Implementation of Integrative Thematic Learning to Teach Aqidah Akhlak (Moral Education): A Case in an Islamic Primary School in Indonesia

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Abstract
This study aimed at (1) analyzing the integrative thematic learning planning in the subject of Aqidah Akhlak subject, (2) analyzing the implementation of integrative thematic learning in the Aqidah Akhlak subject, (3) analyzing the evaluation of integrative thematic learning in the subject of Aqidah Akhlak, and (4) analyzing the supporting and inhibiting factors of integrative thematic learning in the Aqidah Akhlak subject. In this study, the author used a qualitative approach. This study obtained descriptive data that describes planning, implementation, evaluation, and the supporting and inhibiting factors of integrative thematic learning in the subject of Aqidah Akhlak with a research location at MI Istiqomah Sambas Purbalingga, Indonesia. In contrast, the data was obtained through interviews, observation, and documentation and then processed into information. The results of this study show that the implementation of integrative thematic learning in the subject of Aqidah Akhlak was conducted through three stages. First, initial activities, including greeting, asking for news, and attendance of students. Second, core activities include four activities: observing, asking questions, concluding, and discussing results. Third, the final activity includes giving homework and ending with closing greetings.

Keywords: Learning, integrative thematic, moral education

Introduction
Learning is a fundamental component of the educational process, characterized by a dynamic interaction between educators, students, and learning resources within a defined learning environment. The effectiveness of learning hinges on its alignment with the developmental stage of students. Each level of education demands tailored educational services that cater to the unique talents, interests, and abilities of the learners.

For instance, at the elementary level, an integrative thematic learning approach is commonly employed, particularly in lower grade levels. However, with the introduction of new curriculum policies, such as the transition to the 2013 curriculum, the integrative thematic learning approach has extended its application to upper grade levels, including grades IV and V. Unlike the previous curriculum, which adopted a subject-based approach, the 2013 curriculum embraces an integrative thematic learning approach.

The integrative thematic learning approach seeks to amalgamate various competencies from different subjects under a unifying theme. By intertwining various subject matters with real-world problems, learning takes on a contextual dimension. This approach aims to integrate
knowledge, skills, values, and creative thinking within the framework of thematic exploration (Amri, 2014).

Efforts to continually enhance the learning experience encompass both conventional and innovative methods. While traditional lecture-based learning remains a prevalent daily practice among educators, innovative approaches that adapt to contemporary needs and foster meaningful learning experiences are also explored. Nevertheless, the outcomes often fall short of expectations, with some concerning signs of decline. A study conducted by Halida in six major Indonesian cities in 2018 revealed that 70% of respondents admitted to engaging in cheating, indicating the persistence of cheating culture among students (Hamidayati, 2020).

This prevailing phenomenon has permeated even into private Islamic schools, such as MI Istiqomah Sambas Purbalingga. An initial examination suggests a year-on-year increase in cheating incidents during exams, particularly among upper-grade students. This surge is primarily attributed to significant psychological developments occurring in students aged 10-11, affecting their cognitive, affective, and psychomotor aspects. Statistics indicate a stark increase, rising from 25% in 2015 to 75% in 2020, with male students constituting the majority of offenders. Despite various quality indicators implemented by MI Istiqomah Sambas Purbalingga, improvements have been elusive, and year-end assessments have yielded unsatisfactory results (Mulyasa, 2013).

Several factors contribute to the failure in conducting year-end assessments. The rapid advancement of technology, with its mixed impact, has induced a shift in students' behavior and attitudes. Therefore, there is a growing need for moral education to fortify students' moral compass, aligning their thoughts and actions. The readiness of educators to tackle these challenges hinges on their ability to identify the issues at hand and employ strategies that guide, motivate, and facilitate students' development (Ahmadi et al., 2013).

In the realm of the learning process, educators play an indispensable role. They are the pivotal factor in determining the success of the educational journey, alongside other influencing elements, especially subject development. Competent educators who effectively convey course materials wield a significant positive influence on students, fostering enthusiasm for learning. Hence, educators must persistently enhance the quality of all aspects of their work to contribute to the formation of a more competent and virtuous generation (Putri et al., 2017).

In light of the multifaceted challenges outlined above, numerous issues demand immediate attention. One such endeavor involves the implementation of integrative thematic learning within moral ethics education. Given the paramount importance of morality in students' development, MI Istiqomah Sambas Purbalingga has strived to make a breakthrough by incorporating maximum moral aqeedah subjects into an integrative thematic learning framework. However, this endeavor has not yet reached its full potential. Challenges include the need for teacher-student alignment, effective learning strategies, time constraints, and optimization of educational resources such as books and media. Against this backdrop, the researcher seeks to explore the implementation of integrative thematic learning in the context of aqidah morals.

Method

The research conducted employed a qualitative approach with descriptive methods, following the guidelines presented by Moleong in 2021 (Moleong, 2021: 6). The study's research design entailed field research conducted at MI Istiqomah Sambas, specifically in two classes: class IV Ali-Imron and V Al-Fath. The research sample consisted of 35 students from
each class, along with two teachers responsible for teaching aqidah moral subjects, and data sourced from the school's headmaster.

To gather primary data, the researchers conducted interviews and observations involving the two teachers responsible for teaching the moral creed subject, as well as collected essential documents relevant to the research. Additionally, secondary data sources were incorporated into the study to provide supplementary information, which included data from the Head of Madrasah and reference materials related to the research theme.

Primary data primarily focused on acquiring insights into the planning, implementation, and evaluation aspects of integrative thematic learning within the subject of aqidah morals at MI Istiqomah Sambas Purbalingga. Conversely, secondary data encompassed details about the madrasa's profile, such as student demographics, educator and staff numbers, available facilities, and other relevant contextual information.

The collection of data in qualitative research necessitates the use of specific techniques that serve as essential steps in the research process. The commonly employed qualitative data collection techniques include interviews, observations, and documentation.

In qualitative research, the subsequent phase involves data analysis, which is a systematic process of meticulously exploring and organizing data acquired through interviews, observations, and documentation. This process entails categorizing data, breaking them down into manageable units, synthesizing information, identifying recurrent patterns, discerning significant elements for study, and ultimately drawing meaningful conclusions that are comprehensible to others. Ensuring the validity of the data can be achieved through various methods, one of which is triangulation. Triangulation is a robust technique used to corroborate and strengthen the credibility of the research findings.

**Results and Discussion**

The decision to implement integrative thematic learning in the Aqidah Akhlak subjects at MI Istiqomah Sambas Purbalingga was influenced by several factors. The shift from the KTSP to the 2013 curriculum, mandated by the government, played a significant role in this decision. The 2013 curriculum advocated for the use of an integrative thematic learning approach, which guided the school's choice.

Integrative thematic learning, despite some limitations, offered several advantages, as observed by researchers. Firstly, it provided a clear thematic focus, making it easier for educators to deliver subject matter since the theme itself encompassed various subjects. For instance, in the case of the Aqidah Akhlak subjects, themes included both aqeedah and morals along with the history of Islamic culture, ensuring a more substantial emphasis on aqidah morals.

Secondly, this approach allowed themes to align with students' interests and needs, making learning more engaging and relevant. Educators faced the challenge of identifying these interests, but once established, it facilitated smoother content delivery.

Thirdly, integrative thematic learning led to meaningful learning experiences, making knowledge retention more lasting. By connecting learning to the students' environment, the approach enhanced the quality of education and made learning enjoyable.
Lastly, the integrative thematic learning approach promoted the development of students' social skills. Active learning methods, which encouraged questioning and discussions, facilitated social interaction and skill development among students.

The successful implementation of integrative thematic learning required careful planning and preparation. The school, along with educators, undertook specific measures to ensure readiness. Training sessions were conducted for educators to familiarize them with the 2013 curriculum and the integrative thematic learning approach. Curriculum experts from Unnes served as valuable resources in this training. Additionally, a teacher working group (KKG) program was initiated to enhance educators' competence regarding the 2013 curriculum. Internal educators, some of whom had been with the school since its inception, shared their knowledge and experience with newer educators, making the transition smoother.

Furthermore, MI Istiqomah Sambas Purbalingga prioritized the preparation of facilities and infrastructure essential for implementing integrative thematic learning. They ensured well-equipped classrooms, provided necessary media resources, and stocked relevant books to support learning effectively.

The implementation of integrative thematic learning at MI Istiqomah Sambas Purbalingga comprised three key stages: initial activities, core activities, and final activities. These stages were designed to prepare students mentally, engage them actively in the learning process, and conclude the lessons effectively. Activities like prayers, apperception through songs, and question-and-answer sessions were integrated to create an engaging and effective learning environment.

The evaluation of integrative thematic learning in the Aqidah Akhlak subject involved assessing various aspects. Cognition was evaluated through written, oral, and assignment assessments. Additionally, aspects of affection, including attitudes and spiritual behaviors, were assessed through social and spiritual evaluations. Finally, psychomotor aspects were evaluated through product, project, and practice assessments. These evaluations helped gauge students' progress comprehensively.

Despite the numerous benefits of integrative thematic learning, several barriers were identified during its implementation. The preparation of learning materials, particularly lesson plans, posed a significant challenge. Formulating these plans, especially for integrating multiple subjects into one theme, required time and expertise. Educators faced difficulties in preparing lesson plans due to the complexity involved. Collaboration with fellow educators, participation in teacher working group forums (KKG), training sessions, and guidance on the 2013 curriculum helped address this challenge.

Another challenge was the limited time available for teaching. Integrative thematic learning often required more time to cover the extensive material associated with each theme. Educators faced time constraints, exacerbated by unforeseen teacher meetings that disrupted the learning process. To mitigate this issue, educators adopted strategies such as focusing on one subject per session and coordinating their teaching schedules effectively.

In conclusion, the decision to implement integrative thematic learning at MI Istiqomah Sambas Purbalingga was driven by both government mandates and the benefits the approach offered. Careful planning, educator training, and facility preparation were instrumental in ensuring the success of this approach. While the implementation faced certain challenges, educators' dedication and adaptability played a crucial role in overcoming them and delivering quality education through integrative thematic learning.
Conclusion

MI Istiqomah Sambas Purbalingga made the strategic decision to implement integrative thematic learning in the moral creed subject primarily due to the government's transformative move from the KTSP to the 2013 curriculum. Under the 2013 curriculum framework, the integrative thematic learning approach was strongly advocated. This transition presented a compelling rationale for the school's choice, aligning their educational practices with the government's educational directives.

The planning phase for the implementation of Integrative Thematic Learning in the Aqidah Akhlak Subject at MI Istiqomah Sambas Purbalingga was a meticulous process. It commenced with the Madrasa Head engaging in a dialogue with educators to align their perceptions regarding integrative thematic learning as a government-initiated approach that must be embraced. The objectives of this planning phase were threefold:

Firstly, it aimed to prepare and enhance the competence of educators to ensure they were well-equipped to execute this innovative approach effectively. Secondly, the planning encompassed the preparation of essential facilities and infrastructure necessary to support the activities involved in integrative thematic learning. This comprehensive approach ensured that students had access to comfortable and well-equipped classrooms, media resources were available to facilitate learning, and a range of relevant books were stocked to enhance the educational process. Thirdly, the planning process extended to the development of crucial learning tools, including annual programs, semester programs, syllabi, and lesson plans. These educational materials were meticulously crafted to align with the integrative thematic learning approach and provide educators with a structured framework to follow throughout the academic year.

The implementation of Integrative Thematic Learning in the Aqidah Akhlak Subject at MI Istiqomah Sambas Purbalingga comprised three distinct stages. Firstly, the initial activities phase involved the teacher opening the lesson with a warm greeting, inquiring about the students' well-being, and taking attendance. Additionally, educators used this phase to recap previously covered material and introduce the topics scheduled for the next day. Secondly, the core activities stage featured four essential activities: observing, asking questions, concluding, and discussing the results. These activities engaged students actively in the learning process and allowed educators to monitor their progress effectively. Lastly, the final activities phase involved collaborative activities between educators and students to conclude the material that had been discussed. Educators conducted evaluations, provided follow-up instructions, assigned homework, and concluded the lesson with closing greetings.

The evaluation process for integrative thematic learning in the subject of aqidah morals at MI Istiqomah Sambas Purbalingga was comprehensive, emphasizing cognitive, affective, and psychomotor aspects. It included three criteria: Firstly, daily assessments were held twice a week to gauge students' understanding of the themes discussed. Secondly, midterm assessments were conducted at the midpoint of the subject matter to assess students' progress. Lastly, the final semester assessments were performed twice a year, covering both odd and even semesters. These assessments provided a holistic view of students' development across various aspects.

The successful implementation of integrative thematic learning at MI Istiqomah Sambas Purbalingga was supported by several factors. Firstly, the school had diligently ensured
complete facilities and infrastructure in accordance with accreditation standards. Secondly, the unwavering support from the head of the madrasa played a pivotal role, providing educators with essential moral encouragement and guidance. Thirdly, the availability of competent human resources, both among educators and support staff, was a crucial enabling factor. Fourthly, the surrounding community and environment were supportive of the madrasa's efforts to implement integrative thematic learning. Lastly, the existence of the teacher working group forum (KKG) provided a platform for educators to collaborate, share insights, and collectively enhance their teaching methods.

However, despite these supporting factors, certain inhibiting factors were identified: Firstly, educators faced challenges in preparing learning tools, particularly in the formulation of complex lesson plans that integrated multiple subjects into thematic teaching. Secondly, the limited time allocation available for learning was a constraint, as integrative thematic learning often required more time to cover extensive thematic material. Thirdly, educators had room for improvement in transitioning from conventional teaching methods to more contextual approaches such as jigsaw and sociodrama. Fourthly, educators needed to optimize available learning media more effectively. Lastly, there were challenges related to educators' abilities to integrate integrative thematic questions and describe numerical aspects effectively in narrative assessments. Additionally, some parents of students struggled to understand reports of learning outcomes, highlighting the need for improved communication and understanding between the school and parents.

In summary, MI Istiqomah Sambas Purbalingga's decision to implement integrative thematic learning in the moral creed subject was rooted in government directives and the educational advantages offered by this approach. The planning, implementation, and evaluation of this approach were conducted with great care and attention to detail. While supported by various factors, educators also faced challenges that required ongoing efforts and professional development to overcome. Ultimately, the school's commitment to providing quality education through integrative thematic learning remained steadfast.

Conflict of interests
The author declares that he has no conflict of interest.

References