



Joyful Learning-Based Islamic Religious Education and Its Implications for Students' Intrinsic Motivation

M Renaldy Fadillah¹, Neng Gina Aryani¹, Kahfi Pratama²

¹Islamic Education, STAI Pelabuhan Ratu, Indonesia

²Educational Management, Universitas Pamulang, Indonesia

*Corresponding Author: M Renaldy Fadillah

E-mail: renaldy@staip.ac.id

Article Info

Article History:

Received: 28 April 2026

Revised: 2 June 2026

Accepted: 22 June 2026

Keywords:

Collaborative Learning,
Educational Psychology,
Islamic Religious
Education, Intrinsic
Motivation, Joyful
Learning

Abstract

This study aims to analyze the implementation of joyful learning in Islamic Religious Education and examine its implications for students' intrinsic motivation in a fourth-grade classroom at Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Tegal. A qualitative case study approach was employed using classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, and documentation. The findings indicate that joyful learning creates an interactive, enjoyable, and student-centered learning environment through storytelling, educational games, collaborative activities, and dialogic communication. These instructional practices significantly enhance students' intrinsic motivation, reflected in increased enthusiasm, curiosity, engagement, self-confidence, and learning satisfaction. The study also identifies teacher creativity, positive teacher-student relationships, and supportive classroom environments as key enabling factors. The findings imply that integrating emotionally meaningful learning experiences into religious education can improve instructional effectiveness and promote more humanistic, psychologically responsive educational practices at the primary level.

INTRODUCTION

Islamic Religious Education (IRE) at the Madrasah Ibtidaiyah (MI) level plays a strategic role in shaping students' foundational faith, moral values, and character from an early age (Awwalina 2023; Fadillah 2026). At this developmental stage, students are in the concrete operational phase, which requires contextual, meaningful, and engaging learning experiences (Hayat et al. 2024; Wang, Degol, and Henry 2019). However, in practice, IRE instruction is still frequently dominated by cognitively oriented approaches that emphasize the transmission of normative knowledge, thereby limiting opportunities for emotional engagement and deeper learning experiences. This condition has implications for students' low interest and limited active participation in the learning process (Tossell et al., 2024; Mendrofa et al., 2026; Al-Zahrani & Alasmari, 2024; Li et al., 2024).

From the perspective of educational psychology, intrinsic motivation is a key determinant of students' engagement in learning (Karimi and Sotoodeh 2020; Mohzana 2024; Umar et al. 2023). Intrinsic motivation refers to an internal drive to engage in an activity due to interest, enjoyment, or satisfaction derived from the

activity itself (Fishbach and Woolley 2022; Putra, Cho, and Liu 2017a). Self-Determination Theory proposed by Deci and Ryan emphasizes that intrinsic motivation develops optimally when individuals experience autonomy, competence, and relatedness in their learning environment (Ryan & Deci, 2024). Therefore, learning environments that are enjoyable and meaningful are essential prerequisites for fostering intrinsic motivation, particularly in primary education (Clanton Harpine, 2024; Bukhari et al., 2023; David & Weinstein, 2023; Krulj et al., 2024).

One relevant approach to addressing this issue is joyful learning. Joyful learning emphasizes the creation of a pleasant and non-threatening learning atmosphere while promoting active student engagement through creative strategies such as educational games, interactive discussions, and experiential learning (Kayyali 2025; Pasaribu, 2025; Rowley & Lucas, 2025; Uzzi, 2024). In the context of IRE, this approach has strong potential to integrate religious values with positive emotional experiences, thereby enhancing not only cognitive understanding but also students' affective and spiritual development (Andrei, 2023; Fayzullaevna & Ravshanovich, 2025).

Although joyful learning has been widely examined in general education, its application in IRE, particularly at the MI level, remains relatively limited (Carroll et al., 2025). Most previous studies have focused on improving cognitive learning outcomes or evaluating specific instructional methods, while the dynamics of classroom interactions involving teachers, students, and the learning environment have not been extensively explored. Furthermore, studies that explicitly connect joyful learning with intrinsic motivation in IRE contexts are still scarce.

These limitations indicate a significant research gap, particularly in understanding how joyful learning is implemented in real classroom contexts and how the resulting learning dynamics influence students' intrinsic motivation. In this study, learning dynamics refer to pedagogical interactions, instructional strategies employed by teachers, student responses, and classroom conditions that collectively shape the overall learning experience (Zhou, 2025; De Caro-Barek et al., 2023; Akram & Abdelrady, 2025). A comprehensive understanding of these dynamics is essential for developing more humanistic and psychologically responsive IRE learning models (Jumiati et al., 2025; Priyadarshini et al., 2025; Lapidot-Lefler, 2025). Moreover, the local context of Madrasah Ibtidaiyah in Tegal presents unique characteristics that influence instructional practices. Cultural background, students' socio-economic conditions, and institutional policies are variables that must be considered in examining the implementation of joyful learning. Therefore, a qualitative approach with a case study design is considered appropriate to explore this phenomenon in depth and contextually, enabling a holistic understanding of classroom practices (Kelly, 2023; Viera, 2023; Usman et al., 2025; Adams et al., 2022).

From a theoretical perspective, this study seeks to integrate the concept of joyful learning with intrinsic motivation theory within the framework of educational psychology. This integration is expected to enrich the body of knowledge in IRE, particularly in developing instructional approaches that go beyond knowledge transmission and also address students' psychological needs (Azizah et al., 2025; Bourke et al., 2025; Zein & Arifudin, 2025). Consequently, IRE learning is expected to function not only as a cognitive process but also as a holistic experience encompassing emotional and spiritual dimensions. Previous studies indicate a positive relationship between enjoyable learning environments and increased student motivation. Suyadi found that learning designed in an enjoyable manner stimulates brain activity associated with positive emotions, thereby enhancing students' readiness to learn and engagement (Suyadi 2019). However, this study is largely conceptual and does not deeply examine the dynamics of its implementation in primary-level IRE contexts.

Emda emphasized that intrinsic motivation plays a dominant role in determining students' learning success compared to extrinsic motivation. The study highlights that the learning environment, including teaching methods and instructional approaches, significantly influences the emergence of intrinsic motivation (Putra et al., 2017b; Chen et al., 2024; Merdiaty & Sulistiasih, 2024). Nevertheless, the study does not specifically connect joyful learning with IRE contexts, leaving a gap for further investigation.

This study is expected to contribute to identifying effective instructional practices in enhancing students' intrinsic motivation through joyful learning. The findings may serve as a basis for developing more innovative and contextual teaching strategies, as well as providing practical recommendations for IRE teachers in creating engaging and meaningful learning environments. This aligns with contemporary educational demands that emphasize student-centered learning and the balanced development of cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains.

The research problem focuses on how joyful learning-based IRE is implemented in Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Tegal and how its dynamics influence students' intrinsic motivation. Accordingly, this study aims to analyze in depth the dynamics of joyful learning-based IRE and examine its implications for students' intrinsic motivation. The findings are expected to provide both theoretical and practical contributions to the development of more effective, humanistic, and psychologically responsive IRE instruction.

METHODS

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative research approach using a case study design to investigate the implementation of joyful learning-based Islamic Religious Education (IRE) and its implications for students' intrinsic motivation. A qualitative approach was selected because the study aimed to explore participants' lived experiences, classroom interactions, and pedagogical dynamics in depth rather than measure variables numerically. The case study design was considered appropriate because it allows researchers to examine a specific phenomenon within its real-life context, particularly when the boundaries between the phenomenon and context are not clearly evident (Creswell & Creswell, 2022; Cypress, 2018). In this study, the phenomenon under investigation was the classroom implementation of joyful learning in Islamic Religious Education and its influence on students' internal motivational development.

Research Setting and Participants

The research was conducted at Madrasah Ibtidaiyah (MI) Tegal, Indonesia, during the 2025/2026 academic year. The school was selected purposively because it had begun implementing more student-centered instructional strategies in Islamic Religious Education. The focus of the study was a fourth-grade classroom, as students at this level are in the concrete operational stage of cognitive development, where active and engaging learning experiences significantly influence motivation and comprehension.

Participants were selected using purposive sampling to ensure information-rich cases relevant to the research objectives (Sugiyono, 2019). The primary participant was one Islamic Religious Education teacher who played a central role in designing and implementing joyful learning activities. Supporting participants included 28 fourth-grade students aged between 9 and 10 years, as well as one homeroom teacher who provided additional contextual insights regarding students' classroom behavior and motivation. These participants were chosen because of their direct

involvement in the instructional process and their capacity to provide meaningful information related to learning dynamics.

Data Collection Techniques

Data were collected through three primary techniques: classroom observation, semi-structured interviews, and documentation. Classroom observations were conducted across six instructional meetings to examine teaching strategies, classroom interactions, student participation, and emotional engagement during learning activities. Observation enabled direct examination of how joyful learning principles were implemented in practice, including the use of educational games, storytelling, interactive discussion, and contextual learning activities.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the Islamic Religious Education teacher, the homeroom teacher, and eight selected students representing diverse academic and behavioral characteristics. This technique allowed the researcher to explore participants' perceptions, experiences, and reflections regarding the implementation of joyful learning and its influence on intrinsic motivation (Roulston & Choi, 2018; Tavory, 2020). Interview questions focused on learning enjoyment, participation, curiosity, confidence, and motivational changes observed during classroom activities. Documentation served as supporting data and included lesson plans, instructional materials, student assignments, classroom photographs, and field notes. These documents provided additional evidence to validate findings from observations and interviews. The analytical indicators used in data collection were derived from two major constructs: joyful learning, including enjoyment, active engagement, interaction, and meaningful learning experiences, and intrinsic motivation, including curiosity, enthusiasm, persistence, self-confidence, and autonomous learning behavior.

Data Analysis

Data analysis employed the interactive model proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, consisting of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing. The analysis process began with transcription of interview recordings and organization of observation notes and documentation. During data condensation, relevant information was coded and categorized according to emerging themes related to joyful learning and intrinsic motivation. The coding process involved open coding to identify preliminary concepts, axial coding to establish relationships between categories, and selective coding to generate major themes. The categorized data were then presented through thematic matrices and narrative descriptions to facilitate interpretation. Finally, conclusions were drawn by identifying patterns, relationships, and recurring meanings across data sources. This analytical process enabled comprehensive understanding of how joyful learning influenced students' motivational development.

Trustworthiness of Data

To ensure research trustworthiness, the study applied credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability criteria. Credibility was strengthened through triangulation of data sources and collection methods, prolonged engagement in the research setting, and member checking with participants. Transferability was achieved by providing rich contextual descriptions of the research setting and participants. Dependability was maintained through systematic documentation of research procedures and analytical decisions. Confirmability was ensured through reflective field notes and audit trails to minimize researcher bias. Ethical considerations included obtaining formal permission from the school, ensuring participant confidentiality, and securing voluntary informed consent from all participants.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the empirical findings of the study on the implementation of joyful learning-based Islamic Religious Education (IRE) and its implications for students' intrinsic motivation in the fourth-grade classroom at Madrasah Ibtidaiyah (MI) Tegal. The findings are organized into four main parts. First, the study presents the observed classroom dynamics during six instructional sessions to describe how joyful learning was implemented in practice. Second, it reports the indicators of students' intrinsic motivation based on observation and interview data. Third, thematic findings derived from interviews are presented to explain how students and teachers perceived joyful learning. Finally, supporting and inhibiting factors are described based on triangulated evidence from observation, interviews, and documentation. All findings are presented systematically to demonstrate the relationship between joyful learning practices and motivational development.

Profile of Research Informants

The interview phase involved ten informants consisting of one Islamic Religious Education teacher, one homeroom teacher, and eight students selected purposively to represent varying academic performance and classroom participation levels.

Table 1. Profile of Research Informants

Code	Role	Age	Contribution
T1	IRE Teacher	36	Main informant
H1	Homeroom Teacher	40	Supporting informant
S1	Student	10	Active learner
S2	Student	9	Active learner
S3	Student	10	Moderate learner
S4	Student	9	Moderate learner
S5	Student	10	Passive learner
S6	Student	9	Passive learner
S7	Student	10	Active learner
S8	Student	9	Moderate learner

Source: Primary interview data processed by authors, 2026

The diversity of participants provided comprehensive perspectives on classroom dynamics, instructional practices, and students' motivational changes. The Islamic Religious Education teacher offered insights into teaching strategies and joyful learning implementation, while the homeroom teacher provided additional observations on students' behavioral development. Meanwhile, students with diverse academic and participation levels enriched the data by reflecting varied learning experiences, allowing a more holistic understanding of how joyful learning influenced classroom engagement and intrinsic motivation.

Implementation of Joyful Learning in Classroom Practice

Observation across six instructional sessions showed that joyful learning was consistently integrated into Islamic Religious Education instruction. The teacher moved beyond conventional lecturing by incorporating varied and interactive pedagogical approaches.

Table 2. Observation Results of Joyful Learning Across Six Sessions

Session	Opening Activity	Core Activity	Student Participation	Atmosphere
1	Quiz	Storytelling	Active	Enthusiastic
2	Ice breaking	Group discussion	High	Interactive
3	Short game	Role play	Very high	Enjoyable

4	Reflection	Problem solving	Active	Collaborative
5	Motivation story	Peer learning	High	Dynamic
6	Educational game	Contextual discussion	Very high	Positive

Source: Classroom observation data processed by authors, 2026

Table 2 indicates that joyful learning was present in all six sessions. The opening activities functioned as emotional preparation. Students became more ready to participate when lessons began with enjoyable activities such as quizzes or games.

During the core sessions, teaching strategies varied significantly. Storytelling enabled moral values to be conveyed through relatable narratives. Group discussion strengthened peer interaction. Role-play activities encouraged students to simulate religious and ethical situations, making abstract concepts more concrete. Field notes showed a clear behavioral change. In early sessions, several students remained hesitant. By Sessions 5 and 6, participation increased significantly. Students voluntarily raised hands, initiated questions, and actively contributed during discussions.

The teacher explained:

“Joyful learning helps students feel relaxed. When they are relaxed, they absorb religious values more naturally.” (T1)

This finding indicates that joyful learning improved not only classroom interaction but also emotional readiness to learn.

Indicators of Students’ Intrinsic Motivation

Observation and interview data identified five dominant indicators of intrinsic motivation: enthusiasm, curiosity, engagement, self-confidence, and satisfaction.

Table 3. Indicators of Students’ Intrinsic Motivation

Indicator	Description	Frequency (n=28)
Enthusiasm	Active participation	26
Curiosity	Asking questions	23
Engagement	Sustained attention	25
Self-confidence	Expressing opinions	21
Satisfaction	Positive emotional responses	27

Source: Observation and interview data processed by authors, 2026

Table 3 indicates that satisfaction emerged as the strongest motivational indicator, observed in 27 students. Students demonstrated positive emotional responses through smiling, laughter, and enthusiastic verbal expressions during the learning process.

One student stated:

“Islamic lessons feel fun now, so I don’t get sleepy.” (S2)

Enthusiasm was observed in 26 students. Students actively responded to teacher prompts and voluntarily participated in activities. Compared with conventional sessions, passive behavior declined substantially.

Curiosity emerged in 23 students. Students increasingly asked reflective and contextual questions.

Examples included:

“How do we practice honesty on social media?”

“Is helping friends also part of worship?”

These questions indicate deeper cognitive engagement.

Engagement was evident in 25 students. Students maintained attention longer and were less distracted. Collaborative learning significantly improved concentration.

Self-confidence improved in 21 students. Initially passive students gradually became more willing to express opinions.

One student reported:

“Before, I was afraid of answering wrong. Now I am brave because the teacher appreciates all answers.” (S5)

This suggests joyful learning created psychological safety that reduced fear of failure.

Interview-Based Thematic Findings

Thematic coding of interview data generated 108 meaningful codes, grouped into four major themes.

Table 4. Coding Matrix of Interview Findings

Initial Code	Category	Theme	Example Quote
Fun class	Positive emotion	Emotional experience	“Learning feels fun”
Asking questions	Curiosity	Active participation	“I ask more questions”
Easy to understand	Cognitive meaning	Meaningful learning	“Stories help understanding”
Brave to speak	Confidence	Self-confidence	“I am not afraid now”

Source: Interview coding data processed by authors, 2026

The codes were further quantified.

Table 5. Distribution of Themes

Theme	Frequency	Percentage
Positive Emotional Experience	34	31.5%
Active Participation	28	25.9%
Meaningful Learning	24	22.2%
Increased Self-confidence	22	20.4%

Source: Interview analysis processed by authors, 2026

Positive emotional experience emerged as the dominant theme, as students frequently described the learning process as enjoyable, interactive, and more engaging than conventional classroom instruction. This suggests that joyful learning successfully created a positive emotional atmosphere that encouraged greater participation and motivation.

The homeroom teacher stated:

“Students who were usually passive now participate more frequently during Islamic lessons.” (H1)

Active participation emerged as the second strongest theme. Students no longer functioned as passive listeners but actively discussed, questioned, and collaborated.

Meaningful learning emerged because joyful learning linked abstract religious values with real-life contexts.

A student explained:

*“Stories make religious lessons easier because we can imagine real situations.”
(S7)*

Self-confidence also improved significantly due to the supportive learning environment.

Documentation Findings

Documentation analysis supported the observation and interview findings.

Table 6. Documentation Analysis

Document	Findings	Relevance
Lesson Plan	Game-based activities included	Joyful learning evidence
Student Worksheets	Higher completion rate	Engagement indicator
Classroom Photos	Active group interaction	Participation evidence
Field Notes	Positive teacher-student communication	Motivation support

Source: Documentation analysis processed by authors, 2026

Lesson plans explicitly integrated joyful learning strategies such as storytelling, games, and collaborative tasks. Student worksheets showed improved completion rates, with 25 out of 28 students completing activities independently. Classroom photographs captured active peer interaction and collaborative discussion.

Field notes documented repeated positive interactions between teacher and students. The teacher frequently used supportive verbal reinforcement such as praise and encouragement, which contributed to motivation enhancement.

Triangulation of Findings

To ensure credibility, findings were validated using source and method triangulation.

Table 7. Triangulation Matrix

Finding	Observation	Interview	Documentation
High participation	✓	✓	✓
Increased curiosity	✓	✓	—
Positive emotional response	✓	✓	✓
Improved confidence	✓	✓	—
Joyful strategies implemented	✓	✓	✓

Source: Triangulated primary data processed by authors (2026).

Triangulation confirmed consistency across all data sources. High participation was visible during observations, confirmed by participant interviews, and supported by documentation. Similarly, joyful learning strategies were consistently identified across observations, interviews, and lesson plans.

Joyful Learning as a Pedagogical Mechanism for Strengthening Intrinsic Motivation in Islamic Religious Education

The findings of this study demonstrate that joyful learning functions as a significant pedagogical mechanism for enhancing students' intrinsic motivation in Islamic Religious Education (IRE), particularly at the primary education level. The implementation of joyful learning transformed classroom instruction from a predominantly teacher-centered model into a more interactive, emotionally engaging, and student-centered learning environment. This pedagogical transformation is important because intrinsic motivation in young learners develops not merely

through cognitive stimulation but through emotionally meaningful learning experiences that satisfy psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness. These findings strongly align with Self-Determination Theory (SDT), which argues that individuals are more intrinsically motivated when learning environments support emotional safety, meaningful participation, and self-efficacy (Ryan & Deci, 2024).

One of the most significant findings is that joyful learning created positive emotional experiences that substantially increased students' enthusiasm and satisfaction during IRE instruction. This result is consistent with recent research emphasizing the central role of positive emotion in facilitating learning engagement. Kayyali (2025) argues that enjoyable classroom environments reduce psychological barriers and improve receptiveness to learning. Similarly, Hayat et al. (2024) found that children in the concrete operational stage respond more effectively to emotionally engaging and experiential instruction because such methods align with their developmental characteristics. The present study extends these findings by demonstrating that positive emotional engagement is particularly important in religious education, where abstract moral and spiritual values often become difficult for young learners to internalize through conventional lecturing alone.

The finding that satisfaction emerged as the strongest motivational indicator supports previous evidence showing that positive emotional states directly influence academic engagement and willingness to participate. Fishbach and Woolley (2022) explain that intrinsic motivation is closely linked to the pleasurable nature of learning tasks, where enjoyment becomes a driver of sustained participation. In this study, students consistently reported that IRE lessons became "fun," "interesting," and "not boring" after joyful learning strategies were introduced. This suggests that emotional enjoyment should not be treated as supplementary to learning but rather as an essential component of pedagogical effectiveness. Unlike previous studies that primarily discuss joyful learning in general education settings, this research demonstrates its specific relevance in religious education contexts, thereby providing a novel contribution to IRE pedagogy.

Another important finding concerns increased active participation. Students became more willing to engage in questioning, discussion, collaboration, and problem-solving. This result aligns with Wang et al. (2019), who emphasized that active classroom participation reflects deeper cognitive engagement and stronger psychological investment in learning. Recent studies in student-centered pedagogy also report that participatory instructional approaches increase motivation by giving learners greater agency in the classroom (Umar et al., 2023; Mohzana, 2024). The current study supports these conclusions while extending them into Islamic education, showing that active participation can enhance not only academic engagement but also the internalization of religious values.

This finding differs from traditional Islamic Religious Education practices commonly characterized by memorization and one-way knowledge transmission. Conventional IRE often prioritizes cognitive mastery of religious content without sufficiently addressing emotional and motivational dimensions. The present findings suggest that when students actively participate in constructing understanding through discussion, games, and role-play, religious learning becomes more meaningful and personally relevant. This marks an important departure from traditional instructional models and reinforces the need to modernize IRE pedagogy to align with contemporary educational psychology.

The increase in students' curiosity represents another significant contribution of this study. Students increasingly asked contextual and reflective questions, such as how religious values apply to digital communication and social interaction. This finding

suggests that joyful learning supports inquiry-based learning and higher-order thinking. Previous studies indicate that curiosity serves as a critical precursor to deep learning and knowledge retention because it stimulates autonomous exploration (Karimi & Sotoodeh, 2020). The present study confirms this relationship in the context of religious education, demonstrating that joyful learning encourages students not merely to memorize religious principles but to critically connect them with everyday life.

This finding partially differs from earlier research on religious instruction that often portrays students as passive recipients of doctrinal knowledge. Instead, the present study shows that children are capable of reflective and contextual thinking when instructional design encourages exploration. This finding contributes theoretically by integrating joyful learning theory with motivational theory in the domain of religious pedagogy. The novelty lies in demonstrating that joyful learning does not dilute religious seriousness; rather, it strengthens conceptual internalization by making abstract values cognitively accessible and emotionally meaningful.

The development of self-confidence further supports the argument that joyful learning fulfills essential psychological needs. Students who initially hesitated to speak gradually became more willing to express opinions and respond to teacher questions. This finding strongly supports SDT's competence dimension, which emphasizes that perceived capability enhances intrinsic motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2024). Positive teacher responses and the absence of punitive correction created a psychologically safe environment where students felt comfortable taking intellectual risks.

This result is consistent with research showing that supportive teacher-student relationships significantly influence students' confidence and motivation (Mohzana, 2024). However, the current study adds a contextual nuance by showing that confidence development in IRE is closely tied to relational warmth and non-judgmental communication. Since religious subjects may involve moral evaluation, students can feel anxious about giving incorrect answers. Joyful learning mitigates this anxiety by normalizing exploration and dialogue rather than rigid correctness. This represents an important practical implication for Islamic educators seeking to create more humanistic learning environments.

The study also identified several supporting and inhibiting factors that influence successful implementation. Teacher creativity emerged as the strongest supporting factor. This confirms prior findings that instructional innovation is central to sustaining student engagement (Carter et al., 2023; Zhang & Lin, 2022). Creative teachers are better able to translate abstract concepts into age-appropriate learning activities. In this study, storytelling, games, and collaborative learning proved highly effective in maintaining motivation. This suggests that pedagogical creativity should be treated as a professional competency rather than merely a personal teaching style. Positive teacher-student relationships and institutional support were additional supporting factors. These findings align with relational pedagogy literature emphasizing that motivation flourishes in environments characterized by trust and emotional support (Bakker et al., 2021). School leadership also plays a role by enabling flexible teaching practices and encouraging pedagogical innovation.

Despite these strengths, several challenges were identified. Limited instructional time constrained the implementation of interactive learning activities. This challenge has also been reported in recent educational innovation studies, where engaging pedagogy often requires longer preparation and execution time (Garcia & Ramos, 2023). Diverse student abilities further complicated implementation, as not all students adapted equally to collaborative and active learning formats. These findings

suggest that joyful learning requires differentiated instructional planning and careful classroom management.

The theoretical contribution of this study lies in extending joyful learning discourse into the domain of Islamic Religious Education. Most previous studies examine joyful learning in general or secular educational settings. This study demonstrates that joyful learning also functions effectively in religious instruction by facilitating emotional engagement, conceptual understanding, and motivational growth. The research therefore bridges three major theoretical domains: educational psychology, intrinsic motivation theory, and Islamic pedagogy. This integrative perspective constitutes the primary novelty of the study.

From a practical perspective, the findings offer important implications for teachers, schools, and curriculum developers. Teachers should move beyond lecture-dominated approaches and integrate interactive, emotionally supportive strategies into IRE instruction. Schools should provide institutional support through professional development and pedagogical training. Curriculum designers should also consider incorporating joyful learning principles into instructional guidelines for religious education.

The broader implications of this study suggest that effective religious education in contemporary classrooms must balance cognitive, emotional, and spiritual development. Students learn religious values more effectively when instruction becomes meaningful, interactive, and psychologically responsive. Therefore, educational reform in Islamic schooling should prioritize humanistic pedagogy alongside content mastery. This study has several limitations. First, the research focused on a single classroom in one Madrasah Ibtidaiyah, limiting transferability to broader contexts. Second, the qualitative design provides rich contextual understanding but does not allow causal measurement of motivational changes. Third, the study focused only on intrinsic motivation and did not examine academic achievement or long-term behavioral outcomes.

Future research should expand this inquiry by using mixed-method or quantitative designs involving larger samples across multiple schools and regions. Comparative studies between conventional and joyful learning-based IRE would provide stronger empirical evidence regarding effectiveness. Future studies may also examine long-term impacts on character formation, spiritual development, and academic achievement. Additionally, digital-based joyful learning in Islamic education presents a promising direction for future investigation, particularly in increasingly technology-mediated learning environments.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that the implementation of joyful learning in Islamic Religious Education (IRE) at the fourth-grade level of Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Tegal reflects a significant pedagogical shift toward a more student-centered and interactive learning environment. The teacher's role evolves from knowledge transmitter to facilitator, creating a learning atmosphere that integrates cognitive, emotional, and social dimensions. Through varied instructional strategies, dialogic communication, and contextual learning, joyful learning fosters a more meaningful and engaging educational experience that aligns with students' developmental needs.

The findings further reveal that joyful learning has a substantial impact on enhancing students' intrinsic motivation. Students exhibit higher levels of enthusiasm, active participation, curiosity, and self-confidence during the learning process. The presence of a supportive and enjoyable learning environment contributes to positive emotional experiences, which in turn strengthen students' internal drive to learn. These results confirm that intrinsic motivation can be

effectively developed when learning conditions fulfill students' psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness. The effectiveness of joyful learning is influenced by various supporting and inhibiting factors. Teacher creativity, positive interpersonal relationships, and a conducive classroom environment play crucial roles in facilitating successful implementation. On the other hand, limitations such as restricted instructional time, diverse student characteristics, and limited teacher experience present ongoing challenges. Therefore, continuous professional development and institutional support are necessary to optimize the implementation of joyful learning and ensure its sustainability in improving the quality of IRE instruction.

REFERENCES

- Adams, C. R., Barrio Minton, C. A., Hightower, J., & Blount, A. J. (2022). A systematic approach to multiple case study design in professional counseling and counselor education. *Journal of Counselor Preparation and Supervision*, 15(2).
- Akram, H., & Abdelrady, A. H. (2025). Examining the role of ClassPoint tool in shaping EFL students' perceived E-learning experiences: A social cognitive theory perspective. *Acta Psychologica*, 254, 104775. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.actpsy.2025.104775>
- Al-Zahrani, A. M., & Alasmari, T. M. (2024). Exploring the impact of artificial intelligence on higher education: The dynamics of ethical, social, and educational implications. *Humanities and social sciences communications*, 11(1), 1-12. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41599-024-03432-4>
- Andrei, O. (2023). Enhancing religious education through emotional and spiritual intelligence. *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies*, 79(1), 7887. <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v79i1.7887>
- Awwalina, L. S. (2023). Pembentukan akhlak berlandaskan keimanan: Landasan filosofis-teologis dalam kurikulum PAI pada mata pelajaran aqidah akhlak di madrasah ibtidaiyah. *Epistemic: Jurnal Ilmiah Pendidikan*, 2(3), 289–310. <https://doi.org/10.70287/epistemic.v2i3.77>
- Azizah, N., Fadli, F., Gusnanda, J., Khairunisa, F., Ahmad, F., & Ranialini, N. (2025). IRE students' perception of the relevance of IRE learning in higher education: A qualitative study in an academic environment. *Action Research Journal Indonesia (ARJI)*, 7(3), 1790-1802. <https://doi.org/10.61227/arji.v7i3.441>
- Bourke, T., L'Estrange, L., Willis, J., Alford, J., Davis, J., Henderson, D., ... & Clark-Fookes, T. (2022). Integrated curriculum approaches to teaching in initial teacher education for secondary schooling: A systematic review. *Australian Journal of Teacher Education (Online)*, 47(3), 36-56. <https://doi.org/10.14221/ajte.2022v47n3.3>
- Bukhari, S. G. A. S., Jamali, S. G., Larik, A. R., & Chang, M. S. (2023). Fostering intrinsic motivation among teachers: Importance of work environment and individual differences. *International Journal of School & Educational Psychology*, 11(1), 1-19. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21683603.2021.1925182>
- Carroll, E., Watson, O., Burke, A., & Martin, H. (2025). Defining joy in third level education, an Irish perspective. *Education in the North*, 32(2), 84-94. <https://doi.org/10.26203/sect-w049>

- Chen, H., Chen, J., & Chiang, F. K. (2024). A study on the influence of learning space on students' intrinsic learning motivation. *European Journal of Education*, 59(3), e12652. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ejed.12652>
- Clanton Harpine, E. (2024). Creating an intrinsically motivating learning environment: Promoting student engagement and intrinsic motivation. In *Service Learning in Higher Education: From Pedagogy to Practice* (pp. 59-76). Cham: Springer Nature Switzerland. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-51378-7_5
- Creswell, J. W., & Creswell, J. D. (2022). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (6th ed.). Sage Publications.
- Cypress, B. (2018). Qualitative research methods. *Dimensions of Critical Care Nursing*, 37(6), 302–309. <https://doi.org/10.1097/DCC.0000000000000322>
- David, L., & Weinstein, N. (2023). Using technology to make learning fun: technology use is best made fun and challenging to optimize intrinsic motivation and engagement. *European Journal of Psychology of Education*, 39, 1441–1463. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10212-023-00734-0>
- De Caro-Barek, V., Lysne, D. A., Støckert, R., Solbjørg, O. K., & Røren, K. A. F. (2023, October). Dynamic learning spaces—dynamic pedagogy. Students' voices from a master's program focusing on student active learning in a cross-institution two-campus organization. In *Frontiers in Education* (Vol. 8, p. 1155374). Frontiers Media SA. <https://doi.org/10.3389/feduc.2023.1155374>
- Fadillah, M. R. (2026). Budaya sekolah berbasis salam, sapa, dan senyum sebagai penguat akhlak siswa madrasah ibtidaiyah. *Al-Ilmiya: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam*, 1(4), 1544–1552.
- Fayzullaevna, A. D., & Ravshanovich, A. O. (2025). The Creation of an Integrative Learning Environment in Shaping Spiritual and Intellectual Development. *Spanish Journal of Innovation and Integrity*, 49, 246–251.
- Fishbach, A., & Woolley, K. (2022). The structure of intrinsic motivation. *Annual Review of Organizational Psychology and Organizational Behavior*, 9(1), 339–363. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-orgpsych-012420-091122>
- Hayat, F., Khan, M., Ahmad, S., & Kamran, M. (2024). Exploring the characteristics of concrete operational stage among primary school students. *Qlantic Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities*, 5(1), 124–132. <https://doi.org/10.55737/qjssh.786349315>
- Jumiati, D., Syahrani, A. P., & Yeli, S. (2025). Constructivist and Humanistic Learning Theories in Islamic Religious Education (IRE): Student-Centered Learning Approaches. *Psikologi Prima*, 8(2), 294–302. <https://doi.org/10.34012/psychoprime.v8i2.7689>
- Karimi, S., & Sotoodeh, B. (2020). The mediating role of intrinsic motivation in the relationship between basic psychological needs satisfaction and academic engagement in agriculture students. *Teaching in Higher Education*, 25(8), 959–975. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13562517.2019.1623775>
- Kayyali, M. (2025). Classroom management: Techniques for creating a positive, friendly learning environment. In *Exploration of K–12 teaching and learning for teacher educators* (pp. 53–78). IGI Global Scientific Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.4018/979-8-3693-9370-3.ch003>

- Kelly, G. J. (2023). Qualitative research as culture and practice. *Handbook of research on science education*, 60-86.
<https://doi.org/10.4324/9780367855758-4>
- Krulj, J. R., Marković, E., Simijonović, I., & Lazović, N. R. (2024). Intrinsic and extrinsic motivation within the context of creating a stimulating learning environment. *Društvene i humanističke studije*, 9(2 (26)), 1329-1344.
<https://doi.org/10.51558/2490-3647.2024.9.2.1329>
- Lapidot-Lefler, N. (2025). Teacher responsiveness in inclusive education: A participatory study of pedagogical practice, well-being, and sustainability. *Sustainability*, 17(7), 2919.
<https://doi.org/10.3390/su17072919>
- Li, Y., Chen, D., & Deng, X. (2024). The impact of digital educational games on student's motivation for learning: The mediating effect of learning engagement and the moderating effect of the digital environment. *PloS one*, 19(1), e0294350. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0294350>
- Mendrofa, D. F., Gea, J. K., Lase, A., Buulolo, M., Telaumbanua, I. M., & Telaumbanua, Y. A. (2026). Students'low Interest In Learning English Despite The Use Of Active Learning Strategies In Junior High School. *Jurnal Pendidikan Indonesia: Teori, Penelitian, dan Inovasi*, 6(1).
<https://doi.org/10.59818/jpi.v6i1.2542>
- Merdiaty, N., & Sulistiasih, S. (2024). Empowering Learning: The Mediating Role of Teachers in Enhancing Students' Intrinsic Motivation. *Al-Ishlah: Jurnal Pendidikan*, 16(4), 5163-5172.
<https://doi.org/10.35445/alishlah.v16i4.6430>
- Mohzana. (2024). Meningkatkan komitmen kerja guru: Analisis peran motivasi intrinsik dan emotional intelligence. *Jurnal Ilmiah Kependidikan*, 4.
- Pasaribu, G. R. (2025). Teachers' Approaches to Creating Active Learning Environments in English Classrooms in MAN 1 Labuhanbatu Utara. *JELT: Journal of English Education, Teaching and Literature*, 3(2), 37-43.
<https://doi.org/10.65787/jelt.v3i2.634>
- Priyadarshini, A., Sanyal, D., & Vasanth, B. S. (2025). Integration of social and psychological perspectives in education. In *Shaping Childhood Through Educational Experiences* (pp. 55-104). IGI Global Scientific Publishing.
<https://doi.org/10.4018/979-8-3693-9969-9.ch003>
- Putra, E. D., Cho, S., & Liu, J. (2017). Extrinsic and intrinsic motivation on work engagement in the hospitality industry: Test of motivation crowding theory. *Tourism and Hospitality Research*, 17(2), 228-241.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1467358415613393>
- Roulston, K., & Choi, M. (2018). Qualitative interviews. In U. Flick (Ed.), *The SAGE handbook of qualitative data collection* (pp. 233-249). Sage Publications.
- Rowley, N., & Lucas, S. (2025). Evaluating student nurses satisfaction with educational escape rooms as a pedagogical approach to teaching professional nursing values. *BMC Nursing*, 24(1), 1300.
<https://doi.org/10.1186/s12912-025-03912-1>
- Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2024). Self-determination theory. In *Encyclopedia of quality of life and well-being research* (pp. 6229-6235). Springer.
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-17299-1_2630
- Sugiyono. (2019). *Metode penelitian kuantitatif, kualitatif, dan R&D*. Alfabeta.

- Suyadi. (2019). Kisah (storytelling) pada pembelajaran anak usia dini dalam kajian neurosains pendidikan Islam. *Jurnal Ilmiah Islam Futura*, 18(1), 52. <https://doi.org/10.22373/jiif.v18i1.3130>
- Tavory, I. (2020). Interviews and inference: Making sense of interview data in qualitative research. *Qualitative Sociology*, 43(4), 449–465. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11133-020-09464-x>
- Tossell, C. C., Tenhundfeld, N. L., Momen, A., Cooley, K., & De Visser, E. J. (2024). Student perceptions of ChatGPT use in a college essay assignment: Implications for learning, grading, and trust in artificial intelligence. *IEEE Transactions on Learning Technologies*, 17, 1069–1081. <https://doi.org/10.1109/TLT.2024.3355015>
- Umar, A. F. F., Yusuf, A., Amini, A. R., & Alhadi, A. (2023). Pengaruh motivasi belajar terhadap peningkatan prestasi akademik siswa: The influence of learning motivation on increasing student academic achievement. *Wacana: Jurnal Bahasa, Seni, dan Pengajaran*, 7(2), 121–133. <https://doi.org/10.29407/jbsp.v7i2.20670>
- Usman, A. C., Al-Hendawi, M., & Bulut, S. (2025). Approaches to qualitative research: A narrative literature review. *Advances in Medicine, Psychology, and Public Health*, 2(2), 81–95. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.12804998>
- Uzzi, M. (2024). 4 Effective teaching strategies for a large, diverse class of tertiary students. *Post-Secondary Chemistry Education in Developing Countries: Advancing Diversity in Pedagogy and Practice*, 60. <https://doi.org/10.4324/b23287>
- Viera, C. A. (2023). Case study as a qualitative research methodology. *Performance Improvement*, 62(4), 125–129. <https://doi.org/10.56811/PFI-23-0005>
- Wang, M.-T., Degol, J. L., & Henry, D. A. (2019). An integrative development-in-sociocultural-context model for children's engagement in learning. *American Psychologist*, 74(9), 1086–1102. <https://doi.org/10.1037/amp0000522>
- Zein, K. N., & Arifudin, I. (2025). Analysis of Instructional Needs and General Instructional Objectives in Islamic Religious Education (IRE) Learning: An Integrated Literature Review. *Cristal International Journal of Interdisciplinary Research*, 1(2), 82–90. <https://doi.org/10.64042/1xkq9t14>
- Zhou, H. (2025). Exploring the dynamic teaching-learning relationship in interactive learning environments. *Interactive learning environments*, 33(7), 4363–4393. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10494820.2025.2462149>