

TRANSFORMING ISLAMIC RELIGIOUS EDUCATION INSTRUCTION: ACTIVE LEARNING, VALUE INTEGRATION, DIFFERENTIATION, AND CHARACTER-BASED DESIGN

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Abstract

This review article synthesizes instructional strategies for Islamic Religious Education (PAI) in response to digitalization, globalization, learner diversity, and character-formation challenges. Using a narrative literature review and conceptual synthesis of the sources compiled in the academic paper, the analysis focuses on four themes: active learning, Islamic value integration, differentiated instruction, and character-based instructional design. The review indicates that Problem-Based Learning, Project-Based Learning, and Inquiry-Based Learning can strengthen learner participation, critical thinking, collaboration, and the contextual application of religious knowledge. Islamic values become more meaningful when embedded in content, classroom interaction, learning processes, and digital conduct rather than presented as additional material. Differentiated instruction supports inclusion by adapting content, process, product, and the learning environment to readiness, interests, and learning profiles. Character-based instructional design requires alignment among objectives, learning materials, participatory methods, authentic assessment, and school culture. The synthesis shows that the central principle is instructional coherence: active learning must remain value-oriented, differentiation must preserve shared Islamic learning goals, and character formation must be observable in everyday learning practices.

Keywords: Islamic Religious Education, Active Learning, Islamic Values, Differentiated Instruction, Character-Based Learning



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INTRODUCTION

Islamic Religious Education (Pendidikan Agama Islam/PAI) is increasingly taught in an environment shaped by rapid digitalization, globalization, and unrestricted information flows. The source paper argues that students encounter values, ideologies, and cultural influences that are not always consistent with Islamic teachings. Consequently, PAI instruction

cannot rely solely on efficient transmission of religious knowledge. It must help learners interpret contemporary experiences, exercise ethical judgment, and develop the spiritual and moral dispositions needed to participate responsibly in a changing society (Rokim et al., 2025; Zainuddin et al., 2024).

This challenge is also instructional. The source manuscript identifies a persistent movement from teacher-centered, lecture-dominated learning toward student-centered approaches supported by digital technology. Conventional explanation remains useful for communicating foundational religious concepts, but an exclusive reliance on one-way instruction limits opportunities for learners to question, investigate, collaborate, make decisions, and connect religious knowledge with lived problems. Digital transformation therefore requires not simply new media, but a redesign of learning relationships and activities so that students become active participants in constructing meaning (Naimi et al., 2025).

The pedagogical shift is important because the goals of PAI extend beyond cognition. The paper emphasizes a contemporary character crisis marked by weak moral internalization, problematic social-media behavior, and declining social ethics. Instructional design must therefore align learning objectives, materials, methods, media, and assessment with both academic competence and the formation of *akhlak*. In digitally mediated learning, this includes teaching honesty, responsibility, respectful communication, and discernment in accessing and sharing information. Islamic digital literacy becomes a practical arena in which moral principles are exercised rather than merely memorized (Yulastri & Ramadhon, 2025).

Active learning models provide one route toward this alignment. The paper discusses Problem-Based Learning (PBL), Project-Based Learning (PjBL), and Inquiry-Based Learning as approaches that position learners as active constructors of knowledge. Their common foundation is consistent with constructivist and experiential perspectives: understanding develops through engagement with problems, projects, questions, evidence, and reflection rather than passive reception alone (Azzahra, 2025; Sofa et al., 2022). In PAI, these models are particularly valuable when religious texts and concepts are connected to ethical dilemmas, social issues, and decisions encountered by learners in daily life.

Active learning, however, is not sufficient by itself. The source paper gives equal importance to the integration of Islamic values within the content, process, and learning environment. Values such as *sidq* (truthfulness), *amanah* (responsibility), *tasamuh* (tolerance), cooperation, empathy, and respectful communication should be visible in the way students learn, interact, use information, and complete tasks. This prevents value integration from becoming a decorative addition of Qur'anic verses or *hadith* to otherwise unchanged instructional practices (Seniwati, 2025; Sujiono et al., 2024).

A second challenge is learner diversity. Students in one PAI classroom may differ in prior religious knowledge, family background, learning readiness, interests, and preferred ways of engaging with content. The source paper therefore positions differentiated instruction as an inclusive response that adapts content, learning processes, products, and the learning environment. Differentiation does not imply different educational purposes for each student; rather, it provides varied pathways toward shared learning outcomes so that students who need support and those who are ready for extension can both progress meaningfully (Almujab, 2023; Taufiq, 2025).

These concerns converge in character-based instructional design. Character development is not expected to appear automatically at the end of a lesson. It must be designed from the beginning through character-oriented objectives, emotionally and socially meaningful learning materials, participatory methods that allow students to practice values, and authentic assessment that examines attitudes and behavior alongside knowledge. The source paper also stresses that the credibility of character education depends on consistency between classroom messages and the wider school culture (Athifa et al., 2025; Liza et al., 2024).

Although the literature assembled in the source manuscript provides strong discussions of active learning, Islamic value integration, differentiation, and character education, these themes are often treated as separate instructional concerns. This article synthesizes them as mutually reinforcing dimensions of PAI instructional design. It addresses four questions: how active learning models can be implemented in PAI; how Islamic values can be integrated across learning processes; how differentiation can accommodate learner diversity; and how character-based design can align objectives, learning activities, assessment, and school culture. The contribution of the article is a coherent instructional synthesis that connects learner activity, value internalization, inclusion, and character formation within one design logic.

RESEARCH METHOD

This article employed a narrative literature review and conceptual synthesis. The analytical starting point was the academic paper *Strategi dan Model Pembelajaran PAI*, prepared in the Postgraduate Islamic Religious Education Program at Universitas Islam Negeri Palopo in 2026. The source paper organizes its discussion into four substantive areas: active learning models in PAI, integration of Islamic values in learning strategies, differentiated instruction, and character-based instructional design. Those four areas were retained as the principal categories of analysis in this article.

The literature base consisted of the scholarly sources already compiled in the source paper, including journal articles, review studies, and conceptual publications on PAI learning, constructivism, PBL, PjBL, inquiry learning, digital Islamic education, differentiated instruction, and character-oriented design. Sources were read for recurring propositions concerning instructional purpose, learning sequence, learner participation, Islamic values, examples of classroom implementation, reported benefits, and implementation constraints. The review does not claim exhaustive systematic coverage beyond the literature assembled in the source manuscript.

Analysis proceeded through thematic condensation and cross-theme comparison. First, descriptions of each model or strategy were reduced to its central instructional logic. Second, classroom examples contained in the paper were mapped to expected learning outcomes and Islamic values. Third, recurring implementation requirements and constraints were identified. Finally, the four themes were compared to determine how they can operate as a coherent design system rather than as isolated techniques. The resulting tables summarize the analytical synthesis and are intended as practical design tools for PAI teachers and educational institutions.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Active Learning Models for Islamic Religious Education

The first finding is that active learning in PAI is most effective when learner activity is organized around meaningful religious and social questions rather than activity for its own sake. The source paper explains active learning through a constructivist orientation in which students build understanding through experience, investigation, discussion, and reflection. This is highly relevant to PAI because religious knowledge is expected to guide judgment and action. A student who can reproduce a rule but cannot use it to interpret a real ethical problem has achieved only a partial learning outcome (Azzahra, 2025; Sofa et al., 2022).

Problem-Based Learning begins with an authentic problem and asks students to identify what is known, formulate questions, consult relevant sources, discuss alternatives, and propose a justified solution. The paper's example of social-media ethics illustrates this logic well. A case involving the dissemination of false information can be examined through the principle of *tabayyun* in QS. Al-Hujurat: 6, relevant hadith, and ethical reasoning about harm, responsibility, and communication. The model therefore links textual sources with contextual analysis. Studies cited in the source paper associate PBL in PAI with stronger critical thinking,

motivation, collaborative learning, and reflective understanding, while also noting that complex problems and lengthy group processes can reduce motivation when they are poorly scaffolded (Rohmah, 2025; Prawira et al., 2025).

Project-Based Learning extends active learning from problem analysis to the production of an authentic output. The anti-bullying project described in the paper asks students to connect QS. Al-Hujurat: 11 with a school-based campaign that may include videos, digital posters, short drama, or a simple survey. The educational value lies not only in the finished product. Students must plan, divide roles, communicate, make design choices, and take responsibility for a shared outcome. These processes allow values such as empathy, mutual respect, cooperation, and responsibility to become observable learning practices. The literature summarized in the paper also highlights constraints related to time, facilities, student ability differences, and teacher preparation (Lubis et al., 2024; Widadi et al., 2025).

Inquiry-Based Learning is distinguished by the central role of questions and evidence. In the example on the meaning and wisdom of zakat, students begin with a question about why zakat is obligatory and how it affects social life. They then formulate further questions, examine QS. At-Taubah: 60 and other sources, analyze the relationship between zakat and social inequality, present findings, and reflect on personal social responsibility. Inquiry therefore helps students move from receiving a conclusion to understanding how a conclusion is reached. The method supports critical thinking and independent meaning-making while keeping Islamic primary sources central to the inquiry process (Depin et al., 2024).

The three models are complementary rather than interchangeable. PBL is strongest when the instructional aim is reasoned problem solving, PjBL when learners need to transform knowledge into a sustained collaborative product, and inquiry when the learning goal emphasizes questioning, evidence, and discovery. Their shared requirement is purposeful teacher facilitation. Student-centered learning does not remove the teacher's role; it changes the role from sole transmitter to designer of problems and projects, curator of credible religious sources, facilitator of discussion, and provider of conceptual and ethical clarification.

Table 1. Active learning models and their instructional functions in PAI

Model	Core learning orientation	PAI implementation example	Main outcomes and constraints
Problem-Based Learning (PBL)	Analyze an authentic problem through collaborative inquiry and justified solution building.	Social-media hoax case examined through tabayyun (QS. Al-Hujurat: 6), hadith, discussion, and ethical decision making.	Supports critical thinking, responsibility, collaboration, and contextual understanding; can require substantial time and careful scaffolding.
Project-Based Learning (PjBL)	Create an authentic product through sustained planning, collaboration, and application of knowledge.	School anti-bullying campaign based on QS. Al-Hujurat: 11 using video, poster, drama, or survey products.	Builds creativity, communication, empathy, cooperation, and responsibility; constrained by time, facilities, learner differences, and teacher readiness.

Model	Core learning orientation	PAI implementation example	Main outcomes and constraints
Inquiry-Based Learning	Develop understanding through questions, evidence gathering, analysis, conclusion, and reflection.	Inquiry into the meaning and social function of zakat using QS. At-Taubah: 60, hadith, references, group analysis, and reflection.	Strengthens questioning, critical reasoning, source use, and social awareness; requires guided access to credible sources and clear inquiry stages.

Integrating Islamic Values into Learning Strategies

The second finding is that value integration becomes educationally significant only when Islamic values are embedded across the learning experience. The source paper rejects an approach in which a lesson is labelled Islamic merely because a verse or hadith is appended to the content. Instead, integration must influence what is learned, how learning is conducted, how learners treat one another, and how learning is carried into digital and social environments. This wider conception is consistent with the purpose of PAI as the formation of knowledge, attitude, and conduct (Seniwati, 2025; Sujiono et al., 2024).

At the content level, teachers connect concepts with Qur'anic guidance, hadith, ethical principles, and contemporary situations. The crucial step is contextual interpretation. A text about honesty, for example, can be connected with academic integrity, the verification of online information, and responsible communication. In this way, content integration moves from citation to meaning. It allows students to see Islamic sources as interpretive resources for actual decisions rather than as material that is relevant only for examinations.

At the process level, the method itself becomes a site of value formation. Collaborative tasks can be designed so that students practice amanah through role responsibility, sidq through accurate reporting of information, tasamuh through respectful disagreement, and cooperation through shared problem solving. PBL, PjBL, and inquiry learning are useful because their social structure creates repeated opportunities to enact these values. The teacher therefore needs to assess not only whether a group reaches a correct answer or produces an attractive product, but also how the group arrives at the result.

The learning environment provides a third level of integration. A classroom that teaches respect while tolerating humiliation, or teaches honesty while allowing habitual cheating, sends contradictory messages. The source paper therefore emphasizes a learning climate characterized by respectful communication, mutual appreciation, and consistency between stated values and classroom norms. Value integration is strengthened when routines, teacher language, feedback, and peer interaction embody the same ethical commitments found in the lesson content.

Digital learning extends this requirement beyond the physical classroom. Digital tools should be used as a context for practicing Islamic media ethics, including truthful information use, responsibility in communication, appropriate content selection, and awareness of the consequences of sharing information. Gusmira et al. (2025) and Yulastri and Ramadhon (2025), as cited in the source paper, reinforce the importance of connecting technological use with moral and religious guidance. This means that digital competence in PAI should include ethical competence, not only operational skill.

A practical implication is that value integration should be visible in instructional indicators. Teachers can define what a value looks like during learning: responsibility may be observed in timely completion of group roles; honesty in accurate citation and reporting;

tolerance in the ability to listen to a different interpretation without ridicule; and digital ethics in checking information before sharing it. Such indicators make internalization more teachable and assessable while avoiding the reduction of character to abstract slogans.

Table 2. Dimensions of Islamic value integration in PAI learning

Integration dimension	Instructional strategy	Islamic values emphasized	Observable learning indicators
Content	Connect concepts with Qur'an, hadith, Islamic ethical principles, and current learner experiences.	Sidq, amanah, justice, empathy, responsibility.	Students explain the religious basis of a decision and apply it to a contemporary case.
Learning process	Design discussion, teamwork, problem solving, projects, and inquiry so values are practiced during participation.	Amanah, tasamuh, ta'awun/cooperation, respect.	Students fulfill roles, listen respectfully, report evidence honestly, and share responsibility for outcomes.
Learning environment	Establish classroom routines, communication, feedback, and relationships that are consistent with Islamic ethics.	Adab, respect, fairness, mutual care.	Classroom interaction avoids ridicule, encourages respectful disagreement, and applies rules consistently.
Digital learning	Integrate ethical information searching, verification, communication, and content sharing into technology-supported tasks.	Truthfulness, tabayyun, responsibility, self-control.	Students verify information, cite sources, communicate responsibly, and avoid harmful or misleading content.

Differentiated Instruction in Islamic Religious Education

The third finding is that differentiated instruction provides a structured response to the heterogeneity of PAI classrooms. The source paper describes differentiation as the adjustment of content, process, product, and learning environment according to readiness, interests, and learning profiles. The purpose is not to fragment the class into unrelated learning goals. Rather, differentiation creates equitable access to common competencies by varying the level of support, complexity, representation, or mode of expression (Almujab, 2023; Amalina et al., 2026).

Content differentiation responds to differences in prior knowledge and readiness. In a lesson on prayer, for example, students who still need foundational support may focus on correct recitation and movement, while students who have already mastered those elements can investigate the spiritual meaning, discipline, or ethical implications of prayer. Both groups remain within the same thematic domain, but the learning challenge is calibrated so that one group is not overwhelmed and the other is not under-challenged.

Process differentiation varies how students engage with content. The source paper recognizes that learners may respond differently to discussion, independent reading, visual representation, or direct practice. In PAI, this can mean providing a diagram and demonstration for procedural worship, an audio support for recitation, guided discussion for ethical cases, or a structured reading guide for text-based interpretation. The important principle is purposeful variation based on learning need, not the rigid labeling of students into fixed learning-style categories.

Product differentiation provides flexibility in how students demonstrate achievement. A common PAI competency may be shown through a video explanation, concept map, reflective writing, presentation, or other suitable product, provided that the same assessment criteria remain visible. This can increase motivation and allow students to use strengths without weakening academic expectations. Learning-environment differentiation complements this by arranging spaces and routines that support focused individual work, group discussion, reading, or reflection.

The benefits identified in the source paper include stronger understanding, motivation, participation, inclusion, twenty-first-century skills, and reduced learning gaps. At the same time, differentiation increases planning demands, class-management complexity, resource needs, and expectations for teacher diagnostic competence. These constraints are significant. Differentiation should therefore be implemented through manageable routines, such as readiness-based task tiers, limited product choices, targeted scaffolds, and flexible grouping, rather than through the unrealistic expectation that every learner receives a completely individualized lesson (Taufiq, 2025; Hastuti & Sahnan, 2025).

In PAI, differentiated instruction must also preserve value coherence. Learners may receive different pathways or levels of scaffolding, but common Islamic values and core competencies should remain shared. This distinction is essential because inclusivity is not achieved by lowering expectations for some students. It is achieved by designing multiple access routes so that all learners can participate meaningfully in the same moral and intellectual community of learning.

Table 3. Differentiated instruction components and PAI applications

Element	PAI implementation	Learner need addressed	Teacher responsibility
Content	Use different levels of depth or scaffolding within the same theme; e.g., prayer procedures for beginners and spiritual meaning for advanced learners.	Readiness and prior knowledge.	Diagnose starting points, preserve common outcomes, and provide appropriate challenge.
Process	Vary discussion, guided reading, visual support, audio, demonstration, practice, or collaborative inquiry.	Different access needs and ways of engaging with material.	Select methods purposefully and regroup students flexibly based on evidence of learning.
Product	Allow selected formats such as video, concept map, reflection, or presentation under common criteria.	Interests, strengths, and modes of expression.	Maintain equivalent standards and assess the same competency across product choices.

Element	PAI implementation	Learner need addressed	Teacher responsibility
Learning environment	Provide spaces/routines for discussion, reading, practice, independent work, and reflection.	Need for structure, focus, collaboration, or quiet reflection.	Organize the classroom so varied activities remain manageable, inclusive, and respectful.

Character-Based Instructional Design for PAI

The fourth finding is that character education becomes more credible when it is treated as an instructional design requirement rather than a supplementary message. The source paper defines instructional design as a systematic process linking needs analysis, learning objectives, strategy, media, and evaluation. In PAI, character-based design adds a deliberate question to each component: what moral disposition should this learning experience cultivate, and what learning activity allows the disposition to be practiced and observed? (Liza et al., 2024).

Character-oriented learning objectives should therefore combine knowledge with a clearly articulated disposition. A lesson on zakat can aim not only for students to explain the rules and recipients of zakat but also to demonstrate empathy and social concern through the interpretation of its social purpose. This formulation helps prevent a mismatch in which an affective goal is stated but all learning activities and assessments remain purely cognitive.

Learning materials should likewise move beyond factual presentation. The source paper recommends materials that can engage learners emotionally and contextually, including meaningful stories, real experiences, testimony, social cases, and situations that require ethical reflection. In PAI, such materials are not substitutes for Qur'an, hadith, or established religious concepts; they are contexts through which students can understand why those concepts matter in human life.

Character formation also depends on methods that allow value practice. Discussion can develop respectful disagreement; role play can build empathy; demonstration can connect religious procedure with disciplined practice; and social projects or service learning can connect religious concepts with responsibility toward others. These methods are especially powerful when combined with the active learning approaches discussed earlier. A character goal such as responsibility becomes more visible in a project with real group obligations than in a lesson where students only define responsibility.

Assessment is the fourth component emphasized in the source paper. Authentic assessment can include teacher observation, self-assessment, reflection, peer feedback, performance evidence, and other records that show how values appear in practice. This does not mean assigning a simplistic numerical score to a student's inner religiosity. Rather, teachers assess observable behaviors connected to learning expectations: whether a student uses evidence honestly, fulfills responsibilities, listens respectfully, reflects on mistakes, or demonstrates care in a social task.

The source paper identifies school culture as the decisive consistency test. Character messages lose authority when institutional practices contradict them. Teaching honesty while tolerating cheating, or teaching mutual respect while classroom relationships remain humiliating and coercive, produces a fragmented educational experience. Character-based PAI design therefore needs alignment between lesson objectives, teacher behavior, assessment systems, classroom norms, and the broader school environment (Athifa et al., 2025).

Taken together, the four findings suggest an integrated design sequence for PAI: identify the competency and character outcome, select an authentic problem or question, embed relevant Islamic values in the learning process, differentiate access and expression

where needed, and assess both understanding and observable value-related practice. This sequence makes active learning, value integration, differentiation, and character formation parts of one instructional architecture rather than competing innovations.

Table 4. Character-based instructional design components in PAI

Design component	Character-oriented design principle	PAI example	Assessment or implementation indicator
Learning objectives	State cognitive competence together with the character disposition to be developed.	Explain zakat principles and demonstrate empathy/social concern in interpreting its purpose.	Objectives explicitly include knowledge and observable value-related behavior.
Learning materials	Use Islamic sources together with contextual stories, cases, experiences, and ethical situations.	Connect Qur'anic/hadith guidance with real social or digital dilemmas.	Students can explain both the concept and its relevance to a real situation.
Learning methods	Use participatory methods that require learners to practice values during learning.	Discussion, role play, demonstration, PBL/PjBL, inquiry, or social/service project.	Participation shows responsibility, cooperation, respect, empathy, and ethical reasoning.
Authentic assessment	Assess knowledge alongside observable attitudes and learning behaviors without reducing religiosity to a single score.	Observation, reflection, self-assessment, peer feedback, performance evidence.	Evidence is collected from concrete learning behavior and reflective explanation.
School-culture alignment	Ensure classroom messages are consistent with teacher behavior, rules, assessment systems, and relationships.	Honesty education supported by fair assessment and anti-cheating practices; respect reinforced in daily interaction.	Institutional routines reinforce rather than contradict the values taught in PAI.

CONCLUSION

PAI instruction in contemporary educational contexts requires more than the adoption of isolated innovative methods. The literature synthesized from the source paper shows that effective instructional transformation depends on four connected dimensions. Active learning through PBL, PjBL, and inquiry enables students to interpret Islamic knowledge through problems, projects, questions, evidence, and reflection. Islamic value integration ensures that learner activity remains ethically directed. Differentiated instruction provides equitable pathways for students with different levels of readiness and learning needs. Character-based instructional design aligns objectives, materials, methods, assessment, and school culture so that moral formation is planned rather than assumed.

The main implication is coherence. Active learning should be designed around meaningful PAI outcomes; differentiation should vary pathways without abandoning common competencies and values; digital learning should include ethical responsibility; and character assessment should rely on observable learning practices and reflection. For teachers and institutions, improvement can begin by reviewing whether these dimensions are aligned within lesson planning and school routines. Future empirical studies should test how this integrated design operates across different school levels, learner profiles, and digital learning conditions, particularly its effects on critical thinking, participation, value internalization, and observable character-related behavior.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Mardatilla contributed to conceptualization, literature synthesis, and preparation of the original draft. Muhaemin contributed to conceptual refinement, scholarly review, and manuscript revision. Both authors reviewed and approved the final manuscript.

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