



OPTIMIZATION OF AKIDAH AKHLAK LEARNING STRATEGIES THROUGH THE APPLICATION OF MIND MAPPING METHOD AT MTsN 2 MEDAN

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ABSTRACT

The teacher-centered learning (TCL) model remains a common issue encountered in the process of Islamic Education learning, including the subject of Akidah Akhlak. Ideally, with the implementation of the 2013 Curriculum, the student-centered learning (SCL) approach should have been advocated, but it has not been fully realized. Therefore, this research aims to delve deeper into the application of the SCL approach in Akidah Akhlak learning, specifically utilizing the mind mapping method to achieve active learning as expected by the Merdeka Curriculum. This qualitative case study research employs data collection techniques such as observation, interviews, and documentation. Data analysis techniques involve data condensation, data presentation, and concluding with a summary. Additionally, data validity techniques include prolonged engagement and triangulation of data sources, methodologies, and time. The results of this study indicate that the application of the mind mapping method implemented in the eighth grade at MTsN 2 Medan is effective in enhancing understanding, creativity, collaboration, and making Akidah Akhlak learning more enjoyable for students.

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1. INTRODUCTION

In the world of education, the conventional teacher-centered learning model has actually been shifting towards a student-centered learning approach since the implementation of the 2013 Curriculum in Indonesia (Saputra et al., 2024). But its implementation at that time had not yet been fully optimized, so strengthening the student-centered learning (SCL) approach is needed in the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum (Nisa, 2024). The implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum is driven by various technological media in the learning process, and in its application, traditional learning patterns are still deeply ingrained in teachers who are not yet ready to achieve the goals of the Merdeka Curriculum (Gunawan et al., 2024), and also remains one of the common problems often encountered in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) (Anma et al., 2021).

In PAI lessons, which still use the teacher-centered learning (TCL) method, the understanding of the material is generally still one-way due to the sole use of the lecture approach (Mumtahana et al., 2022). Thus, the PAI teacher occupies a central position in learning and plays a more significant role than the students, who merely listen and follow the teacher's instructions (Yusleni, 2024). However, the demand in the current era is

that teachers should not only be educators but also capable of acting as facilitators, motivators, and innovators for students in the teaching and learning process (Mustofa et al., 2021).

Teachers become very important figures in all forms of learning as well as in building students' character (Suryadi, 2022). The advancement of educational quality will be meaningless if it is not supported by the expertise of competent teachers, as teachers are the pioneers of the learning process. It means that a student will be of high quality if the teacher is capable of meeting the capacity, competence, and qualifications to instill values and continuously shape the character of their students (Zebua, 2023).

To create students' character in line with the teachings of Islam, it has become the duty and responsibility of PAI teachers, especially Akidah Akhlak teachers, to be examples for their students and to guide them to behave well according to the principles of Islamic teachings (Haniyyah, 2021). Akidah Akhlak is one part of Islamic Religious Education that supports the formation of students' faith, piety, and morals in accordance with their needs, potential, talents, and interests (Hairunisa, 2023).

The subject of Akidah Akhlak is rich in material, therefore a professional teacher is needed to master various strategies and teaching methods that can support the teaching and learning process to achieve more enthusiastic learning and eliminate student boredom during lessons (Saefudin, 2024). In relation to this, teaching methods and media become very important for teachers and need to be taken seriously so that the methods and media can align with the topics or materials to be instructed (Shalimar, 2024).

Among the various learning methods, one that is student-centered is the mind mapping method. This method is referred to as a note-taking technique in the form of concepts, popularized and developed by the renowned psychologist Tony Buzan (Putri et al., 2021). Buzan explains that mind mapping is a great tool for memory, allowing us to arrange facts and thoughts in such a way that the brain's mechanisms are engaged from the start. In this regard, it means that remembering information will be easier and more expressible compared to using traditional note-taking methods (Buzan, 2006). Previous research has examined the discussion of mind mapping. Like a study on the use of the mind mapping model (mind map) to improve reading comprehension of elementary school students (Aprinawati, 2018).

However, that research used a literature review method that was more focused on theories and had weaker data validity. Whereas in this study, the focus is more on how the mind mapping method is applied in practice during the student learning process, not just theory. Additionally, other research has also highlighted the mind mapping method, such as improving the learning outcomes of IX-F grade students using the mind mapping method in the SKI subject at Demak (Sholikhudin, 2023). That research implemented the mind mapping method in only one class, specifically in IX-F MTS Negeri 2 Demak. In contrast, this research implements it in several classes, not just one class. Therefore, this research also aims to investigate whether there are differences in the findings from the application of the mind mapping method on various class criteria.

The gap that emerges from previous research indicates that although there have been studies on mind mapping, such as those using literature review methods and focusing on theory, as well as studies limited to a single class, there has yet to be comprehensive research exploring the application of mind mapping methods in a broader and more diverse context. Therefore, further research is needed by observing the implementation of mind mapping in several classes, so as to provide deeper insights into the effectiveness of this method in enhancing the understanding of students from various backgrounds.

This research aims to fill the gap from previous studies by further analyzing the use of the mind mapping method in the learning of Akidah Akhlak at MTsN 2 Medan. Additionally, this research will identify the challenges faced in the mind mapping method in the learning of Akidah Akhlak at MTsN 2 Medan. Thus, it is hoped that solutions can be found to overcome these obstacles and improve the effectiveness of teaching methods and strategies, as well as create a generation that is not only academically intelligent but also possesses good morals.

2. RESEARCH METHODS

The approach used in this research is a qualitative approach in which the researcher collects information regarding the use of the mind mapping method in the learning process of Akidah Akhlak. The type of this research is a case study, presenting data after its collection, which is then concluded in a descriptive form according to the observed phenomena. In this study, the research location is at MTsN 2 Medan, with the research subjects being the Akidah Akhlak subject teacher for the eighth grade, and the eighth-grade students of class VIII J, totaling 30 students, and class VIII K, totaling 31 students.

The interview process with the research subjects, namely the Akidah Akhlak teacher for the eighth grade and two representatives from the eighth grade students of classes VIII J and VIII K, was conducted. Observations and documentation related to the application of mind mapping in the Akidah Akhlak subject at MTsN 2 Medan were carried out, which became the data collection technique, with the results being used as primary data. As for the secondary data, it is taken from published writings such as books, journals, or other notes as supporting data for the research. And the data analysis in this study uses data analysis from the theory of Miles & Huberman, which begins with data condensation, data presentation, and ends with drawing conclusions (Fadjarajani, 2020).

3. RESULT AND ANALYSIS

Application of the Mind Mapping Method in Akidah Akhlak Lessons

Learning fatigue is no stranger to students; the issue of learning fatigue needs to be taken seriously, especially in schools that tend to overload students. This can occur in any subject, including Akidah Akhlak, if teachers engage in one-way communication with their students. To minimize this, it is necessary for teachers to design learning strategies that make students the center of the learning process (Hasri, 2023).

Based on data collected through interviews with the eighth-grade Akidah Akhlak teacher, the Akidah Akhlak learning with a teacher-centered learning approach that he previously used resulted in students becoming passive and feeling bored during the lessons. So at that time, the teacher began to change and use various diverse teaching methods and made the students the subjects or centers of learning, such as the mind mapping method, discussions, question and answer sessions, and so on (Interview with the Akidah Akhlak teacher). However, in the discussion of this Akidah Akhlak learning research, the focus will be more on the application of the mind mapping method only.

Through the results of observations and interviews at the research location, namely at MTsN 2 Medan, the Akidah Akhlak teacher as the research subject explained that before he assigns tasks to the students of class VIII J and class VIII K to create mind mapping, he begins by greeting all the students when entering the classroom, where the benefit of the greeting itself is to make the children more concentrated and focused on looking at the teacher in front of them. After that, he conducted an appreciation, motivation, and explained to the students about the material that would be studied. Then, he assigned a task to all students in the form of group mind mapping with different sub-materials (Interview with the Akidah Akhlak teacher).

That stage is part of the teacher's skills in starting the learning process. That ability is mandatory for every teacher to possess and perform, as it is done to stimulate student motivation before starting the lesson, thereby preventing all students from feeling pressured and bored during the learning process (Kafi, 2023). Although the students at MTsN 2 Medan had previously created concept maps or mind maps when they were in seventh grade, the Akidah Akhlak teacher still provided an explanation about mind mapping along with its creation process, as he mentioned in the interview.

“Actually, the students at MTsN 2 Medan are already familiar with mind mapping. However, I still briefly explain mind mapping again to strengthen their memory, like writing the main idea in the center first and then creating branches for the points. Then, I ask them to make it as beautiful and attractive as possible and color it. After that, I assign them to memorize what they created. Finally, they present what they made in front of the class because mind mapping is just a brief overview; not all learning materials are written down, just like a summary, right?” (Interview with the Akidah Akhlak teacher).

Thus, the Akidah Akhlak teacher did not explain in detail the seven steps of creating a mind map as outlined by Tony Buzan, but only conveyed it in general terms because mind mapping is already familiar to eighth-grade students.

The seven steps to create a mind map according to Tony Buzan are:

1. Start from the middle of the blank paper with the long side placed horizontally.
2. Use images or photos for the central idea. Pictures will be worth a thousand words and help us use our imagination.
3. Use color. Colors make mind mapping more vibrant, adding a pleasant energy.
4. Connect the main branches to the central image and connect the second and third level branches to the first and second levels, and so on.
5. Create curved connection lines. Curved and organic branches, like tree branches, are much more visually appealing.
6. Use each keyword for each line. Single keywords provide more power and flexibility to mind mapping.
7. Use images (Buzan, 2006).

In the implementation of Akidah Akhlak learning, which lasted for almost two semesters, the Akidah Akhlak teacher applied the mind mapping method twice, namely before the Semester I Competency Test on the chapter "History, Essence, and Special Characteristics of the Qur'an" and after the Semester I Competency Test on the chapter "Rasul Ulul Azmi". The assignment to create mind maps was not just carried out in one face-to-face meeting. However, this task required two to three face-to-face meetings for the material "History, Essence, and Special Characteristics of the Qur'an" and two face-to-face meetings for the chapter "Rasul Ulul Azmi" (Interview with the Akidah Akhlak teacher).

In the first meeting of the chapter that uses mind mapping, the teacher provided an introduction to the material and assigned tasks to be completed by all students, dividing them into three groups for the chapter "History, Essence, and Distinction of the Qur'an" and four groups for the chapter "Rasul Ulul Azmi", each with different discussion topics. Then, for the remaining time, each group discussed the design of the mind mapping to be created, and the task was carried out in class and continued at home.

In that assignment, the teacher allowed students to use any materials for their creations (Observation Results). Then, in the next meeting, in the chapter "History, Essence, and Distinctiveness of the Qur'an", I assigned each group to present, followed by a question-and-answer discussion. If this activity requires two meetings because there are three sub-chapters (The History of the Revelation of the Qur'an, The Essence of the Qur'an, and The Uniqueness of the Qur'an) or three groups.

But unlike the meeting in the chapter "Rasul Ulul Azmi", based on field observation data, the implementation of the mind mapping task was conducted in a single face-to-face session using presentation and question-and-answer discussion methods (Observation Results). This differs from the research findings (Farera, 2022) where learning using mind mapping was conducted in a single face-to-face session, with the Akidah Akhlak teacher creating the material in the form of mind mapping for the students to observe and understand. The students were then divided into several groups to explain the material again, discuss it, and summarize it.

There is also a study (Handayani, 2024) that conducted mind mapping research on Islamic Cultural History learning with three teachers as informants, and two of them, the students, were only given the task of creating mind maps, without any presentation and question-and-answer discussion tasks. On the other hand, the research conducted by (Prameswati, 2022) does not detail the process of implementing the Akidah Akhlak learning using the mind mapping method, but only presents the results and consequences of applying the method.

Based on the results of the mind mapping assignment, between class VIII J and class VIII K, according to the Akidah Akhlak teacher, each class clearly has different levels of creativity. He said, "For the mind mapping assignment, I do not prohibit the children from using any media, whether it is cardboard, HVS paper, origami paper, or notebooks. I let them express their creative ideas in making this mind mapping".

In class VIII J, they usually use notebooks, while in class VIII K, they use cardboard. Therefore, the results of mind mapping in class VIII K are more impressive and creative compared to those in class VIII J because cardboard can accommodate more diverse creations such as placing images and various colors. This usually

happens due to their abilities and interests in the subject, which causes the difference (Interview with the Akidah Akhlak teacher). Thus, the Akidah Akhlak teacher always appreciates all the results of mind mapping creation, and for the assessment of this mind mapping task, it is not only viewed from one aspect but from various aspects such as material understanding, teamwork, and so on. In this creativity assessment, it will also include the evaluation of students' skills.

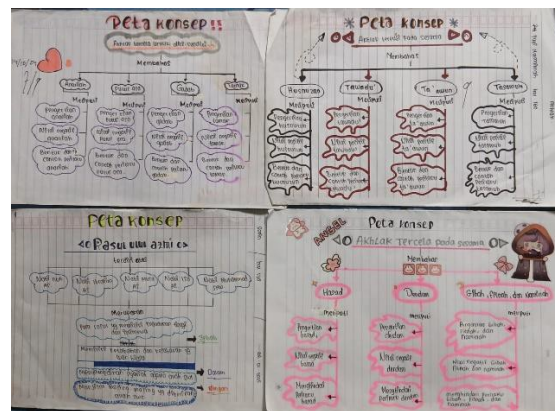


Figure 1. Mind Mapping Class VIII J

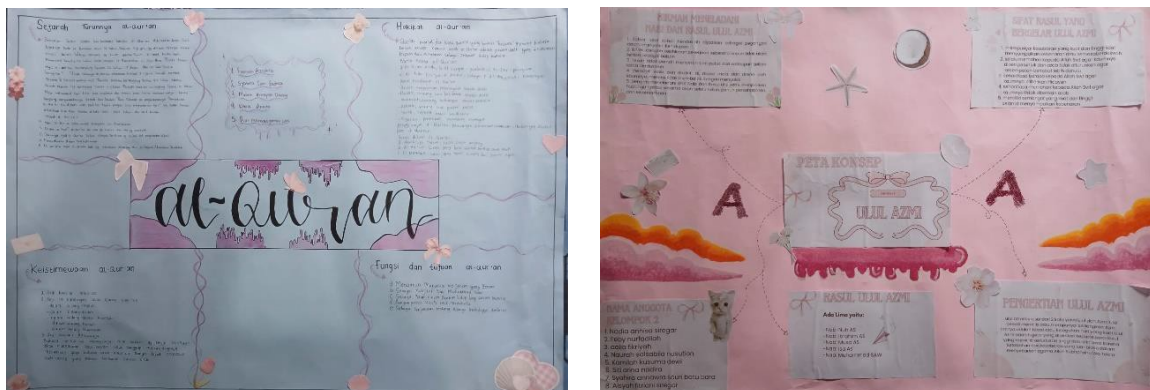


Figure 2. Mind Mapping Class VIII K

In this group assignment of mind mapping, the aim is for students to collaborate in its execution, from designing, creating, to presenting it. According to the statement of the Akidah Akhlak teacher, the mind mapping method in Akidah Akhlak learning is sometimes an individual task but is more often done in groups. Because by forming it this way, the teacher can make students more active, including in communicating with their groups to unify ideas in creating mind maps.

From the group activities conducted, in addition to assessing the skills derived from students' creativity, teachers can also evaluate students in terms of affective aspects such as teamwork, responsibility, and care. To develop students' collaborative skills to achieve learning objectives, according to (Mufarohah, 2024), this can occur if there are learning media as a stimulus. The emphasis on this ability involves active group discussions in sharing knowledge and information, helping each other in solving problems to achieve common goals. In this case, the learning media used is mind mapping.

Regarding the assessment of students' cognitive aspects, based on the explanation from the Akidah Akhlak teacher, it will be evaluated from their understanding or memorization of the mind mapping they create, as well as from the depth of questions and answers during the presentation and discussion activities in the form of Q&A. The emphasis on presentation and Q&A discussion activities in this Akidah Akhlak learning requires sufficient time, thus necessitating several face-to-face meetings to cover the numerous sub-chapters that need to be studied.

In this discussion activity, each group is required to provide questions as discussion material. From both classes, all groups from each class appeared very enthusiastic and prepared questions to be given to other groups, and each question provided by each presenting group will be answered to the best of their knowledge. Thus, this activity can create a learning environment that requires deep conceptual understanding and encourages every student to think critically.

The observation results from each class that became the subjects of the research, namely class VIII J and VIII K, show that the students feel enthusiastic and motivated in the learning process using mind mapping. This is in line with the statement of one of the students from class VIII J who said, "Making mind mapping is enjoyable, sir, because it's easy to make, so we don't get bored and are motivated to do it, sir" (Interview with a student from class VIII J).

This is reinforced by Tony Buzan's opinion that mind mapping can enhance enthusiasm and creativity by stimulating various parts of the brain simultaneously through visualization (Buzan, 2006). The statement indicates the teacher's success in selecting methods that can attract students' interest in participating in Akidah Akhlak learning activities, including the mind mapping method.

In addition, based on the interview results with an eighth-grade K student, he said that he enjoys learning using the mind mapping method, stating, "In my opinion, making mind maps is really fun and also enjoyable... because I really like drawing and coloring, so when I have an assignment to make a mind map, I really enjoy doing it, especially working in groups so I can ask each other what to include to make the result good" (Interview with an eighth-grade K student).

This is supported by the theory that the process of creating mind maps is enjoyable because it involves images, colors, and other elements (Widiyono, 2021). It is also supported by Isjoni's opinion, which states that it enhances cooperative skills in problem-solving (group process), which is the most important goal expected in achieving students' learning through cooperation and interaction (Isjoni, 2011).

Based on the data analysis from this study, it was found that the use of a single learning method in the form of mind mapping not only makes students active in the learning of Akidah Akhlak but also visibly increases students' creativity and critical thinking. However, this is also due to the role of the teacher as a facilitator and motivator in the learning of Akidah Akhlak. Additionally, through the mind mapping learning method, the Akidah Akhlak teacher can simultaneously assess students in terms of affective, cognitive, skills, and social aspects.

Supporting and Hindering Factors in the Implementation of Mind Mapping Method in Akidah Akhlak Learning

In the implementation of the mind mapping method in the Akidah Akhlak learning for class VIII J and VIII K at MTsN 2 Medan, there are several supporting and inhibiting factors that affect the effectiveness of this method. One of the main supporting factors is the role of the teacher as a facilitator. The teacher not only delivers the material but also provides stimuli to students by relating the lessons to everyday life. When discussing the material "History, Essence, and Uniqueness of the Qur'an", the teacher can stimulate students by connecting Qur'anic lessons to daily life, such as explaining the moral values in the Qur'an that are relevant to the current social situation. For example, relating the stories in the Qur'an to the challenges faced by students in their environment, making the learning more meaningful and applicable.

In addition, a pleasant and interactive learning atmosphere can also be a supporting factor, where students feel comfortable asking questions and expressing their opinions. Collaboration among students in completing mind mapping tasks is also a positive aspect, where they can help each other and learn together. On the other hand, there are several hindering factors that arise. Such as the lack of contribution from group members in creating the mind mapping, which can disrupt the group's learning process. In addition, the limited allocation of time also becomes an obstacle, where the teacher is forced to make this task a homework assignment (PR), thus unable to fully monitor the creation process directly. Because during the process of creating mind maps, all students need a long period of time so that they do not rush in their work. This is supported by Chusnul Nurroeni's opinion that creating mind maps requires relatively more time and needs to be accustomed to in its creation (Nurroeni, 2013). Because here, teachers also need to consider the learning time used so that all the material can be covered, this shows the need for more attention from teachers to help students overcome existing obstacles, so that the implementation of the mind mapping method can run smoothly.

4. CONCLUSION

The application of the mind mapping method in Akidah Akhlak learning has great potential to improve the quality of education. This method is not only effective in enhancing students' understanding and memory retention but also stimulates creativity and collaboration among students, making learning more enjoyable. At MTsN 2 Medan, both class VIII J and class VIII K demonstrate impressive creativity and are active in discussions and deep understanding. The success of implementing mind mapping also depends on the teacher's ability as a facilitator and guide, enabling students to create effective mind maps. In addition, the availability of adequate and competent resources is one of the important factors in supporting the implementation of the mind mapping method in Akidah Akhlak learning.

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