

Integrating Islamic Podcasts to Enhance Student Engagement in Islamic Religious Education Learning

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ABSTRACT. The digital transformation of Islamic education has intensified the need for learning media that are not only technologically accessible but also pedagogically meaningful and aligned with Islamic values. At the Madrasah Aliyah level, sustaining students' engagement in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) remains a persistent challenge, particularly within online and hybrid learning settings. Addressing this issue, the present study aims to examine the integration of Islamic podcasts into PAI learning and to explore their contribution to students' learning interest, participation, conceptual understanding, and independent learning practices. This study employed a qualitative multiple-case study design in three State Madrasah Aliyah in Banjarmasin, involving students, PAI teachers, and madrasah administrators as research participants. Data were collected through participant observation, in-depth interviews, and document analysis over one academic semester and were analyzed thematically using the Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña framework. The findings demonstrate that integrating Islamic podcasts enhanced students' engagement in learning by encouraging more active participation, deeper conceptual understanding, and more meaningful involvement in classroom discussions. Podcasts also improved access to learning, enabled flexible, repeated access to instructional materials, and fostered stronger independent learning habits among students. In addition, the narrative and contextual nature of podcast-based learning supported students' emotional and spiritual connection with Islamic values. The originality of this study lies in its contextual and pedagogical contribution to Islamic education by positioning Islamic podcasts not merely as digital tools, but as integrative learning media that connect cognitive, affective, and spiritual dimensions within the madrasah context.

Keywords: *Islamic Podcasts, Digital Learning, Learning Interest of Students.*

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INTRODUCTION

The digital era has brought about a fundamental transformation in the methodology of Islamic education learning (Hadiati et al., 2023; Juhairiah et al., 2024; Rosodor & Putra, 2025; Sirojuddin et al., 2025). This transformation is particularly crucial at the Madrasah Aliyah level, which functions not only as a formal educational institution but also as a strategic space for shaping students' religious character, moral reasoning, and spiritual awareness. In the post-pandemic context, the shift toward online and hybrid learning has compelled madrasah institutions to re-evaluate conventional pedagogical approaches that have long relied on face-to-face instruction (Correia et al., 2025; Rochim et al., 2025; Singh et al., 2022). However, the core challenge in this transition lies not merely in the provision of technological infrastructure, but in designing learning experiences that are interactive, meaningful, and firmly rooted in Islamic values (Webb et al., 2013; West, 1999), Empirical data from the Indonesian Ministry of Religious

Affairs indicates that although 78% of Madrasah Aliyah have adopted online learning, only 45% have succeeded in maintaining student engagement at levels comparable to conventional classrooms (Alifah & Zuhriyah, 2025; Haddade et al., 2024). This disparity highlights a critical gap between digital access and pedagogical effectiveness.

A number of previous studies have demonstrated that podcasts are effective in enhancing student motivation, engagement, and knowledge retention across various educational settings (Errabo et al., 2024; Meden et al., 2024; Weinstock et al., 2020). In higher education contexts, podcasts have been shown to strengthen institutional learning identity and support digital storytelling approaches (Galvis & Carvajal, 2022; Leandro et al., 2026). Other studies also confirm that podcast-based learning can significantly improve participation and conceptual understanding, including in contexts integrating Islamic values (Adimayuda et al., 2025; Kakhki et al., 2025). Nevertheless, despite these promising findings, most existing studies remain concentrated in general education, language learning, or higher education environments. Research that specifically examines the integration of podcasts within Islamic Religious Education (PAI), particularly at the Madrasah Aliyah level, is still limited. More importantly, prior studies tend to emphasize the outcomes of podcast use such as motivation and retention without sufficiently exploring how podcasts can be systematically integrated into the pedagogical structure of Islamic education. The dimension of spiritual internalization, which is central to PAI learning, is also often overlooked. In addition, although the issue of low religious digital literacy among madrasah students has been acknowledged, there is still a lack of contextual and empirically grounded models that offer concrete solutions through digital learning media. Thus, there remains a significant research gap in understanding how Islamic podcasts can function not only as a technological tool but also as a pedagogical medium that integrates cognitive, affective, and spiritual dimensions within the madrasah context.

This study aims to analyze the integration of Islamic podcasts as a digital learning medium in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) at Madrasah Aliyah (Islamic Senior High School) in Banjarmasin City. Furthermore, this study also focuses on evaluating the impact of Islamic podcast use on increasing students' learning interest, active participation, and conceptual understanding in the context of PAI learning. Furthermore, this study seeks to formulate a conceptual model for podcast-based PAI learning that can be adapted and implemented by various Islamic educational institutions as a strategy to improve the quality and engagement of students in online learning in the digital era.

Based on these gaps, this study offers a novel contribution by not only examining the effectiveness of Islamic podcasts in increasing students' learning interest, but also by analyzing the process of their pedagogical integration within PAI learning in Madrasah Aliyah. Furthermore, this study proposes a conceptual model of podcast-based Islamic learning that integrates digital technology with Islamic values, student engagement, and independent learning culture. This integrative approach distinguishes the present study from previous research, which has largely been fragmented and outcome-oriented. By situating the analysis within the specific socio-religious context of Madrasah Aliyah, this study contributes both empirically and theoretically to the development of digital-based Islamic education that is more contextual, holistic, and sustainable in the digital era.

The theoretical contribution of this study lies in the development of an integrative framework for podcast-based Islamic Religious Education (PAI) that bridges digital pedagogy with the spiritual and value-oriented dimensions of Islamic learning in Madrasah Aliyah. Unlike previous studies that predominantly focused on technological effectiveness and learning outcomes, this research expands the theoretical discourse by positioning Islamic podcasts not merely as digital media, but as a pedagogical instrument capable of simultaneously fostering cognitive understanding, affective engagement, and spiritual internalization. Furthermore, this study contributes to the growing body of digital Islamic education literature by proposing a contextual model that integrates student-centered learning, independent learning culture, and

Islamic values within online and hybrid learning environments. By situating the analysis within the socio-religious context of madrasah education, this research also enriches the theoretical understanding of how digital learning media can be adapted to preserve religious identity and meaningful learning experiences in the digital era.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative approach with a multiple-case study design to explore the integration of Islamic podcasts in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning at Madrasah Aliyah in Banjarmasin. This design was selected to gain an in-depth understanding of participants' experiences, perceptions, and meaning-making processes within their natural educational context (Sardana et al., 2023). Rather than aiming for statistical generalization, the study emphasizes analytical depth and contextual interpretation, particularly in examining how digital learning media shape students' learning interest and engagement in value-based Islamic education (Creswell & Poth, 2016). The research was conducted in three State Madrasah Aliyah that had actively implemented podcast-based learning. The three madrasahs were selected purposively based on several considerations: (1) they had consistently integrated podcast-based learning into PAI instruction for at least one academic year, (2) they represented different institutional characteristics and student demographics within the urban context of Banjarmasin, and (3) they demonstrated administrative support and technological readiness for digital learning implementation. These criteria enabled the researchers to capture diverse institutional experiences and compare patterns of podcast integration across different educational settings.

The unit of analysis in this study was primarily the learning process and experiences of individuals involved in podcast-based PAI learning within the institutional context of Madrasah Aliyah. At the individual level, the study focused on students' learning interest, participation, and perceptions, as well as teachers' pedagogical strategies in integrating Islamic podcasts into classroom instruction. At the institutional level, the analysis also considered how madrasah policies, digital learning culture, and administrative support influenced the implementation of podcast-based learning. This multi-level unit of analysis allowed the study to comprehensively examine the interaction between individual learning experiences and institutional educational practices.

Participants were selected using purposive sampling based on their direct involvement in the planning, implementation, and experience of the learning process. A total of 45 informants were involved, consisting of 30 students, 9 Islamic Religious Education teachers, and 6 madrasah administrators. This selection ensured that the data reflected diverse perspectives within the madrasah learning ecosystem, thereby enhancing the richness and credibility of the findings (Sather-Wagstaff, 2011).

Data collection was carried out over one academic semester, from September 2024 to January 2025, using three complementary techniques: participant observation, in-depth interviews, and document analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2021). Observations focused on student interaction patterns, engagement during podcast-based learning, and classroom dynamics in digital settings. In-depth interviews, conducted for approximately 60–90 minutes per participant, explored participants' experiences, perceptions, and reflections regarding the use of Islamic podcasts in learning. In addition, document analysis was conducted on lesson plans, student activity records, and learning platform logs to provide contextual support and triangulate findings from observations and interviews. The research instruments were developed systematically to ensure conceptual and contextual validity. The interview guide was grounded in the construct of student learning interest derived from educational psychology literature, which was operationalized into three main dimensions: cognitive engagement, affective interest, and behavioral participation. These dimensions were further translated into observable indicators, such as students' attention to learning materials, enthusiasm during learning activities, frequency of participation, and initiative in accessing additional learning resources. To ensure the validity of

the instrument, it was reviewed and refined through expert judgment involving specialists in Islamic education and qualitative research methodology.

Data analysis was conducted using thematic analysis following the framework of (Miles et al., 2014), involving an iterative process of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing. The analysis began with the systematic organization and reduction of raw data, followed by the categorization of meaningful units into codes and themes. These themes were then interpreted to identify patterns and relationships related to student learning interest, engagement, and learning experiences. The analytical process was conducted continuously throughout the study, allowing themes to emerge inductively while remaining aligned with the research focus. Although this study is qualitative in nature, several findings are presented in percentage form to illustrate dominant patterns observed in the data. These percentages do not represent statistical measurements but are descriptive representations derived from recurring responses across participants, observational trends, and patterns identified in student activity records. Their use is intended to support interpretive explanations and enhance the clarity of findings without implying quantitative generalization.

To ensure the trustworthiness of the study, several validation strategies were employed, including data source and method triangulation, member checking, peer debriefing, and the maintenance of an audit trail. Triangulation was conducted by comparing data obtained from students, teachers, and administrators as well as across different data collection techniques. Member checking was carried out by confirming the accuracy of interpretations with participants, while peer debriefing involved discussions with fellow researchers to minimize bias. The audit trail documented the entire research process, ensuring transparency and methodological rigor.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

The findings indicate a substantial increase in student participation following the integration of Islamic podcasts into PAI learning. Students demonstrated greater involvement in online discussions, more consistent task completion, and increased initiative in responding to learning materials. Observational data and interview insights reveal a shift from passive listening to active engagement, particularly during post-listening discussions. Teachers also noted that students became more confident in expressing their opinions and interacting with peers, reflecting a more participatory learning environment.

As one teacher stated, “*Students who were previously passive have become more active in discussions after using podcasts, especially when the material is presented in a conversational format.*” This suggests that the narrative and dialogic structure of podcasts reduces barriers to participation and encourages students to engage more actively with the content.



Figure 1. Teacher Podcast

The integration of Islamic podcasts contributed to improved conceptual understanding among students. They were able to re-articulate key Islamic concepts in their own words and demonstrate a deeper understanding of abstract materials, particularly in topics related to morality and daily religious practices. Rather than relying solely on memorization, students increasingly connected concepts to real-life contexts.

A student reflected, “It is easier to understand the material when it is explained through stories or real-life examples, so I can relate it to my daily life.” This highlights the role of narrative-based explanations in facilitating meaning-making and bridging the gap between theory and practice.



Figure 1 Student Podcast

Another important finding is the increased accessibility and flexibility of learning. Students were able to access podcast materials anytime and anywhere, allowing them to learn at their own pace. This flexibility was reflected in repeated access patterns, where students revisited specific episodes multiple times to reinforce their understanding.

As expressed by one student, “*I can listen to the podcast anytime, even outside class, and repeat the parts I do not understand.*” This indicates that podcasts function as a self-paced learning resource that supports personalized learning experiences and extends learning beyond the classroom.

The data also reveal the emergence of independent learning behaviors among students. Many students showed initiative in revisiting materials, exploring related topics, and engaging with additional learning resources independently. This suggests a shift toward self-directed learning, where students take greater responsibility for their own learning process.

A teacher noted, “*Students often access the podcast more than once and even look for additional references related to the topic.*” This pattern reflects the development of sustainable learning habits and indicates that learning continues beyond formal instructional settings.

Beyond cognitive and behavioral outcomes, the findings highlight the role of podcasts in enhancing students’ emotional and spiritual engagement. Students reported a stronger personal connection to the material, particularly when concepts were delivered through relatable narratives and contextual examples. This approach supports the internalization of Islamic values in a more meaningful way.

As one student explained, “*The stories in the podcast make the lessons feel more real and meaningful for my daily life.*” This demonstrates that podcasts not only convey knowledge but also facilitate the integration of cognitive understanding with emotional and spiritual dimensions.

These findings indicate that the use of Islamic podcasts not only improves short-term understanding but also fosters a culture of independent and ongoing learning among students. The integration of digital media such as podcasts has proven effective in strengthening students’ connection to Islamic values in a more personal and contextual way. Accordingly, Figure 1 presents a synthesized visualization of the main thematic findings, illustrating how podcast-based learning contributes to engagement, understanding, and the development of independent learning practices.



Figure 3. Key Finding on Islamic Podcasts in Education

The figure synthesizes three core findings of podcast-based learning. First, it promotes independent learning habits, as students actively revisit materials and seek additional resources. Second, it enhances emotional and spiritual engagement, enabling deeper internalization of Islamic values through contextual and narrative approaches. Third, it fosters a sustainable learning culture, reflected in the continued use of podcasts beyond formal instruction. Collectively, these findings position Islamic podcasts not merely as instructional media, but as a transformative pedagogical tool that integrates autonomy, engagement, and long-term learning.

Discussion

The Connectivism theory put forward by George Siemens and Stephen Downes explains that learning in the digital era no longer takes place linearly or individually, but rather through dynamic and collaborative information networks (Corbett & Spinello, 2020; Kotzee & Palermos, 2021). In this paradigm, knowledge is not only stored in the minds of individuals but also distributed across systems, digital devices, and online communities. Learning is not simply a process of internalizing information, but rather the ability to recognize, connect, and update knowledge through networks (learning as connecting nodes). Therefore, learners in the digital age need digital literacy skills, the ability to select credible sources, and the flexibility to adapt to rapidly changing information.

In the context of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning at Madrasah Aliyah, the theory of connectivism finds its relevance through the implementation of Islamic Podcasts as a digital learning medium (Imamah, 2025; Millatina & Sutiah, 2024). Podcasts function as digital knowledge nodes that enable students to access, relate to, and construct new meanings from religious material presented in a contextual and engaging manner (Farid, 2024; Lee et al., 2008). Through interactive audio narration, students can learn anytime and anywhere, making the learning experience more personalized, flexible, and sustainable. Each podcast episode forms part of a network of knowledge connecting teaching materials, students' learning experiences, and Islamic values contextualized to their lives.

Furthermore, the implementation of Islamic Podcasts is integrated with online platforms and the madrasah's Learning Management System (LMS). This creates a connected learning ecosystem, where students interact not only with the teacher as the primary source of knowledge, but also with fellow students and relevant external sources, such as religious scholars, Islamic education experts, or trusted religious content in the digital world (Aulia et al., 2026; Badawi, 2025; Fauziyah et al., 2025). This process expands the learning network and transforms the teacher's role into a facilitator and designer of digital learning experiences, rather than simply a transmitter of information.

Empirical data shows that students tend to access a single podcast episode repeatedly (an average of 3–4 times). This phenomenon indicates a dynamic and layered learning process, where students independently navigate meaning while building connections between concepts. This pattern aligns with the principle of connectivism, which states that learning is the ability to explore, update, and adapt knowledge through networks. Thus, Islamic Podcasts serve not only as a learning tool but also as a medium for developing a network-based Islamic knowledge ecosystem that encourages independence, collaboration, and religious digital literacy among Madrasah Aliyah students.

Implementation of Islamic Podcasts in Learning

The implementation of Islamic podcasts at the State Islamic Senior High School (MAN) in Banjarmasin was carried out through a systematic and collaborative approach, involving various stakeholders in the madrasah education ecosystem. The implementation process began with a capacity-building activity in the form of a podcast content development workshop for Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers. This activity not only focused on improving technical audio production skills but also emphasized storytelling skills, designing Islamic messages, and integrating learning materials into engaging digital formats. The workshop, attended by 15 PAI teachers from three MANs in Banjarmasin, lasted three days and featured professional podcast practitioners and Islamic education experts (Anwar & Hasanah, 2024). This activity laid a crucial foundation in preparing teachers as digital learning designers who adapt to developments in educational technology.

The next stage was podcast content development, which was carried out by taking into account the Competency Standards (SK) and Basic Competencies (KD) for the PAI subject. This process was designed collaboratively by PAI teachers, learning media experts, and the technical production team. Podcast content is developed in various formats, including educational monologues, interactive dialogues, short Islamic-themed dramas, and panel discussions, to accommodate diverse student learning styles (auditory, reflective, and social-interactive). This variety of formats aligns with the principle of connectivism, which emphasizes learning through diverse networks of information and experiences (Chatti et al., 2010; Selialia et al., 2023).

Each podcast episode has an ideal length of 15–20 minutes, as research shows this is the most effective length for maintaining student focus and retention. Additionally, each episode includes a study guide and student worksheets designed to integrate the listening experience with reflective and evaluative activities. This approach reinforces self-directed learning, where students can manage their own learning time and methods according to their needs (Charokar & Dulloo, 2022; Chukwunemerem, 2023).

The podcast production process involves professional sound engineers and audio editors to ensure optimal technical quality. Each episode undergoes a multi-layered quality control process, from content review by Islamic Education (PAI) subject matter experts, audio quality assessment by the production team, to pilot testing on a small group of students before its widespread release (Awwaliyah & Hafidz, 2024; Rugaiyah & Ma'arif, 2025; Supriyanto et al., 2025; Umam & Hasan, 2025). This mechanism ensures that the resulting content is not only informative and authentic from an Islamic perspective, but also engaging, communicative, and easy to understand for madrasah students. The distribution stage utilizes an online learning

platform integrated with the madrasah's Learning Management System (LMS) (Agus et al., 2024; Avcı & Ergün, 2019; Kardi et al., 2023; Khaerunnisa et al., 2025; Miftah et al., 2024; T̄iru & T̄aran, 2025)

. Through this system, students can flexibly access podcasts via smartphones or computers, both online and offline via the download feature. This technological integration aligns with the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) (Faizah et al., 2023; Shishakly et al., 2023), Ease of access and perceived benefits are key factors in the successful adoption of digital learning innovations.

Furthermore, the LMS system is equipped with a student activity tracking feature that allows teachers to monitor access frequency, listening duration, and student engagement with podcast content. This data serves as a basis for learning evaluation and pedagogical reflection for teachers to improve the relevance and quality of subsequent episodes. Overall, the implementation of Islamic podcasts at MAN Banjarmasin demonstrates a harmonious integration of technological innovation and Islamic educational values. The process, which begins with strengthening teacher capacity and developing competency-based content, and ends with distribution through an integrated digital system, reflects a new paradigm for Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning that is more contextual, participatory, and oriented toward student learning independence. Thus, podcasts are not only an alternative learning medium but also a transformative Islamic learning culture that is adaptive to the digital era.

Analysis of Increasing Interest in Learning

Analysis of the increase in learning interest following the implementation of Islamic podcasts at the State Islamic Senior High School in Banjarmasin was conducted through systematic observations over one semester. The research team developed an observation instrument based on learning interest indicators, encompassing three main dimensions: (1) student activeness in discussions and Q&A sessions, (2) frequency of access to podcast content, and (3) quality of student responses to the material presented. This approach draws on the concept of student engagement, which emphasizes cognitive, affective, and behavioral involvement in the learning process.

The analysis revealed a significant increase in the dimension of student active participation. Seventy-five percent of students demonstrated increased activeness during the learning process, reflected in the increase in the number of questions asked, increased participation in discussion forums, and the emergence of student initiatives to seek additional resources related to religious material. This phenomenon indicates a shift from passive learning to more interactive and participatory learning. Pedagogically, this aligns with the principles of social constructivism (Barak, 2017; Correia et al., 2025), which emphasizes that knowledge is formed through social interaction and collaboration in meaningful learning contexts.

Furthermore, students' conceptual understanding also showed a positive upward trend. Based on formative and summative evaluations, 68% of students demonstrated improved ability to re-explain Islamic Religious Education concepts using their own language. This indicates an improvement in higher-order thinking skills, such as analyzing and applying religious values to everyday life. Furthermore, the recapitulation of grades showed an average 15% increase in learning outcomes compared to the period before the podcast implementation. This improvement was most pronounced in materials requiring in-depth conceptual understanding, such as morals, Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh muamalah*), and thematic interpretation, which students previously considered abstract. These data reinforce the view that podcast use not only increases attention and interest in learning but also facilitates the internalization of meaning through narrative, dialogue, and contextual examples.

Overall, the results of this analysis indicate that Islamic podcasts are effective in increasing students' interest, participation, and conceptual understanding. Through a flexible audio-interactive approach, students are encouraged to learn independently and reflectively. This supports the theory of connectivism (Pea et al., 1999; Selialia et al., 2023; Tan et al., 2021) dan

Self-Directed Learning (Li & Wu, 2023; Robinson & Persky, 2020), where digital technology functions as a knowledge network that encourages learners to actively construct their own understanding. Thus, Islamic podcasts are not only a technological innovation but also a pedagogical tool that strengthens students' spiritual and intellectual engagement in Islamic Religious Education learning.

The novelty of this study lies in its integrative approach to positioning Islamic podcasts not merely as digital learning media, but as a transformative pedagogical model that bridges technology, Islamic values, and student-centered learning within the context of Madrasah Aliyah. Unlike previous studies that mainly focused on the effectiveness of podcasts in improving motivation or academic outcomes, this research highlights how podcast-based learning can systematically foster cognitive engagement, reflective understanding, spiritual internalization, and independent learning simultaneously. In addition, this study introduces a contextual model of podcast-based PAI learning that integrates teacher capacity building, competency-based Islamic content design, and LMS-supported digital ecosystems into a holistic learning framework. The findings also extend the application of connectivism and self-directed learning theories into the field of Islamic education by demonstrating how students construct religious knowledge through flexible digital interactions and network-based learning experiences. Therefore, this study offers a new theoretical and practical contribution to the development of sustainable digital Islamic education that remains adaptive to technological transformation while preserving the socio-religious values and identity of madrasah education.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that the integration of Islamic podcasts in PAI learning at Madrasah Aliyah contributes to the enhancement of student engagement, conceptual understanding, and the development of independent learning practices. More importantly, the findings indicate a shift toward a more flexible, reflective, and student-centered learning environment that aligns with the demands of digital-era education.

The main contribution of this study lies in its contextual and pedagogical insight into how podcast-based learning can be effectively integrated within Islamic education. Unlike previous studies that primarily focus on general digital media outcomes, this research highlights the role of Islamic podcasts in simultaneously fostering cognitive, affective, and spiritual dimensions of learning. In addition, the study offers an empirical basis for understanding how digital media can support the internalization of Islamic values in a more meaningful and contextual manner within the madrasah setting.

Despite these contributions, this study has several limitations. First, the research is limited to a specific geographical context, which may affect the transferability of the findings to other educational settings. Second, the qualitative design does not allow for statistical generalization, although it provides in-depth insights into the learning process. Third, variations in technological access and teacher competence were not explored in detail, which may influence the effectiveness of implementation. Future research is recommended to adopt mixed-method or experimental designs to examine the impact of Islamic podcasts on learning outcomes more systematically. Further studies could also explore comparative contexts across different regions or educational levels, as well as investigate the long-term impact of podcast-based learning on students' religious attitudes and lifelong learning behaviors.

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