

# THE RELEVANCE OF LEV VYGOTSKY'S CONSTRUCTIVIST THEORY TO THE ISLAMIC RELIGIOUS EDUCATION LEARNING SYSTEM IN INDONESIA

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**Abstrak:** Penelitian ini membahas tentang hubungan teori konstruktivisme Lev Vygotsky terhadap pembelajaran Pendidikan Agama Islam (PAI) di Indonesia. Pada sebagian kasus, masih ditemukan bahwa implementasi pembelajaran PAI dilakukan melalui metode indoktrinasi. Peserta didik diberikan pemahaman agama secara "hitam dan putih". Pendekatan yang konservatif tersebut dijalankan untuk membujuk mereka agar taat dan patuh kepada agama tanpa adanya upaya membangkitkan kesadaran kritis. Karena itu, seringkali tugas-tugas mekanis diberikan kepada peserta didik tanpa mendukung proses pembelajaran di sekolah, atau bahkan hanya tugas-tugas mekanis yang berada di luar konteks kemampuan dasar dan standar kompetensi. Secara lebih terperinci, riset ini mengkaji tentang aspek apa saja pemikiran konstruktivisme Lev Vygotsky kontekstual terhadap praktik pembelajaran PAI di lembaga pendidikan Islam di Indonesia. Metode penelitian dalam riset ini menggunakan pendekatan deskriptif kualitatif dengan kajian pustaka. Hasil analisis teori konstruktivisme Vygotsky dan sistem pembelajaran Islam memiliki keterkaitan yang relevan dalam proses pembelajaran. Bukti-bukti yang menghubungkan teori konstruktivisme Lev Vygotsky dengan sistem pembelajaran PAI di Indonesia terlihat dari penerapan pendekatan kolaboratif dalam pembelajaran PAI, di mana guru berperan sebagai mediator dalam membantu siswa memahami konsep agama melalui interaksi dan diskusi. Selain itu, penggunaan bahasa sebagai alat mediasi dalam pemahaman konsep agama juga mencerminkan konsep penting dalam pemikiran Vygotsky tentang peran bahasa dalam pembelajaran.

**Kata Kunci:** Teori Konstruktivisme, Lev Vygotsky, Sistem Pembelajaran, Pendidikan Agama Islam

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**Abstract:** This research discusses the relationship of Lev Vygotsky's constructivist theory to Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning in Indonesia. In some cases, it is still found that the implementation of PAI learning is carried out through the indoctrination method. Students are given a "black and white" understanding of religion. This conservative approach is carried out to persuade them to obey and comply with religion without any effort to raise critical awareness. Because of this, mechanical tasks are often given to students without supporting the learning process at school, or even just mechanical tasks that are outside the context of basic abilities and competency standards. In more detail, this research examines what aspects of Lev Vygotsky's constructivist thinking are contextual to PAI learning practices in Islamic educational institutions in Indonesia. The research method in this research uses a qualitative descriptive approach with a literature review. The results of the analysis of Vygotsky's constructivism theory and the Islamic learning system have a relevant relationship in the learning process. Evidence connecting Lev Vygotsky's constructivist theory with the PAI learning system in Indonesia can be seen from the implementation of a collaborative approach in PAI learning, where the teacher acts as a mediator in helping students understand religious concepts through interaction and discussion. Apart from that, the use of language as a mediating tool in understanding religious concepts also reflects an important concept in Vygotsky's thinking about the role of language in learning.

**Keywords:** Constructivism Theory, Lev Vygotsky, Learning System, Islamic Religious Education

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## Introduction

Islamic Religious Education (PAI) is an integral part of the educational curriculum which aims to shape the character and morals of students. PAI learning is often faced with a number of complex problems, which include understanding in-depth religious concepts, moral development, and internalizing ethical values in everyday life. In this context, an appropriate learning approach is needed to overcome these various challenges and facilitate

students in understanding and applying religious teachings holistically. One perspective that can be adopted is Lev Vygotsky's constructivist thinking, which offers the concept of the "Zone of Proximal Development" (ZPD). ZPD describes the potential area of development between knowledge that has been mastered and knowledge that still requires help to understand (Vygotsky, 1962). By utilizing the principles of Vygotsky's constructivism, such as social interaction and mediation, PAI learning can be reproduced to be more effective in overcoming complex educational challenges, easier to understand and provide deep meaning for students (Vygotsky, 1962). Ramayulis explained that the aim of teaching Islam in schools is to increase faith, understanding, appreciation and recognition of Islam, so as to produce Muslims who are obedient and devoted to Allah Subhanahu wa Ta'ala and have noble character in personal life, society, nation and state so that they can continue their education to a higher level (Ardiati, 2021).

The concept of Islamic religious education has sparked an understanding that the aim of implementing Islamic religious education in schools is generally in line with the goals of national education, namely developing students' potential to become people who are faithful and devout, have noble souls, are full of fear of God, have high morals, are empowered, creative, be independent, and become democratic and responsible citizens (RI, 2007)

From a national education perspective, with the emphasis on religious education in this context, Islam is at the forefront of the successful implementation of education in this country. Thus, it can be concluded that if national education goals are not achieved, then what must be accounted for first is Islamic religious education. The description above is in accordance with the level description explained by (Purnama, 2013), namely that in providing Islamic religious education, it is an obligation to educate students with personal and social integrity (Purnama, 2013). Therefore, if you form personal and social self-confidence, you will indirectly achieve national education goals (Dahar, 2011).

Through the results of the study conducted by Sa'adillah, it can be seen that the implementation of Islamic religious education in the field can be considered an educational doctrine. Many students are given "black" or "white" assignments. The term "black" refers to things that are not permitted (haram), while "white" refers to things that are permitted (halal). This process is often carried out to ensure that students become obedient and diligent. Often, students are given mechanical tasks that do not support the learning process at school, or are only given mechanical tasks outside the context of SK (competency standards) and KD (basic competencies). Worse yet, students are not aware of the cognitive load in their daily lives (Arini, Aida, & Umami, 2019).

Many facts in the literature show the problems faced by all schools, so that the development of Islamic Religious Education teaching needs to be improved. (Muhibin & Hidayatullah, 2020) Developing an Islamic Religious Education teaching system with a constructivist approach is the main effort to overcome this problem. This is because the essence of constructivist theory is that students must discover and interpret complex systems in various situations. In other words, constructivism is a learning process that encourages students to develop knowledge, not just receive knowledge from outside (knowledge transfer). In her research, Ardiati stated that constructivist theory is related to Islamic education which can design learning that involves students in the process of cognitive development. This means that student development does not only occur at school, but also through the environment around them. (Ardiati, 2021)

One of the main figures of this theory is Lev Vygotsky, a Russian psychologist, who stated that faced with new experiences and challenges, this condition can help human intellectual development. According to Vygotsky's constructivism theory, it is the development of knowledge obtained by students based on experience, not just knowledge received through learning (Saksono, 2023). This theory is in line with the opinion of Muhammad Abed Al Jabiri, who states that Islamic education today needs to integrate past thinking with current thinking, which is then used as a reference to answer emerging challenges (Habibi, 2022).

Research conducted by Verrawati shows that the application of Vygotsky's constructivism theory can be a solution in facing the challenges of implementing Islamic teachings in education. This research emphasizes a learning approach that places student orientation as the center of attention in applying constructivism theory. (Verrawati, 2015)

By understanding the concepts and phenomena above, this research has two main objectives: first, to explain Lev Vygotsky's constructivist theory, and second, to analyze the relevance of Lev Vygotsky's constructivist theory in the Islamic religious education teaching system. (Esa, 2017)

### **Get to know Constructivism Theory**

The word "Constructivism" comes from the verb "costruire" which means "to build". The origin of this word comes from the Latin "con struere" which means to arrange or build. Therefore, the main concept of constructivism is the process of organization or formation. In the context of learning, constructivism is a theory

that designs the formation (construct) of knowledge that comes from oneself. Constructivism theory emerged from dissatisfaction with the views of previous experts who believed that learning was a process of stimulus-response-reinforcement relationships. This theory states that every individual has the ability to direct themselves and control their own cognition (Sukiman, 2008).

Vygotsky was a Russian scholar who specialized in psychology, philosophy, and literature. Vygotsky's famous philosophy is related to the relationship between humans and the environment, according to him "humans are not like animals who only respond to the environment, humans have the ability to change the environment according to their needs." Vygotsky's philosophical thinking about humans paved the way for the emergence of the theory of Social Constructivism, which means building children's knowledge through social interaction. (Muhibin & Hidayatullah, 2020). Vygotsky was very interested in exploring the essence of various important activities in the socio-cultural environment that influence children's cognitive construction. Therefore, Vygotsky's thinking is often referred to as a socio-cultural perspective (Muhibin et al., 2020)

Vygotsky's philosophical thinking about humans later became the forerunner of social constructivist theory, which means developing children's cognition through social interaction. Vygotsky was very interested in experiencing various activities that have meaning in the socio-cultural environment related to the cognitive formation of children. Therefore, Vygotsky's thinking is often referred to as a socio-cultural perspective (Verrawati, 2015).

Vygotsky explained important social factors in learning. Because during educational activities there is a reciprocal influence between words and actions in social situations. If it is said that learning must occur in social situations, then it seems true that learning is constructive. Therefore, Vygotsky is known as a social constructivist researcher (Syafarudin et al., 2005).

According to Vygotsky (1962), the basic mental functions of humans are formed naturally and in developing these mental functions, humans need the participation of society and culture. Furthermore, related to the concepts in Lev Vygotsky's constructivist theory, Ormrod, as quoted by Muhibin and Hidayatullah, explained that Vygotsky believes that there are several important things related to his theory (Yanto, 2023), including:

First, there is a relationship between children and adults, both formal and informal, which will provide children with an understanding of how they develop. Vygotsky emphasized the importance of social relationships between children and adults, both formal, such as relationships with teachers at school, and informal, such as relationships with parents or peers. Through interactions with adults, children will gain an understanding of the ways they can develop and learn from their surroundings (Saqinah, 2023).

Second, all cultures have the meaning of efforts to improve the cognitive domain of children. The meaning of culture for children here has the aim of guiding children to live their lives productively and efficiently. Vygotsky believed that each culture has an important role in shaping children's understanding of the world and providing guidance in children's cognitive development. Culture provides a variety of relevant experiences and learning contexts to guide children to live productively and efficiently in accordance with the values and norms of their society.

Third, based on Vygotsky's opinion, children's cognitive development is very dependent on their ability to master language. Vygotsky emphasized the role of language in children's cognitive development. Language is the main tool for thinking and communicating with other people. Through language, children can convey ideas, discuss and share knowledge with others, thereby influencing the way they think and understand the world (Wandani, 2023).

Fourth, the process of complete mental development occurs when the child has carried out social activities, then slowly the child will experience a deepening of his cognitive abilities so that he can use them freely. Vygotsky stated that children's cognitive development occurs through social interactions and social activities carried out by children. In this process, children slowly understand and deepen cognitive concepts obtained from social interactions, so that the ability to think and solve problems can be used independently.

Fifth, based on Vygotsky's opinion, the perfect thinking process really depends on how children carry out social relationships. Like discussing problems or phenomena, with people who are more mature and have more knowledge than them. Vygotsky emphasized the importance of discussion and interaction with more experienced and knowledgeable people to enrich children's understanding of various problems or phenomena. Through these interactions, children can gain new insights and deepen their understanding of the world. (Vygotsky, 1962)

Fifth. A child has the ability to do a task perfectly if the task given is challenging then this will encourage optimal cognitive development of a child. Vygotsky stated that providing challenging tasks for children can provide a boost in their cognitive development. Challenging tasks trigger children to think more

creatively, find solutions, and develop higher cognitive skills. This will optimize children's cognitive development and encourage them to achieve higher cognitive potential.

Sixth, there are two principles that need to be derived from Vygotsky's constructivism theory, including: 1) Language has a very important function in the social communication process which begins with the process of sensing symbols or signs. 2) Zone of proximal development, namely an educator is a mediator whose role is to guide students to construct their knowledge.

### **Islamic Religious Education Learning System**

Salisbury, as explained by Syarafudin, states that a system is a group of parts that work together as one unit. Meanwhile, according to Johnson, "the definition of a system is an arrangement of interrelated elements." From these two statements, it can be understood that a system is a whole of all parts that work together or interact with each other to achieve the desired results, based on predetermined or planned requirements. (Syafaruddin & Nasution, 2005)

In the context of learning theory, the term "apprendimento" according to Hamalik can have many meanings, including: 1) efforts to instill knowledge in students at school, 2) transmitting culture to the younger generation through national educational institutions, 3) creating learning conditions for students, 4) preparing students to become good citizens, 5) the process of helping students face everyday social life. (Syafaruddin & Nasution, 2005)

Meanwhile, in Islamic education, according to Zakiyah Darajat quoted by Hemtan, "Islamic education is an effort to develop and guide students so that they always understand Islamic teachings as a whole, so that they respect these goals so that they can make Islam a lifestyle."

Based on the three explanations above, it can be understood that the Islamic religious education teaching system is a network of various components or elements of materials, facilities, tools and teaching methods, each of which applies certain procedures to achieve learning objectives. Islamic religious education makes Islam a way of life. In other words, the Islamic religious education teaching system is a process of interaction between students and educators to encourage creative thinking during the Islamic religious education teaching process which will produce the desired results.

### **Method**

This research uses a qualitative approach method with the type of library research to explore and explore the relevance of Lev Vygotsky's constructivist theory to the Islamic religious education learning system. This approach aims to describe and analyze how Lev Vygotsky's theory can be applied in the Islamic religious learning system. (Ramayulis, 2005)

The data used in this research comes from secondary data sources in the form of literature about Lev Vygotsky's theory and the Islamic religious education learning system contained in books and journal articles both online and offline. Data collection was carried out through the documentation method, namely collecting various literature documents for study. The collected research data was then analyzed using content analysis techniques to explore and understand the relationship between Lev Vygotsky's constructivist theory and the Islamic religious education learning system. It is hoped that the results of this analysis will provide a deeper understanding of how this theory can be applied in the context of Islamic learning, as well as providing valuable insight for the development of a more effective and relevant learning system in facing the challenges of the times.

### **Findings and Discussion**

#### **Lev Vygotsky's Constructivism**

Lev Vygotsky's constructivist thinking emphasizes the importance of social interaction and mediation in the learning process. Vygotsky argued that individuals learn through interaction with their environment, both with fellow individuals and with objects. The main concept in Vygotsky's thinking is the "Zone of Proximal Development" (ZPD), namely the area between what an individual has mastered and what they can master with the help of someone who is more competent.

In ZPD, the role of teachers or mediators is very important, because they help students achieve deeper understanding by providing support and direction. Vygotsky's thinking also highlights the importance of language in learning, because language acts as a tool for organizing thoughts and mediating social interactions. (Newman & Holzman, 2014)

The Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning system in Indonesia includes a number of components that seek to integrate religious teachings with the development of students' character and morals. PAI learning in public and religious schools is carried out in a structured and comprehensive manner, with the aim of introducing ethical

values, religious teachings and Islamic behavior to students. However, in an increasingly complex and fast-paced context, problems in PAI learning can arise, such as difficulty understanding complex religious concepts or applying religious values in everyday life. In overcoming this challenge, Vygotsky's constructivist thinking can be applied by prioritizing social interaction and mediation in PAI learning. Teachers can act as mediators who help students understand religious teachings more deeply through group interactions or discussions.

The use of appropriate language is also an important focus, because language is a mediating tool in the learning process that connects students' understanding of concepts with reality. By integrating Vygotsky's constructivist thinking in the PAI learning system, it is hoped that students can be more actively involved in learning and be able to better internalize religious values in everyday life. Meanwhile in constructivism, the material object is empirical reality, namely knowledge built based on experience changing or dynamic humans. However, in Islamic teachings, experience as the formation of knowledge still refers to revelation. For example, in verse 137 of Surah Ali Imran, Allah invites humans to recognize various realities, both the realities of the past (history) and the realities faced today. From various facts observed, humans can build knowledge and draw lessons from these facts. (Nata, 2009)

Therefore, the constructivist approach in Islamic education is not something new, because before this theory was developed, the verses of the Koran had encouraged humans to develop their knowledge. The constructivist paradigm in Islam is a rational paradigm related to theology. This relationship paved the way for science for humanity. Because there are facts that cannot be understood and comprehended by reason, but can be believed through faith (Heriyanto, 2011)

The application of the constructivism paradigm in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) subjects offers three important aspects, not only like building a house, but also planting and caring for plants so that they grow well, so that they produce fruit that is useful for humans and a source of life for other creatures (Muthahhari, 2014)

The connection between Vygotsky's constructivist theory and PAI material was found in Muhidin's research entitled "Implementation of Vygotsky's Constructivist Theory in PAI Subjects at Yogyakarta Qur'an Science High School." The results of this research show that teachers start learning by giving greetings, giving alms, and praying, so that they can understand the students. Before starting the learning process, teachers give students 15 minutes to prepare physically and mentally.

The application of Vygotsky's constructivism theory in PAI learning certainly faces various obstacles and support factors. One of the inhibiting factors is students' lack of confidence in exploring knowledge through interaction and collaboration. However, a supporting factor that can support this theory is the clear connection between the methods, materials and media used in the learning process. Although learning methods and media can be demanding and involve students, Vygotsky's constructivism theory can be implemented more easily and produce effective results.

One of the things that can hinder the application of Vygotsky's constructivism theory in PAI subjects is time management skills. Applying a constructivist approach requires sufficient time for a more intense interaction and discussion process between teachers and students. However, important support from the role of the school principal plays a crucial role in encouraging and implementing Vygotsky's constructivism-based learning approach. With strong support from the school principal, teachers can be more enthusiastic and creative in implementing learning methods in accordance with this theory.

On the other hand, the education board's strategy can also be a supporting factor in implementing Vygotsky's constructivism theory in PAI subjects for students. A strategic location and good accessibility can encourage collaboration between teachers and students so that the teaching process becomes smoother. Although not identified in the table, other inhibiting factors such as lack of support from schools, limited resources, and the presence of social or cultural barriers in the school environment must also be considered, because they can influence the optimal application of Vygotsky's constructivist theory in PAI subjects.

### **Application of Constructivist Theory**

The application of Lev Vygotsky's constructivist theory in the world of education has become an important focus for developing more effective teaching methods that are directed at students' active experiences. This theory emphasizes the important role of social interaction and guidance in building students' understanding and knowledge. The concept that learning occurs through interaction with the social environment and the help of others has provided a new direction for developing inclusive and student-centered learning approaches. How can real efforts to solve problems in applying Vygotsky's constructivist theory be realized? Let's take a closer look.

To maximize the potential application of Vygotsky's constructivist theory, several strategic steps can be taken. Attending training or seminars will enable teachers to continue to improve their competence in designing

learning experiences that adhere to the principles of constructivism. Through this exercise, teachers will be given an idea of how to facilitate social interactions that support student understanding.

Collaboration and discussion between fellow teachers will allow for a greater exchange of ideas and experiences in the application of constructivism in the classroom. By understanding the challenges and solutions faced by fellow teachers, they can together create a learning environment that further enhances students' cognitive and social development.

Apart from that, motivating students to actively participate in the learning process is also important. Teachers should implement strategies that support students' intrinsic motivation, so that they feel they have an important role in building their own knowledge. Finally, investment in improving educational facilities and infrastructure is also important, because a comfortable and modern learning environment will create a context that supports constructivist teaching methods that focus on students.

## **Conclusion**

The results of the analysis of Vygotsky's constructivism theory and the Islamic teaching system show that the two are interrelated and relevant in the learning process. Islamic Religious Education (PAI) has long been of interest, it is nothing new, because before this theory was developed, verses in the Koran acknowledged that humans have the ability to develop knowledge. The constructivist paradigm in Islam is a rational paradigm related to theology. This relationship opens up space for human knowledge, because there are facts that cannot be known and understood by reason, but can be believed through belief.

Constructivism theory, which has its roots in the Latin word "construere" which means "to build," brings the understanding that the formation of knowledge is the result of an organizational process or the formation of oneself. In learning, it refers to the idea that individuals have the ability to self-direct and control their own cognition. This thinking emerged in response to previous views that linked learning to stimulus, response, and reinforcement.

Lev Vygotsky, a Russian scientist, played an important role in the development of the theory of Social Constructivism. He emphasized the relationship between humans and their environment, highlighting that humans are capable of changing the environment to suit their needs, rather than simply responding to them. This idea paved the way for the theory of Social Constructivism, which proposes that the formation of children's knowledge occurs through social interactions.

Vygotsky also emphasized the importance of language in learning, considering it the primary tool for thinking and communicating. Language facilitates the process of organizing thoughts and mediates social interaction. This forms the basis for the socio-cultural perspective often associated with Vygotsky.

Vygotsky's thinking highlights four important social factors in learning, including social interaction, the influence of the socio-cultural environment, the role of language in thinking, and the ability to discuss with more experienced people. This created the framework for Social Constructivism theory, emphasizing that learning is the result of social interaction, especially through discussions with those with more experience.

In the context of Islamic education, the application of Vygotsky's Constructivism requires the teacher's role as a mediator who helps students achieve deeper understanding through social interaction and effective use of language. It also requires wise time management, principal support, and educational strategies that support intense interaction between teachers and students.

In developing a learning system that is more effective and relevant in facing the challenges of the times, the application of Vygotsky Constructivism in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) offers an inclusive and student-centered approach. Teachers can act as mediators who help students internalize religious values in everyday life through social interactions and group discussions.

Supporting factors in applying this theory are continuous teacher training, collaboration between teachers, and student motivation to actively participate in learning. However, obstacles such as students' lack of self-confidence, time management, lack of support from schools, as well as social and cultural barriers also need to be overcome.

The application of Vygotsky's constructivism in Islamic education connects children's cognitive development with social interaction, the role of teachers as mediators, and the use of language as a tool of understanding. With the right strategy, this can increase understanding and appreciation of religious values in students' daily lives. This approach becomes relevant in creating a more effective learning environment and supporting students' cognitive and social development.

Apart from that, students must also be able to restructure an idea that has been given into a new idea or as their own understanding. This is a form of constructivism in learning. So that students can easily take part in discussions and do not hesitate to express opinions to the teacher or to their social environment.

Educators must be mediators who can accommodate and help students to provide ideas and concepts for the ongoing learning process. When students have the ability to filter knowledge and turn it into an understanding that can be narrated through concepts, students can easily learn the lesson and it is no longer doctrinal or only accepts right and wrong straight away.

With this ability, students can learn critically and not only know or understand knowledge dogmatically, but they can also digest the knowledge provided at school and in the social environment. And of course, with this ability, students are far from bad actions that are not in accordance with the context of Islamic knowledge because students are able to construct the knowledge provided.

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