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Joyful Learning for Enhancing Pedagogical Competence of Islamic Education Teachers in Building Meaningful and Character-Based Learning

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ABSTRACT

This literature review explores the role of joyful learning in enhancing the pedagogical competence of Islamic education teachers to promote meaningful and character-based learning. Drawing on various scholarly sources, the study identifies joyful learning strategies such as interactive discussions, educational games, storytelling, and multimedia as practical tools for improving instructional planning, classroom management, and student assessment. The review also emphasizes the relevance of Vygotsky's social constructivist theory, especially scaffolding and social interaction, in supporting joyful and engaging learning experiences. Furthermore, it highlights challenges such as limited professional development and low digital literacy among teachers that may hinder the practical application of joyful learning. The study concludes that joyful learning contributes to pedagogical improvement and the formation of students' moral and spiritual character. Recommendations include the need for systematic training and institutional support to help Islamic education teachers implement joyful learning strategies more effectively in their classrooms.

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Introduction

Islamic Religious Education Teachers Islamic education plays a strategic role in instilling moral, spiritual, and character values in students. In carrying out their duties, teachers are required to have pedagogic competencies that include technical teaching skills. [1], but also skills in creating a meaningful, inspiring, and learning atmosphere that is in accordance with the needs of students [2]. In an era of modern learning that emphasizes active student engagement, a rigid, one-way, and memorization-oriented approach to learning is no longer relevant. Many Islamic education teachers still face challenges in designing learning that can arouse students' interest in learning, especially when religious materials are often considered heavy, normative, and lack context with the realities of their lives. The ideal condition is expected to be Islamic education learning that is fun, interactive, collaborative, and able to foster students' love for religious values [3]. However, the reality on the ground still shows that there is a gap that is quite striking. Learning tends to be monotonous, less innovative, and not fully accommodating students' potential holistically. This impacts the low involvement of students in the learning process and the limited character development, which should be the core of religious education.

In this context, the joyful learning approach emerged as a potential solution. Joyful learning emphasizes the importance of a learning atmosphere that is fun [4], meaningful, and actively engages students both cognitively, affectively, and socially [5]. This approach encourages teachers to be more creative in developing learning methods that utilize educational games, interactive discussions, visual media, and activities that touch the emotional side of students. Theoretically, joyful learning is very much in line with Lev Vygotsky's view of social constructivism [6], emphasizing the importance of social interaction, scaffolding, and collaboration in building a more profound understanding. Through this literature review, the researcher wants to explore further how joyful learning can improve the pedagogic competence of Islamic education teachers, especially in building meaningful and character-based learning. This study also aims to identify the obstacles teachers often face in implementing this strategy and explore the relevance of Vygotsky's theory in the context of Islamic religious learning in madrasas. It is hoped that the results of this study can provide strong theoretical insights and practical recommendations for developing an Islamic education learning model that is more effective, fun, and in accordance with the development needs of current students.

Literature Review

Several previous studies have discussed joyful learning influenced by teachers' pedagogic competence. Joyful learning has emerged as a promising approach to enhance pedagogical competence and improve educational outcomes. Research shows that training

programs focusing on joyful learning and innovative teaching methods can significantly enhance teachers' understanding and implementation of interactive, creative learning environments [7], [8]. These strategies aim to create dynamic, meaningful learning experiences that promote critical thinking and creativity among students [8]. However, implementing child-centered pedagogies in low-income, rural contexts may present challenges, as social controls of knowledge acquisition can remain unchallenged despite the rhetoric of joyful learning [9]. Nevertheless, joyful learning is essential for professional teachers to create inspiring, interactive, and motivating learning environments that cater to students' diverse needs and developmental stages [10].

Islamic education teachers play a crucial role in developing character-based learning and building students' moral values in schools [11], [12]. Teachers act as role models, facilitators, and mentors, integrating character values into the curriculum, classroom learning, and extracurricular activities [12]. Effective strategies include project-based learning, technology use, and implementing character building through the planning, implementation, and evaluation stages [11]. Supporting factors for character development include school discipline, co-curricular activities, student diversity, parental involvement, and the social environment [13]. Teachers provide good examples, instill Islamic values, and assign tasks for evaluation [14]. While adequate facilities and parental cooperation support character building, environmental factors and technology can inhibit [14]. Schools address these challenges through advice, regulations, and sanctions to achieve educational goals in character development [14].

Material and Methods

This study uses a qualitative approach with the library research method, which aims to examine and analyze various scientific literature, journals, books, and relevant documents that discuss joyful learning, pedagogic competence of Islamic Religious Education teachers, and Lev Vygotsky's theory of social constructivism. The object of study in this study is the concept of joyful learning as a learning strategy used to improve the pedagogic competence of Islamic education teachers in building meaningful and character-based learning. The population and sample in this study do not refer to specific individuals or institutions, but to relevant scientific sources, both from national and international journals. The data collection technique is carried out through documentation and literature study, with instruments in the form of study notes and content analysis from the sources studied. The data obtained were analyzed descriptively-qualitatively with a content analysis approach to identify the main themes, compare the views of experts, and formulate a synthesis of findings that support the research objectives.

Results

The results of this literature review were obtained through the analysis of several relevant studies that discussed the concept of joyful learning, pedagogic competence of teachers, and Lev Vygotsky's theory of social constructivism in the context of Islamic religious education. These studies are used as the primary reference material in building a conceptual framework and strengthening the theoretical foundation of this research. The following table summarizes the ten studies analyzed in depth, including the author's name, the study's title, the year of publication, the research method used, and the main findings of each study. This analysis shows that most previous studies have emphasized increasing student motivation and engagement through joyful learning approaches. At the same time, not many have specifically linked joyful learning to improving teachers' pedagogic competence. The research is as follows:

Table 1. Summary of literature on enjoyable learning and pedagogical competence

No.	Author and Title	Year	Research Methods	Research Findings
1	Cronqvist - *Enhanced student joy in learning environment; understanding and influencing the process* [15]	2024	Qualitative	Joyful learning significantly increases student motivation; focus on students, not teacher competence.
2	Rahayu et al. - Analysis of the Results of the Influence of Science and Technology Development on Elementary School/Islamic Elementary School Student Learning Outcomes [16]	2023	Qualitative	Fun learning has a positive impact on learning outcomes; it does not discuss the competence of teachers.
3	Cahyadi and Qomariyah - Teacher Pedagogical Competence in Islamic Education from the Perspective of Al-Quran Interpretation [17]	2022	Library research	The paper examines Islamic education teachers' pedagogical competence from the Quranic interpretation perspective, including understanding students, communication, curriculum, evaluation, and teaching methods.
4	Suryatini et al. - Teacher Pedagogical Competence in Islamic Education Learning Based on High-Order Thinking Skills (HOTS) [18]	2024	Qualitative descriptive	Enhancing the pedagogic competence of Islamic education teachers through integrating Higher Order Thinking Skills (HOTS) can improve student learning outcomes.
5	Nurfuadi - The Development of Teachers' Pedagogical Competencies of Islamic Religious Education based on Learning Quality Management [19]	2020	Qualitative	Improving the pedagogical competence of Islamic education teachers through learning quality management.
6	Suliwati - Correlation of Islamic Education Teachers' Pedagogical Competence with Students' Learning Motivation in Inclusive Schools [20]	2021	Quantitative, correlational research design	The pedagogical competence of Islamic education teachers positively correlates with students' learning motivation in Islamic education subjects.
7	Muamanah and Suyadi - Implementation of David Ausubel's Meaningful Learning Theory in Islamic Religious Education Learning [21]	2020	Qualitative	Islamic Religious Education teachers implemented meaningful learning principles, but faced challenges with student engagement.

No.	Author and Title	Year	Research Methods	Research Findings
8	Sutarto and Sari - Islamic Religious Education Learning Strategies to Build Inclusive Religious Character for University Students [22]	2022	Qualitative phenomenological approach	Islamic religious education learning strategies should build inclusive religious character through knowledge, feelings, and practical experience.
9	Suyudi - The Efforts of Islamic Religious Education Teachers and Characteristics in Improving Students' Learning Interest [23]	2022	Qualitative	Islamic religious education teachers use various efforts, including varied learning methods, to improve students' learning interest and character.
10	Alamsyah and Ahwa - Implementation of the Joyful Learning Method in Islamic Religious Education Learning at Alam Banyuwangi Islamic School Junior High School (Implementasi Metode Joyful Learning pada Pembelajaran Pendidikan Agama Islam di Sekolah Menengah Pertama Alam Banyuwangi Islamic School) [24]	2020	Qualitative	The paper describes the implementation of joyful learning methods in Islamic religious education to make the learning more engaging and effective for students

Based on the references in Table 1, this study has a unique and different contribution. The focus is on exploring the implementation of joyful learning in improving the pedagogic competence of Islamic education teachers by using Lev Vygotsky's theory as the main framework. In terms of method, this study uses a conceptual approach. This distinguishes this study from previous studies focusing on students or using quantitative methods. In addition, this research makes a new contribution to Islamic education learning, especially in answering learning challenges in the digital era by comprehensively integrating the concept of joyful learning and Vygotsky's theory.

Discussion

A. Joyful Learning Concept

Joyful learning is a pedagogical approach that emphasizes the creation of a fun, interactive, and engaging classroom atmosphere. Instead of relying solely on conventional methods that may lead to boredom and passive participation, joyful learning introduces creative strategies that stimulate students' interest and motivation. The essence of this approach lies in providing meaningful experiences that encourage learners to enjoy the process of acquiring knowledge rather than perceiving it as a burden. In the context of Islamic Religious Education, joyful learning plays a particularly important role because religious subjects are sometimes viewed as monotonous, rigid, or difficult to fully comprehend. By transforming the learning process into something enjoyable, students are more likely to shift their perception of religious studies into a positive, meaningful, and enriching experience that connects knowledge with real-life values [15], [16], [24].

The application of joyful learning in religious education allows teachers to incorporate a wide variety of activities such as educational games, interactive discussions, role plays, storytelling, and the use of innovative visual media. These activities make lessons more dynamic and stimulate multiple aspects of students' development, including cognitive, affective, and social skills. Beyond simply making learning enjoyable, this approach fosters deeper engagement with religious values, enabling students to internalize lessons more effectively. Furthermore, joyful learning encourages collaboration, creativity, and active participation, which are essential skills in both academic and social contexts. As a result, students not only gain a stronger understanding of religious teachings but also develop critical thinking and interpersonal skills that prepare them to live in harmony with their peers and community. In this way, joyful learning becomes a bridge that connects educational goals with students' holistic growth [20], [21], [23].

B. Pedagogic Competence of Teachers

Pedagogic competence is a fundamental ability that teachers must possess to carry out learning tasks well. These competencies include understanding student characteristics, designing effective learning, managing classes, and evaluating learning outcomes. In Islamic education, teachers' pedagogic competence has a strategic role because religious learning is oriented to delivering knowledge and forming students' character and morals [17], [18]. The researcher highlighted that improving the pedagogic competence of Islamic education teachers through a joyful learning approach will help create a more meaningful learning experience [19]. Pedagogically competent teachers can combine creativity with relevant learning methods to make Islamic education learning informative and transformational. With good pedagogic competence, teachers can help students internalize religious values through a fun approach that also enhances student motivation and interest in learning [20], [23].

C. Lev Vygotsky's Social-Constructivist Theory

This research is also based on the social-constructivist theory put forward by Lev Vygotsky. According to Vygotsky, the learning process occurs through social interaction involving teachers, students, and the learning environment. The two main concepts in this theory are the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) and scaffolding. ZPD refers to the distance between a student's ability that can be achieved independently and an ability that can be achieved with the teacher's guidance. In joyful learning-based Islamic education, teachers act as facilitators who help students achieve a higher level of understanding through fun and challenging activities [15], [16], [24]. Scaffolding is a guidance strategy teachers give students to help them master difficult material. In religious learning, scaffolding can be a hint, a real example, or a motivational boost that facilitates students' understanding of religious values [21], [22]. The researcher understands this theory provides a strong conceptual framework for creating

collaborative, active, and meaningful learning. By combining the principles of joyful learning and Vygotsky's theory, Islamic education teachers can build learning that is not only fun but also relevant to the needs of students [23].

D. Joyful Learning Strategy in Islamic Religious Education Learning in Madrasah

Active learning encourages students to be directly involved in the learning process through discussions, simulations, educational games, and collaborative projects. This approach is particularly relevant to joyful learning, as it places students as active subjects in learning. In Islamic education, joyful learning has been successfully implemented through various creative strategies such as outbound activities, moving classes, outdoor sessions, mind mapping, trainer training, and gameplay supported by music [15], [16], [24]. These activities stimulate students' enthusiasm and create a positive and enjoyable learning atmosphere.

For instance, outbound activities can be designed to internalize the values of *ukhuwah islamiyah* (Islamic brotherhood) through teamwork-based challenges, fostering cooperation, empathy, and mutual trust among students. Moving class and outdoor learning sessions can be oriented towards developing good morals, such as discipline, respect, and responsibility, by situating learning in environments that require adaptation and proper manners. Meanwhile, gameplay and mind mapping can strengthen students' understanding of *ibadah* concepts, such as prayer procedures or Qur'anic interpretation, more engagingly and memorably [21], [22].

The researcher sees that active learning can be applied through prophet story dramas, religious quiz games, or exploration of Qur'anic values using digital media in the context of Islamic Education learning. This approach increases student participation and helps them develop critical, analytical, and creative thinking skills for the material [23]. Supporting factors for the application of joyful learning include addressing declining student motivation, which makes engaging and interactive methods more relevant [20]. However, the lack of teacher creativity in integrating games or interactive activities into lessons remains a barrier. Therefore, professional development for educators, particularly in designing game-based Islamic learning, becomes essential to optimally implement the joyful learning method in *madrasah* settings, in line with the broader goals of forming pious, moral, and socially responsible Muslim students [18], [19].

E. Challenges and Opportunities for Islamic Education Learning in the Digital Era

The digital era provides both challenges and opportunities for Islamic education learning. The main challenges are the low interest of students in traditional learning methods and the lack of technology integration in the learning process. Researchers observed that many teachers have not optimally utilized technology to create innovative learning [16], [21]. However, the digital era offers excellent opportunities through educational applications,

interactive videos, and online learning platforms. Integrating technology with a joyful learning approach can enhance students' learning experiences, making them more relevant to their current needs [24]. In this study, technology is essential to create more interesting, meaningful, and effective Islamic education learning [22].

The researcher laid the foundation for this theory by integrating various theoretical elements to build a complete conceptual framework. This research aims to create a joyful learning-based Islamic education learning model supported by the principles of social-constructivism, active learning, and digital technology. With a strong theoretical foundation, this research is expected to provide strategic recommendations to improve the pedagogic competence of Islamic education teachers [17]–[19], create fun learning [15], [16], and support student development holistically [20], [23], [24].

Conclusion

Based on the results of the literature review that has been conducted, it can be concluded that the joyful learning approach has significant potential in improving the pedagogic competence of Islamic Religious Education teachers, especially in building meaningful and character-based learning. Although most previous studies have focused on enhancing student motivation and learning outcomes, the findings still show that a pleasant learning environment positively impacts the learning process and outcomes. This research fills the gap in previous research by focusing on teachers as the main subject and integrating Lev Vygotsky's theory of social constructivism, especially the concept of scaffolding and social interaction as a relevant theoretical foundation in supporting collaborative and contextual learning. Thus, joyful learning is not only a practical approach in creating a positive learning environment, but also a strategic means to improve the quality of professionalism of Islamic education teachers in planning, implementing, and evaluating more creative, reflective, and transformative learning.

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