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The Effectiveness of CORE (Connecting, Organizing, Reflecting, and Extending) Learning Model on Students' Learning Outcomes in Islamic Religious Education

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A B S T R A C T

This research investigates the effectiveness of the CORE learning model—Connecting, Organizing, Reflecting, and Extending—in enhancing students' learning outcomes in Islamic Religious Education (IRE) at SMP Negeri 36 Bandar Lampung. The study was conducted in response to students' relatively low performance in higher-order thinking skills, indicating the necessity for instructional approaches that are more contextual, interactive, and student-centered. A quantitative approach was applied using a quasi-experimental design with a post-test-only control group. The participants consisted of two eighth-grade classes selected through simple random sampling, in which the experimental group was taught using the CORE learning model, while the control group received instruction through conventional teaching methods. Data were collected using a multiple-choice achievement test that had been confirmed to be valid and reliable, with a reliability coefficient of $\alpha = 0.834$. The results reveal that the CORE learning model significantly improves students' learning outcomes, particularly in higher-order cognitive domains (C4–C6). The application of the CORE model promotes active participation, collaboration, and reflective learning, thereby enabling students to develop a deeper and more meaningful understanding of Islamic Religious Education concepts. Overall, this study offers both theoretical and practical contributions to the advancement of innovative, twenty-first-century-oriented teaching strategies in Islamic Religious Education.

Keywords
Effectiveness, Learning Outcomes, CORE Model, Islamic Religious Education

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1. INTRODUCTION

Learning outcomes refer to the attainment of individual competencies developed through the learning process, which include positive changes in knowledge, understanding, attitudes, skills, and character formation. Ideally, learning outcomes are not limited to cognitive mastery alone but also encompass the development of critical thinking, creativity, communication, collaboration, and the internalization of Pancasila values. In this regard,

optimal learning outcomes are aligned with the objectives of national education, which aim to produce learners who are faithful, morally grounded, competent, independent, and capable of responding to global challenges while maintaining national cultural values.

Nevertheless, the current state of learning outcomes in Indonesia has not yet met these expectations. Evidence from the 2022 PISA results indicates that Indonesian students' performance in reading, mathematics, and scientific literacy remains below the OECD average. Although PISA specifically assesses competencies within these three domains, its findings reflect a broader systemic issue within the Indonesian education system, particularly the limited development of higher-order thinking skills (HOTS). Similar conditions are also observed in Islamic Religious Education (IRE), where instructional practices tend to emphasize rote memorization and normative understanding rather than analytical, evaluative, and value-reflective thinking. Educational quality is further constrained by regional disparities, limited facilities and infrastructure, and the continued predominance of teacher-centered instructional practices, all of which collectively hinder the development of HOTS across both general subjects and religious education. Moreover, the assessment of learning outcomes remains largely dominated by final examination results, while broader competency dimensions such as critical, reflective, and applicative thinking have not been adequately evaluated. Therefore, there is an urgent need for instructional innovations that are more contextual, interactive, and oriented toward the development of holistic competencies, including within Islamic Religious Education.

In the practical implementation of Islamic Religious Education (IRE) learning, particularly in the Aqidah Akhlaq domain focusing on the chapter Integrity: Trustworthiness and Honesty, various challenges are still frequently encountered. Based on a preliminary study conducted in collaboration with Mrs. Asmi, S.Pd., an IRE teacher at SMP Negeri 36 Bandar Lampung, on November 3, 2025, several major issues were identified in the teaching of this chapter. These include disparities in students' levels of understanding of faith based values related to trustworthiness and honesty, limited active student engagement during the learning process, and suboptimal utilization of learning resources and educational technology. Such conditions have resulted in learning experiences that tend to be monotonous and lack meaningful engagement. Consequently, students demonstrate relatively low academic achievement and declining learning motivation, which are closely associated with an unconducive learning environment and the minimal use of engaging and innovative instructional media. The low level of students' learning outcomes in the Aqidah chapter Integrity: trustworthiness and honesty highlight the urgent need for the implementation of more innovative instructional models to foster higher order thinking skills. Therefore, the CORE learning model (Connecting, Organizing, Reflecting, and Extending) is proposed as an alternative approach for teaching this chapter, as it has the potential to replace conventional instructional practices by providing students with opportunities to learn both independently and collaboratively. Through the CORE stages, students are guided to connect the concept of integrity in Aqidah with real-life experiences, organize their understanding of trustworthiness and honesty, reflect on the meaning of faith as manifested in actual behavior, and extend its application within broader social contexts. As a result, learning becomes more meaningful and holistic (Apriyanti et al., 2025; Isabela, 2021; Ramdani et al., 2023). Furthermore, the CORE model emphasizes collaboration, active interaction, and group accountability in understanding Aqidah content, which ultimately supports the development of knowledge that is more meaningful, enduring, and relevant to

students' learning needs (Mufidah et al., 2022; Rohmah & Ulya, 2021; Toni Hardianto et al., 2024).

Findings from the studies of Zebua (2024), Widiastika (2023), and Febriani (2020) demonstrate that the CORE learning model (Connecting, Organizing, Reflecting, Extending) is effective in enhancing learning outcomes, motivation, and students' skills across various subjects, such as mathematics, integrated social studies, and history, even when supported by video media to strengthen motivation and mathematical communication skills. Nevertheless, most of these studies have predominantly focused on mathematics, social studies, and history, while the application of the CORE model in the context of Islamic Religious Education (IRE) has received relatively limited attention, despite its distinct characteristics that emphasize spiritual values, morality, and religious understanding. Therefore, this study introduces novelty by exploring the effectiveness of the CORE model on students' learning outcomes in IRE, thereby expanding the scope of its implementation while also providing both theoretical and practical contributions to the development of innovative instructional methods relevant to the future needs of religious education.

Accordingly, this study aims to examine the effectiveness of the CORE (Connecting, Organizing, Reflecting, and Extending) learning model in improving students' learning outcomes in Islamic Religious Education (IRE) at the junior secondary school level. Specifically, this research seeks to determine whether there is a statistically significant difference in learning outcomes between students taught using the CORE learning model and those taught through conventional instructional methods, particularly in higher-order cognitive domains (C4–C6). Through this investigation, the study intends to provide empirical evidence regarding the applicability of the CORE model in value-based subjects and to contribute to the development of innovative, student-centered instructional strategies in Islamic Religious Education

2. METHOD

This study employed a quantitative approach using a quasi-experimental design in the form of a posttest-only control group design. To minimize the risk of initial ability differences between groups, group equivalence was established prior to the intervention by assigning classes based on students' prior academic achievement and relatively homogeneous learning characteristics. In addition, the selected classes underwent an instrument pilot-testing phase to ensure comparability of students' initial abilities before the implementation of the experiment. The research subjects were eighth-grade students of SMP Negeri 36 Bandar Lampung during the first semester of the 2025/2026 academic year. The research sample was determined using a cluster random sampling technique, taking into account that the instructional units were organized into pre-existing intact classes. Based on the randomization results, two classes were selected as the research sample: Class VIII A was designated as the experimental group receiving the CORE learning model intervention, while Class VIII B served as the control group and was taught using conventional instructional methods The research process began with the assignment of experimental and control groups, followed by the treatment in the form of implementing the steps of the CORE model in the experimental class according to its syntax: group division, delivery of instructional guidance, discussion, presentation, argumentation, the reinforcement stage in the CORE model aims to rectify students' understanding and to consolidate the key concepts that have been learned. At this stage, the teacher actively identifies and corrects students'

misconceptions, particularly those related to the application of religious laws and moral values that emerged during prior discussions. The teacher provides further explanations supported by concrete examples drawn from everyday life to strengthen students' conceptual understanding and religious attitudes. In addition, the teacher guides students through simple learning practices, such as case analysis or value reflection, and conducts brief formative assessments through questioning or short assignments. This systematic sequence of reinforcement, practice, and evaluation activities is designed to ensure that the learning process can be readily reproduced by other teachers in similar educational contexts. Meanwhile, the control class carried out learning activities as usual without any special treatment.

The research instrument employed was a learning outcome test in the form of multiple-choice questions encompassing higher-order cognitive indicators within the domains of C4 (analyzing), C5 (evaluating), and C6 (creating). A pilot test of the instrument was first conducted to examine item quality. Of the 30 items developed, validity testing using the product-moment correlation yielded 25 valid items, while 5 items were discarded for not meeting the criteria. Subsequently, a reliability test was conducted using the Cronbach's Alpha formula, resulting in a reliability coefficient of 0.83, which falls within the very high category, indicating that the instrument is dependable as a data collection tool. In addition, item difficulty, discrimination index, and distractor effectiveness analyses were also carried out to ensure that the instrument was suitable for use in this study.

The implementation of this study was carried out in several stages. First, the researcher developed the learning materials, test blueprint, and assessment instruments. Second, the experimental class received treatment through the application of the CORE learning model following the prescribed steps, while the control class was taught using conventional methods. Third, after the learning process was completed, both classes were administered a post-test using items that had been validated and proven reliable. The test data were then analyzed through prerequisite tests (normality and homogeneity), followed by hypothesis testing using an independent sample t-test to identify differences in learning outcomes between the two groups. Through this procedure, the study was able to demonstrate the effectiveness of the CORE model in enhancing IRE learning outcomes, particularly at the cognitive levels of C4, C5, and C6.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Results

Normality test

The normality test was conducted using the Shapiro–Wilk procedure, as the sample size consisted of fewer than 100 respondents. The results are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Normality test results (Shapiro-Wilk)

Group	Kolmogorov–Smirnov (Sig.)	Shapiro–Wilk (Sig.)
Control Class (Class B)	0.200	0.564
Experimental Class (Class A)	0.200	0.972

Based on the results of the normality test using the Shapiro–Wilk method as presented in the table, the significance (Sig.) values for each group were obtained as follows: the control group (Class B) yielded a Shapiro–Wilk significance value of 0.564, while the experimental group (Class A) demonstrated a Shapiro–Wilk significance value of 0.972.

The significance values for both groups exceed the threshold of 0.05, indicating that there is no statistically significant deviation between the distribution of the learning outcome data and a normal distribution. Therefore, it can be concluded that the learning outcome data for both the control and experimental groups are normally distributed

Homogeneity test

The homogeneity of variances was examined using Levene's test (Table 2).

Table 2. Homogeneity test results

Measurement	Levene's Statistic	df1	df2	Sig.
Learning outcomes	**2.662**	**1**	**58**	**.108**

Based on the results of the homogeneity of variance test using Levene's Test, a significance value of 0.108 was obtained, which is higher than the significance level of 0.05. Therefore, it can be concluded that the variances of learning outcome data between the compared groups are homogeneous, thereby satisfying the prerequisite for further analysis using an independent samples *t*-test under the assumption of equal variances assumed.

Independent Sample t-test

The results of the homogeneity test indicate that the variances of the data across the two groups are homogeneous, thereby satisfying the assumption required for conducting an independent samples *t*-test. Descriptive statistics presented in Table 3 show that the experimental group implementing the CORE learning model achieved a higher mean score (M = 88.33; SD = 3.25) than the control group (M = 70.57; SD = 2.39), indicating a substantial difference in learning outcomes.

Furthermore, the results of the independent samples *t*-test reported in Table 4 reveal a statistically significant difference between the two groups ($p < 0.001$), leading to the rejection of the null hypothesis (H_0). A mean difference of –17.767 indicates that the experimental group outperformed the control group by 17.76 points; the negative sign reflects the SPSS coding in which the control group was designated as the reference group. These findings confirm that the implementation of the CORE learning model contributes significantly to the improvement of students' learning outcomes, particularly in fostering higher-order thinking skills at the C4 (analyzing), C5 (evaluating), and C6 (creating) levels.

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics of Students' Learning Outcomes

Group	Mean	Standard Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Control Class	**70.57**	**2.39**	**66**	**75**
Experimental Class	**88.33**	**3.25**	**82**	**95**

Table 4. Independent Sample t-test

		t-test for Equality of Means							
				Significance				95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
		t	df	One-Sided p	Two-Sided p	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
Learning Outcomes	Equal variances assumed	-24.120	58	<,001	<,001	-17.767	.737	-19.241	-16.292
	Equal variances not assumed	-24.120	53.230	<,001	<,001	-17.767	.737	-19.244	-16.289

3.2. Discussion

The findings of this study demonstrate that the CORE (Connecting, Organizing, Reflecting, and Extending) instructional model is empirically proven to be effective in enhancing students' learning outcomes in Islamic Religious Education (IRE), particularly within higher-order cognitive domains, namely analyzing (C4), evaluating (C5), and creating (C6). This improvement underscores the capacity of the CORE approach to address the primary issue identified in the study, namely students' limited ability to develop analytical, evaluative, and creative thinking skills (Priantini, 2022). Accordingly, the CORE model not only strengthens students' mastery of fundamental concepts but also provides meaningful opportunities for them to construct deeper and more applicable knowledge.

These findings are consistent with the studies of Zebua (2024), Widiastika & Kartika (2023), and Febriani & Kusnafizal (2020), which demonstrated that the CORE model is effective in enhancing students' learning outcomes, motivation, and skills in mathematics, social studies, and history. However, the novelty of the present study lies in the application of CORE within the subject of Islamic Religious Education (IRE), which carries distinct characteristics as it emphasizes the strengthening of spiritual, moral, and religious values. Thus, this research not only broadens the scope of CORE's implementation but also contributes a new perspective to the development of value-based learning strategies.

The successful implementation of the CORE model can be explained through its syntax, which systematically guides students: connecting links new material with prior knowledge, organizing structures information, reflecting evaluates understanding, and extending broadens ideas or generates new solutions (Mufidah et al., 2022; Muria & Budianti, 2021; Rachmadhani & Kamalia, 2023). This syntax is consistent with constructivist theory, which emphasizes the active role of learners in constructing knowledge. Accordingly, learning is no longer limited to the mere transfer of information but becomes a transformation of knowledge through active engagement.

The findings also demonstrate that the CORE model fosters a collaborative and interactive learning environment. Students became more actively engaged in discussions, arguments, and presentations of ideas, which in turn enhanced their sense of responsibility for their own learning process (Ayudia & Mariani, 2022; Sari, 2021; Suci et al., 2020). This aligns with the findings of Rohmah & Ulya (2021), who emphasized that CORE promotes cooperation and active interaction, as well as the study by Nelwati et al. (2020) which

affirmed that CORE can improve critical thinking and problem-solving skills (Hartiningrum & Maarif, 2025). Thus, this study both confirms and extends the evidence that CORE is effective not only in exact sciences but also in Islamic Religious Education, which emphasizes the integration of values and knowledge.

In line with the quantitative findings demonstrating a significant improvement in higher-order thinking skills (C4–C6), the results of this study confirm that the implementation of the CORE learning model is effective in developing students' higher-order cognitive competencies in the areas of integrity, trustworthiness, and honesty within Islamic Religious Education. The observed differences in learning outcomes between the experimental and control groups indicate that learning processes emphasizing conceptual connection, organization of understanding, reflection, and reinforcement effectively promote students' abilities to analyze, evaluate, and generate solutions grounded in Islamic values. These findings are relevant to the demands of 21st-century education, which emphasize the development of critical, reflective, and creative thinking, and they further reinforce the CORE learning model as an effective pedagogical approach for enhancing HOTS-based learning outcomes in the context of Islamic education. This study demonstrates that the CORE model is highly relevant to these demands, as it not only cultivates cognitive skills but also develops communication through discussion, collaboration through group work, and creativity through extending activities (Nugroho, 2020; Saputro et al., 2021; Sofiarum et al., 2020). Furthermore, the spiritual values embedded in Islamic Religious Education can be reinforced through critical reflection, positioning CORE as an approach that integrates both cognitive and affective learning outcomes (Habibah & Sunarmi, 2025).

Compared to previous studies that primarily focused on mathematics, social studies, and history (Zebua et al., 2024; Widiastika & Kartika, 2023; Febriani & Kusnafizal, 2020), this research offers novelty in two key aspects. First, its emphasis on Islamic Religious Education (IRE) provides a theoretical contribution by demonstrating that the CORE model can be adapted to value- and morality-based disciplines. Second, it delivers a practical contribution by presenting a learning strategy that not only enhances students' learning outcomes in IRE but also addresses the low levels of interest and engagement identified in the preliminary study.

These findings not only reaffirm the effectiveness of the CORE model in improving students' learning outcomes in Islamic Religious Education (IRE) but also underscore the importance of pedagogical innovation in addressing the challenges of low higher-order cognitive achievement at the secondary level. Practically, IRE teachers can adopt CORE as an alternative instructional strategy that is interactive, adaptive, and aligned with students' learning needs. Theoretically, this study enriches the literature with new empirical evidence regarding the effectiveness of CORE in value-based subjects. This novelty highlights the study's significant contribution to both the advancement of learning theory and the improvement of educational practice in schools.

4. CONCLUSION

Based on the findings, it can be concluded that the CORE learning model (Connecting, Organizing, Reflecting, Extending) is effective in improving students' learning outcomes in Islamic Religious Education (IRE) at SMP Negeri 36 Bandar Lampung, particularly in higher-order cognitive domains (C4, C5, and C6). The application of the CORE syntax has been

shown to encourage students to engage more actively, collaboratively, and reflectively in the learning process, thereby fostering deeper and more applicable understanding of the material. The novelty of this study lies in the implementation of CORE within IRE instruction, which emphasizes the reinforcement of spiritual and moral values-an area that has been relatively underexplored. Consequently, this research provides a theoretical contribution by expanding the literature on the effectiveness of CORE, while also offering practical implications for IRE teachers in selecting instructional strategies that are innovative, adaptive, and relevant to students' needs.

Based on the findings, it is recommended that future researchers expand the investigation of the effectiveness of the CORE learning model within broader contexts, either by extending the sample to different educational levels or by integrating additional variables such as learning motivation, creativity, or students' religious attitudes. Subsequent studies may also combine CORE with innovative instructional media or digital technologies to ensure its implementation is more adaptive to the demands of the digital era. In this way, future research will not only reinforce the evidence regarding the improvement of learning outcomes in Islamic Religious Education (IRE) but also contribute to the development of a more comprehensive learning model that is relevant to the challenges of twenty-first century education.

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