



THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE LEARNING AND *MINI-RESEARCH* INTEGRATION PROGRAM IN IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF ISLAMIC EDUCATION: A STUDY AT THE ISLAMIC EDUCATION MANAGEMENT STUDY PROGRAM OF STAI DARUSSALAM KUNIR

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Abstract:

This study analyzes the effectiveness of the Learning and Mini-Research Integration Program in improving the quality of Islamic education in the Islamic Education Management Study Program of STAI Darussalam Kunir. It focuses on research management, program implementation, and supporting and inhibiting factors. Using a descriptive qualitative approach, data were collected through interviews, observations, and documentation from LPPM, study program leaders, students, staff, and partner school principals, then analyzed through reduction, display, and verification with triangulation and member checking. The results show that the program is quite effective. Research management is conducted through structured planning, organizing, implementation, and evaluation. The integration of learning and mini-research creates more contextual learning by linking theory with field data. The program also improves students' research skills, supports lecturers' tridharma, strengthens academic culture, and benefits partner institutions. The main obstacle is students' limited research competence, but this is supported by institutional policies, lecturer involvement, and partner networks. In conclusion, the program is an effective strategy to enhance the quality of Islamic education through research-based learning, improved student competence, and strengthened academic culture.

Keywords: *Program Effectiveness, Learning Integration, Mini-Research, Quality Of Islamic Education, Research Management*

INTRODUCTION

Islamic higher education is expected not only to provide instruction as a process of knowledge transfer, but also to foster an academic culture that promotes critical thinking, research skills, and data-driven problem-solving (Muhibbi et al., 2025). This requirement is particularly important for the Islamic Education Management (MPI) program, as graduates are expected not only to understand the theoretical concepts of educational management but also to

analyze the realities of Islamic educational institutions, identify problems, and formulate scientific solutions (Rodliyah, 2022). In this context, integrating learning with research activities has become a key strategy for strengthening the quality of academic processes at Islamic universities.

Normatively, higher education institutions have a “tridharma” mandate that encompasses education, research, and community service (Irwansyah et al., 2025). However, in practice, teaching and research often proceed separately (Amalia, 2024). Classes often focus on delivering material in the classroom, while research is treated as a separate activity that is not always connected to students’ learning experiences. This situation can create a gap between the theory studied in class and the empirical reality in the field, resulting in learning that is less contextual and students who are underprepared in research skills. In teacher education programs, including the MPI program, this situation poses a challenge because the field of study is closely related to the practical management of educational institutions, such as curriculum, leadership, organizational culture, supervision, and educational quality.

One relevant approach to bridging this gap is the integration of learning and mini-research within the framework of research-based learning (Karimah Nursaya’bani et al., 2025). Research-based learning positions research as an integral part of students’ learning experiences, so that students not only absorb theory but are also engaged in the processes of inquiry, data collection, analysis, and scientific reflection. Through mini-research projects, students learn to connect concepts of Islamic educational management with real-world phenomena in schools or madrasahs (Aryono & Fanggidae, 2025). On the other hand, instructors do not merely serve as conveyors of material but also as academic advisors who guide students through the research process. Thus, learning and research are not positioned as two separate activities but rather reinforce one another within an integrated academic framework.

From an educational management perspective, the effectiveness of research-based learning programs is determined not only by the implementation of student research activities but also by the quality of program management, which includes planning, organizing, implementation, and evaluation (Sholeh, 2023). A program is considered effective if it achieves its planned objectives, strengthens the learning process, and produces a tangible impact on academic quality. At the level of Islamic higher education institutions, educational quality is not only related to student learning outcomes but also to academic culture, research productivity, faculty quality, and the institution’s contributions to partner educational institutions. Therefore, the integration of learning and mini-research can be viewed as a strategy for strengthening the quality of Islamic education if it is managed systematically and has an impact on students, faculty, academic programs, and the institution.

A number of studies indicate that research-based learning can enhance student engagement, critical thinking skills, and academic literacy. Research on quality management in Islamic higher education institutions also confirms that institutional quality is significantly influenced by the ability to integrate learning, research, and community service into a single, mutually supportive academic system (Ramdhan & Siregar, 2019). Another study frames quality management in Islamic education as a process that requires the integration of planning, implementation, control, and continuous improvement (Basyit, 2018). These findings underscore that research-based learning innovations hold great potential for strengthening the quality of Islamic education. However, most studies still discuss research-based learning in general or focus on the quality management of Islamic education at the macro-institutional level. Studies that

specifically examine the effectiveness of programs integrating learning and mini-research within the context of the Islamic Education Management Study Program—particularly at locally-based private Islamic universities such as STAI Darussalam Kunir—remain relatively limited.

The Islamic Education Management Study Program at STAI Darussalam Kunir has developed the Learning Integration and Mini-Research Program as one of its strategies for strengthening academic quality. This program is implemented by integrating the lecture topics of each course with the themes of students' mini-research projects, which are designed based on the Semester Learning Plan (RPS). Students are guided to conduct mini-research at educational institutions relevant to the course material, while faculty members supervise the research design process, data collection, and discussion of results. This approach demonstrates a systematic effort to make research an integral part of learning while also serving as a means to strengthen the program's academic culture.

Given these circumstances, this study plays a crucial role in explaining how the effectiveness of the learning integration and mini-research program is implemented within the context of the Islamic Education Management (MPI) Study Program at STAI Darussalam Kunir. This study not only examines mini-research as a learning activity but also explores the dimensions of research management, the implementation of learning and research integration, as well as the program's obstacles and support mechanisms in improving the quality of Islamic education. Therefore, this study aims to: (1) analyze research management within the Islamic Education Management Study Program at STAI Darussalam Kunir; (2) describe the implementation of learning integration and mini-research in the lecture process; and (3) identify the obstacles and supports for the learning integration and mini-research program in improving the quality of Islamic education.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach to gain an in-depth understanding of the effectiveness of the Learning Integration and Mini-Research Program in improving the quality of Islamic education in the Islamic Education Management Program at STAI Darussalam Kunir. This approach allows the researcher to describe the phenomenon holistically based on ongoing experiences and practices without manipulating variables (Imanulloh, 2020), so that the reality of the program can be understood naturally within the context of the campus and partner educational institutions.

The research was conducted at the Islamic Education Management (MPI) Study Program at STAI Darussalam Kunir as well as several partner educational institutions, namely MAN 2 Subang, SMAN 1 Pagaden, SMP PUI Haurgeulis, MA Al Irsyad Anjatan, MA Al Islah Jatireja, and MA Tarbiyatul Mutaallimin Pagaden. Informants were selected through purposive sampling, including members of the Research and Community Service Office (LPPM), the Head of the Study Program, course instructors, students, educational staff, as well as school principals or representatives from partner institutions. The number of informants was adjusted as needed until data saturation was reached.

The research focuses on research management, the implementation of integrated learning and mini-research projects, as well as program barriers and support mechanisms for improving the quality of Islamic education. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, non-participant observation, and a review of various relevant academic documents. The researcher served as the primary instrument, aided by interview guidelines, observation protocols, and document analysis guidelines.

Data analysis was conducted interactively through data condensation, data presentation, and drawing conclusions. Data validity was ensured through triangulation of sources and techniques, member checks, thorough observation, and an audit trail. The research was carried out systematically through the stages of preparation, data collection, analysis, verification, and report writing.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings show that the Learning and Mini-Research Integration Program in the Islamic Education Management Study Program of STAI Darussalam Kunir has been implemented quite effectively and contributes to improving the quality of Islamic education. The effectiveness of the program can be understood from three main aspects: research management, the implementation of learning–mini-research integration, and the supporting and inhibiting factors that influence the program’s contribution to educational quality.

Research Management in the Islamic Education Management Study Program

The first finding indicates that research management in the Islamic Education Management Study Program has been carried out through the main managerial functions of planning, organizing, implementation, and evaluation. At the planning stage, mini-research activities are not conducted incidentally, but are directed by the institutional research roadmap prepared by the Research and Community Service Institute (LPPM). This shows that the program is placed within the academic policy framework of the institution rather than merely as a classroom assignment. In management terms, such planning is important because program effectiveness is closely related to clarity of objectives, alignment with institutional goals, and the availability of a formal framework to guide implementation.

The organizing function is reflected in the integration of mini-research themes with course topics and in the division of roles among academic actors. LPPM functions at the policy and research-roadmap level, the study program coordinates academic integration, lecturers design and supervise mini-research activities, students carry out fieldwork, and partner schools or madrasahs provide the empirical context of the research. This structure indicates that the program is supported by collective academic work rather than depending solely on individual lecturer initiative. It also strengthens the argument that effective research-based learning requires not only pedagogical design but also institutional organization and academic networking.

In the implementation stage, lecturers prepare the research design, theoretical framework, and instruments, while students conduct interviews, observations, and document studies in relevant educational institutions. The mini-research findings are then brought back to the classroom for presentation and discussion. This pattern confirms that mini-research functions both as a field-based research activity and as a contextual learning strategy. In other words, the program narrows the gap between theory and practice by allowing students to encounter real educational problems and then reinterpret them in academic discussion (Syahri, 2023).

Evaluation is conducted at two levels. At the micro level, mini-research



Findings are reviewed in class through presentations and lecturer feedback. At the macro level, the study program and LPPM evaluate the alignment of research themes with the roadmap and semester lesson plan, the implementation of student mini-research, and the contribution of the program to academic culture. This layered evaluation suggests that the program does not stop at implementation but includes a mechanism for reflection and continuous improvement. Therefore, the effectiveness of the program is strongly supported by structured research management, which becomes the institutional foundation of the learning and mini-research integration model.

The Integration of Learning and Mini-Research in the Lecture Process

The second finding shows that the integration of learning and mini-research has made the lecture process more contextual, empirical, and reflective. Mini-research is linked directly to course topics, so students do not only study educational management concepts from lectures and textbooks, but also investigate how those concepts are practiced in schools and madrasahs. This integration transforms classroom learning from a largely theoretical process into a research-based learning experience.

In practice, the integration begins with the preparation of the Semester Learning Plan (RPS), in which lecturers connect course themes with mini-research assignments. Students are then guided to conduct small-scale field research in educational institutions that match the course topic. After collecting data, they prepare reports and present their findings in class. This process creates a cycle in which theory is used to frame field investigation, while field findings are used to enrich classroom discussion. Such a pattern reflects the core idea of research-based learning, namely that knowledge is built not only through the transmission of concepts but also through inquiry, evidence, and reflection.

This model is particularly relevant to the Islamic Education Management Study Program because its academic focus is closely related to the real management of educational institutions, including curriculum, leadership, school culture, supervision, and quality improvement (Ansori et al., 2023). Through mini-research, students learn to see that these concepts are not abstract academic categories but analytical tools for understanding actual educational practices. The findings therefore support the view that mini-research is not merely an additional assignment, but a pedagogical strategy that strengthens conceptual understanding, methodological skills, and critical thinking.

Another important finding is that mini-research results are not treated as

isolated written reports; instead, they are reused in classroom learning. The field findings become materials for presentation, debate, reflection, and comparison with theory. This makes classroom discussion more dynamic and data-based, while also training students to construct arguments from empirical evidence. As a result, the integration of learning and mini-research contributes not only to students' research competence but also to the development of a more dialogical and academically rigorous learning culture.

Supporting and Inhibiting Factors and Their Contribution to the Quality of Islamic Education

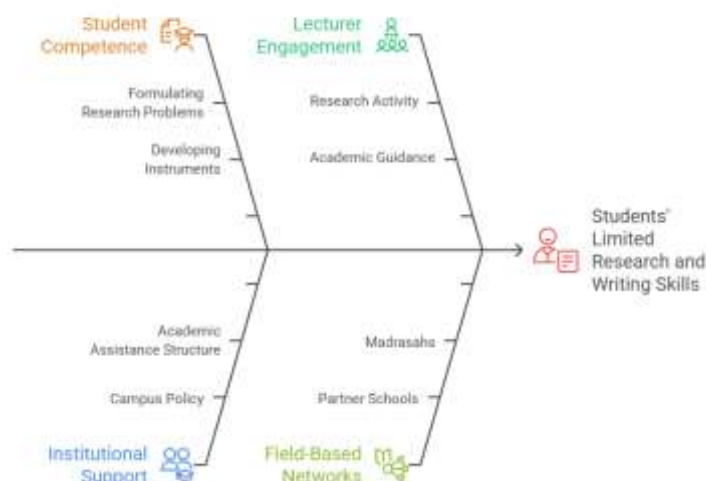
The third finding concerns the factors that support and hinder the implementation of the program, as well as the program's contribution to the quality of Islamic education. The main obstacle identified in this study is students' limited competence in conducting research and writing scientific reports. This limitation appears in several areas, including formulating research problems, developing instruments, organizing data, and presenting findings systematically. This indicates that while the program has pedagogical value, its effectiveness still depends on students' methodological readiness and academic writing skills.

However, the existence of such obstacles does not negate the effectiveness of the program. Instead, it shows that the program requires stronger scaffolding, especially in the form of research-methodology training, writing workshops, and more intensive supervision. In this sense, the challenge faced by students should not be interpreted simply as a weakness, but as an indication that research-based learning must be supported by a more systematic academic assistance structure (Rahmawati et al., 2025).

On the other hand, the program is strengthened by several supporting factors. First, there is institutional support in the form of a campus policy that places the integration of learning and research as part of the institution's flagship academic program. Second, lecturers who are active in research provide strong academic guidance and help students connect theory with field practice. Third, the availability of partner schools and madrasahs gives students access to authentic research settings. These factors confirm that the sustainability of research-based learning depends not only on student participation but also on institutional commitment, lecturer engagement, and the availability of field-based academic networks.

In terms of its contribution to the quality of Islamic education, the program has a multidimensional impact. For students, it strengthens research skills, critical thinking, and contextual understanding of educational issues. For lecturers, it supports the integration of teaching and research as part of the *tridharma* of higher education. For the study program, it reinforces academic culture and provides a stronger basis for research-oriented learning. For partner institutions, mini-research findings offer reflections and insights on educational practices in their own settings. Therefore, the effectiveness of the program can be seen not only from the successful implementation of mini-research activities, but also from its contribution to building a research-based academic culture and improving the quality of Islamic education at multiple levels (KURNIAWAN et al., 2024).

Enhancing Quality of Islamic Education through Research-Based Learning



Synthesis of Findings

Overall, the findings confirm that the Learning and Mini-Research Integration Program in the Islamic Education Management Study Program of STAI Darussalam Kunir is an effective academic strategy. Its effectiveness lies in the combination of structured research management, contextual and research-based learning practices, and institutional support that enables the program to generate benefits for students, lecturers, the study program, and partner schools. Although the program still faces challenges related to students' research competence, it has demonstrated strong potential as a model for strengthening academic culture and improving the quality of Islamic education in Islamic higher education institutions.

CONCLUSION

This study shows that the Learning Integration and Mini-Research Program within the Islamic Education Management Study Program at STAI Darussalam Kunir has been quite effective in improving the quality of Islamic education. The program's effectiveness is evident in three main findings, which also address the research focus.

First, from the perspective of research management, this program has been managed through relatively structured management functions, namely planning, organizing, implementation, and evaluation. During the planning stage, the mini-research program is guided by a research roadmap developed by the Research and Community Service Institute (LPPM) and integrated with the Semester Learning Plan (RPS) for each course. During the organizing stage, the themes of the student mini-research projects were aligned with learning themes, accompanied by a division of roles involving the LPPM, the academic program, faculty members, students, and partner educational institutions. During the implementation stage, faculty members were responsible for preparing the research design, theoretical framework, and instruments, while students conducted the mini-research through interviews, observations, and document reviews at relevant educational institutions. During the evaluation phase, the results of the mini-research are reviewed at the classroom level with faculty and students and evaluated more broadly at the academic program and institutional levels.

Second, regarding the implementation of learning integration and mini-research, this study found that the program has successfully linked course material to empirical data collected by students in the field. This integration

makes learning more contextual, dialogic, and grounded in scientific experience. Students not only study the theory of Islamic education management in the classroom but also test it through mini-research at schools and madrasahs. The results of the field research are then brought back to the classroom to be presented, discussed, and analyzed collectively, making the learning process more dynamic, reflective, and relevant to the realities of Islamic education.

Third, regarding the program's barriers and supporting factors, this study indicates that the primary barrier lies in students' limited ability to conduct research and prepare scientific reports. These limitations include the ability to formulate research questions, design research instruments, analyze data, and write research reports systematically. However, these obstacles are offset by several supporting factors, namely campus policies that prioritize the integration of learning and research as a flagship program, the active involvement of faculty members in research, and the availability of a network of partner educational institutions serving as sites for students' mini-research projects.

In substance, the effectiveness of this program is reflected in its impact on the quality of Islamic education. For students, this program strengthens research skills, critical thinking abilities, and a contextual understanding of course material. For faculty members, this program supports the implementation of the three pillars of higher education through the integration of teaching and research. For academic programs and institutions, this program contributes to strengthening academic culture, scientific productivity, and institutional quality development. As for partner schools and madrasahs, students' mini-research projects provide input and insights into the educational challenges they face. Thus, the Learning and Mini-Research Integration Program serves not only as a learning innovation but also as an academic strategy that contributes to strengthening the quality of Islamic education more broadly.

This study still focuses on the effectiveness of the learning and mini-research integration program within the context of a single academic program and employs a descriptive qualitative approach. Therefore, further research is recommended to explore several directions. First, conducting comparative research among study programs or Islamic universities that implement research-based learning models. Second, developing mixed-methods or quantitative approaches to measure the program's impact on specific variables, such as students' research skills, the quality of learning, or academic culture.

Overall, this study confirms that the integration of learning and mini-research can be an effective strategy for fostering research-based learning, strengthening academic culture, and improving the quality of Islamic education in higher education institutions. The success of this program is determined not only by students' research activities but also by structured program management, faculty involvement, institutional support, and the sustainability of academic follow-up on the results of the mini-research. Therefore, the development of programs integrating learning and mini-research needs to continue systematically so that they can serve as a model for the sustainable improvement of the quality of Islamic education within the Islamic Education Management Study Program and other Islamic higher education institutions.

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