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The Improvement of Learning Outcomes of Elementary School Students in Islamic Religious Education through the Index Card Match Model

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ABSTRACT

Background: Islamic Religious Education instruction in elementary schools should ideally be interactive and engaging, fostering deep conceptual understanding and the internalization of religious values. **Objective:** This study aims to implement and evaluate the effectiveness of the Index Card Match learning model in improving engagement and learning outcomes among fourth-grade students on the topic of Asmaul Husna at SDN 02 XIV Koto. **Method:** This study employed Classroom Action Research (CAR) across two cycles, using data collection techniques such as observation, interviews, learning outcome tests, and documentation. Data were analyzed using a mixed-methods approach: qualitative descriptive analysis to describe learning activities and quantitative analysis to measure improvements in student achievement. **Result:** The findings indicate a significant increase from the pre-cycle to cycle II, with mastery learning improving from 25% to 80%, along with consistent growth in student participation and motivation in each meeting. **Conclusion:** The Index Card Match model is effective in enhancing student engagement, conceptual understanding, and Islamic Religious Education learning outcomes, particularly in the Asmaul Husna material. **Originality/Value:** This study offers practical and pedagogical novelty to primary Islamic religious education by demonstrating the effectiveness of the *Index Card Match* game-based cooperative learning model in fostering student motivation, active participation, and deep conceptual understanding regarding the topic of Asmaul Husna within regional elementary classrooms, an area that remains limited in empirical documentation. These findings enrich the empirical literature and serve as a strategic reference for educators to design enjoyable, student-centered active learning strategies that align with the cognitive and social developmental characteristics of elementary school learners.

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1. INTRODUCTION

In the process of Islamic Religious Education learning in elementary schools, the ideal condition is the creation of interactive, enjoyable learning that builds deep conceptual understanding among students. According to Fatkhulloh & Mardiyah (2023), interactive learning enables students to communicate with teachers and peers and engage in in-depth dialogues, thereby making their understanding of Islamic Religious Education more meaningful. Additionally, Chafshah et al. (2024) argue that creative strategies in designing Islamic Religious Education curricula that combine media, games, and collaborative activities hold great potential to internalize religious values comprehensively. Therefore, Islamic Religious Education learning should not only focus on the verbal delivery of material but also encourage active student participation through meaningful learning experiences (Misran & Kasmantoni, 2025). In other words, teachers are expected to design learning activities that integrate creative pedagogical approaches, enabling students to understand religious values comprehensively and internalize their meaning.

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The Index Card Match learning model is one of the cooperative strategies that emphasize the activity of matching cards containing questions and answers. This technique can increase student involvement by encouraging them to move, discuss, and interact actively. Mediatati et al. (2023) state that the use of Index Card Match in civic education significantly enhances student activity and motivation because this model provides interactive dynamics and kinesthetic stimulation for learners. Additionally, research by Ningsih et al. (2024) in the context of mathematics confirms that the Index Card Match model is efficacious in improving student learning outcomes through collaborative activities and card-question repetition, ultimately strengthening conceptual understanding and long-term memory. Several previous studies also show that Index Card Match is effective in enhancing conceptual understanding and long-term memory retention among students because of its kinesthetic and collaborative activities. Furthermore, this model can foster a fun classroom atmosphere, reduce monotony, and enhance students' ability to solve problems through group collaboration.

Islamic Religious Education learning in elementary schools has specific characteristics, emphasizing the integration of cognitive, affective, and psychomotor aspects (Nasron et al., 2025). According to Zainuri et al. (2022), the application of active learning models in Islamic Religious Education within the Merdeka Curriculum increases student engagement and understanding of religious values, as students do not merely passively receive material but actively build knowledge through interaction and collaboration. Moreover, Khairani & Rahman (2023) emphasize that the creativity of Islamic Religious Education teachers is essential to create a compelling and meaningful learning environment in elementary schools, where creative methods can reduce boredom and make religious values more contextual and applicable in everyday life. A common challenge in Islamic Religious Education is teachers' tendency to use one-way lecture methods, which make students passive and less participatory. As a result, learning outcomes do not meet the expected targets. Various literatures stress the need for active learning models to help develop student engagement, understanding, and motivation in religious subjects.

However, the reality shows that Islamic Religious Education learning has yet to motivate and achieve student learning goals optimally. Observations in several classes reveal that students tend to have difficulty focusing, are passive during teacher explanations, and lack enthusiasm for learning activities. According to Sinta et al. (2023), interactive methods of Islamic Religious Education learning are urgently needed following online learning, as traditional approaches such as lecturing are no longer sufficient to sustain student motivation. Additionally, Masnadi et al. (2024) state in their study that "student motivation in Islamic Religious Education must be strengthened through interactive media and active learning strategies because traditional media and lecturing alone are insufficient to maintain student involvement. This situation affects low learning outcomes, especially in understanding religious concepts such as Asmaul Husna, basic worship practices, and daily morals. Low participation in learning indicates that the methods used by teachers have not met students' learning needs, which require variation, interactivity, and engaging activities. This phenomenon shows that a learning strategy that involves students holistically is needed. Previous research generally shows that the use of Index Card Match can improve learning outcomes in various subjects such as Science, Mathematics, and Indonesian.

Additionally, research by Meilani & Aryati (2025) showed increased learning activity and student interaction following its use. However, studies specifically investigating the application of Index Card Match in the context of Islamic Religious Education at the elementary school level are still limited. Therefore, research on Islamic Religious Education, particularly on religious values, is crucial to the development of active learning models in the field.

Based on the literature review and empirical findings, there is a gap between the need for interactive Islamic Religious Education and the methods teachers use in the classroom. According to expert opinion, Iskandar (2024) states that active learning methods in Islamic education can improve student involvement, understanding of the material, and the development of critical thinking skills, making them highly relevant for overcoming the tendency toward monotonous Islamic Religious Education learning. Additionally, Duanasari et al. (2024) emphasize that the application of cooperative active methods in Islamic Religious Education is crucial because it can stimulate student participation and make the learning process more interactive than traditional lecturing methods. Through a case study, that cooperative learning models such as STAD and TSTS have proven effective in improving students' achievement and learning outcomes in Islamic Religious Education by fostering positive interdependence, social interaction, and group accountability. While many studies have demonstrated the effectiveness of cooperative models across general subjects, research exploring their application in Islamic Religious Education remains rare. Moreover, few studies examine how this model explicitly enhances student learning outcomes in religious-themed materials in elementary schools. This gap highlights the need for research that provides empirical evidence on the effectiveness of active cooperative models, such as Index Card Match, in improving Islamic Religious Education learning outcomes and on how this strategy can address the issue of low student participation and motivation.

Research on the implementation of the Index Card Match model in Islamic Religious Education learning at the elementary school level is highly relevant and necessary. This study is expected to provide practical solutions for teachers to overcome low learning outcomes and enhance the quality of the learning process, making it more active, collaborative, and meaningful. Furthermore, this research can contribute to the development of theory and practice in Islamic Religious Education learning through the application of cooperative learning models that have been proven effective in other contexts but are not widely used in Islamic Religious Education. Thus, this research holds an important position in efforts to improve the quality of religious education in elementary schools. The purpose of this research is to apply the Index Card Match learning strategy in Islamic Religious Education on the material of Asmaul Husna in grade IV at SDN 02 XIV Koto, while also describing the implementation process and determining the extent to which this strategy can increase student involvement and learning outcomes. This study also aims to analyze the effectiveness of applying the Index Card Match in strengthening the conceptual understanding of Asmaul Husna, thereby significantly improving students' learning achievements.

2. METHOD

2.1 Research Design

The approach used in this study combines a subjective methodological strategy and quantitative procedures. This research is a type of classroom action research (CAR), where the methods and steps of examination are carried out using CAR techniques through repeated interactions. Given the issues previously described, this classroom action research is planned to consist of two cycles (Utomo et al., 2024). Each cycle includes four stages: (1) activity preparation, (2) activity implementation, (3) activity perception or observation, and (4) activity reflection. The decision to stop the research depends on the results of the student reflection. If the results meet the achievement criteria, the research will be stopped; if not, it will continue to the next cycle.

2.2 Research Object

This classroom action research is conducted in the odd semester at SDN 54 Sinar Wajo. The research subjects are fourth-grade students in the Islamic Religious Education subject, using the Asmaul Husna material.

2.3 Data Collection

The data collection strategies used in this study include interview instruments, observation, and documentation. These three instruments are used to gather data on the learning process, student activities, and learning outcomes during classroom action research.

2.4 Data Analysis

The data analysis strategy used in this research is a mixed-methods procedure. The qualitative method is used to describe the implementation of activities, identify obstacles encountered during the learning process, describe students' learning activities, and assess basic thinking skills based on observation results. Meanwhile, the quantitative method is used to describe the level of learning success in terms of learning outcomes and student capabilities, using numerical data and simple statistical calculations.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Results

Based on the initial pre-cycle observation, the learning ability of fourth-grade students in the Islamic Religious Education subject at SDN 54/X Sinar Wajo remained low. This was evidenced by the students' daily test results, which included 20 students.

Table 1. Pre-cycle Student Learning Results

No	Description	Amount
1	Total Score	1,215
2	Average Score of Students	60.75
3	Number of Students Who Passed	5 students
4	Number of Students Who Failed	15 students
5	Pass Percentage	25%
6	Fail Percentage	75%

The pre-cycle learning results show that of 20 students, only 5 (25%) passed, while 15 (75%) failed. With a total score of 1,215 and an average of 60.75, these results indicate that most students are still struggling to complete. The high failure rate suggests a need to improve teaching methods or the material approach. Intensive evaluation and improvement are required to enhance students' understanding and learning outcomes in the next cycle.

3.1.1 Results of Cycle I

Cycle I research was conducted in three meetings, from October 27, 2023, to October 30, 2023. The first and second learning sessions were held to test students' understanding and concentration skills on Asmaul Husna (Al Malik, Al Quddus, As-Salam, Al-Mu'min, and Al-Aziz), a chapter discussing the quantity of Asmaul Husna. The teacher presented the material using an active strategy and lectured, followed by a clarification, while the educator completed examples using the Index Card Match technique. Before proceeding, the instructor gave an overview of how the lesson would be conducted. In the third meeting, a test was held to assess the learning achievement using the Index Card Match. Perceptions during Cycle 1 were obtained while the lessons were in progress and observed by the researcher. Below are the results of the first and second meetings of Cycle I research.

Table 2. Cycle I Test Results

No	Description	Amount
1	Total Score	1,105
2	Average Score of Students	55.25
3	Number of Students Who Passed	8 students
4	Number of Students Who Failed	12 students
5	Pass Percentage	40%
6	Fail Percentage	60%

The test results for Cycle I show that of 20 students, 8 (40%) passed and 12 (60%) failed. The average score of 55.25, calculated from a total of 1,105, indicates that the students' performance remained at a moderate level. The failure rate is still relatively high, suggesting that most students have not mastered the material. This highlights the need for further evaluation of the teaching methods or material and requires adjustments in the teaching approach to improve students' understanding and test results in the next Cycle.

3.2.1 Results of Cycle II

Cycle II was conducted several times from November 1 to November 3. In the first and second meetings, learning was conducted using the Index Card Match, while the third meeting involved a test to assess student outcomes. In the preparation stage, the researcher and educator worked together to develop a plan that included creating a Cycle II learning module on Asmaul Husna using Index Card Match, preparing demonstration materials, perception sheets, and tests. This phase aimed to assess how well students understood the lesson using the Index Card Match.

Table 3. Cycle II Test Results

No	Description	Amount
1	Total Score	1,506
2	Average Score of Students	67
3	Number of Students Who Passed	16 students
4	Number of Students Who Failed	4 students
5	Pass Percentage	80%
6	Fail Percentage	20%

Cycle II test results show a significant improvement over pre-cycle and Cycle I results. Of 20 students, 16 (80%) passed, while 4 (20%) failed. With a total score of 1,506 and an average of 67, these results reflect a clear improvement in students' understanding of the material. The pass percentage has increased, suggesting that the implemented teaching method is becoming effective. However, a few students still have not passed, indicating that further improvements are necessary to ensure that all students achieve optimal completion.

Seeing the results from the pre-cycle test, through Cycle I, and continuing to Cycle II, there has been a remarkable improvement. Therefore, learning through Index Card Match is expected to further develop student learning outcomes, especially for fourth-grade students at SDN 54/X Sinar Wajo, in the learning of Asmaul Husna. Furthermore, student participation has significantly increased at each meeting held.

Table 4. Comparison of Results Between Cycle I and Cycle II

CYCLE I	CYCLE II
Meeting I: 61.88%	Meeting I: 70.63%
Meeting II: 68.44%	Meeting II: 76.56%

The comparison between Cycle I and Cycle II results shows significant improvement in student learning outcomes. In Cycle I, the first meeting recorded 61.88%, while the second meeting reached 68.44%. In Cycle II, the first meeting showed an increase to 70.63%, and the second meeting was even higher at 76.56%. This indicates evident progress in students' understanding of the material as the improvement cycles continued. The increasing percentages at each Cycle II meeting demonstrate the effectiveness of the changes implemented during the learning process.

Table 6. Test Results of Students in Pre-cycle, Cycle I, and Cycle II

No	Cycle	Pass Percentage	Fail Percentage
1	Pre-cycle	25%	75%
2	Cycle I	40%	60%
3	Cycle II	80%	20%

Table 6 shows significant improvements in student learning outcomes from pre-cycle to Cycle II. In the pre-cycle, only 25% of students passed, while 75% of students failed. In Cycle I, the pass rate increased to 40%, with 60% still failing. In Cycle II, a notable improvement occurred: 80% of students passed, and 20% failed. This increase indicates the effectiveness of the applied teaching strategy and highlights the importance of continuous evaluation and improvement in the learning and teaching process.

3.2. Discussion

The research findings indicate that applying the Index Card Match model had a positive impact on student activity and learning outcomes in the Islamic Religious Education subject. This finding aligns with the principles of active learning, which emphasize that students learn more effectively when they are directly involved in the learning process. Initially, students appeared passive, less responsive to the teacher's questions, and tended to listen rather than engage. However, after implementing the Index Card Match model, student engagement significantly increased because it enables the simultaneous engagement in motor, social, and cognitive activities.

The Index Card Match model operates based on Vygotsky's social constructivist theory, which emphasizes the importance of social interaction in the learning process. Students learn through scaffolding and peer support as they work together to match question-and-answer cards. Ertugruloglu et al. (2023) emphasize that scaffolding in collaborative learning environments embodies the ZPD (Zone of Proximal Development) principle, in which social support enables students to complete tasks that were previously beyond their independent capabilities. Xi & Lantolf (2021) also highlight the relationship between ZPD and scaffolding, showing that well-structured interactions among teachers and students, as well as among peers, facilitate cognitive development through gradual, contingent support. Furthermore, Van Hoe et al. (2024) in their study on peer assessment as a scaffolding tool demonstrate how peer feedback and interaction in collaborative activities enhance the quality of learning products and students' ability to revise their understanding based on peer input. This interaction creates a proximal development zone that allows students to understand concepts that they previously struggled to grasp on their own. Thus, the activity of matching cards is not just a game, but also a collaborative activity that strengthens knowledge development through systematic social scaffolding.

Game-based learning and kinesthetic activities are highly relevant in Islamic Religious Education because they help students build an understanding of religious values in a structured and engaging way. Research by Ninaus et al. (2019) shows that game-based learning consistently enhances student emotional engagement, an important factor for memory and retention, because games trigger positive affect that facilitates the encoding of information. A study by Baah et al. (2024) adds that gamification elements (e.g., challenges, quick feedback) increase motivation and reduce cognitive load, enabling students to process and store material more efficiently. Additionally, the physically active learning approach discussed by Demir (2024) demonstrates that integrating movement and structured physical activity into learning increases focus, engagement, and the ability to retain vocabulary and concepts, with direct implications for subjects like Asmaul Husna that require memorization and comprehension of meaning. Therefore, the game-based and kinesthetic learning embedded in the Index Card Match model is supported by

international evidence as a strategy that strengthens the internalization of concepts and long-term memory through a combination of cognitive, affective, and psychomotor engagement.

The research findings show that in the first cycle, students still needed adjustments, particularly because they were not yet accustomed to the rules of the game. However, as the activities progressed, students became more responsive and understood the learning flow. According to behaviorist learning theory, repetition and the teacher's positive reinforcement during the card-matching process help shape more effective learning responses. In other words, the repetitive activity in Index Card Match strengthens the stimulus-response relationship to the Asmaul Husna material.

The increase in student activity aligns with humanistic theory, which emphasizes meaningful learning and a supportive classroom atmosphere. Omodan & Mtshatsha (2024) state that humanistic pedagogy is highly relevant for building students' self-esteem because, with an approach that values individual feelings, values, and creativity, students feel more appreciated and are more willing to contribute in class. Furthermore, Amir et al. (2024) found that the humanistic learning approach in elementary schools is highly effective in instilling positive character traits and empathy in students because it provides students with space to express themselves and interact emotionally in the classroom. Furthermore, Diana et al. (2025) reported that applying humanistic theory in Islamic Religious Education at the high school level enhances students' emotional engagement through cooperative learning strategies that encourage cooperation and healthy social relationships. Thus, the use of Index Card Match, which allows students to move, interact, and receive positive reinforcement, helps meet their emotional needs and boosts their self-confidence, making them more ready to absorb the material through healthy, active involvement.

From the perspective of learning outcomes, the improvement in student scores across cycles indicates that the Index Card Match model effectively enhances students' understanding of religious concepts. This finding is consistent with international studies that show that game-based learning improves information retention and students' cognitive abilities. Tavares et al. (2022) report that game-based learning consistently improves knowledge retention, motivation, and meaningful learning compared to traditional methods, especially when the games are designed to trigger active student involvement. Moreover, a longitudinal study by Kanade (2024) found that structured game-based interventions improve long-term retention of factual and procedural material, a relevant effect for memorization material such as Asmaul Husna.

The Index Card Match model also reflects the principles of Cooperative Learning, as outlined by Johnson and Johnson, which emphasize five key elements: positive interdependence, face-to-face interaction, individual accountability, social skills, and group processing. Research by Hofmann et al. (2023) found that the quality of implementing these elements, particularly positive interdependence and individual accountability, is critical to the effectiveness of cooperative learning strategies; when students realize that their success is linked to others, group learning outcomes improve significantly. Furthermore, in the context of inquiry-based science learning, Sánchez et al. (2021) demonstrate that face-to-face promotive interaction, along with structured social skills such as communication and helping one another, strengthens student participation and collaboration in small groups. Finally, in a systematic review by Park & Lee (2024) on physical education learning, it was found that group processing and social skills elements not only enhance student engagement but also increase individual responsibility and long-term group dynamics. In the card matching activity, each student is responsible for finding the correct answer while helping their peers, creating positive interdependence and accountability. These principles make learning more effective compared to individual learning, which tends to be passive and less interactive.

However, the study notes some challenges. At the beginning of the implementation, some students were confused about the activity's steps, so the teacher needed to provide additional scaffolding in the form of instructions. Additionally, time management became a challenge because the activity required preparation and coordination. This challenge aligns with learning management theory, which holds that active learning models require careful planning to function optimally. However, these challenges could be overcome as students became more accustomed to this learning model.

This study reveals that the Index Card Match model effectively increases student activity, motivation, and learning outcomes in the Asmaul Husna material. The theoretical reinforcement shows that this model aligns with various modern learning approaches, such as constructivism, cooperative learning, and memory theory. Therefore, this model is highly recommended for use in Islamic Religious Education in elementary schools as an alternative to the dominant lecture method. Moreover, this model can be further developed for other Islamic Religious Education materials that require deep conceptual understanding.

4. IMPLICATIONS AN CONTRIBUTIONS

4.1 Research Implications

The implications of this study show that the application of the Index Card Match model can be an effective alternative teaching strategy to improve learning outcomes and student engagement in Islamic Religious Education, particularly in the material of Asmaul Husna. These findings encourage teachers to be more creative in selecting active, collaborative, and enjoyable teaching models, so that the process of internalizing religious values can be more optimal. Additionally, this study contributes to the development of teaching practices in elementary schools by emphasizing the importance of using methods that align with students' developmental characteristics and can serve as a reference for future studies to test the application of similar models across different materials or educational levels.

4.2 Research Contributions

This study provides empirical evidence that the Index Card Match model, as an active learning strategy, can improve learning outcomes and student engagement in Islamic Religious Education in elementary schools, particularly in the Asmaul Husna material. This research enriches the body of knowledge in Islamic Religious Education theory and practice by demonstrating that cooperative game-based methods can help students understand religious concepts more deeply and enjoyably. Furthermore, this study provides practical guidelines for teachers in designing innovative lessons. It opens the door to further research applying similar models to other materials, levels, or student characteristics, thereby expanding its contribution to the development of Islamic Religious Education pedagogy at the elementary level.

5. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTION

5.1 Research Limitations

This study has several limitations, including the fact that it was conducted in only one class, so the findings cannot be generalized to other schools with different student characteristics. Additionally, the application of the Index Card Match model requires relatively more time for media preparation and explaining the rules of the game, making its effectiveness highly dependent on classroom management and the teacher's time management skills. This study was also limited to the Asmaul Husna material, so it does not yet reflect the model's effectiveness in other Islamic Religious Education topics with different characteristics. External factors, such as students' emotional states and classroom dynamics during the study, also had the potential to influence learning outcomes but could not be fully controlled.

5.2 Recommendation for Future Research

Future research is recommended to test the application of the Index Card Match model to other Islamic Religious Education materials, such as worship, ethics, or Islamic cultural history, to assess its consistency in effectiveness across different types of learning content. Future studies should also involve more classes or schools with different characteristics to enable broader generalization of the results. Additionally, a mixed-method approach with deeper analysis, such as measuring aspects of motivation, social skills, or long-term retention, could provide a more comprehensive picture of the impact of this method. Future researchers can also compare the Index Card Match model with other active learning models to determine which strategy is most effective for improving learning outcomes in Islamic Religious Education in elementary schools.

6. CONCLUSION

The application of the Index Card Match technique in Islamic Religious Education has been shown to enhance student engagement, understanding, and mastery of the material. Through the activity of matching question-and-answer cards, students are directly involved in the learning process, so they do not just receive information passively but also process, discuss, and confirm knowledge independently. This process helps strengthen the memory of religious concepts and increases learning motivation.

In addition to its impact on cognitive aspects, the use of the Index Card Match model also contributes positively to students' affective and social aspects. Student interaction during the activity fosters self-confidence, cooperation, and effective communication. The learning atmosphere becomes more enjoyable and less monotonous, making it

easier for students to understand Islamic Religious Education materials that are sometimes considered abstract and complex.

Based on these findings, it is recommended that educators and school authorities continue to develop and focus on diverse teaching techniques, especially the Index Card Match model, as an innovative strategy to improve learning quality. Directed and consistent implementation will help teachers understand the essence of effective learning and provide a more comprehensive picture of students' learning achievements. Therefore, this technique is worth considering as an alternative to improve school education quality.

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Author Contribution Statement

All authors discussed the results, contributed to the final manuscript, and approved the final version for publication. Titin Zunta: Conceptualization and Design, Methodology, Writing - Original Draft, Performed data collection and Analysis, Interpretation of the results. Khermarinah: Conceptualization, Writing - Review & Editing.

Declaration of Generative AI (GenAI) Usage in Scientific Writing

The author states that AI Paraphraser was used in a limited capacity to assist with language editing, paraphrasing, consistency checking, and improving the readability and clarity of the manuscript. All AI-generated suggestions were critically reviewed and selectively modified by the author to ensure that the final manuscript reflects the author's own academic voice and judgment. All instances of Generative AI usage in this article were conducted by the authors in accordance with the JIPPG GenAI Tool Usage Policy, with the authors assuming full responsibility for the originality, accuracy, and integrity of the work."

Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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