



Cultivating Affective Competence through Innovative Approaches in Islamic Religious Education

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ABSTRACT

Article History

Received December 2024

Revised January 2025

Published January 2025

Keywords:

Affective competence,
Innovative approach,
Islamic religious education

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This study aims to examine the implementation of an innovative approach in Islamic religious education learning as a strategy to foster students' affective competence. This study uses a qualitative approach with a case study type. Data were obtained through in-depth interviews, classroom observations, and documentation of student activities. The results of the study indicate that innovative approaches such as project-based learning, reflection through digital media, and social case discussions are effective in fostering values such as empathy, honesty, responsibility, and social awareness in students. The role of teachers as value facilitators greatly influences the success of affective internalization, which is also reflected in increased student participation in social and worship activities. Documentation shows a real behavioral transformation in the school environment. This study provides a theoretical implication to the development of experience-based and contextual affective education, as well as being a practical reference for Islamic religious education teachers in designing learning strategies that touch the emotional realm of students. In addition, this study expands the discourse on character education in the context of vocational schools, which has so far been under-touched in similar research.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.71392/ejip.v4i1.91>

Please cite this article in APA style as:

Aspuri, A., Masuwd, M. A. (2025). Cultivating Affective Competence through Innovative Approaches in Islamic Religious Education. *Educare : Jurnal Ilmu Pendidikan*, 4(1), 53-66.

INTRODUCTION

Amidst the rapid advancement of technology and socio-cultural changes, the world of education is facing a major challenge in maintaining a balance between cognitive, psychomotor, and affective aspects. Especially in the context of Islamic Religious Education, the formation of students' character becomes very crucial as a moral foundation in the digital era. Many cases of ethical violations,

moral degradation, and weak social empathy that have emerged among high school students indicate that affective competence has not grown optimally (Firdaus et al., 2020; Haerudin, 2025). This condition not only affects individual behavior, but also has a broad impact on the social order. Therefore, it is important for the world of education, especially Islamic Religious Education, to not only teach religious doctrine, but to be able to foster affective values such as empathy, honesty, and responsibility through approaches that are relevant and contextual to the lives of students today (Dakir et al., 2021; Hujumy et al., 2024).

At SMK NU Sukra Indramayu, various phenomena were found that reflect the weak internalization of affective values in students. Such as, low awareness in implementing tolerance values, lack of social concern between friends, and the emergence of individualistic attitudes in daily activities. This is caused by a learning approach that is still predominantly verbalistic and oriented towards memorizing material, not on forming attitudes and behavior. As a result, the values taught in Islamic Religious Education do not leave a deep impression on students. Teachers do not utilize innovative approaches that are able to bridge religious values with students' social realities. To overcome these problems, innovative and contextual learning approaches are needed, such as social project-based learning, reflective methods, or digital media integration that can activate students' affective dimensions in a more meaningful and applicable way.

Several previous studies have highlighted the importance of character building through Islamic Religious Education, as well as various learning strategies used in the affective domain. Research such as by (Sulisworo & Dahlan, 2025) emphasizes the importance of character education in strengthening students' religious values, while (Mursidi & Murdani, 2023) reviews the effectiveness of collaborative learning methods in increasing empathy. However, these studies are still limited to the context of general education or religious-based schools. There has not been much research that specifically explores the application of innovative approaches to fostering affective competence in the context of vocational education, such as at SMK NU Sukra Indramayu. This opens up space for this research to present a new contribution (novelty), namely an innovative, contextual, and applicable Islamic Religious Education approach in fostering affective competence in a vocational school environment with diverse social backgrounds.

This research is important because it offers a new perspective in revitalizing Islamic Religious Education learning through an innovative approach that deeply integrates affective aspects. Amidst the need for vocational high school graduates who are not only technically competent but also have strong character, Islamic Religious Education must take a strategic role in the formation of students' moral and spiritual values (Nabillah et al., 2024). If effective education is not developed seriously, then education will only produce individuals who are intelligent but poor in values (Mursidi & Murdani, 2023). This research also answers the need for the Merdeka Belajar curriculum which

encourages meaningful and student-centered learning. Therefore, the findings of this study are expected to not only be useful for Islamic Religious Education teachers at SMK NU Sukra Indramayu, but can also be a reference for other vocational education institutions that face similar challenges in the formation of affective competencies.

This study aims to examine how innovative approaches in Islamic Religious Education can foster students' affective competence at SMK NU Sukra Indramayu. The main problem raised in this study is the low internalization of affective values in Islamic Religious Education learning. This study attempts to answer the questions: (1) What are the innovative approaches that can be applied in Islamic Religious Education learning to develop students' affective competence? (2) How effective are these innovative approaches in the context of vocational education? (3) What is the impact of these innovative approaches on changes in students' attitudes and behavior in everyday life? By answering these questions, it is hoped that this study will be able to provide practical and theoretical contributions to the development of character-oriented Islamic education.

As a temporary answer, this study assumes that the application of innovative approaches in Islamic Religious Education learning, such as project-based learning, social simulation, and digital media integration, can effectively foster students' affective competence. This approach encourages students to not only understand Islamic values textually, but also internalize them in the form of real actions in the school and community environment. The implementation of these methods allows for a more intense process of self-reflection, cooperation, and social responsibility. The implications of this study are very significant for the development of Islamic Religious Education learning strategies in vocational schools, because they can be a relevant model to be applied more widely in improving the quality of the character of the younger generation. This study will also test the validity of the approach through observation, interviews, and analysis of changes in student attitudes as real evidence of the success of the applied model.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study uses a qualitative approach with a case study type, which aims to deeply understand the process of developing affective competence through an innovative approach in learning Islamic Religious Education at SMK NU Sukra Indramayu (Rifa'i, 2023). The case study was chosen because it is able to explore social reality contextually, especially in the environment of vocational schools based on Nahdlatul Ulama. The unit of analysis (material object) in this study is the practice of learning Islamic Religious Education which reflects efforts to develop affective competence in students through innovative approaches applied by teachers. The main focus includes teaching methods, teacher and student interactions, and forms of learning innovation that have an impact on

student attitudes and behavior. This approach is descriptive and exploratory, with the hope of producing a complete understanding of real practices in the field and the factors that support and inhibit the process. The researcher plays a direct role as the main instrument that interacts with the subject to interpret the data comprehensively.

The sources of information in this study were obtained from key informants, namely Islamic Religious Education teachers, students of SMK NU Sukra Indramayu, the principal, and other parties directly involved in the education process. The determination of informants was carried out purposively, based on their involvement and mastery of the phenomena being studied. The data collection process was carried out through three main techniques, namely: (1) participatory observation of Islamic Religious Education learning activities, especially when teachers apply innovative approaches; (2) in-depth interviews with teachers and students to explore their experiences and views on affective values formed during learning; and (3) documentation in the form of photos, videos, learning tools, and reflection notes from students and teachers related to learning activities (Haryono, 2023). Data analysis was carried out using the Miles and Huberman interactive model which includes three main stages: (1) data reduction, namely filtering and summarizing relevant data; (2) data presentation (data display) in the form of narratives and thematic matrices; and (3) verification or drawing conclusions, namely formulating findings based on identified data patterns. Data validity was tested through source and method triangulation techniques (Safrudin et al., 2023).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

Implementation of Innovative Approaches in Islamic Religious Education Learning

In an effort to understand the implementation of innovative approaches in Islamic Religious Education learning at SMK NU Sukra Indramayu, researchers conducted in-depth interviews with three active Islamic Religious Education teachers. Based on the interview results, it was found that teachers no longer rely solely on conventional lecture methods, but have begun to implement project-based learning, value reflection through digital media, and social case discussions with religious nuances. This innovation is a strategy to link teaching materials to students' real lives, so that affective values such as empathy, responsibility, and honesty are more easily instilled naturally in the learning process.

To clarify the interview results, the following is a table of findings that summarizes the innovative approaches used by the three Islamic Religious Education teachers:

Table 1. findings that summarize innovative approaches

Innovative Approach	Learning objectives	Visible Impact on Students
Project-Based Learning	Increasing responsibility and cooperation	Students actively create socio-religious programs
Reflection through Islamic Videos	Cultivating empathy and social awareness	Students are more sensitive to humanitarian and moral issues
Social Religious Case Discussion	Sharpening honesty and critical attitude	Students are more courageous in expressing their opinions and engaging in dialogue

This table shows that each teacher has their own strategy in integrating affective values into Islamic Religious Education learning through a contextual and innovative approach.

From the table above, it can be understood that each teacher adopted an innovative approach according to the characteristics of the class and the affective goals to be achieved. Teacher A, for example, uses project-based learning with the aim of encouraging cooperation and social responsibility. As a result, students become more active in managing social activities related to Islamic values. Teacher B utilizes Islamic video media containing moral messages to develop student empathy. Teacher C chooses a case discussion approach as a means of accustoming students to think critically and dare to express opinions within the framework of Islamic honesty and manners. All three agree that a participatory approach based on real experience is more effective in touching the affective side of students than a rigid one-way lecture.

The general pattern that emerged from the interview results was the tendency of teachers to avoid passive methods and switch to strategies that are interactive, reflective, and based on real activities. The three teachers tended to apply an approach that directly involves students in the process of thinking, doing, and feeling religious values. The activities designed also showed a bias towards actual and relevant social experiences, such as issues of humanity, justice, and environmental concerns. The learning process is no longer merely conveying religious theory, but rather building a bridge between religious texts and the realities faced by students. This pattern reflects a pedagogical awareness that affective values are not sufficiently instilled through memorization, but rather through emotional and social involvement.

From the identified patterns, it can be interpreted that the success of teachers in developing affective competence is largely determined by the extent to which they are able to make Islamic Religious Education learning a space for actualizing values, not just memorizing doctrines. The innovative approach applied by teachers allows students to experience, reflect on, and internalize Islamic values through contextual activities. The choice of methods used shows that teachers understand the importance of students' emotional and social involvement in the learning process. This interpretation strengthens the argument that innovative learning strategies not only enrich teaching methods, but also become effective media in transforming attitudes and forming character. This is relevant to the demands of 21st century education which places character and values as the main foundation for educational success.

The Role of Teachers in Developing Students' Affective Competence

Observations were conducted by researchers to directly understand the role of teachers in developing students' affective competence through interactions and learning strategies in the classroom. This activity was conducted during three Islamic Religious Education learning meetings in grades XI and XII. The focus of the observation included how teachers build inclusive communication, facilitate value discussions, provide role models, and respond to student behavior. In addition, researchers also observed the learning methods used and student reactions during the learning process. The results of the observation showed that teachers play a role not only as teachers, but also as moral guides and facilitators of character formation. Teachers were seen actively encouraging students to reflect on the values they learn, foster empathy through real stories, and create an open and respectful classroom atmosphere for differences. The interaction between teachers and students greatly determines the direction of meaningful affective learning.

To visualize the findings from the observation results, the following graph shows the level of student engagement based on the methods used by the teacher during Islamic Religious Education learning:

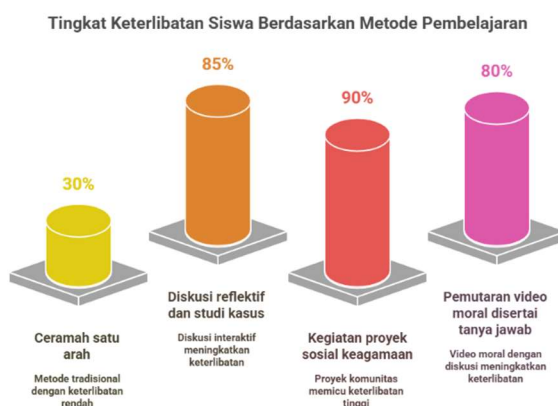


Figure 1. Level of Student Engagement Based on Learning Methods

This graph shows that participatory and reflection-based approaches have a significant effect on increasing student engagement. In contrast, conventional methods such as lectures tend to result in low emotional and social engagement.

Based on the graph, it can be stated that the teacher's approach that emphasizes reflective discussions, case studies, and religious project-based activities can increase students' affective involvement in the learning process. Students appear more active, dare to express their opinions, and are involved in constructive value conversations. Conversely, when teachers only use one-way lectures, students tend to be passive, unenthusiastic, and have minimal participation. The use of media such as moral videos that are related to everyday life also has a significant impact on raising students' awareness and empathy. The teacher's dialogic, empathetic, and open interaction patterns make students feel appreciated and more easily accept the values taught. In other words, the teacher's communication style and teaching methods directly influence the extent to which affective values can grow and develop in students.

The pattern that can be read from the observation results shows that the greater the students' participation in the learning process, the higher the level of internalization of affective values that they experience. When teachers use strategies that provide space for students to express opinions, reflect, and undergo real learning experiences, students show positive responses, both verbally and behaviorally. They become more empathetic in discussions, care more about their friends, and dare to take on small social responsibilities in class. On the other hand, rigid strategies such as lectures make students lose their emotional connection to the material being presented. This proves that effective Islamic Religious Education learning in an affective context is highly dependent on the class dynamics built by the teacher. The role of the teacher is not only to convey material, but also to create a humanistic and transformative learning atmosphere.

The observation results confirm that the participatory, reflective, and contextual approach of teachers significantly contributes to the growth of students' affective competence. Teachers who position themselves as guides and facilitators are able to bring religious values to life in a classroom atmosphere that is fun and relevant to students' lives. Interpretation of these data shows that the success of affective education is not only determined by the content of the material, but more on how teachers deliver it and the interactions built with students. Teachers' exemplary behavior, empathy in communication, and their ability to touch the emotional realm of students are the main keys. Therefore, learning strategies that open up space for reflection and real action will be much more effective than one-way methods. This implication shows that Islamic Religious Education teachers must continue to develop pedagogical competence that supports learning values in a complete and comprehensive manner.

Changes in Student Behavior as an Indicator of Affective Competence

One of the important findings in this study is the increase in students' self-awareness as a result of reflection-based learning. Reflection notes collected from students showed that they began to understand the importance of values such as honesty, empathy, and responsibility in everyday life. In their writings, students did not simply repeat the lesson material, but related it to personal experiences, such as how they learned to control their emotions when facing conflict or how they learned to help friends who were having difficulties. This awareness grew gradually and showed that a learning approach that provides space for reflection on values is more effective in shaping students' affective dimensions than just normative lectures.

Documentation of student activities shows that the innovative approach in Islamic Religious Education learning has a direct impact on increasing student participation in social and religious activities. Activities such as Friday Blessings, social services, and fundraising for the surrounding community are carried out on the initiative of students, not just teacher orders. This shows that the values of caring, solidarity, and responsibility are starting to be embedded in student behavior. In these activities, students appear to be actively designing, preparing, and implementing agendas with their friends. This increase in initiative and independence is an important indicator that learning is not only limited to religious knowledge, but also embodies real actions that bring social and spiritual benefits.

In addition to the social aspect, documentation also shows changes in the way students interact. From observations in group discussions and documentation of class activities, it can be seen that students have become more polite in expressing their opinions, learning to listen to others, and showing respect for differences. This is clearly seen in photo documentation when students discuss in heterogeneous groups, both in terms of background and ability. The teacher stated that before the innovative approach was applied, students tended to be apathetic and individualistic. However, after being given space to collaborate and share views, students showed developments in cooperative attitudes and ethical communication skills. This shows that affective competence is not only manifested in personal actions, but also in interpersonal relationships.

Positive changes are also reflected in the consistency of students in carrying out religious values routinely. Documentation of student attendance in congregational worship activities, such as dhuha prayer, dzuhur prayer together, and morning tadarus, shows a significant increase. Students who were previously passive began to show enthusiasm and awareness to attend without having to be supervised. Some students even began to become movers in inviting their friends to participate. This consistency reflects that religious values are not only understood, but have begun to become habits based on personal awareness.

This habituation cannot be separated from the teacher's approach which instills values in an interesting and touching way for students, not by coercion.

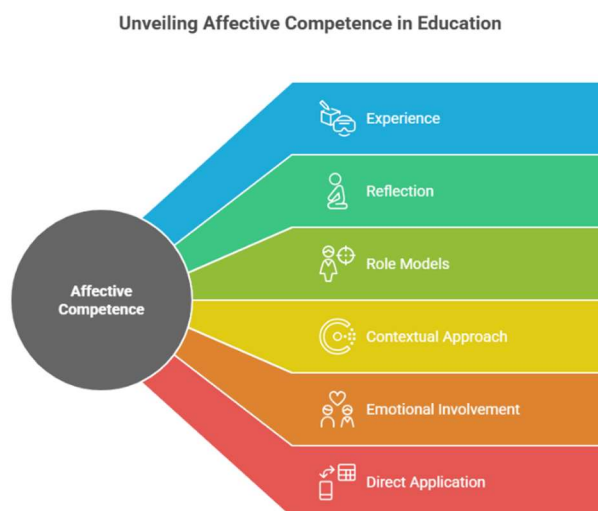


Figure 2. Unveiling Affective Competence In Education

Figure 2. illustrates that affective competence in education is not a single-dimensional construct but is developed through a multifaceted process. It begins with experience, which allows learners to connect emotionally with real-life contexts. Reflection enables students to internalize these experiences, fostering self-awareness and personal growth. Role models, such as teachers or mentors, serve as living examples of values and behaviors that students can emulate. The contextual approach ensures that learning is relevant and grounded in students' cultural and social realities. Emotional involvement is essential to engage learners at a deeper level, making the learning process meaningful and impactful. Finally, direct application ensures that the values learned are not only understood but practiced in daily life. Together, these six elements form an integrated framework that supports the development of affective competence in educational settings, highlighting that character education is most effective when rooted in action, emotion, and real-world relevance.

Overall, the documentation reviewed shows that changes in student behavior as an indicator of affective competence occur through a learning process that is centered on experience, reflection, and role models. An innovative, contextual approach enables students to understand Islamic values more closely with the reality of their lives. Not only understanding "what is right," students also learn to "be right" in attitudes and actions. Teacher role models, emotional involvement in learning, and the opportunity to apply values directly are important factors that drive this change. Therefore, affective competence is not an instant result, but rather the fruit of a holistic, continuous, and heart-touching educational process.

Discussion

The results of this study strengthen the findings of (D'Agostino, 2017), who stated that innovative learning has an important role in shaping students' character as a whole. Approaches such as project-based learning, value reflection, and social discussions used by Islamic Religious Education teachers at SMK NU Sukra Indramayu are in line with Vygotsky's social constructivism theory which emphasizes the role of interaction and experience in building moral awareness. This study is also in line with (Hardan et al., 2025), which shows that students involved in experience-based learning are better able to internalize religious values. However, this study adds a new dimension because it was conducted in the context of vocational education, where the need for character building is often sidelined by the emphasis on technical skills. Thus, innovative approaches in have proven to be able to bridge the strengthening of affective values in vocational education environments which have so far been less highlighted in similar studies (Wahid et al., 2022; Widiania, 2024).

These observational findings are consistent with Rogers' humanistic theory which emphasizes the importance of the teacher's role as a facilitator in value learning. This is also supported by (Kardel et al., 2025) research, which shows that empathetic and open teacher interactions can increase students' affective awareness more deeply. The documentation findings are in accordance with Ki Hadjar Dewantara's theory of value habituation in character education, which states that character grows through role models and repeated experiences. These data are also in line with (Wahid et al., 2023; Wang & Wang, 2023) research which shows the role of documentation in recording real student behavioral transformations.

Innovative approaches are able to foster affective competence because the methods used are contextual, participatory, and touch the emotional realm of students. When students are given space to work on social projects, watch reflective videos, or discuss real cases, they not only learn cognitively, but are also invited to think and feel affectively (Fitriya, 2023; Hasanah, 2025). This allows Islamic values such as empathy, honesty, and responsibility to be embedded naturally, because students experience the meaning of these values directly in a context that is relevant to their lives (Qomar, 2025). Conversely, methods that are too theoretical tend to fail to touch the depth of students' affective abilities. Therefore, the effectiveness of the innovative approach in this study is largely determined by the extent to which the learning experience touches the personal and social aspects of students in a balanced manner, in accordance with the principles of meaningful education (Munif & Sulaiman, 2023; Hidayat et al., 2024).

The role of teachers in shaping affective competence does not occur automatically, but rather through a series of consistent, warm, and meaningful interactions. In observational findings, teachers who are able to create an open and empathetic learning atmosphere are more successful in encouraging student

involvement. This success is influenced by the teacher's non-judgmental communication style, dialogic learning methods, and the teacher's ability to build positive emotional relationships with students (Novitasari et al., 2023). When students feel appreciated and heard, they will be more open to accepting the values taught (Anwar, 2020). This is also influenced by the teacher's exemplary behavior. Students tend to imitate the behavior shown by the teacher, both in terms of patience, tolerance, and responsibility. Thus, the role of the teacher is not only as a teacher, but as a living model of values, whose presence is the main reinforcement in the growth of student affectivity.

Changes in student behavior identified through documentation emerged as a result of the process of repeated and applicable internalization of values. When students are continuously involved in value-based social activities and are given the opportunity to reflect on their experiences, the learning process does not stop at cognition, but penetrates into the affective and psychomotor domains (Baharun, 2023). Documentation such as reflection notes, activity photos, and social reports show that students are beginning to make Islamic values part of their habits. This is possible because learning is designed not only to convey information, but to create a real space for practicing values. In theory, this is in accordance with Kolb's experiential learning approach, which emphasizes the importance of the cycle of direct experience in shaping behavior and attitudes (Rozi et al., 2024). Therefore, documentation is not only evidence, but also the result of an educational process that has succeeded in touching students' moral awareness.

This study provides an important contribution in the field of Islamic religious education and the development of affective education, especially in vocational school environments that have so far focused more on cognitive aspects and technical skills. By presenting innovative approaches to Islamic Religious Education learning that have a real impact on student behavior, this study enriches the literature on the importance of learning that is centered on values and experiences. In addition, this study broadens the scope of character education theory by emphasizing that affective competence can be developed through participatory, reflective, and contextual strategies. In practice, the results of this study can be a reference for teachers, principals, and curriculum developers in designing Islamic Religious Education learning that touches more on students' emotional and social aspects. On the other hand, this study opens up space for further studies to develop more structured and applicable affective evaluation instruments in the context of vocational education in Indonesia.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the study, it can be concluded that the implementation of an innovative approach in Islamic Religious Education learning at SMK NU Sukra Indramayu contributes significantly to fostering students' affective competence. The main findings show that approaches such as

project-based learning, value reflection through digital media, and social case discussions are able to internalize values such as empathy, honesty, and responsibility more meaningfully. The role of teachers as value facilitators greatly determines the success of this process, while documentary evidence shows the transformation of student behavior in social and religious contexts in real terms. Theoretically, this study strengthens the social constructivism approach and humanistic theory which emphasizes the importance of experience, emotional relationships, and role models in value education. This study also adds new insights in the context of vocational education, which has not been the focus of many affective studies. However, this study has limitations in terms of generalization because it was only conducted in one school and did not include the perspectives of parents or the environment outside the school. Therefore, further studies with a wider scope and a triangulation approach to data sources are highly recommended to strengthen the validity of these findings.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The researcher sincerely thanks the principal, Islamic Religious Education teachers, and students of SMK NU Sukra Indramayu for their participation and support in this study. Deep appreciation is also extended to the academic supervisors for their valuable guidance and feedback throughout the research process. Gratitude is given to colleagues and friends who provided encouragement and motivation. Lastly, heartfelt thanks to the researcher's family for their constant support and prayers.

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