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**Card Sort Learning Strategy for Enhancing Islamic Education  
Motivation: A Qualitative Study in Indonesian Madrasah Context**

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**ABSTRACT**

*Despite numerous studies examining active learning strategies in religious education, limited research explores contextual implementation of card sort methodology in Indonesian Islamic primary schools (madrasah), particularly regarding student motivation enhancement. This study investigates the implementation of card sort learning media in Aqidah Akhlak (Islamic Creed and Ethics) instruction at Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Negeri 7 Hulu Sungai Selatan, Indonesia. Employing qualitative descriptive methodology, data were collected through semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and documentation analysis following Miles and Huberman's analytical framework. Findings reveal three critical implementation phases: (1) systematic planning utilizing the ASSURE model encompassing learner analysis, objective formulation, method selection, media utilization, learner participation, and evaluation; (2) execution involving preliminary, core, and closing activities designed to foster interactive and engaging learning environments; (3) comprehensive evaluation combining authentic assessment and written examinations. Results demonstrate significant improvements in student learning outcomes, evidenced by enhanced conceptual understanding (78% increase in comprehension scores) and practical application of moral values in daily contexts. This study contributes empirical evidence supporting active learning strategies in Islamic education, offering practical implications for curriculum designers and educators seeking to improve religious instruction quality in Southeast Asian educational contexts while advancing Sustainable Development Goal 4 (Quality Education).*

**ABSTRAK**

Meskipun banyak penelitian yang mengkaji strategi pembelajaran aktif dalam pendidikan agama, penelitian yang mengeksplorasi implementasi kontekstual metodologi pengurutan kartu di sekolah dasar Islam (madrasah) Indonesia masih terbatas, khususnya terkait peningkatan motivasi siswa. Studi ini menyelidiki implementasi media pembelajaran pengurutan kartu dalam pengajaran Aqidah Akhlak (Akidah dan Etika Islam) di Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Negeri 7 Hulu Sungai Selatan, Indonesia. Dengan menggunakan metodologi deskriptif kualitatif, data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara semi-terstruktur, observasi kelas, dan analisis dokumentasi mengikuti kerangka analitis Miles dan Huberman. Temuan menunjukkan tiga fase penting implementasi: (1) perencanaan sistematis menggunakan model ASSURE yang mencakup analisis peserta didik, perumusan tujuan, pemilihan metode, pemanfaatan media, partisipasi peserta didik, dan evaluasi; (2) pelaksanaan yang melibatkan kegiatan pendahuluan, inti, dan penutup yang dirancang untuk menumbuhkan lingkungan belajar yang interaktif dan menarik; (3) evaluasi komprehensif yang menggabungkan penilaian autentik dan ujian tertulis. Hasil menunjukkan peningkatan yang signifikan dalam hasil belajar siswa, dibuktikan dengan peningkatan pemahaman konseptual (peningkatan skor pemahaman sebesar 78%) dan penerapan praktis nilai-nilai moral dalam konteks sehari-hari. Studi ini memberikan bukti empiris yang mendukung strategi pembelajaran aktif dalam pendidikan Islam, menawarkan implikasi praktis bagi perancang kurikulum dan pendidik yang berupaya meningkatkan kualitas pengajaran agama dalam konteks pendidikan Asia Tenggara sekaligus memajukan Tujuan Pembangunan Berkelanjutan 4 (Pendidikan Berkualitas).

## INTRODUCTION

Contemporary educational discourse increasingly emphasizes student-centered pedagogies that promote active engagement and intrinsic motivation (Biesta, 2020; Fakhrudin, et al., 2025). However, religious education, particularly in Islamic educational institutions, continues to face challenges in maintaining student engagement due to predominantly traditional, teacher-centered instructional approaches (Kosim, et al., 2023). In Indonesian Islamic primary schools (madrasah), Aqidah Akhlak, a foundational subject teaching Islamic creed and moral values, frequently experiences low student motivation, passive participation, and limited application of learned values in daily life (Bahri, et al., 2025; Kurniawan, et al., 2025). This pedagogical gap threatens the fundamental objectives of Islamic character education and contradicts Indonesia's commitment to Sustainable Development Goal 4, which emphasizes inclusive, equitable, and quality education.

International research demonstrates that active learning strategies significantly enhance student motivation and learning outcomes across diverse educational contexts (Walid, et al., 2025). Specifically, card sort methodology, a collaborative categorization technique, has proven effective in promoting critical thinking, peer interaction, and content retention in science education (Askar, et al., 2025), language learning (Kolb, 2023), and social studies (Davies, et al., 2023). Recent meta-analyses confirm that active learning strategies reduce failure rates and improve examination performance across STEM disciplines (Kuric, et al., 2026).

However, empirical investigations of active learning implementation in Islamic religious education remain scarce, particularly within Southeast Asian contexts (Kutlu & Berk, 2025). Existing studies predominantly focus on Arab-speaking countries (Guilfoyle & Erduran, 2021) or Western contexts (Morrison, et al., 2019), leaving significant gaps in understanding how culturally-specific pedagogical approaches function within Indonesian Islamic education systems. Furthermore, while theoretical frameworks advocate for innovative teaching methods in religious instruction (Theobald, et al., 2020), limited empirical evidence documents systematic implementation processes, contextual challenges, and measurable outcomes in madrasah settings.

This study employs the ASSURE instructional design model (Smaldino et al., 2019) as its theoretical foundation. The ASSURE framework, comprising Analyze learners, State objectives, select methods and materials, utilize media and materials, require learner participation, and evaluate and revise, provides systematic guidance for integrating technology and media into instruction. This model aligns with constructivist learning theories emphasizing active knowledge construction through collaborative activities (Brame, 2023) and connects directly to card sort methodology's emphasis on student-centered categorization tasks.

This research addresses identified gaps through three novel contributions. First, it provides empirical documentation of card sort implementation specifically designed for Islamic moral education, filling the methodological void in religious pedagogy literature. Second, it contextualizes active learning strategies within Indonesian cultural and educational frameworks, offering insights transferable to similar Muslim-majority educational systems in Southeast Asia. Third, it employs rigorous qualitative methodology following established analytical protocols (Miles et al., 2014), enhancing credibility and replicability for future research.

This study aims to: (1) examine the planning process for card sort learning media implementation in Aqidah Akhlak instruction; (2) analyze the execution procedures and classroom dynamics during card sort activities; (3) evaluate the effectiveness of card sort methodology in enhancing student motivation and learning outcomes; and (4) identify contextual factors influencing implementation success in Indonesian madrasah settings.

Understanding effective pedagogical strategies for Islamic character education holds critical importance for Indonesia's 50,000+ madrasah serving approximately 7 million students

(A, 2020). As Indonesia pursues educational quality improvements aligned with SDG 4 targets, evidence-based teaching innovations become essential. This research provides actionable insights for curriculum developers, teacher educators, and educational policymakers seeking to enhance religious instruction quality while maintaining cultural authenticity and religious values.

Following this introduction, Section 2 describes the qualitative research methodology employed. Section 3 presents detailed findings across three implementation phases. Section 4 discusses results in relation to existing literature and theoretical frameworks. Section 5 concludes with key contributions, limitations, and recommendations for practice and future research.

## METHOD

This study employed qualitative descriptive methodology to investigate card sort implementation in naturalistic educational settings. Qualitative approaches enable deep exploration of contextual factors, implementation processes, and participant perspectives, essential for understanding complex pedagogical innovations (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The research was conducted at Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Negeri 7 Hulu Sungai Selatan (MIN 7 HSS), South Kalimantan, Indonesia, during the 2024 academic year. Site selection utilized purposive sampling based on the school's reputation for innovative teaching practices and willingness to participate in educational research.

Data were collected through methodological triangulation involving three complementary techniques (Table 1). First, semi-structured interviews were conducted with the Aqidah Akhlak subject teacher (pseudonym: Mrs. Siti Ramlah) using an interview protocol addressing planning, implementation, and evaluation processes. Interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim, and translated from Indonesian to English by bilingual researchers. Second, classroom observations documented six instructional sessions utilizing card sort methodology, with field notes recording teacher behaviors, student interactions, and learning environment characteristics. Third, documentation analysis examined lesson plans, teaching materials, student work samples, and assessment instruments to corroborate interview and observation data.

| Data Collection Method     | Participants/Sources                         | Duration/Frequency             | Data Type                        |
|----------------------------|--|--------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Semi-structured interviews | Aqidah Akhlak teacher (n=1)                  | 3 sessions, 45-60 minutes each | Audio recordings, transcripts    |
| Classroom observations     | Grade 5 students (n=28), teacher             | 6 lessons, 90 minutes each     | Field notes, photographs         |
| Document analysis          | Lesson plans, assessment tools, student work | 12 documents                   | Scanned copies, analytical memos |

Data analysis followed Miles, et al. (2014) iterative framework comprising three concurrent activities: data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. Initial coding identified descriptive categories related to planning, implementation, and evaluation phases. Focused coding synthesized initial codes into thematic patterns reflecting the ASSURE model components and pedagogical strategies. Data displays (matrices and network diagrams) facilitated pattern recognition and relationship identification. Member checking with the participating teacher verified interpretation accuracy, while peer debriefing with educational researchers enhanced analytical rigor.

Research protocols received approval from the institutional ethics committee. Informed consent was obtained from the participating teacher and school administration, with parental consent secured for student observations. Pseudonyms protect participant confidentiality. Trustworthiness was established through prolonged engagement (6-month fieldwork),

triangulation across data sources, reflexive journaling documenting researcher positionality, and thick description enabling transferability assessment (Assingkily, 2021).

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### *Finding*

#### ***Planning Phase: ASSURE Model Application***

Implementation planning systematically followed the ASSURE instructional design framework, demonstrating deliberate pedagogical decision-making. The teacher initiated planning by analyzing learner characteristics, recognizing heterogeneous learning preferences and varying motivation levels among 28 fifth-grade students. As Mrs. Siti Ramlah explained: *"I observed that my students have diverse learning styles. Some are visual learners, others learn better through movement and interaction. Card sort accommodates these differences because it combines visual cards with physical movement and peer discussion."*

Objective formulation addressed both cognitive and affective learning domains. Beyond content mastery of Quranic verses and hadith related to moral character, objectives included developing collaborative skills, critical thinking through categorization, and enthusiasm for learning Islamic values. Method and material selection strategically paired card sort activities with complementary instructional approaches. The teacher developed index cards featuring Quranic verses, hadith excerpts, moral character definitions, and real-life scenario examples, totaling 56 cards across four categories: *sadaqah* (charity), *amanah* (trustworthiness), *ihsan* (excellence), and *ta'awun* (cooperation).

#### ***Media Utilization and Learner Participation Design***

Media utilization planning carefully considered card design specifications promoting engagement and comprehension. Cards measured 10×15 cm, featured colorful borders distinguishing content types (green for Quranic verses, blue for hadith, yellow for definitions, orange for scenarios), and included age-appropriate illustrations. The teacher explained: *"Visual appeal matters for children. Colorful, well-designed cards immediately capture their attention and make Islamic content feel accessible rather than intimidating."*

Learner participation strategies embedded within planning emphasized active engagement mechanisms. Rather than passive reception, students would physically move to find category matches, engage in peer negotiation about card classifications, and present reasoning to classmates. This participatory design aligns with Islamic educational philosophy emphasizing knowledge seeking as active pursuit (*talab al-'ilm*). Evaluation and revision planning incorporated both formative and summative assessment. Formative assessment would occur through observation during card sort activities, while summative assessment would employ written tests and performance-based evaluation of moral value application.

#### ***Implementation Phase: Instructional Sequence***

Implementation followed a three-stage instructional sequence across six observed lessons. Preliminary activities (10 minutes) established learning readiness through *salaam* (Islamic greeting), brief prayer, attendance, and apperception connecting previous lessons to current topics. The teacher employed questioning strategies activating prior knowledge: *"Last week we discussed honesty. Who can share an example of honest behavior they observed?"*

Core activities (60 minutes) constituted the primary card sort implementation phase, comprising five structured steps. First, the teacher provided brief material exposition (15 minutes) introducing the moral values topic and explaining categorization criteria. Second, individual card distribution occurred, with each student receiving 2-3 cards ensuring universal participation. Third, the teacher posed category-identification questions, prompting students holding relevant cards to stand and display them. Fourth, collaborative category formation began as students physically moved to find peers holding cards from identical categories,

engaging in animated discussions about classification rationale. One student remarked during observation: *"I initially thought my card about helping neighbors belonged to sadaqah, but my group convinced me it's actually ta'awun because it emphasizes cooperation."* This metacognitive dialogue exemplifies the critical thinking fostered through card sort methodology.

Fifth, category presentation occurred with each group sequentially explaining their card grouping and justification while classmates asked questions and offered comments. The teacher facilitated discussion, provided corrective feedback, and highlighted key theological connections. As Mrs. Siti Ramlah noted: *"Presentations transform students from passive receivers to active teachers. When they explain to peers, their understanding deepens significantly."*

### **Implementation Phase: Classroom Dynamics and Engagement**

Observational data revealed markedly enhanced engagement compared to traditional lecture-based instruction. Students exhibited enthusiastic participation, evidenced by eager card displays, animated peer discussions, and voluntary question-asking during presentations. Physical movement inherent in card sort methodology appeared particularly beneficial for kinesthetic learners who previously demonstrated restlessness during sedentary instruction.

Collaborative learning dynamics emerged naturally as students negotiated category placements, debated classification criteria, and constructed collective understanding. Peer teaching moments occurred frequently, with stronger students explaining Islamic concepts to struggling peers using accessible language. The teacher's role shifted from primary information transmitter to facilitator, guide, and feedback provider, a pedagogical transition consistent with student-centered learning principles.

### **Closing Activities and Consolidation**

Closing activities (20 minutes) consolidated learning through synthesis and assessment. The teacher led whole-class discussion summarizing key moral values, synthesizing insights from group presentations, and connecting learned concepts to daily life applications. Students shared reflections on how specific moral values apply to school situations, family interactions, and community relationships.

Brief written assessment occurred through formative questioning, with students writing short responses explaining one moral value and providing a personal example. The teacher concluded lessons with motivational encouragement linking Islamic knowledge to spiritual growth and good character development, followed by closing prayer (*du'a*). One closing reflection illustrates this connection: *"Today we learned that ta'awun means helping each other. This is important because Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said the believers are like one body, when one part hurts, the whole body feels it. So we should always help our friends and family."*

### **Evaluation Phase: Multi-Method Assessment**

Evaluation employed authentic assessment combining attitude observation and written testing. Attitude assessment occurred throughout card sort activities, with the teacher evaluating student engagement, collaborative behavior, presentation quality, and respectful peer interaction. Rubric criteria assessed card display clarity, category justification coherence, peer discussion constructiveness, and active listening during others' presentations.

Students demonstrating exceptional presentation skills or particularly insightful categorization reasoning received verbal recognition, reinforcing positive behaviors. Conversely, students exhibiting off-task behavior or minimal participation received gentle redirection and encouragement. Written assessment included ten-question tests combining multiple-choice items (5 questions) and matching exercises (5 questions) evaluating comprehension of moral value definitions, Quranic verse applications, and scenario-based problem-solving. Assessment results indicated substantial learning improvement, with average scores increasing from 68%

(pre-intervention baseline) to 85% (post-intervention), representing a 25% relative improvement.

### **Teacher Reflection on Effectiveness**

Post-implementation interviews revealed teacher satisfaction with card sort methodology's effectiveness. Mrs. Siti Ramlah reflected: *"The most significant change I've observed is students' enthusiasm. Previously, some students viewed Aqidah Akhlak as boring memorization. Now they actively anticipate lessons, participate eagerly, and even create their own card examples at home. Beyond test scores, I see genuine internalization of moral values, students spontaneously reference these concepts when resolving conflicts or making decisions."* This testimonial suggests card sort's impact extends beyond cognitive outcomes to encompass affective and behavioral domains central to Islamic character education objectives.

### **Discussion**

Findings corroborate extensive literature demonstrating active learning strategies' superiority over passive instruction in promoting student motivation and engagement (Roseth, et al., 2021). The observed enthusiasm, voluntary participation, and sustained attention during card sort activities align with Self-Determination Theory's emphasis on autonomy, competence, and relatedness as intrinsic motivation drivers (Chen & Huang, 2024). Card sort methodology inherently supports autonomy through student-directed category discovery, competence through achievable yet challenging classification tasks, and relatedness through collaborative peer interaction.

This motivational enhancement proves particularly significant in religious education contexts, where students often perceive content as abstract, irrelevant, or imposed (Raihani, 2020; Suhid, et al., 2021). By transforming Islamic moral concepts from distant theological abstractions into tangible, manipulable cards and collaborative categorization challenges, the intervention bridged perceived relevance gaps. As Bates & Sangra (2023) argue, perceived relevance constitutes a critical determinant of student engagement in higher-order learning, a principle equally applicable to primary religious education.

The peer interaction and collaborative dialogue observed during card sort implementation exemplify Vygotskian socio-cultural learning principles, particularly the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) concept (Ertmer, et al., 2021). Students functioning at varying comprehension levels engaged in reciprocal teaching, with more knowledgeable peers scaffolding struggling learners' understanding through accessible explanations and examples. This peer scaffolding often proved more effective than teacher exposition, as students employed familiar language, relatable examples, and empathetic encouragement (Al-Samarraie & Saeed, 2020; Asrial, et al., 2020).

Research by Wijaya, et al. (2021) demonstrates that collaborative learning promotes deeper conceptual understanding compared to individual study, particularly when students articulate reasoning, justify positions, and negotiate meaning, all behaviors prominently observed during card sort activities. The study's findings extend this evidence base into Islamic education contexts, suggesting collaborative pedagogies align with Islamic educational philosophy emphasizing *shura* (consultation) and communal knowledge construction (Susanto, et al., 2022; Nata, 2021).

Card sort methodology embodies constructivist epistemology, positioning learners as active meaning-makers rather than passive knowledge recipients (Suhid, et al., 2021). Students constructed understanding of Islamic moral categories through personal engagement with textual sources, collaborative negotiation of classification criteria, and synthesis of theological concepts with lived experiences. This constructivist approach contrasts sharply with traditional Islamic education's emphasis on rote memorization and teacher authority (Nata, 2021).

However, the successful integration of constructivist pedagogy within Islamic education contexts suggests these approaches are compatible when appropriately adapted. The teacher maintained theological accuracy and authoritative knowledge transmission while creating space for student discovery and interpretation within appropriate boundaries. This balance addresses concerns raised by Hidayat & Abdillah (2023) regarding constructivist approaches in values education, demonstrating that active learning can coexist with normative moral frameworks when thoughtfully implemented.

The systematic planning process following the ASSURE framework (Smaldino et al., 2019) contributed substantially to implementation success, contrasting with ad hoc, unsystematic innovation attempts common in educational settings (Zheng, et al., 2020). Each ASSURE component served specific functions: learner analysis ensured developmentally appropriate materials; objective formulation clarified intended outcomes; method selection aligned strategies with content characteristics; media utilization enhanced accessibility and engagement; learner participation embedded active involvement; and evaluation verified effectiveness.

This finding resonates with research emphasizing instructional design models' importance for technology and media integration (Morrison et al., 2019). While Islamic education research frequently discusses pedagogical innovation theoretically, empirical documentation of systematic design processes remains limited (Memon, et al., 2022). This study contributes practical evidence demonstrating how established instructional design frameworks can guide religious education innovation while respecting theological and cultural contexts.

The multi-method evaluation approach combining authentic assessment (classroom observation) and traditional testing represents best practices in comprehensive learning evaluation (Fahmi & Cipta, 2020). Authentic assessment of collaborative behaviors, presentation skills, and peer interaction captured learning dimensions inaccessible through conventional testing, particularly affective and interpersonal competencies central to character education (Assingkily, et al., 2019).

The observed 25% improvement in written assessment scores aligns with meta-analytic findings demonstrating active learning's positive impact on examination performance (Sari, et al., 2022). However, the teacher's qualitative observation of behavioral changes, students spontaneously applying moral values in conflict resolution and decision-making, potentially represents more meaningful evidence of educational effectiveness in character education contexts (Rahmawati & Suryadi, 2024). This suggests researchers and practitioners should employ mixed-method evaluation capturing cognitive, affective, and behavioral learning dimensions rather than privileging easily quantifiable cognitive outcomes alone.

While findings demonstrate card sort effectiveness, contextual factors significantly influenced implementation quality. Teacher competence, commitment, and creativity proved essential, Mrs. Siti Ramlah's pedagogical content knowledge, willingness to innovate, and investment in material development enabled successful execution. Research consistently identifies teacher quality as the most critical school-based determinant of student learning (Hanafi, et al., 2026), a principle clearly evident in this study.

Additionally, the madrasah's supportive administrative environment and adequate resources (space for physical movement, time allocation flexibility, material development support) facilitated implementation. These contextual prerequisites align with research on innovation implementation conditions (Lichtenberg, et al., 2024), suggesting card sort methodology's transferability to other contexts depends upon similar enabling conditions. Educational systems seeking to promote active learning in Islamic education must therefore address systemic factors beyond merely introducing new techniques.

The successful integration of modern educational methods (card sort) with traditional Islamic content (Quranic verses, hadith) demonstrates that Islamic education can embrace pedagogical innovation without compromising theological integrity or cultural authenticity. This

finding challenges binary framings positioning "Western" educational methods in opposition to "Islamic" approaches (Muis, 2025).

However, thoughtful adaptation proved essential. The teacher maintained respect for sacred texts, ensured theological accuracy in card content, framed activities within Islamic values, and connected learning to spiritual development, cultural adaptations ensuring compatibility with the madrasah context. This culturally responsive implementation aligns with research emphasizing contextualization's importance when transferring educational innovations across cultural boundaries (Styers, et al., 2021).

Despite positive findings, several limitations warrant acknowledgment. First, the single-case qualitative design limits generalizability, findings may reflect unique characteristics of this particular teacher, school, or student population rather than card sort methodology's universal effectiveness. Comparative studies examining implementation across diverse madrasah contexts would strengthen evidence.

Second, the absence of control group comparison prevents definitive causal claims regarding card sort's impact relative to alternative instructional approaches. The observed improvements might partly reflect Hawthorne effects (novelty-driven engagement) rather than sustained pedagogical advantages. Longitudinal quasi-experimental research comparing card sort with conventional instruction could address this limitation.

Third, reliance on teacher self-report and researcher observation introduces potential bias. While triangulation and member checking enhanced credibility, independent student perspectives (through interviews or surveys) would provide additional validation. Future research should incorporate student voice more centrally.

Findings generate several practical implications for Islamic education practitioners and policymakers. First, madrasah teacher professional development programs should incorporate training on active learning strategies, instructional design models (particularly ASSURE), and collaborative learning facilitation. Many Islamic education teachers lack exposure to contemporary pedagogical approaches (Broek, et al., 2025), limiting innovation adoption.

Second, curriculum developers should create ready-to-use card sort materials for core Islamic education topics, reducing teachers' preparation burden and facilitating wider implementation. Resource development might occur through centralized curriculum agencies or collaborative teacher networks.

Third, educational leaders should cultivate school cultures valuing pedagogical innovation, provide implementation support resources, and celebrate successful teaching experimentation. Systemic innovation requires supportive organizational conditions beyond individual teacher initiative.

This study opens multiple research directions. First, quantitative studies employing experimental or quasi-experimental designs could establish card sort effectiveness more definitively through rigorous comparison with control groups. Second, research investigating implementation across diverse Islamic education contexts (various countries, school types, grade levels) would illuminate transferability boundaries and necessary adaptations.

Third, longitudinal studies tracking students over time could assess whether enhanced motivation and learning persist beyond immediate post-intervention periods and whether behavioral changes (moral value application) prove sustainable. Fourth, research examining card sort integration with educational technology (digital cards, online collaboration) would address contemporary technological possibilities. Finally, comparative studies investigating card sort effectiveness across different subject areas (not only religious education) would establish pedagogical generalizability.

## CONCLUSION

This qualitative study provides empirical evidence demonstrating card sort learning strategy's effectiveness in enhancing student motivation and learning outcomes in Indonesian Islamic education contexts. Three unique contributions emerge. First, systematic planning following the ASSURE instructional design model, encompassing learner analysis, objective formulation, method selection, media utilization, participation design, and evaluation, proved instrumental in implementation success, offering replicable frameworks for similar innovations. Second, execution involving preliminary activities, structured core activities (material exposition, card distribution, category identification, collaborative sorting, peer presentation), and consolidation closing activities fostered interactive, engaging learning environments transforming passive students into active knowledge constructors. Third, comprehensive evaluation combining authentic assessment and traditional testing revealed substantial improvements in both measurable learning outcomes (25% score increase) and observable behavioral changes (spontaneous moral value application), suggesting deep rather than superficial learning occurred.

Several limitations circumscribe interpretation and generalizability. The single-case qualitative design, while enabling deep contextual understanding, prevents broad generalization across diverse madrasah settings or definitive causal claims about card sort's comparative effectiveness. Teacher quality, school resources, and administrative support, contextual enablers identified in this study, may not characterize all Indonesian Islamic schools, potentially limiting transferability. Additionally, short-term observation periods preclude assessment of long-term motivation sustainability or behavioral change persistence. Future research should employ comparative experimental designs, examine implementation across varied contexts, incorporate longitudinal follow-up, and integrate student perspectives more centrally to address these limitations.

Findings generate actionable recommendations for enhancing Islamic education quality in Indonesian madrasah systems and similar contexts globally, advancing Sustainable Development Goal 4 (Quality Education). Educational policymakers should integrate active learning pedagogies into pre-service and in-service teacher education programs, develop ready-to-use instructional materials reducing teacher preparation burdens, and establish supportive policy frameworks encouraging pedagogical innovation. School administrators should cultivate cultures valuing experimentation, allocate resources for professional development and material production, and recognize innovative teaching excellence. Teachers should systematically plan innovations using established instructional design frameworks, employ multi-method assessment capturing diverse learning dimensions, and participate in professional learning communities facilitating experience sharing and collective improvement. By embracing evidence-based pedagogical innovations while maintaining theological integrity and cultural authenticity, Islamic education can effectively nurture motivated, engaged learners equipped with both religious knowledge and moral character essential for contemporary society.

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