. In conventional learning contexts, students' ignorance was often exposed to more intelligent peers, creating social pressure that dampened interest.

However, level-based grouping in TaRL successfully breaks down this wall of fear. Because students are grouped with peers of similar abilities, the fear of social judgment fades. The learning environment becomes inclusive and stress-free. This concept aligns with the theory of Psychological Safety, where students feel safe taking interpersonal risks (such as attempting to read even when not yet fluent) without fear of embarrassment.

2. Building Self-Efficacy and Self-Confidence

As fear fades, budding confidence emerges. Field observations note that students who previously stuttered are now beginning to read short surahs fluently. The small wins experienced by elementary-level students when they master a single letter or verse become the main fuel for their confidence.

This change confirms that learning interest grows when emotional barriers are removed and replaced by a sense of competence. Students begin to believe they "can" learn to recite the Quran, provided they use the right methods. This increases their self-efficacy, shifting their mindset from "I have no talent for religion" to "I'm on the road to success."

C. Transforming Student Engagement: From Passive to Participatory

Changes in psychological conditions lead to visible behavioral changes in the classroom. This study found a shift in student behavior from passive to active participation.

Relevance of Material and Reduction of Cognitive Load

One key factor in increasing participation is the personalization of materials, which eliminates excessive cognitive pressure. In traditional learning, students are passive because their brains experience cognitive overload due to overly difficult material. TaRL presents materials that are relevant to the students' current capacity.

Observations revealed a more lively classroom atmosphere, with indicators of interest such as "active questioning" emerging organically. Students who typically hunkered down in the corners began to raise their hands because the material being discussed was within their grasp.

Interview data supports this finding, where students stated that learning became easier to understand because it started from things they had already mastered. This sense of competence is the core of intrinsic motivation. Students become When students were asked "Tell me, before learning was grouped like now, how did Rian feel when Islamic Religious Education (PAI) lessons started?" Rian, a fifth-grade student, answered, "Honestly, I was scared, Ma'am. Back then, when the teacher brought the grade book and called names one by one for the Quran reading test in front, I felt a stomach ache. I was really nervous. Because I wasn't fluent yet, I was still reading Iqro volume 2. Meanwhile, my deskmate had already read the Quran in a big way."

Then the researcher asked Rian again, "What makes Rian afraid? Is the teacher angry?", and Rian answered, "The teacher isn't angry, but it's embarrassing, ma'am. If I get stuck reading, the other friends sometimes look at me or smile. So I get even more nervous, cold sweats. I feel like I just want to take a break so I don't have to go to the front. I often pretend to have a stomach ache so I can get permission to go to the UKS during PAI time."

And Rian was asked again, "What about now after studying in separate groups?" Rian answered: "Now I feel relieved, ma'am. Because my group mates are still learning Iqro. So if I make a mistake, no one laughs, because we both can't do it yet. The teacher also teaches it slowly in our group, not in a rush. So I dare to ask if I forget a letter."

From the interview with one of the students mentioned above, it was found that the phrases "stomach ache" and "pretending to be sick" are physical manifestations of academic anxiety. Changing the narrative to "relieved" and "daring to ask" indicates that TaRL successfully eliminated social threats in the classroom.

Enthusiasm is not due to forced grades, but because they enjoy the process of "being able" and "understanding." The following are the results of interviews with students:

The researcher asked Siti (a fifth-grade student): "I saw you raising your hand a lot in class earlier. What's the difference in the way you teach now, sir?" Siti's answer: "Previously, the teacher had a hard time explaining it, sir. He immediately started talking about tajwid, which has complicated rules. I didn't understand it, so I felt sleepy. I felt like I was really stupid in religion."

Then the researcher asked again: "Now?" and Siti's answer: "Now the material is adjusted. Yesterday when they taught the long and short (Mad Thobi'i) using cards, I immediately understood. It turned out to be easy when taught like that. When the teacher asked for an example of reading, I immediately raised my hand because I knew the answer. I felt really happy when they said 'That's right, good job Siti!'. So I want to be able to do the next material."

Analysis of the interviews above shows that the statement "It turned out to be easy" is a key indicator of growing self-efficacy. Students recognize that previous difficulties were not due to their own inability, but rather to inappropriate methods.

D. The Role of Teachers as Adaptive and Humanistic Facilitators

The successful implementation of TaRL at SDN Cipeuyeum 04 is inseparable from the transformation of teachers' roles. Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers shifted their role from mere transmitters of knowledge to adaptive learning facilitators.

Scaffolding and Personal Assistance

Teachers actively provide personal guidance or scaffolding to groups in need. These techniques vary across groups; in the beginner group, teachers provide intensive guidance and drills, while in the advanced group, teachers provide analytical challenges.

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This flexibility makes students feel individually cared for. In interviews, students expressed comfort because teachers no longer get angry when they don't understand a concept, but instead provide patient guidance. This personalized attention creates an emotional bond between teacher and student, which is a crucial catalyst for fostering long-term learning interest. The following is an excerpt from an interview with an Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teacher:

Researchers:"Mr. Ahmad, changing the habit from classical (public lectures) to TaRL grouping is definitely not easy. What is the biggest challenge and how do you see the change?"

Teacher (Mr. Ahmad Fadli):"That's right, Ma'am. Honestly, I was overwhelmed at first. Dividing my focus between three groups in one lesson hour felt 'riweuh' (troublesome). I had to prepare three different types of LKPD (Student Worksheets). Before, I just went into class, gave a lecture, and it was done. Now I have to be a facilitator who keeps going around."

Researchers:"So, what makes you stick with this method?"

Teacher (Mr. Ahmad Fadli):"The inner satisfaction is different, Ma'am. Before, when I taught, it felt like I was talking to a wall for the children in the back. They were quiet, but their gazes were blank. After using TaRL, I saw children who were usually 'sleeping students' suddenly have their eyes sparkling when they managed to spell 'Ba-Ta-Tsa'. That moment is priceless for a teacher. It turns out that all this time it wasn't them who didn't want to learn, but I was the one who gave them 'food' they couldn't chew. It was tiring, but seeing them enthusiastic, the tiredness disappeared."

Analysis of the interview results above shows that this teacher's narrative confirms a shift in role from "administrative compliance" (simply fulfilling teaching obligations) to "pedagogical leadership" (leading a meaningful learning process).

E. Challenges and Solutions in TaRL Implementation

Despite showing positive results, the implementation of TaRL was not without challenges. Managing a class with three distinct groups required extra time and energy from the teacher. Initially, there was some confusion among students regarding group changes. However, with time and consistent instruction from the teacher, the classroom dynamics became more structured. The teacher addressed this by using peer tutors from the advanced group to assist the basic group, which actually strengthened social solidarity among students.

CONCLUSION

Based on qualitative analysis, it can be concluded that the Teaching at the Right Level (TaRL) approach at SDN Cipeuyeum 04 Cianjur is effective in increasing students' interest in learning Islamic Religious Education not only because of the method, but also because this approach touches on students' psychological aspects.

1. TaRL creates an inclusive and stress-free learning environment, where students are not judged for their disabilities, but rather guided from their starting point..

2. Increased interest in learning is marked by changes in behavior: from passive, afraid and anxious, to active, daring to ask questions and enthusiastic..
3. The main key to success lies in the suitability of the material to actual abilities, which builds students' self-confidence (self-efficacy)..
4. Overall, the data shows that TaRL is effective not only as a teaching method, but also as an approach to student psychological recovery. By adapting the material to the appropriate level, TaRL breaks the cycle of failure experienced by low-ability students. The inclusive, stress-free, and supportive learning environment provides fertile ground for the revitalization of previously waning interest in Islamic Religious Education (PAI). The transition from fear to confidence, and from passivity to activity, is empirical evidence of the success of this approach at SDN Cipeuyeum 04.

Suggestion: Islamic Religious Education teachers are advised to continue to maintain periodic diagnostic assessments so that group shifts (from elementary to secondary) can be facilitated dynamically as students' abilities increase.

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