

Improving Students' Learning Interest in Islamic Cultural History Through the Make a Match Cooperative Learning Model in Grade VA of MI Al-Umm: A Classroom Action Research

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ABSTRACT

Purpose of the Study: This study aims to improve the learning interest of Grade VA students in Islamic Cultural History (SKI) at MI Al-Umm through the implementation of the Make a Match cooperative learning model. The research addresses the persistent problem of low student engagement and participation in SKI learning, examining how a structured, interactive pairing strategy can foster greater enthusiasm, active involvement, and sustained interest in the subject matter. **Methodology:** This research employs Classroom Action Research (CAR) based on the Kemmis and McTaggart model, conducted across two cycles with two meetings in each cycle. The participants were 33 Grade VA students at MI Al-Umm. Data were collected through learning-interest questionnaires, observation sheets, documentation, and field notes. Quantitative data were analyzed using percentage techniques, while qualitative data were analyzed descriptively to capture changes in student participation and classroom dynamics throughout the intervention. **Main Findings:** The implementation of the Make a Match model led to a measurable improvement in students' interest in learning, rising from 69.4% in Cycle I to 80% in Cycle II. Observation results further indicated increased student participation, enthusiasm, and active engagement during learning activities. These findings demonstrate that the collaborative, game-based structure of the Make a Match model effectively stimulates motivation and creates a more participatory learning environment in Islamic Cultural History instruction. **Novelty/Originality of this Study:** This study provides practical evidence on the application of the Make a Match cooperative learning model in the specific context of Islamic Cultural History (SKI) at the elementary madrasah level, an area that remains underexplored in the existing literature. It offers a replicable, classroom-tested strategy for enhancing student learning interest in religious-historical subjects, providing a foundation for educators seeking active-learning alternatives to conventional, lecture-based SKI instruction.

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A. Introduction

Education plays a crucial role in shaping the quality of human resources. Through education, individuals can develop their potential, acquire knowledge, cultivate positive attitudes,

and enhance the skills needed for daily life (Defriansyah et al., 2023). The success of the educational process is determined not only by teachers' ability to deliver instructional content but also by various student-related factors, including learning interest. Learning interest is an important factor influencing students' engagement in the learning process and contributing to the achievement of educational objectives (Nasution et al., 2023).

Learning interest can be defined as an individual's sense of attraction, enjoyment, and willingness to pay attention to a particular activity without external coercion (Nurlaeliyah, 2023). Students with high learning interest tend to demonstrate greater attention to learning materials, actively participate in classroom activities, and show a strong desire to understand the subject matter more deeply (Herman et al., 2022). In contrast, students with low learning interest are generally less focused, more passive during instruction, easily bored, and less engaged in learning activities. Therefore, learning interest is considered one of the key factors determining the effectiveness of the learning process.

Both internal and external factors influence interest in learning. Internal factors include students' motivation, talents, abilities, physical condition, self-confidence, and educational goals. External factors involve family and school environments, learning media, instructional approaches, and teaching models implemented by teachers (Muliani & Arusman, 2022). Among these factors, the learning model plays a particularly important role because it directly affects how students experience learning in the classroom. The use of instructional models that align with students' characteristics can create a more active, engaging, and enjoyable learning environment (Walewangko et al., 2024), thereby fostering greater learning interest.

One subject that requires particular attention to students' learning interests is Islamic Cultural History. This subject aims to provide students with an understanding of the historical development of Islam, prominent Islamic figures, and exemplary values applicable in everyday life (Isnaini, 2024). Through SKI learning, students are expected not only to acquire historical knowledge but also to draw lessons and emulate the positive values demonstrated by Islamic figures.

However, SKI instruction often faces several challenges. One common issue is that students perceive SKI as a monotonous subject because it is frequently associated with memorizing names of historical figures, events, and chronological sequences (Ratri & Ulya, 2022). Furthermore, SKI instruction is often dominated by lecture-based methods, resulting in a teacher-centered and one-way learning process. In such situations, students primarily act as passive recipients of information while teachers become the central source of knowledge. This condition reduces students' active participation and contributes to low learning interest (Munawir et al., 2024).

Low learning interest in SKI can be identified through several indicators, including lack of attention during lessons, limited participation in classroom discussions, low enthusiasm for learning activities, and a tendency to feel bored during instruction (Syah et al., 2024). If these conditions persist, the learning process may become less effective and educational objectives may be difficult to achieve. Therefore, innovative instructional strategies are needed to create more active, engaging, and enjoyable learning experiences.

One instructional strategy to increase students' interest in learning is the Make a Match cooperative learning model. Developed by Lorna Curran in 1994, this model encourages students to learn by matching question-and-answer cards in a game-like setting (Fauhah & Rosy, 2021). Through the Make a Match model, students become more active and gain opportunities to think critically and express their ideas. The enjoyable learning atmosphere created by this model can enhance students' engagement and motivation (Galuh Sabila & Jani Jani, 2025).

The implementation of the Make a Match model involves several stages. First, the teacher prepares question cards and corresponding answer cards. Each student receives one card and is asked to find the matching pair within a specified period of time (Hermawan et al., 2024). Students

who correctly identify the pair are awarded points and then present their answers to the class. Through this process, students actively participate in learning rather than passively receiving information. They are required to think, search for matching pairs, engage in discussion, and communicate their findings to their peers.

The Make a Match learning model offers several advantages that can support the improvement of students' interest in learning. It creates a more active and enjoyable classroom environment, promotes collaboration among students, and enhances communication skills. In addition, the model encourages teamwork and helps reduce students' boredom during learning activities (Achmad et al., 2022). By allowing students to learn while playing, Make a Match increases students' attention and engagement throughout the learning process. This characteristic is consistent with Lev Vygotsky's social constructivist theory, which emphasizes that knowledge is constructed through social interaction and shared learning experiences (Awwalina, 2023).

Previous studies have demonstrated that the Make a Match learning model is effective in improving students' engagement, motivation, and learning outcomes. However, research specifically examining the implementation of this model to enhance learning interest in Islamic Cultural History at the Madrasah Ibtidaiyah level remains limited. Considering that SKI contains substantial historical content and exemplary narratives of Islamic figures, more interactive and engaging instructional strategies are needed to maintain students' enthusiasm and participation during learning activities.

Preliminary observations conducted in Grade VA at MI Al-Umm revealed that students' interest in learning SKI was relatively low, as indicated by limited attention, participation, and enthusiasm during classroom instruction. Therefore, this study aims to enhance students' interest in learning by implementing the Make a Match cooperative learning model in Islamic Cultural History lessons. The findings are expected to provide an alternative instructional strategy that is more active, interactive, and engaging for learning in Madrasah Ibtidaiyah.

B. Methods

This study employed Classroom Action Research (CAR) to improve students' interest in learning Islamic Cultural History (ICH) by implementing the Make a Match cooperative learning model. Classroom Action Research is a form of research conducted by teachers or researchers in the classroom through planned actions aimed at improving the quality of the learning process continuously (Machali, 2022). The selection of CAR was based on the objective of improving classroom learning practices through systematic and reflective actions.

This study adopted a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative and qualitative data. Quantitative data were used to measure students' learning interest and learning activities, with percentages calculated for each cycle. Qualitative data were used to describe the learning process, students' engagement, and findings that emerged during the implementation of the actions. The integration of both data types was expected to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the effectiveness of the Make a Match model in enhancing students' interest in learning.

The research was conducted in Class VA at MI Al-Umm and involved 33 students, both male and female. The participants were selected based on preliminary observations indicating that students' learning interest in Islamic Cultural History was relatively low. This condition was reflected in students' lack of attention during lessons, low participation in discussions, and limited enthusiasm for learning activities.

The study was carried out in two cycles, with each cycle consisting of two meetings. The CAR model followed the framework of Kemmis and McTaggart, which includes four stages: planning, action, observation, and reflection (Syafiuddin, 2021). During the planning stage, the researcher prepared learning materials and research instruments. The action stage involved implementing the Make a Match cooperative learning model on the topic of Caliph Uthman ibn Affan's leadership, in which students matched question-and-answer cards, participated in

discussions, and presented their findings. This model was selected because it promotes active, enjoyable, and participatory learning (Magdalena, 2023). An observation was conducted to monitor students' learning interest using four indicators: attention, interest, participation, and enjoyment. At the end of each cycle, a collaborative reflection was conducted with the observer to evaluate implementation and identify necessary improvements for the subsequent cycle (Millah et al., 2023).

The research instruments consisted of a learning-interest questionnaire, learning-interest observation sheets, Make a Match activity assessment sheets, documentation, and field notes. The learning-interest questionnaire contained 10 statements developed based on four indicators: attention, interest, participation, and enjoyment. The questionnaire employed a four-point Likert scale (1–4). Observation sheets were used to monitor students' engagement during learning activities. At the same time, the Make a Match activity assessment sheets evaluated students' enthusiasm, confidence in answering questions, response accuracy, and focus during the learning process. All instruments were validated through expert judgment involving the academic supervisor and the subject teacher and were declared suitable for use after revisions based on their recommendations.

The study's success indicator was determined by the improvement in students' learning interest across cycles. The study was considered successful when students' learning interest reached the high category, as indicated by questionnaire and observation results. The research was concluded after Cycle II because the results showed that students' learning interest had improved from the moderate category to the high category, in accordance with the research objectives.

Data were collected through observation, questionnaires, documentation, and field notes. Quantitative data were analyzed using percentage analysis to determine the development of students' learning interest across cycles. The percentage score was calculated by comparing the obtained score with the maximum possible score and multiplying the result by 100%. The percentages were categorized as very high (86–100%), high (76–85%), moderate (60–75%), and low ($\leq 59\%$). Qualitative data were analyzed through data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing to obtain a deeper understanding of the learning process and changes in students' learning interests throughout the study.

C. Result and Discussion

This classroom action research was conducted in two cycles, with each cycle consisting of two meetings. Each cycle included four stages: planning, action, observation, and reflection. The Make a Match cooperative learning model was implemented in the Islamic Cultural History (SKI) subject to improve the learning interest of fifth-grade students at MI Al-Umm. Research data were collected through a learning interest questionnaire, observation sheets, and student activity assessment sheets during the learning process. To examine the development of students' learning interest, measurements were conducted in both Cycle I and Cycle II. The results of individual students' learning interest measurements are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Comparison of Students' Learning Interest Levels in Cycle I and Cycle II

No	Student Name	Cycle I Score (%)	Category	Cycle II Score (%)	Category
1	A	55	Low	70	Moderate
2	I	50	Low	80	High
3	S	55	Low	80	High
4	F	55	Low	70	Moderate
5	A	50	Low	77	High
6	A	60	Moderate	70	Moderate

No	Student Name	Cycle I Score (%)	Category	Cycle II Score (%)	Category
7	K	70	Moderate	82	High
8	A	85	High	80	High
9	A	90	Very High	100	Very High
10	Z	65	Moderate	82	High
11	J	70	Moderate	87	Very High
12	D	70	Moderate	87	Very High
13	H	70	Moderate	75	Moderate
14	B	75	Moderate	75	Moderate
15	S	75	Moderate	73	Moderate
16	N	60	Moderate	77	High
17	I	70	Moderate	100	Very High
18	K	70	Moderate	75	Moderate
19	A	90	Very High	65	Moderate
20	K	85	High	95	Very High
21	K	90	Very High	100	Very High
22	Y	90	Very High	97	Very High
23	A	80	High	85	High
24	A	50	Low	72	Moderate
25	S	75	Moderate	75	Moderate
26	F	75	Moderate	67	Moderate
27	H	75	Moderate	80	High
28	R	65	Moderate	72	Moderate
29	Z	45	Low	80	High
30	A	55	Low	70	Moderate
31	G	70	Moderate	77	High
32	KA	70	Moderate	90	Very High
33	A	80	High	60	Moderate
Average		69,4	Moderate	80	High

Category criteria:

86-100: Very High

76-85: High

60-75: Moderate

≤ 59: Low

Based on Table 1, students' learning interest increased after the implementation of the Make a Match cooperative learning model. The average learning interest score improved from 69.4% in Cycle I (moderate) to 80% in Cycle II (high). This 10.6 percentage-point increase indicates an increase in students' interest in learning following the instructional intervention. Most students demonstrated improved learning interest scores from Cycle I to Cycle II. Many students who were previously categorized as having low or moderate learning interest progressed to the high or very high categories. Although a few students experienced a slight decline, the overall findings suggest that the Make a Match learning model was effective in enhancing students' learning interest in the Islamic Cultural History (SKI) subject.

In addition to the learning interest questionnaire, this study also employed an observation sheet to monitor students' engagement during the learning process. The results of the learning interest observations are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Observation Result of Students' Learning Interest

Stage	Percentage (%)	Category
Pre-Cycle	55%	Low
Cycle I	75%	Moderate
Cycle II	85%	High

Category criteria:
 86-100: Very High
 76-85: High
 60-75: Moderate
 ≤ 59: Low

Based on Table 2, the results indicate a continuous improvement in students' interest in learning throughout the study. In the initial condition, the percentage of students' learning interest was 55%, which was categorized as low. After implementing the Make a Match learning model in Cycle I, the percentage increased to 75%, which is categorized as moderate. Furthermore, in Cycle II, it increased to 85%, placing it in the high category. The increase in students' participation and attention during the learning process suggests that the Make a Match learning model contributed positively to improving students' interest in learning Islamic Cultural History (SKI).

The assessment of the Make a Match learning activities was used as supporting data to examine students' level of participation during the learning process. The results of students' learning activities are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Result of Make a Match Learning Activities

Cycle	Percentage (%)	Category
Cycle I	85,36%	High
Cycle II	93%	Very High

Category criteria:
 86-100: Very High
 76-85: High
 60-75: Moderate
 ≤ 59: Low

Based on Table 3, students' learning activities during the implementation of the Make a Match model increased from 85.36% in Cycle I to 93% in Cycle II. This improvement indicates that students became more active and enthusiastic in participating in each stage of the learning process, including finding matching cards, engaging in discussions, and presenting their answers. Although learning activity was not the primary variable in this study, these findings suggest that the Make a Match model was effective in creating an interactive and enjoyable learning environment, which, in turn, increased students' interest in learning Islamic Cultural History (SKI).

Discussion

Based on the findings, implementing the Make a Match cooperative learning model in the Islamic Cultural History (SKI) subject increased students' interest in learning. The results of the learning interest questionnaire showed that the average score increased from 69.4% in Cycle I (moderate) to 80% in Cycle II (high). In addition, most students experienced improvements in their learning interest achievement, moving from low and moderate categories to high and very high categories. These findings indicate that the Make a Match model created a more engaging learning environment and encouraged students' active involvement in the learning process.

The increase in interest in learning was influenced by a shift in the learning environment from teacher-centered instruction to student-centered learning. Prior to the intervention, learning activities were predominantly delivered through lectures, leaving students as passive recipients of information and with limited opportunities to participate actively or interact with their peers (Purnama & Sylvia, 2022). Through the implementation of Make a Match, students were given opportunities to search for matching cards, discuss answers, and collaborate with classmates to complete learning tasks. These activities increased students' attention, interest, and engagement during the learning process. The interactive nature of the model created a more enjoyable classroom environment, stimulating curiosity and encouraging active participation.

These findings were further supported by classroom observations, which revealed a continuous increase in students' interest in learning from Cycle I to Cycle II. Students became more attentive to the teacher's explanations, participated more actively in learning activities, and demonstrated greater enthusiasm throughout the lessons. In addition, student activity during the implementation of Make a Match increased from 85.36% in Cycle I to 93% in Cycle II. This improvement indicates that students became more familiar with the learning procedures and more actively involved in finding matching cards, discussing answers, and presenting their responses to the class. Although learning activity was not the primary variable in this study, its improvement served as supporting evidence for the enhancement of students' interest in learning Islamic Cultural History.

The improvement in learning interest is consistent with the principles of cooperative learning, which emphasize collaboration, communication, and active student participation in the learning process (Ali, 2021). Cooperative learning provides students with opportunities to learn through interaction with their peers, making the learning experience more meaningful than instruction that relies solely on teacher explanations (Alwi et al., 2023). In the Make a Match model, students were required to find corresponding card pairs, discuss answers, and respond to learning tasks. Such activities encouraged students to become directly involved in the learning process and increased their sense of participation.

The findings are also in line with previous studies showing that cooperative learning can enhance student participation and engagement in classroom activities (Suprijono et al., 2025). Cooperative learning creates an environment where students can collaborate, express opinions, and contribute to group activities. Such conditions are closely related to learning interest because students feel that they have opportunities to contribute and that their participation is valued (Nugraha et al., 2016). In this study, the Make a Match model promoted a more interactive learning environment by encouraging students not only to follow the teacher's instructions but also to participate in discussions and actively discover answers.

The increase in students' interest in learning can also be explained by Lev Vygotsky's Social Constructivist Theory, which emphasizes that learning develops through social interaction and shared experiences (Awwalina, 2023). According to this theory, students construct knowledge through communication and collaboration with others. This principle was evident during Make a Match activities, where students searched for matching cards, discussed answers, exchanged information, and assisted one another in completing learning tasks (Purnama & Sylvia, 2022). The relevance of Vygotsky's theory to the present findings is evident in increased student participation during classroom activities. Before the implementation of Make a Match, learning tended to be

one-directional, resulting in relatively low student engagement. After the model was introduced, students became more confident in participating, collaborating, and paying attention to the learning materials. These social interactions contributed positively to the development of students' learning interest in Islamic Cultural History.

In addition to Vygotsky's perspective, the findings can also be interpreted through David Ausubel's Meaningful Learning Theory. Ausubel argues that learning becomes more effective when new information is connected to learners' prior knowledge and experiences (Purnama & Sylvia, 2022). In the Make a Match model, students connected new SKI content to existing knowledge through activities involving matching question-and-answer cards. This process encouraged students to recall information, understand relationships among concepts, and apply their prior understanding to solve learning tasks. Consequently, learning became more meaningful and engaging than conventional teacher-centered instruction, leading to greater interest in learning.

Beyond social interaction and meaningful learning experiences, the improvement in learning interest was also influenced by the extent to which learning activities matched students' needs and preferences. Maintaining student engagement remains one of the major challenges in education (Membrive et al., 2026). Learning interest tends to decline when students perceive learning activities as uninteresting or unrelated to their experiences. Therefore, instructional approaches that provide opportunities for exploration, communication, and meaning-making can significantly enhance student engagement. In this study, the use of supporting media such as PowerPoint presentations and instructional videos also contributed to increasing student participation and enthusiasm during the learning process (Fadillah et al., 2023)

The characteristics of Islamic Cultural History as a subject further highlight the importance of interactive learning strategies. SKI contains extensive information about historical figures, events, and the development of Islamic civilization that students are expected to understand (Sapitri et al., 2025). When taught primarily through lectures, students may lose interest because of the limited variety of learning activities. The Make a Match model transformed SKI lessons into more active learning experiences by incorporating games, collaboration, and direct participation. Such activities not only increased students' interest but also supported a deeper understanding of the subject matter (Nababan et al., 2023).

This study has several limitations. First, the research was conducted in a single class of 33 students, limiting the generalizability of the findings. Second, the study was implemented over two action cycles without a comparison group, making it difficult to determine whether similar improvements would occur under different instructional conditions. Future research may involve larger samples and compare the effectiveness of the Make a Match model with other learning models in Islamic Cultural History or other subject areas.

Overall, the findings indicate that the Make a Match cooperative learning model effectively increased students' learning interest in Islamic Cultural History. The improvement was reflected in students' greater participation, enthusiasm, and engagement during the learning process. Therefore, Make a Match can be considered an alternative instructional strategy for teachers seeking to enhance students' interest in learning, particularly in subjects that require an understanding of historical content.

D. Conclusion

The implementation of the Make a Match cooperative learning model was shown to improve students' interest in learning the Islamic Cultural History (SKI) subject in Class VA at MI Al-Umm. The results showed that the average learning interest score increased from 69.4% in Cycle I (moderate category) to 80% in Cycle II (high category). In addition, students demonstrated greater engagement, enthusiasm, and participation throughout the.

Therefore, the Make a Match model can be considered an effective instructional alternative for enhancing students' learning interest in Islamic Cultural History. However, this study was

limited to a single class with a relatively small number of participants, which restricts the generalizability of the findings. Future studies are recommended to involve more diverse participants and a broader range of educational settings to obtain more comprehensive results.

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