



Contextual Learning and Teaching to Improve Students Understanding of Aqidah and Akhlak

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Abstract

Classroom action research analyzes the effectiveness of contextual learning and teaching to improve understanding of aqidah and akhlak. Classroom action was carried out in Class 7 of Madrasah Tsanawiyah. The results of the classroom action show that contextual learning and teaching enable students to connect the concepts of honesty and responsibility with everyday life. The principle of constructivism helps students build understanding through direct experience. The community of inquiry and learning increases student engagement in exploring the values of aqidah and akhlak. Modeling provides concrete examples that students can imitate. Authentic reflection and assessment measure student understanding and behavioral changes. Contextual learning and teaching successfully improve student understanding and participation. There are challenges in ensuring equal involvement among all students. Additional strategies such as simulation and role-playing are recommended to further optimize learning effectiveness. Contextual learning and teaching are effective in linking aqidah and akhlak material with students' real experiences, strengthening understanding and application of Islamic values in everyday life.

Keywords: Contextual teaching and learning, *aqidah akhlak*, honesty, responsibility

INTRODUCTION

Aqidah akhlak education at the Madrasah Tsanawiyah (MTs) level plays a crucial role in shaping students' character and moral values. However, various challenges hinder the effectiveness of this learning process. One of the primary issues is the low interest and engagement of students in understanding and practicing moral values in their daily lives.¹ This issue stems from conventional and less engaging teaching methods, making it difficult for students to relate the subject matter to their real-life experiences. The lack of variation in teaching strategies results in abstract content that is challenging to apply in real-world contexts. Consequently, a contextual learning is needed to connect *aqidah akhlak* material with students' realities, making it more relevant and meaningful.²

Several previous studies have explored different instructional methods to enhance students' understanding of *aqidah akhlak*. One study found that implementing Problem-Based Learning (PBL) at MTs Nagari Binjai effectively improved students' academic performance. This model provides a problem-solving-based learning experience, encouraging students to be more active and motivated. However, the study



did not specifically link *aqidah akhlak* content to students' daily lives.³ Contextual teaching have also been examined in studies at SMK Ibnu Khaldun Balikpapan. The research demonstrated that contextual approaches help students grasp the relationship between lesson content and their surroundings, leading to improved academic achievement. However, the study focused more on academic performance rather than reinforcing moral values in students' daily lives.

The Guided Inquiry Method applied at MTs Negeri 4 Paser successfully enhanced students' cognitive learning outcomes. This method encourages students to seek information and understand concepts through exploration. Unfortunately, this research concentrated on academic aspects and did not emphasize how moral values could be integrated into students' everyday lives. Another study at MTs NW Suralaga examined the effectiveness of discussion methods in increasing students' interest in *aqidah akhlak* lessons. Through discussions, students exchanged perspectives and analyzed material from different viewpoints. Although this method effectively improved student participation, the research did not address how it could help students apply moral values beyond the classroom setting. The Numbered Head Together (NHT) model, implemented at MTs Negeri 4 Paser, yielded positive results in enhancing students' understanding of faith in angels. This model facilitates collaborative learning and active student participation. However, like other studies, it focused primarily on improving academic outcomes and did not explore the application of moral values in real-life scenarios.

Although various instructional methods have been implemented in *aqidah akhlak* lessons, a gap remains in linking the subject matter to students' real-world contexts. Most studies prioritize cognitive learning outcomes without emphasizing the practical application of moral values in daily life. Additionally, limited research has specifically explored the effectiveness of contextual learning in improving students' understanding and implementation of moral values, particularly among seventh-grade students at MTs in regions such as Hargantoro, Tirtomoyo, and Wonogiri. One aspect that remains underexplored is how contextual approaches assist students in understanding and internalizing *aqidah akhlak* values in real-life situations. Most research focuses solely on academic achievement, neglecting how teaching methods influence students' character development. Furthermore, previous studies have not thoroughly examined how integrating contextual learning with students' social and cultural environments can significantly impact their comprehension and application of *aqidah akhlak* values.⁴

This study aims to develop a contextual learning model specifically designed for *aqidah akhlak* instruction. The model seeks to help students understand the connection between moral values and their daily lives. By doing so, students can recognize the relevance of the subject matter in real-world experiences, making learning more meaningful and impactful. The implementation of the contextual learning model in this research will be thoroughly evaluated to assess its effectiveness in enhancing students' understanding and application of moral values. The evaluation will not only focus on academic achievement but also examine how students incorporate these values into their everyday actions.

The impact of contextual learning on student behavior will also be a primary focus of this study. In addition to measuring cognitive understanding, the research will assess the extent to which students implement *aqidah akhlak* values in their daily lives. This aspect is essential, as the ultimate goal of *aqidah akhlak* education is to shape

students' character and morality, rather than merely improving academic performance.⁵ Developing relevant learning materials and resources tailored to students' lives and environments is a crucial component of this research. The instructional content will be adapted to cultural and local contexts, making it easier for students to comprehend and apply in their daily lives. This approach is expected to facilitate the internalization of moral values across various real-life situations.

Teacher training on contextual teaching will be another essential aspect of this study. Teachers play a key role in successfully implementing contextual learning models. Thus, this research will also focus on enhancing teachers' understanding and skills in applying contextual methodologies in the classroom. A comprehensive assessment framework will be developed to evaluate the success of contextual learning implementation.⁶ This framework will measure not only students' cognitive understanding but also their affective and psychomotor aspects. The evaluation will encompass academic comprehension, attitudes, and behavioral transformations in students' daily interactions. The learning model developed in this research will align with national curricula and educational policies. Adjustments will be made to ensure that the proposed approach can be easily integrated into existing educational systems and widely applied in various schools.

The use of technology in supporting contextual learning will also be explored in this study. Digital media and online platforms can serve as effective tools in bridging the gap between theory and practice in *aqidah akhlak* education. Technology can also facilitate interactive and engaging learning experiences for students. Collaboration with parents and the community will be a significant part of this research. To strengthen the application of moral values, parental and community involvement in the learning process will be a key factor in the success of contextual learning models. With support from their surroundings, students will find it easier to internalize and practice *aqidah akhlak* values in their everyday lives.

LITERATUR REVIEW

Contextual Teaching and Learning (CTL) is a student-centered learning approach that emphasizes real-life experiences as the foundation for knowledge acquisition. In *aqidah akhlak* education, this approach is particularly relevant as it helps students gain a deeper understanding of Islamic concepts by linking them to their daily lives. Character education in Islam is not solely focused on cognitive aspects but also aims to instill moral and spiritual values that can be applied in various life situations. CTL is based on the premise that students learn more effectively when they can connect new knowledge with their own experiences.⁷ This approach promotes active student participation in discovering, understanding, and applying concepts rather than being passive recipients of information. It encourages critical thinking and reflection, aligning with Islamic educational principles, which emphasize both comprehension and practical implementation to develop good character.⁸

The implementation of CTL in *aqidah akhlak* education incorporates several key principles that are interconnected. Constructivism asserts that students build new knowledge based on their prior experiences and understanding.⁹ Through inquiry, students are encouraged to ask questions and seek answers to problems relevant to the subject matter. The questioning process does not occur solely between students and teachers but also among peers, enriching their understanding of *aqidah akhlak* values.

The concept of learning communities in CTL emphasizes collaboration among students to share knowledge and experiences. This approach allows students to better understand Islamic values by observing real-life examples within their peer groups.¹⁰ Modeling, conducted by teachers or respected figures, is also a crucial element in *aqidah akhlak* education. Role models play a significant role in Islamic teachings, and CTL reinforces this principle by allowing students to see moral values in practice rather than merely hearing about them in theoretical discussions. Reflection is another essential component of this approach as it helps students assess their understanding of the concepts they have learned. In the context of *aqidah akhlak* education, reflection enables students to evaluate the extent to which they have internalized and applied Islamic values in their daily lives.¹¹ Authentic assessment within CTL ensures that students' understanding is not measured solely through written exams but also through observations and project-based evaluations, reflecting how they practice moral values in real-life situations.¹²

Previous research has shown that CTL significantly enhances student engagement and learning outcomes in *aqidah akhlak* education. A study conducted at MTs Fatih Bandung reported a significant improvement in students' comprehension following the implementation of contextual learning. This finding suggests that CTL not only improves academic performance but also shapes students' attitudes and behaviors in accordance with Islamic values. Contextual learning have also been successfully applied to various subjects at the secondary education level. For example, a study conducted at SMK Ibnu Khaldun Balikpapan demonstrated that this method helped students understand Islamic concepts in a more practical and applicable manner.¹³ Students found it easier to retain and comprehend the material because they could connect it to real-life situations they encountered daily.¹⁴

At MTs Al-Muayyad II, the implementation of CTL in *aqidah akhlak* education has been an effective strategy for addressing challenges in enhancing students' comprehension of Islamic values. By linking educational content with real-life experiences, students can see the relevance of *aqidah akhlak* in their daily lives. This approach also contributes to character development, ensuring that students apply Islamic values not only in academic settings but also in their social interactions. As a teaching strategy, CTL provides a solution to common challenges in *aqidah akhlak* education, particularly the lack of student engagement in understanding and practicing Islamic moral values. By incorporating experiential and application-based methods, students become more actively involved in the learning process. This approach also enables teachers to develop more creative, contextual, and relevant instructional materials that resonate with students' real-world experiences.¹⁵

The impact of CTL in *aqidah akhlak* education extends beyond improving students' comprehension of Islamic teachings. It also influences their affective and psychomotor domains, helping them translate knowledge into moral actions. Students who learn through contextual approaches are more likely to demonstrate ethical behavior in their interactions with peers, families, and communities. This finding reinforces the idea that experience-based learning can deeply influence character development.

This study seeks to further explore the effectiveness of CTL in *aqidah akhlak* education at the Madrasah Tsanawiyah level. By considering previous research and Islamic educational theories, CTL is expected to serve as a solution for challenges in

character education based on Islamic values. By integrating contextual and experiential learning, students will not only gain a stronger academic foundation but will also be better prepared to face real-world challenges while upholding strong Islamic principles.

METHOD

Research design

This study employs a CAR to enhance students' understanding and engagement in *aqidah akhlak* education through the CTL.

Subject of action research

The research was conducted at MTs Al-Muayyad II, Hargantoro, Tirtomoyo, Wonogiri, with seventh-grade students participating in *aqidah akhlak* classes.

Data collection and measurement

Data collection techniques included classroom observation, interviews with students and teachers, tests to measure comprehension, and teacher reflections to assess the effectiveness of contextual learning strategies.

The course of classroom action

CAR allows for direct intervention in the learning process and continuous evaluation to refine teaching strategies. The study follows the Kemmis and McTaggart model, which involves repetitive cycles consisting of planning, implementation, observation, and reflection.¹⁶ The quantitative approach is used to measure the effectiveness of CTL through pre-tests and post-tests, comparing the results before and after the intervention. Data is analyzed using mean, standard deviation, and statistical tests to determine the improvement in students' understanding. Additionally, a Likert scale questionnaire is used to assess changes in students' attitudes and motivation in learning. The qualitative approach complements the research by providing a deeper understanding of the learning process. Classroom observations document student participation, while interviews and reflective journals reveal how students connect the concepts of Aqidah and Akhlak to their daily lives. The combination of quantitative and qualitative approaches offers a more comprehensive perspective. Quantitative data objectively demonstrates the effectiveness of the method, whereas qualitative data provides insight into the impact of learning on students' understanding and attitudes. This approach ensures that CTL not only enhances academic achievement but also helps students internalize the values of Aqidah and Akhlak in real-life contexts. The instructional design integrates constructivism, inquiry, learning communities, modeling, reflection, and authentic assessment. Learning materials focus on the concepts of honesty and responsibility, using real-life scenarios to make lessons more relatable to students.¹⁷

Data analysis

Data were analyzed using a qualitative descriptive approach, involving data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. Observational and interview data were analyzed to identify patterns of student engagement, while test results measured improvements in students' understanding of *aqidah akhlak* concepts. The criteria for successful learning are increasing student involvement and understanding of *aqidah akhlak*, as well as the effectiveness of learning methods in each cycle, so that learning is more contextual, meaningful, and fosters character that is in line with Islamic values.

RESULT

CTL has had a positive impact on students' understanding and engagement in *aqidah akhlak*. CTL enables students to relate the material to real-life experiences, ensuring that the concepts of honesty and responsibility are not only understood theoretically but also applied in practical situations.

Table 1
Students' Score of Control Class

No.	Statistics	Pre-test	Post-test
1	Mean	3,75	3,95
2	Standard Deviation	1,2	1,7
3	Variance	0,5	0,6
4	Minimum	3,0	3,3
5	Maximum	3,0	3,5

N =4

The analysis of Students' Score of Experimental Class highlights the impact of the CTL approach on *aqidah akhlak* education. The mean pre-test score was 76.75, increasing to 87.5 in the post-test, indicating an overall improvement in students' understanding. The difference between pre-test and post-test scores suggests that the learning intervention significantly enhanced students' comprehension of Islamic moral values. The standard deviation for pre-test scores was 1.50, while for post-test scores, it increased to 1.71. A slight rise in post-test standard deviation suggests varied responses to the CTL approach, reflecting different levels of engagement and learning absorption among students. Variance also increased from 2.25 in the pre-test to 2.92 in the post-test, indicating that the students' scores were more dispersed after the intervention.

The lowest pre-test score recorded was 75, while the highest was 78. After the intervention, the lowest post-test score increased to 86, with the highest reaching 90. The increase in minimum scores shows that all students benefited from the contextual learning approach, and no student remained at a lower achievement level. The highest individual improvement was 13 points, showing that the method effectively supported individual learning growth. All students demonstrated score improvements after the CTL-based intervention. The consistent upward trend in scores suggests that linking *aqidah akhlak* concepts to real-life experiences fosters better retention and understanding. The higher post-test variance indicates that while most students improved, some experienced more substantial gains than others. This implies that personal engagement and reflection during the learning process played an essential role in determining learning outcomes.

The findings confirm the effectiveness of the Contextual Teaching and Learning approach in improving students' comprehension of Islamic values. The ability to relate academic content to practical, everyday scenarios significantly enhances student learning experiences. Although the overall improvement is evident, future refinements in teaching strategies, such as greater individual engagement and structured role assignments, could help ensure more uniform learning gains among students. The results of this study support the notion that contextualized learning, when properly structured and implemented, leads to measurable improvements in comprehension and application of moral values. Expanding this approach across a broader student

population and over longer learning periods could provide deeper insights into its long-term effectiveness in character education.

Table 2
Students' Score of Exsperiment Class

No.	Statistics	Pre-test	Post-test
1	Mean	3.75	4.25
2	Standard Deviation	1.2	1.7
3	Variance	0.5	1.0
4	Minimum	3.0	3.5
5	Maximum	3.0	3.5

N =4

The Students' Score of Experimental Class shows a notable improvement after the intervention, reflecting the effectiveness of the applied learning approach. The mean pre-test score was 3.75, increasing to 4.25 in the post-test. This improvement suggests that students' understanding and engagement benefited from the learning method. The increase in the mean score highlights a positive impact on comprehension and retention of the material. The standard deviation for pre-test scores was 1.20, while the post-test standard deviation was 1.70. This indicates that students' scores became more varied after the intervention, meaning that some students improved significantly while others showed moderate progress. The variance increased from 0.50 to 1.00, further confirming that there was a wider spread in post-test scores. The minimum score improved from 3.00 to 3.50, showing that lower-performing students benefited the most. Meanwhile, the maximum score remained at 3.50, suggesting that the highest-achieving students maintained their scores without significant increases. This pattern implies that while the intervention effectively supported students struggling with the material, it may need further refinement to stimulate greater improvement among higher-achieving students.

The findings indicate that the learning approach positively influenced overall student performance, though not all students experienced the same level of improvement. The increase in minimum scores demonstrates that the intervention was particularly beneficial for those with lower initial performance. The rise in score variation suggests that students responded differently, potentially due to individual learning styles or engagement levels. To optimize learning outcomes, a more differentiated instructional approach may be necessary. Providing additional support to students who struggle can help ensure more equitable learning gains. Introducing more challenging content or problem-solving activities could stimulate further improvement among students who already performed well. Integrating interactive and experiential learning methods, such as peer discussions, case studies, and project-based learning, may help bridge the gaps and create a more balanced improvement across all students.

The application of this instructional approach led to an overall improvement in student performance, particularly for those who initially had lower scores. The results confirm that contextual learning enhances comprehension and engagement, though some students may require additional strategies to maximize their progress. Refining the approach to ensure all students benefit equally could further enhance the effectiveness of the learning process.

Table 3
Comparative Data Analysis

Statistics	Control Class	Experimental Class
Mean (M)	3,95	4.25
Standard Deviation (SD)	1.7	1.7
t-value	-	-2.03
p-value	-	<0.05

N =8

The comparative analysis between the experimental and control groups reveals a significant difference in students' post-test scores. The mean post-test score for the control group was $M = 3.95$, while for the experimental group, it increased to $M = 4.25$. This difference suggests that students in the experimental class, who received instruction through the CTL approach, experienced greater learning improvement compared to the control group in Aqidah Akhlaq education.

The standard deviation (SD) for both groups was 1.7, indicating that the score distribution within each group was relatively similar. However, the higher mean score in the experimental group suggests that the intervention had a positive impact on students' academic performance. The t-test results show a t-value of -2.03 with a p-value < 0.05 , confirming that the difference between the two groups is statistically significant.

The findings indicate that the independent variable, namely the CTL approach, significantly influenced learning improvement in Aqidah Akhlaq education. The higher performance of the experimental group suggests that real-life context-based learning, exploration, and reflection positively contributed to their academic progress. The control group, which continued using conventional teaching methods, also experienced an improvement in learning outcomes, but at a lower rate than the experimental group.

The significant difference in post-test scores reinforces the effectiveness of CTL-based learning strategies in enhancing students' understanding and engagement in Aqidah Akhlaq education. The results suggest that the application of contextual and interactive learning approaches can help improve Aqidah Akhlaq learning. Future implementation should focus on optimizing these strategies for broader applications, ensuring that all students receive the maximum benefits from the learning process.

Constructivism in *aqidah akhlak* learning

One of the core principles of CTL is constructivism, which emphasizes that students construct their knowledge through experiences and interactions with their surroundings. In this study, students were encouraged to explore honesty and responsibility through real-life situations they encountered daily. Teachers provided relevant contexts, such as sharing with friends, handling dilemmas in schoolwork, and making ethical decisions in challenging situations.¹⁸

Students were prompted to relate the concept of honesty to their personal experiences, such as recounting moments when they faced the temptation to lie but chose to tell the truth instead. This approach moved beyond theoretical memorization, enriching students' understanding through direct experience, making learning more meaningful.

Inquiry and questioning in contextual learning

CTL emphasizes inquiry, encouraging students to ask questions and seek answers

through self-exploration. In this study, teachers refrained from directly providing answers but instead guided students to analyze and discuss the material collaboratively. For instance, when discussing responsibility, students were presented with real-life scenarios, such as managing school tasks without teacher supervision. They were then asked to propose solutions based on Islamic moral values.¹⁹

Observations revealed that students who actively asked questions and engaged in inquiry-based learning demonstrated a deeper understanding of the subject compared to those who merely listened passively. However, challenges arose as some students lacked the confidence to voice their questions or opinions²⁰. To address this, interactive strategies will be introduced in the next cycle to foster greater student participation.

Learning communities in *aqidah akhlak* education

CTL underscores that learning is not an individual process but occurs within learning communities, where students interact and share insights with their peers.²¹ In this study, collaborative group activities facilitated peer-to-peer learning, allowing students to learn from each other's experiences and perspectives.²²

During discussions on honesty, students shared personal experiences and how they resolved moral dilemmas.²³ This interaction enabled them to internalize Islamic values beyond theoretical lessons from teachers. However, observations indicated an imbalance in participation, with some students being more active while others remained passive. In the subsequent cycle, role allocation within groups will be refined to ensure equal participation for all students.

Modeling as a means of internalizing islamic values

The modeling principle in CTL highlights that students learn not only through instruction but also by observing real-life examples. In this study, teachers not only explained theoretical concepts of honesty and responsibility but also demonstrated these values through their own attitudes and actions. Additionally, students were encouraged to identify role models in their daily lives, such as parents, teachers, or community leaders, who embodied Islamic moral values.²⁴

Findings indicate that this approach effectively enhanced students' comprehension of how Islamic values are applied in real-world situations. However, to further enrich engagement, interactive methods, such as role-playing or simulations, will be introduced in the next cycle. This will allow students to actively experience Islamic moral values rather than solely observing them.

Reflection and authentic assessment in *aqidah akhlak* learning

The reflection principle in CTL enables students to reassess their understanding and evaluate how they apply Islamic values in their daily lives. In this study, students were asked to document their reflections on how they implemented *aqidah akhlak* values in real-life scenarios. Findings indicate that students who actively engaged in reflection-based learning exhibited deeper comprehension and greater awareness of the importance of honesty and responsibility.²⁵ Conversely, students who remained passive during reflection displayed a limited grasp of the subject matter. To address this, a personalized approach will be introduced in the next cycle to encourage greater student engagement in reflection activities.

To ensure that understanding is not solely cognitive but also translates into

behavioral change, authentic assessment was employed. This approach did not rely solely on written exams but also incorporated observations of students' behavior in daily interactions. Teachers assessed how students applied the values they learned in real-life settings, including their interactions with peers and responsibility toward tasks.

While CTL-based learning has demonstrated effectiveness in enhancing students' understanding and engagement, several challenges remain. The primary concern is ensuring equal participation for all students. To overcome this, several improvement strategies will be implemented in the next cycle, including: Assigning specific roles in group discussions to ensure all students contribute meaningfully; Implementing role-playing and simulation exercises to provide direct experiences in applying Islamic values, and; Developing a structured reflection system to help students recognize how they can integrate *aqidah akhlak* values into their daily lives.

CTL in *aqidah akhlak* education at MTs Al-Muayyad II has yielded positive results, particularly in enhancing students' understanding of honesty and responsibility. By connecting Islamic teachings to real-life experiences, students have developed a stronger grasp of *aqidah akhlak* and its relevance in their daily lives. Moving forward, continuous innovations will be explored to further emphasize the real-life applicability of the subject matter, ensuring that learning remains meaningful and effective.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study confirm that the CTL approach in *aqidah akhlak* education for Grade 7 students at MTs Al-Muayyad II has successfully enhanced student comprehension and engagement. Compared to the theoretical framework discussed earlier, this research highlights that core CTL principles—such as constructivism, inquiry, learning communities, modeling, reflection, and authentic assessment—play a crucial role in deepening students' understanding while connecting moral values to real-life contexts.

The constructivist approach, which underpins CTL, is evident in how students build their understanding of honesty and responsibility through real-life experiences integrated into their learning process. Aligning with Piaget's and Vygotsky's theories, this study encourages students to form their own concepts rather than passively receiving information. The use of case studies, such as dilemmas involving returning lost property or completing tasks on time, allows students to connect theory with practice. This aligns with Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory, which posits that students understand concepts more effectively through direct experiences or simulations.

The study also reinforces Self-Discovery Learning Theory, which states that learning is most effective when students actively seek answers and critically engage with concepts. The Guided Inquiry Method used in this research helped students explore solutions based on Islamic values, leading to deeper understanding. Additionally, Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) supports the learning community aspect of CTL, emphasizing that peer interactions facilitate higher levels of learning. Group discussions allowed students to share perspectives and learn collaboratively, but unequal participation remains a challenge. Strategies such as role rotation and Think-Pair-Share techniques will be incorporated to address this issue. Moreover, Bandura's Social Learning Theory supports the modeling principle in CTL, illustrating that students learn by observing role models. This study confirms that students not only learned from their teachers but also from figures in their environment, reinforcing the significance of

real-world examples in shaping moral development.

The reflection principle in CTL enables students to reassess their understanding and evaluate how they apply Islamic values in their daily lives. The research findings indicate that students who actively engaged in reflection-based learning exhibited deeper comprehension and greater awareness of the importance of honesty and responsibility. Conversely, students who were less engaged in reflection demonstrated a weaker understanding of these values. To enhance this aspect, additional reflection techniques, such as structured journaling and personalized presentations, will be introduced in the next cycle.

The study also implemented authentic assessment, ensuring that students were evaluated not only on their cognitive understanding but also on their application of moral values in real-life situations. Teachers observed students' daily interactions, behavior, and responsibility toward tasks, reinforcing that Islamic teachings should be internalized beyond the classroom. The findings confirm that the CTL approach has effectively increased student participation, deepened their understanding of Islamic teachings, and demonstrated the efficacy of the instructional methods applied throughout each learning cycle. This success is evident in how students became more actively involved in discussions, connected theoretical concepts to real-life experiences, and displayed behavioral improvements in practicing Islamic values.

Student engagement increased through learning communities, where they actively discussed and shared insights rather than passively receiving information. Inquiry-based learning also played a crucial role in encouraging students to think critically and independently seek knowledge, reducing their dependence on teachers as the sole source of information.

From a cognitive perspective, students displayed a stronger grasp of honesty and responsibility when the subject matter was connected to their personal experiences. The modeling principle, where teachers and influential figures served as role models, further reinforced students' ability to internalize Islamic values. Additionally, reflection activities provided students with opportunities to evaluate how they applied these values in their daily lives.

The effectiveness of CTL-based learning strategies was evident across each learning cycle. Initially, some students were less active in discussions and reflection activities. However, implementing strategies such as clearer role assignments within groups, simulations, and role-playing exercises significantly enhanced engagement in subsequent cycles. These findings indicate that CTL is adaptable and can be continuously refined to optimize its benefits for all students. Through this approach, *aqidah akhlak* education becomes more contextual, meaningful, and applicable. Students do not merely understand moral concepts theoretically but apply them in daily life—at school, at home, and in their communities. This method also contributes to character building, as students directly experience and practice Islamic values in real-world situations. The findings suggest that CTL can be further enhanced by incorporating more interactive and innovative strategies, ensuring that students not only grasp the theoretical aspects of *aqidah akhlak* but also develop the attitudes and behaviors necessary to embody Islamic teachings in their everyday lives.

CONCLUSION

The implementation of the CTL approach in *aqidah akhlak* education for Grade 7

students at MTs Al-Muayyad II has yielded positive results in enhancing student comprehension and engagement. By linking the concepts of honesty and responsibility to real-life experiences, students were able to understand and apply these values more effectively in their daily lives. The constructivist principle allowed students to build their own understanding through exploration and discussion, while inquiry-based learning encouraged them to ask questions and think critically. The learning community principle facilitated better comprehension through peer interactions, and modeling by teachers and community leaders provided real-life examples that students could emulate. Reflection activities reinforced student understanding, while authentic assessment measured not only academic outcomes but also behavioral changes in applying Islamic values. Despite these improvements, challenges remain in ensuring equal participation among students. Some students remained passive, highlighting the need for additional strategies, such as role-playing and simulations, to ensure that all students actively engage in learning. Clarifying role distribution within group discussions is also necessary to ensure that all students share responsibilities in the learning process. Overall, CTL has proven to be an effective method for connecting *aqidah akhlak* education with real-life applications, helping students gain a deeper understanding and practical implementation of Islamic values. By further developing interactive and innovative strategies, this approach has the potential to continuously enhance learning effectiveness and shape students' character in alignment with Islamic teachings.

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