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Understanding Students' Interest in Akidah Akhlak Learning: Factors and Improvement Strategies at MTsN 4 Banda Aceh

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ABSTRACT

Islamic religious education plays an important role in developing students' faith, character, and moral behavior. In Akidah Akhlak learning, students' interest is particularly important because learning is expected to connect religious knowledge with everyday attitudes and behavior. This study aims to examine the dimensions and factors shaping students' interest in Akidah Akhlak learning and to identify strategies for strengthening such interest at MTsN 4 Banda Aceh. The study employed a qualitative case study design. Data were collected through classroom observations, semi-structured interviews with students and an Akidah Akhlak teacher, and documentation of learning activities. Data were analyzed through data condensation, thematic coding and categorization, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. The findings indicate that students' learning interest is reflected in four dimensions: enjoyment, interest, attention, and active engagement. These dimensions are shaped by several interrelated factors, including the teacher's pedagogical approach, the relevance of learning materials, the madrasah environment, instructional and digital media, and students' intrinsic motivation. The study also identifies six strategies for strengthening learning interest: contextual learning, interactive discussion, storytelling, role-playing, digital and visual media, and religious extracurricular activities. The findings suggest that students' interest develops through a thematic progression from positive learning experiences toward greater attention and active engagement. Accordingly, Akidah Akhlak learning should be developed through contextual, participatory, and value-oriented approaches that connect religious knowledge with students' everyday experiences and moral practice.

Keywords: *Learning Interest, Akidah Akhlak, Islamic Education, Madrasah Tsanawiyah, Student Engagement*

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ABSTRAK

Pendidikan Agama Islam memiliki peran penting dalam mengembangkan keimanan, karakter, dan perilaku moral peserta didik. Dalam pembelajaran Akidah Akhlak, minat belajar menjadi aspek penting karena pembelajaran diharapkan mampu menghubungkan pengetahuan keagamaan dengan sikap dan perilaku dalam kehidupan sehari-hari. Penelitian ini bertujuan menganalisis dimensi dan faktor yang membentuk minat belajar peserta didik dalam pembelajaran Akidah Akhlak serta mengidentifikasi strategi untuk memperkuat minat tersebut di MTsN 4 Banda Aceh. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan desain studi kasus. Data dikumpulkan melalui observasi pembelajaran di kelas, wawancara semi-terstruktur dengan peserta didik dan guru Akidah Akhlak, serta dokumentasi kegiatan pembelajaran. Data dianalisis melalui tahapan kondensasi data, coding dan kategorisasi tematik, penyajian data, serta penarikan dan verifikasi kesimpulan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa minat belajar peserta didik tercermin dalam empat dimensi, yaitu kesenangan (enjoyment), ketertarikan (interest), perhatian (attention), dan keterlibatan aktif (active engagement). Dimensi tersebut dibentuk oleh beberapa faktor yang saling berkaitan, meliputi pendekatan pedagogis guru, relevansi materi pembelajaran, lingkungan madrasah, penggunaan media pembelajaran dan media digital, serta motivasi intrinsik peserta didik. Penelitian ini juga mengidentifikasi enam strategi untuk memperkuat minat belajar, yaitu pembelajaran kontekstual, diskusi interaktif, storytelling, role-playing, penggunaan media digital dan visual, serta kegiatan ekstrakurikuler keagamaan. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa minat belajar berkembang melalui pola tematik dari pengalaman belajar yang positif menuju perhatian dan keterlibatan yang lebih aktif. Oleh karena itu, pembelajaran Akidah Akhlak perlu dikembangkan melalui pendekatan kontekstual, partisipatif, dan berorientasi pada nilai yang menghubungkan pengetahuan keagamaan dengan pengalaman sehari-hari dan praktik moral peserta didik.

Kata Kunci: *Minat Belajar; Akidah Akhlak; Pendidikan Agama Islam; Madrasah Tsanawiyah; Keterlibatan Peserta Didik*

INTRODUCTION

Islamic Religious Education (PAI) plays an important role in developing students' faith, character, and moral conduct. One subject that directly supports this purpose is Akidah Akhlak, which is intended not only to develop students' understanding of Islamic beliefs and moral principles but also to encourage their application in everyday life. Learning is therefore expected to move beyond the acquisition of religious knowledge toward the development of attitudes, manners, and behavior consistent with Islamic values. This orientation is in line with the direction of character education in madrasahs as reflected in the Regulation of the Minister of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia Number 2 of 2020.

Achieving these objectives is closely related to students' interest in learning. In this study, learning interest refers to students' tendency to experience positive feelings toward learning, show curiosity and sustained attention, and participate

actively in learning activities. Thus, learning interest is not simply a matter of whether students like a subject, but is reflected in their emotional, cognitive, and behavioral responses to the learning process. Previous studies have linked students' interest and engagement with supportive teacher practices, meaningful learning experiences, opportunities for participation, and the fulfillment of learners' psychological needs ([Ahn et al., 2019](#); [Reeve, 2012](#); [Vollet et al., 2017](#); [Chiu, 2022](#)). In Akidah Akhlak learning, these dimensions are particularly important because students are expected to understand moral concepts and relate them to their everyday experiences.

However, preliminary observations at MTsN 4 Banda Aceh indicate that students' interest in Akidah Akhlak learning is not consistent. Some students actively participate in discussions and learning activities, while others show limited attention, participation, and enthusiasm, particularly when lessons rely mainly on conventional approaches. This situation suggests that a religiously oriented school environment does not automatically ensure high interest in classroom learning. The quality of learning experiences, relevance of materials, teachers' pedagogical approaches, and availability of appropriate learning media may also influence how students respond to Akidah Akhlak lessons.

Previous studies have identified teaching strategies, intrinsic motivation, classroom environment, and instructional media as important factors associated with students' interest and engagement ([Alamri et al., 2020](#); [Bedenlier et al., 2020](#); [Hsu et al., 2019](#); [Limbu & McKinley, 2025](#)). In Islamic education, varied and contextual strategies such as discussion, educational games, case-based activities, storytelling, and digital media have also been reported to support student participation and engagement when connected to students' experiences ([Rahmawati, 2020](#); [Agusti, 2022](#); [Hardiyati et al., 2025](#)). These studies indicate that learning interest is shaped not only by individual motivation but also by the pedagogical and social environment in which learning takes place.

Nevertheless, three gaps remain. First, much of the existing literature discusses learning interest in relation to motivation, engagement, or academic achievement in general. Second, studies on Akidah Akhlak have more often examined learning strategies, learning outcomes, or specific instructional techniques than learning interest as a multidimensional classroom experience. Third, qualitative studies connecting the dimensions of students' learning interest with the pedagogical and contextual factors that shape them in the specific setting of Madrasah Tsanawiyah remain limited. This gap is relevant to MTsN 4 Banda

Aceh, where a strong religious environment exists alongside differences in students' classroom participation and enthusiasm.

Addressing this gap requires attention not only to whether students are interested in Akidah Akhlak, but also to how their interest is expressed, what factors shape it, and what strategies may strengthen it. A qualitative approach allows these experiences to be examined within their natural instructional context, particularly in relation to students' enjoyment, interest, attention, and active engagement. It also provides a basis for understanding how Akidah Akhlak learning can move beyond the normative delivery of moral concepts toward learning experiences that are meaningful and connected to students' everyday lives.

Based on this background, this study aims to analyze the dimensions and factors shaping students' interest in Akidah Akhlak learning and to identify instructional strategies that can strengthen such interest at MTsN 4 Banda Aceh. The study addresses three questions: (1) How is students' interest in Akidah Akhlak learning manifested in classroom activities? (2) What factors shape students' interest in learning Akidah Akhlak? and (3) What instructional strategies can be used to strengthen students' interest in Akidah Akhlak learning? The findings are expected to provide a contextual understanding that can assist teachers and madrasah stakeholders in developing Akidah Akhlak learning that is more meaningful, participatory, contextual, and relevant to students' needs.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a qualitative approach with a case study design to develop an in-depth understanding of students' interest in Akidah Akhlak learning, the factors shaping such interest, and the instructional strategies used to strengthen it. The case study focused on the specific learning context at MTsN 4 Banda Aceh, examining students' experiences, classroom interactions, and the teacher's instructional practices. A case study is appropriate for examining a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, particularly when the boundaries between the phenomenon and its context are closely connected (Yin, 2018).

The study was conducted at MTsN 4 Banda Aceh, an Islamic junior secondary school where Akidah Akhlak is taught as part of the Islamic education curriculum. The site was selected based on preliminary observations indicating differences in students' attention, participation, and enthusiasm during Akidah Akhlak lessons. Participants were selected through purposive sampling according to their

relevance to the research questions (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Student informants represented varying patterns of learning interest, including relatively high, moderate, and low levels of participation and engagement. The Akidah Akhlak teacher was included as a supporting informant to provide information about instructional practices, classroom conditions, and strategies for strengthening students' interest.

Data were collected through classroom observation, semi-structured interviews, and documentation. Observations focused on observable expressions of learning interest, including *enjoyment, interest, attention, and active engagement*. Interviews with selected students explored their learning experiences, perceptions of classroom activities, factors shaping their interest, and responses to different instructional approaches. The teacher interview addressed teaching practices, classroom conditions, learning media, and efforts to encourage students' interest. Documentation, including learning notes, photographs of classroom activities, and relevant instructional materials, was used to complement the observation and interview data.

Data analysis followed the interactive framework of Miles et al. (2014), consisting of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. The analysis was supported by thematic coding to identify recurring patterns related to students' learning interest, its influencing factors, and strategies for strengthening it. During data condensation, relevant information from the three data sources was selected, organized, and coded. Initial coding focused on the four dimensions of learning interest, followed by coding of factors such as teacher pedagogical approaches, material relevance, the madrasah environment, instructional and digital media, and students' intrinsic motivation.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

1. Dimensions of Students' Interest in Akidah Akhlak Learning

The findings indicate that students' interest in Akidah Akhlak learning is reflected in four interconnected dimensions: enjoyment, interest, attention, and active engagement. These dimensions describe how students respond emotionally, cognitively, and behaviorally to the learning process. The findings suggest a thematic progression from positive learning experiences and perceived relevance toward sustained attention and more visible participation. However, this pattern should not be understood as a causal sequence, but rather as a recurring pattern found in students' learning experiences.

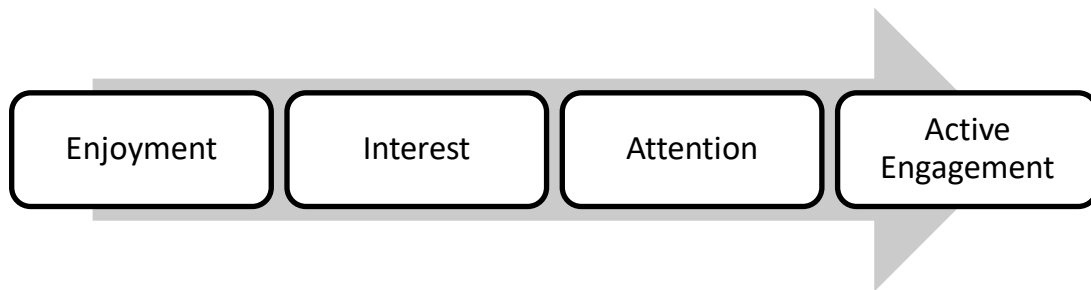


Figure 1. Thematic Dimensions of Students' Interest in Akidah Akhlak Learning
Source: Synthesized from the study findings.

First, enjoyment was evident when students experienced a comfortable and communicative classroom atmosphere. Storytelling, light humor, and examples related to everyday life made students more willing to participate. One student explained, *"I enjoy it because it is not only theory. When the teacher tells stories about the Prophet, I feel more motivated"* (Raj, 2025). This indicates that students' positive emotional responses were closely related to the way teachers presented religious content.

Second, interest emerged when students perceived the learning material as relevant to their everyday experiences. Topics concerning respect for parents and teachers, relationships with peers, and moral behavior were considered more meaningful when connected to real-life situations. As one student stated, *"This subject can be applied directly... so I feel it is important for my life"* (Hid, 2025). Visual media also helped students understand abstract or normative material more easily.

Third, attention was reflected in students' ability to remain focused, follow explanations, and respond to teachers' questions. Students reported that patient explanations, direct questioning, and responsive classroom management helped them maintain concentration. *"The teacher often asks us one by one, so we must pay attention."* (Nad, 2025). Thus, attention was shaped not only by individual characteristics but also by the pedagogical environment created by the teacher.

Fourth, active engagement appeared through discussions, group assignments, presentations, role-playing, and religious extracurricular activities. Students became more involved when they had opportunities to discuss, practice, and reflect on moral values. One student remarked, *"When we act out situations, the lesson feels more real"* (Nad, 2025). Such activities enabled students to experience Akidah Akhlak beyond the memorization of concepts.

Overall, the findings show that students' learning interest is multidimensional, involving emotional, cognitive, and behavioral expressions. The four dimensions are interconnected in students' learning experiences, but the data do not establish that one dimension directly causes another. Rather, enjoyment,

perceived relevance, sustained attention, and active engagement repeatedly appeared together in meaningful learning situations. Their characteristics and classroom indicators are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Dimensions of Students' Interest in Akidah Akhlak Learning

Aspect/ Factor	Core Meaning	Classroom Indicators	Contribution to Learning Engagement
Enjoyment (Affective)	Positive emotional response to learning	Comfortable classroom climate, storytelling, communicative teacher, light humor	Creates a positive emotional condition for students' involvement in learning
Interest (Cognitive)	Perceived relevance and curiosity toward learning	Connections with everyday life, social issues, and visual media	Encourages students to explore and relate learning to their experiences
Attention (Cognitive)	Sustained focus during learning	Patient explanations, questioning, classroom management	Helps students remain focused and involved during classroom activities
Active Engagement (Behavioral)	Visible participation in learning activities	Discussion, group work, presentation, role-playing, religious activities	Provides opportunities for students to participate, practice, and reflect on learning

2. Factors Shaping Students' Interest in Akidah Akhlak Learning

The findings further indicate that students' learning interest is shaped by five interrelated factors: teacher pedagogical approach, relevance of learning materials, the madrasah learning environment, instructional media, and students' intrinsic motivation. These factors were reflected in students' classroom experiences and their responses concerning what made Akidah Akhlak learning meaningful and engaging. The findings suggest that learning interest develops through the interaction between students' internal responses and the learning conditions provided by teachers and the madrasah.

First, teacher pedagogical approach emerged as an important factor shaping students' responses to Akidah Akhlak learning. Students showed greater interest when teachers used discussion, questioning, storytelling, everyday examples, and direct interaction rather than relying mainly on one-way explanations. Such approaches provided opportunities for students to express opinions, ask questions, and relate moral concepts to their own experiences. This finding indicates that the teacher's role extends beyond delivering religious knowledge; classroom interaction provides an important context in which students experience the relevance of Akidah Akhlak values.

Second, the relevance of learning materials was repeatedly reflected in students' responses. Students were more interested when topics were connected to situations they encountered in everyday life, including relationships with friends, respect for parents and teachers, and everyday moral choices. When students could recognize the practical meaning of what they were learning, Akidah Akhlak was perceived as more relevant to their lives. This suggests that contextualizing religious and moral concepts can strengthen students' connection with the subject rather than presenting them only as normative statements.

Third, the madrasah learning environment provided an important context for students' learning interest. MTsN 4 Banda Aceh supports religious learning through worship habituation, extracurricular activities, and character-building programs. These activities provide opportunities for students to encounter and practice Islamic values beyond the classroom. However, the findings also indicate that a strong religious environment does not automatically result in the same level of interest among all students. The institutional environment therefore provides a supportive context, while students' classroom experiences remain closely connected to pedagogical interaction, material relevance, and opportunities for participation.

Fourth, instructional media were associated with students' attention and interest. Students indicated that videos, pictures, and other visual materials helped them understand examples more easily and made lessons less monotonous. At the same time, the use of digital and visual media remained relatively limited and depended on available facilities and teachers' capacity. The findings therefore suggest that media does not function as an automatic solution to low learning interest. Its value depends on how appropriately it is integrated with learning objectives, subject content, and classroom activities.

Fifth, students' intrinsic motivation appeared in their perceptions of the usefulness and meaning of Akidah Akhlak learning. Statements such as *"this lesson is important for my life"* indicate that students were more willing to engage when they recognized personal meaning in the material. This factor complements the external conditions provided by teachers, instructional media, and the madrasah environment. Learning interest, therefore, is not something that teachers simply create, but a response that develops through the interaction between students' internal dispositions and the learning environment.

Overall, the findings identify five interrelated factors associated with students' interest in Akidah Akhlak learning: teacher pedagogical approach, relevance of learning materials, madrasah learning environment, instructional media, and intrinsic motivation. These factors should not be interpreted as independent variables that directly determine learning interest. Rather, the case

study shows that students' interest emerges within a learning environment where pedagogical interaction, meaningful content, supportive institutional conditions, appropriate media, and students' own perceptions of meaning intersect.

The relationship among these factors is therefore best understood as a thematic pattern rather than a causal model. This finding complements the four dimensions identified in the previous section—*enjoyment, interest, attention, and active engagement*—by showing the contextual conditions in which those dimensions become visible.

3. Strategies for Enhancing Students' Interest in Akidah Akhlak Learning

The findings indicate that strengthening students' interest in Akidah Akhlak requires a combination of contextual, participatory, experiential, and value-oriented strategies. No single instructional technique was found to be sufficient. Rather, students responded more positively when learning activities were relevant to their lives, encouraged interaction, created emotional involvement, and provided opportunities to practice Islamic values. Six strategies emerged from classroom observations and interviews.

First, contextual learning was found to make Akidah Akhlak more meaningful by connecting learning materials with students' everyday experiences, including relationships with friends, respect for parents and teachers, and social behavior. One student explained: *"When the lesson is linked to our daily life, such as how to behave toward friends or respect teachers, I understand better and become more interested. It feels like the lesson is truly needed."* (Nad, 2025). This finding suggests that contextual learning helps move Akidah Akhlak beyond abstract moral instruction toward reflection on situations that students encounter in everyday life.

Second, interactive discussion and question-and-answer activities provided opportunities for students to express opinions, ask questions, and respond to different perspectives. One student stated: *"I feel more enthusiastic when there is a discussion, because we can speak and ask questions. If we only listen continuously, it can become boring."* (Yul, 2025). The finding indicates that classroom participation itself becomes an important part of students' learning experience and provides space for connecting Islamic values with concrete situations.

Third, storytelling and exemplary moral narratives created emotional engagement while presenting Islamic values through concrete examples. Stories of the Prophet Muhammad, his companions, and narratives from the Qur'an and Hadith helped students relate moral concepts to exemplary behavior. As one student noted: *"I like it most when the teacher tells stories about the Prophet or narratives from Hadith. I feel more touched and want to follow the examples."* (Hen,

2025). This suggests that storytelling can bridge the gap between understanding moral concepts and developing an emotional connection with the values being learned.

Fourth, role-playing and moral simulations provided opportunities for students to practice values such as honesty, respect, and helping others. One student explained: *"When we were asked to act out situations like helping friends or being honest, I remembered the lesson better. It felt real, not just theory."* (Raj, 2025). The findings suggest that role-playing supports active engagement by allowing students to experience and practice moral values rather than merely discuss them.

Fifth, digital and visual media such as videos and pictures helped students maintain attention and made learning less monotonous. One student stated: *"When the teacher uses videos or pictures, I become more interested. It's not only listening, but also seeing the examples."* (Zul, 2025). However, the use of such media remained dependent on available facilities and teacher preparation. Therefore, digital media functions primarily as a supporting pedagogical resource, rather than a substitute for teacher interaction.

Sixth, religious extracurricular activities extended students' learning experiences beyond the classroom. Speech competitions, Islamic discussions, worship habituation, and character-building activities provided opportunities for students to practice and express the values addressed in Akidah Akhlak learning. One student remarked: *"I joined a speech competition at school, and it helped me understand that morality must be practiced, not only learned."* (Hid, 2025). This finding highlights that Akidah Akhlak learning is connected to the wider religious culture of the madrasah, where values can be encountered and practiced in different educational settings.

Taken together, the six strategies indicate that enhancing students' interest in Akidah Akhlak is not simply a matter of making lessons more enjoyable. The more important consideration is the creation of learning experiences that are relevant, interactive, emotionally meaningful, experiential, and connected to the practice of Islamic values. Contextual learning and storytelling help students find meaning in religious content; discussion and role-playing provide opportunities for participation and practice; while digital media and religious extracurricular activities broaden the ways in which students encounter and engage with learning.

These findings complement the previous results. If enjoyment, interest, attention, and active engagement represent the main dimensions of students' learning interest, and teacher pedagogy, material relevance, madrasah environment, instructional media, and intrinsic motivation represent the factors associated with it, then the strategies identified here illustrate how those learning conditions can be strengthened through classroom and madrasah practices.

4. Conceptual Synthesis of Students' Learning Interest

The findings suggest that students' interest in Akidah Akhlak learning is best understood as a multidimensional experience involving *enjoyment, interest, attention, and active engagement*. These dimensions appeared in different classroom situations and were associated with several contextual factors, particularly teacher pedagogical approach, material relevance, the madrasah environment, instructional media, and students' intrinsic motivation.

Taken together, the findings point to a recurring pattern in which supportive pedagogy, meaningful learning experiences, appropriate learning media, and a supportive religious environment provide conditions for students to experience enjoyment, perceive relevance, maintain attention, and participate actively. This pattern is not proposed as a causal pathway, but as a conceptual synthesis of recurring relationships identified in the qualitative data. It suggests that students' interest is more likely to be sustained when Akidah Akhlak learning is experienced as meaningful, participatory, contextual, and connected to the practice of Islamic values.

Discussion

The findings show that students' interest in Akidah Akhlak learning is shaped by the interaction between students' internal responses and the learning environment. Rather than being determined by a single factor, learning interest emerges through classroom experiences involving teacher pedagogy, meaningful learning materials, the madrasah environment, instructional media, and students' own perceptions of the value of learning. This pattern is consistent with previous engagement research, but the present study highlights how these factors operate within the value-oriented character of Akidah Akhlak learning.

1. Factors Shaping Students' Interest in Akidah Akhlak Learning

Teachers' pedagogical approach emerged as one of the most important factors. Students showed greater involvement when teachers used discussion, questioning, storytelling, direct interaction, and everyday examples rather than relying mainly on one-way explanation.

This finding is consistent with [Reeve \(2012\)](#), who emphasizes the teacher's role in creating conditions that support student engagement, and with [Ahn et al. \(2019\)](#), who found that supportive classroom practices are associated with stronger student involvement. The present study adds a more specific perspective: in Akidah Akhlak learning, pedagogical interaction does not merely sustain attention but helps students connect religious concepts with situations they encounter in everyday life. Teacher-student interaction therefore becomes an

important bridge between knowing Islamic values and understanding how those values are lived.

The relevance of learning materials was another recurring factor. Students were more interested when lessons addressed experiences familiar to them, such as respect for parents and teachers, relationships with peers, and everyday moral choices. This finding is in line with [Alamri et al. \(2020\)](#), who emphasize the importance of meaningful learning environments for student engagement, and with [Nasution \(2021\)](#), who highlights the contribution of contextual learning to students' motivation. In Akidah Akhlak, however, relevance has a broader significance. Connecting moral concepts with students' experiences does not simply make lessons more interesting; it creates space for students to reflect on how Islamic values can guide their actual behavior. This helps prevent Akidah Akhlak from being experienced merely as a collection of normative statements.

The madrasah learning environment also provides an important context. Religious activities, worship habituation, and character-building programs at MTsN 4 Banda Aceh create opportunities for students to encounter and practice Islamic values beyond classroom instruction. At the same time, the findings indicate that a religious school culture does not automatically result in strong classroom interest. Students continued to respond differently depending on the quality of classroom interaction and the opportunities provided for participation. This distinction is important: institutional religious culture provides a supportive foundation, but meaningful classroom pedagogy remains necessary to translate that environment into students' active learning experiences.

The role of instructional media was also evident in students' responses. Videos, images, and other visual materials helped students understand examples more easily and made lessons less monotonous. This finding is broadly consistent with [Chiu \(2022\)](#), [Hsu et al. \(2019\)](#), and [Bedenlier et al. \(2020\)](#), who point to the potential of technology-supported and interactive learning environments to strengthen engagement. [Akpen et al. \(2024\)](#) likewise report positive associations between educational technology and student engagement.

However, the present findings qualify this positive view. Media use at the research site remained relatively limited and depended on available facilities and teacher preparation. Thus, technology itself does not generate learning interest; its contribution depends on how well it is connected to learning objectives, subject content, and classroom interaction. In Akidah Akhlak learning, visual media may attract attention, but teachers remain essential in explaining and interpreting the moral meaning of what students see.

Finally, students' intrinsic motivation was reflected in their recognition that Akidah Akhlak was useful and meaningful for their lives. This finding can be

understood through Self-Determination Theory, which emphasizes autonomy, competence, and relatedness as important conditions for sustaining motivation (Deci et al., 2017). It is also consistent with research showing that supportive learning environments can contribute to students' engagement by meeting these psychological needs (Alamri et al., 2020; Limbu & McKinley, 2025).

In this study, intrinsic motivation should not be viewed as entirely separate from classroom conditions. Opportunities to express opinions, participate in activities, receive teacher attention, and recognize the relevance of learning may strengthen students' sense of involvement. Thus, students' internal responses and external learning conditions appear to reinforce one another.

The five factors form a learning ecology in which teacher pedagogy, material relevance, madrasah culture, instructional media, and students' own perceptions of meaning interact in shaping learning interest. The finding confirms the importance of the broader engagement literature while also showing that, in Akidah Akhlak, interest is closely connected to the opportunity to understand, experience, and practice Islamic values. The quality of learning therefore depends not simply on making lessons more attractive, but on creating conditions in which students find the learning meaningful, relevant, and worth engaging with.

2. Strategies for Enhancing Students' Interest in Akidah Akhlak Learning

The findings show that strategies for strengthening students' interest are closely related to the factors identified in the previous section. Contextual learning, interactive discussion, storytelling, role-playing, digital and visual media, and religious extracurricular activities all provide opportunities for students to become more actively involved in the learning process. Although these strategies differ in form, they share a common feature: they make Akidah Akhlak learning more relevant, participatory, experiential, and connected to students' lives.

Contextual learning was closely associated with students' perception of the relevance of Akidah Akhlak materials. When moral issues were connected to situations familiar to students, such as relationships with friends, respect for parents and teachers, and everyday ethical choices, students found the lessons easier to understand and more meaningful. This finding is consistent with Nasution (2021) and Alamri et al. (2020), who emphasize the importance of meaningful and contextual learning experiences in supporting students' engagement. In the present study, however, contextualization has particular significance because it connects Islamic moral concepts with students' actual decisions and behavior. Thus, contextual learning can help move Akidah Akhlak beyond the transmission of normative concepts toward reflection on how Islamic values are practiced in everyday life.

Interactive discussion and question-and-answer activities also emerged as important strategies. Students became more involved when they were given opportunities to express opinions, ask questions, and respond to moral situations. This finding supports [Bedenlier et al. \(2020\)](#), who highlight the role of interaction and participation in fostering student engagement, and is consistent with studies in Islamic education that emphasize varied teaching approaches as a means of encouraging students' participation ([Agusti, 2022](#); [Siregar, 2022](#)). The present study further suggests that discussion has an important function in value-oriented learning: it creates space for students to interpret Islamic values rather than simply receive them. In this sense, classroom interaction becomes part of the process through which students connect religious knowledge with their own experiences.

Storytelling and exemplary narratives provide another way of strengthening students' involvement. Students responded positively to stories about the Prophet Muhammad, his companions, and other Islamic moral exemplars. This finding is consistent with [Casudi et al. \(2025\)](#), who highlight the contribution of narrative approaches to moral learning. Storytelling appears particularly relevant to Akidah Akhlak because it brings together knowledge, emotion, and example. Rather than presenting values such as honesty, respect, and responsibility as abstract principles, narratives provide concrete situations and figures that students can understand and reflect upon. The teacher's role remains important in drawing out the moral meaning of the story and relating it to students' own conduct.

Role-playing and moral simulation were found to provide opportunities for students to practice values through direct experience. This finding is broadly consistent with previous studies reporting the contribution of active learning approaches to engagement in Akidah Akhlak learning ([Nurazizah, 2017](#); [Sodik & Setyaningsih, 2025](#)). However, because this study did not experimentally measure changes in students' interest, the finding should not be interpreted as proof that role-playing increases engagement. Rather, the classroom evidence suggests that role-playing supports active engagement by allowing students to experience and practice moral situations. This is particularly relevant to Akidah Akhlak because understanding a value and practicing that value is not necessarily the same process.

The use of digital and visual media also contributed to students' attention and interest. Videos, images, and other visual resources helped students understand examples more easily and reduced the monotony of conventional explanation. This finding is in line with [Chiu \(2022\)](#) and [Akpen et al. \(2024\)](#), who emphasize the potential of technology-supported learning to support student engagement when accompanied by appropriate pedagogical design. Nevertheless, the present study

shows that the contribution of digital media is conditional. Its use remains dependent on facilities and teachers' ability to integrate technology into learning activities. Digital media should therefore be regarded as a supporting pedagogical resource rather than a substitute for teacher–student interaction.

The final strategy concerns religious extracurricular activities, including speech competitions, Islamic discussions, worship habituation, and character-building activities. These activities extend students' opportunities to encounter and practice Islamic values beyond the classroom. Their significance lies in connecting what students learn as subject matter with what they experience as part of everyday life in the madrasah. In this respect, Akidah Akhlak learning is not confined to classroom instruction but becomes part of the broader religious culture of the school. Such continuity is important because the internalization of moral values requires opportunities for practice, reflection, and habituation rather than cognitive understanding alone.

The six strategies should not be viewed as isolated techniques. They represent complementary pedagogical approaches that address different aspects of students' learning experiences: contextual learning provides relevance; discussion encourages interaction; storytelling creates emotional and exemplary connections; role-playing provides practice opportunities; digital media enriches learning experiences; and extracurricular activities extend value formation beyond the classroom. Their common contribution is not simply making lessons more enjoyable, but creating conditions in which students can understand, engage with, experience, and practice the values taught in Akidah Akhlak.

3. Practical Implications for Curriculum and Teacher Development

The findings have several practical implications for the development of Akidah Akhlak learning at the madrasah level. The first concerns curriculum design. Akidah Akhlak learning needs to provide sufficient space for contextual, reflective, and participatory activities. Learning objectives should therefore go beyond students' ability to recall concepts of faith and morality and give them opportunities to discuss, interpret, and apply Islamic values to situations they encounter in everyday life. This direction is consistent with the broader view that meaningful learning is strengthened when students can connect new knowledge with their experiences and social context ([Alamri et al., 2020](#); [Nasution, 2021](#)).

The second implication concerns teacher professional development. The findings suggest that students' learning interest is closely related to the quality of classroom interaction. Teacher development should therefore not focus solely on subject-matter knowledge, but also strengthen teachers' capacity to use interactive, contextual, experiential, and student-centered approaches. Discussion,

storytelling, role-playing, and reflective activities can be incorporated into professional development so that teachers are better prepared to create learning environments that encourage participation. This is consistent with research emphasizing the importance of teacher support and classroom interaction in sustaining student engagement (Reeve, 2012; Ahn et al., 2019).

The third implication is the need to develop digital competence alongside pedagogical competence. The findings show that videos and visual media can support students' attention, but their contribution depends on how appropriately they are integrated into learning. Teachers therefore need to be able to select and use digital resources according to learning objectives, subject content, and students' needs. This is in line with studies showing that educational technology is more likely to support engagement when it is accompanied by appropriate pedagogical design (Bedenlier et al., 2020; Chiu, 2022; Akpen et al., 2024). At the institutional level, adequate facilities and support are also necessary so that teachers can use digital resources consistently and meaningfully.

The fourth implication concerns the integration of classroom learning with the wider religious environment of the madrasah. Classroom instruction, worship habituation, extracurricular activities, and character-building programs need to reinforce one another. Such consistency can help students experience Akidah Akhlak not simply as a subject to be studied but as a set of values to be practiced in everyday school life. The finding that a religious environment alone does not guarantee strong classroom interest also suggests that institutional culture should be accompanied by meaningful pedagogical experiences.

These implications show that improving students' interest in Akidah Akhlak is not simply a matter of making lessons more entertaining. More importantly, it requires learning experiences in which students feel comfortable, recognize the relevance of what they learn, remain attentive, participate actively, and have opportunities to practice Islamic values. In this sense, curriculum development, teacher competence, digital resources, and madrasah culture need to work together to create learning that is contextual, participatory, and value-oriented.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that students' interest in learning Akidah Akhlak is a multidimensional phenomenon reflected in four interconnected dimensions: *enjoyment, interest, attention, and active engagement*. These dimensions emerged as recurring patterns in students' learning experiences rather than as a causal sequence. Students tended to show stronger involvement when learning provided a comfortable atmosphere, meaningful content, sustained attention, and opportunities for active participation.

Students' learning interest was shaped by the interaction of teacher pedagogical approach, material relevance, the madrasah learning environment, instructional and digital media, and intrinsic motivation. Among these factors, teacher pedagogy played an important role in creating meaningful learning experiences through interaction, contextualization, storytelling, discussion, and direct participation. The findings also indicate that a supportive religious environment and appropriate learning media can strengthen students' engagement when they are integrated with purposeful classroom activities.

The conceptual synthesis suggests that students' learning interest develops through a thematic progression from positive learning experiences and perceived relevance toward sustained attention and active engagement. This pattern becomes more meaningful when students are given opportunities to discuss, experience, and practice Islamic values. Accordingly, Akidah Akhlak learning should move beyond conventional knowledge transmission toward contextual, participatory, and value-oriented learning.

These findings imply that teachers and madrasah administrators need to strengthen interactive and contextual pedagogy, use digital and visual media appropriately, and provide opportunities for students to practice Islamic values inside and outside the classroom. Teacher professional development should integrate pedagogical and digital competence, while madrasah programs should reinforce the connection between classroom learning and religious character formation. Further research may examine this conceptual pattern in other madrasah contexts to explore how differences in students, teachers, institutional environments, and learning resources shape interest in Akidah Akhlak learning.

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