

# The CORE Learning Model (Connecting, Organizing, Reflecting, and Extending): How Does Its Implementation Affect Learning Outcomes at the C5 Level?

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## ABSTRACT

This study examines the effectiveness of the CORE (Connecting, Organizing, Reflecting, and Extending) learning model in enhancing students' evaluative cognitive skills (C5) in Islamic Religious Education (IRE) at the junior high school level. The gap between the need for teaching that fosters higher-order thinking skills and the current teaching practices, which are still dominated by a lecture-based approach, provides the backdrop for this research. A quantitative approach with a Posttest-Only Control Group design was used, involving two classes selected through cluster random sampling. The analysis results show a significant difference in evaluative abilities between the experimental group and the control group, confirming that the CORE model has a positive impact on facilitating critical thinking and argument-based decision-making. These findings provide strong empirical support to reinforce the constructivist approach in IRE teaching and recommend expanding the application of the CORE model to more diverse contexts and cognitive domains in the future.

### Keywords

CORE Learning Model; C5 Cognitive Level; Higher-Order Thinking; Islamic Education; Learning Outcomes

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Ideally, learning in Islamic Religious Education (IRE) should not only emphasize cognitive attainment, but also foster the development of values, attitudes, and higher-order thinking skills (Pranajaya et al., 2023). However, numerous studies indicate that the implementation of IRE in schools remains dominated by lecture-based instruction, with limited reflective activities and minimal student engagement in connecting concepts to real-life experiences. This condition results in weak conceptual understanding and suboptimal learning outcomes, particularly at the intermediate to higher cognitive levels (Masruri et al., 2024; Syamsuddin et al., 2024). The CORE learning model (Connecting, Organizing, Reflecting, Extending) serves as a constructivist approach that emphasizes learners' active

engagement in linking prior knowledge with new concepts, systematically organizing information, engaging in reflective thinking, and extending their understanding through direct application (Anisah & Maratussalihah, 2023; Nasrulloh et al., 2022).

The literature indicates that the CORE model has been proven to enhance learning outcomes across various disciplines, including mathematics, science, economics, and history. Numerous studies have demonstrated its effectiveness (Crismono, 2022; Isnaini, 2024; Melinda & Dewi, 2021; Siswanto et al., 2023; Nurbillah & Nuriadin, 2022). They reported significant improvements in students' conceptual understanding, motivation, and learning engagement. Nevertheless, most of these studies positioned CORE within the context of exact or socio-economic subjects, and many even integrated it with specific digital media. Consequently, empirical evidence regarding the effectiveness of CORE in value- and spirituality-based subjects such as IRE remains limited, making it difficult to illustrate how the CORE syntax operates within religious learning contexts that are rich in cognitive and affective dimensions (Nasrulloh et al., 2024).

Another limitation evident in previous studies is the absence of a focus on integrating religious character values, the insufficient exploration of students' reflective aspects, and the scarcity of research conducted in public-school settings, which typically exhibit greater heterogeneity (Amiq et al., 2025). In the context of SMP Negeri 36 Bandar Lampung, the preliminary findings indicate that students continue to experience difficulties at certain cognitive levels, particularly in evaluative skills (C5). Furthermore, classroom interactions tend to be one-directional, the material is not contextually connected to students' real-life experiences, and reflective activities are scarcely implemented. These conditions reveal a clear gap between the ideal expectations of IRE learning and the actual practices in the field, thereby underscoring the urgency of implementing constructivism-based instructional innovations (Sari et al., 2024).

The uniqueness of this study lies in the pure application of the CORE model in IRE at the evaluative cognitive level (C5) in general schools, without the use of additional digital media. This study fills a gap in the literature that is limited in terms of the effectiveness of the CORE model in enhancing evaluative abilities in this context. Focusing on the topic 'Emulating Productivity in Creative Works and the Spirit of Literacy during the Golden Age of Islam in the Abbasid Era (750–1258 CE),' this material integrates knowledge, values, and character internalization (Muttaqo et al., 2025; Yuliana et al., 2021). Unlike previous studies, this research uses the CORE syntax not only to reinforce conceptual understanding but also to encourage students in moral reflection and to connect religious values with their everyday lives. This approach provides a new perspective on how a constructivist model can be applied in values-based learning and how the stages of connecting, organizing, reflecting, and extending can aid in the deeper internalization of religious attitudes (Husna et al., 2024).

Conceptually, the novelty of this study lies in the integration of the CORE model into IRE instruction at public junior high schools, with a particular emphasis on intermediate-level cognitive outcomes, especially evaluative skills. It also offers an empirical contribution regarding the model's effectiveness in improving student learning outcomes. Accordingly, the primary objective of this research is to analyze the influence of the CORE learning model on the Islamic Education learning outcomes of eighth-grade students at SMP Negeri 36 Bandar Lampung, while simultaneously providing an empirical foundation for developing more interactive, reflective, and contextual IRE instructional strategies. Thus, this study is

expected to contribute to the expansion of IRE pedagogical scholarship and to offer a more relevant instructional model option for teachers in enhancing the quality of learning at the secondary school level.

## 2. METHOD

This study was conducted during the first semester of the 2025/2026 academic year at SMP Negeri 36 Bandar Lampung, employing a quantitative approach with a Posttest-Only Control Group Design. The Posttest-Only Control Group design used in this study was chosen because it allows for measuring outcomes after the intervention, without the bias of pretest measurements that might affect the results. This design is considered more appropriate given the limitations of time and resources. Although a pretest-posttest design could provide a more comprehensive view of changes, the Posttest-Only design remains relevant as it allows for a direct comparison between the experimental and control groups after the intervention. To ensure equivalence between the experimental and control groups prior to the intervention, participants were selected based on similarities in academic background and prior achievements. This ensures that any differences in outcomes found in this study can be directly attributed to the intervention, rather than uncontrolled factors, thereby enhancing the internal validity of the study.

The research subjects consisted of all eighth-grade students, from which two classes were selected using a cluster random sampling technique. Class VIII B was designated as the experimental group and received instruction through the CORE learning model, whereas Class VIII H served as the control group and was taught using a conventional model. Following the treatment, both groups were administered only a final test (posttest) to examine differences in learning outcomes between students who were taught using the CORE model and those who did not receive the treatment.

The research instrument consisted of multiple-choice tests developed based on the assessment blueprint for IRE learning outcomes on the material '*Emulating Productivity in Work and the Spirit of Literacy during the Golden Age of Islam in the Abbasid Era (750–1258 CE)*', specifically targeting the cognitive level C5. The instrument was subsequently piloted to examine the quality of its items. Based on the validity test results, nine items were deemed valid and one item invalid; therefore, only the valid items were used for data collection. Reliability testing was conducted using the Cronbach's Alpha formula, and the results indicated that the instrument fell within the reliable category ( $\alpha > r\text{-table}$ ), confirming its appropriateness as a measure of learning outcomes. The instrument was then administered to both classes to assess learning outcomes following the completion of the instructional process.

The implementation of the CORE learning model in the experimental class was carried out through four main stages. First, *Connecting*, in which the teacher initiates the lesson by linking the new material to students' prior knowledge or experiences. Second, *Organizing*, where the teacher guides students in structuring and categorizing information through focused discussions. Third, *Reflecting*, during which students engage in reflection on their understanding through question-and-answer activities or brief written responses. Finally, *Extending*, which involves expanding students' comprehension by assigning individual tasks or applying the concepts in alternative contexts (Suminar et al., 2024). The entire instructional sequence was carried out in accordance with the time allocation stated in the

lesson plan (RPP) across three meetings. Upon completion of the treatment, the researcher administered a posttest to both classes and analyzed the differences in learning outcomes using a t-test to determine whether the implementation of the CORE learning model had a significant effect.

### 3. 1. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

#### 3.1. Results

##### Normality test

The normality test was conducted using the Shapiro–Wilk procedure because the number of respondents was fewer than 100. The results are presented in Table 1.

**Tabel 1.** Normality test results (Shapiro–Wilk)

	Group	Kolmogorov-Smirnov <sup>a</sup>			Shapiro-Wilk		
		Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
Data	1.00	.267	31	.000	.901	31	.070
	2.00	.167	31	.027	.994	31	.085

a. Lilliefors Significance Correction

Based on Table 1, the significance value (Sig.) for the control group is 0.000, while the significance value for the experimental group is 0.005. Because both values are less than 0.05, it can be concluded that the data in both groups are not normally distributed.

##### Homogeneity test

The homogeneity test was performed using Levene's test (Table 2).

**Tabel 2.** Homogeneity test results

		Levene	df1	df2	Sig.
		Statistic			
Data	Based on Mean	2.287	1	60	.136
	Based on Median	1.682	1	60	.200
	Based on Median and with adjusted df	1.682	1	58.007	.200
	Based on trimmed mean	2.227	1	60	.141

Based on Table 2, the Sig. value obtained is 0.136, which is greater than 0.05. Therefore, the data have homogeneous variances.

##### Independent sample t-test

Because the variances are homogeneous, the independent sample t-test was carried out. The results are shown in Table 3.

The significance value (Sig. 2-tailed) obtained is 0.036, which is less than 0.05. Thus,  $H_0$  is rejected and  $H_1$  is accepted. This result indicates that the CORE learning model has a significant effect on students' learning outcomes at the C5 cognitive level.

**Tabel 3.** Independent sample t-test results

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means			
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2- tailed)	Upper
Data	Equal variances assumed	2.287	0.136	2.143	60	0.036	1.24748
	Equal variances not assumed			2.143	58.303	0.036	1.24784

### 3.2. Discussion

The findings of this study indicate that the CORE learning model exerts a significant influence on students' learning outcomes at the C5 cognitive level, thereby confirming the acceptance of the alternative hypothesis ( $H_1$ ). This result affirms that the constructivist approach grounded in the CORE syntax is capable of shifting the orientation of learning from mere information transmission to the development of more complex cognitive structures. The C5 level requires the ability to evaluate, decide, and formulate judgments based on explicit criteria; competencies which can only be cultivated through learning processes that engage reflective and analytical thinking (Ragab et al., 2024). Thus, the superior performance of the experimental group compared to the control group demonstrates that the CORE model substantively supports the development of students' evaluative abilities.

The connecting stage in the CORE model plays a crucial role as the initial foundation for activating cognitive schemas. Linking prior knowledge with new information not only establishes continuity of understanding, but also enhances students' mental readiness to engage in critical evaluation (Hartiningrum & Maarif, 2025; Simanjuntak et al., 2023). Previous studies on constructivism-based learning have indicated that activating prior knowledge is a prerequisite for the emergence of higher-order thinking skills. The findings of this research reinforce this perspective, demonstrating that evaluative abilities are more likely to develop when students are able to contextualize concepts through authentic experiences (Prasasty et al., 2025; Putri et al., 2025; Rozy, 2025). This explains why the students in the experimental class demonstrated sharper evaluative abilities in identifying criteria, weighing arguments, and drawing logical conclusions.

The organizing stage provides a strategic contribution to the enhancement of C5 learning outcomes, as this process encourages students to structure, categorize, and interrelate information in a systematic manner (Nisa et al., 2021; Sari & Waluya, 2023; Sudane et al., 2023). Evaluation cannot be carried out optimally without a knowledge structure that is concise, coherent, and hierarchical. In this study, students' ability to construct logical judgments appeared to improve alongside the provision of information-organization activities, such as concept mapping, argument classification, or the development of evaluation indicators (Muslim et al., 2024). These findings indicate that the process of organizing knowledge constitutes a critical cognitive step in preparing students for more complex evaluative activities, thereby significantly enhancing their C5 scores (Hidayati, 2024; Rhomadan & Khairuddin, 2025).

The reflecting stage serves as a critical component that directly correlates with students' high achievement at the C5 cognitive level. Reflection enables students to reassess their understanding, identify weaknesses in their arguments, and revise their reasoning based on logic and evidence (Adyan et al., 2025; Kurniasari et al., 2025). In the context of IRE learning, reflection is not only cognitive in nature but also encompasses introspective dimensions, which strengthen students' ability to examine values, textual evidence, and moral principles. The findings of this study indicate that the intensity of reflective activities within the CORE model enhances students' capacity to provide more mature, consistent, and rationally supported judgments. This represents an achievement that is rarely observed in conventional learning environments, which tend to lack metacognitive engagement (Savitri et al., 2025).

The extending stage completes the sequence of the CORE learning model by providing opportunities for application in new contexts or problematic situations. This phase directly assesses students' evaluative abilities." (Hajriyanto et al., 2023; Nurjanah et al., 2024; Rasmita et al., 2020). When students are asked to evaluate a case or situation based on the principles they have learned, they engage all components of C5: identifying criteria, comparing arguments, and making decisions. The findings indicate that students in the experimental class were able to provide more logical and relevant justifications when confronted with new problems (Harahap, 2022; Rohmah & Ulya, 2021). This improvement indicates that the CORE model not only reinforces understanding but also enhances the transfer of learning, an essential aspect in higher-order assessment (Crismono, 2022).

The novelty of this study lies in its exclusive focus on assessing the C5 cognitive domain within the context of implementing the CORE model in Islamic Religious Education. Unlike previous studies, which predominantly evaluate basic cognitive achievements or general learning outcomes, this research examines evaluative skills as an indicator of value- and morality-based learning quality. Moreover, the study demonstrates that the CORE model can be applied effectively without digital media support, highlighting the intrinsic strengths of the constructivist approach in fostering higher-order thinking skills in normative disciplines (Bariroh & Sholihah, 2022; Parnawi, 2023). This contribution broadens the theoretical understanding of the effectiveness of reflection- and concept-organization-based learning models in enhancing evaluative capabilities.

The practical implications of this study are extensive for the future of education. First, IRE teachers can adopt the CORE syntax to enhance students' evaluative capacities, particularly in topics that require critical thinking and value-based decision making. Second, this study provides insights for the development of curricula that emphasize active-reflective learning to achieve higher-order learning outcomes. Third, these findings open avenues for further research examining the effects of the CORE model on other dimensions, such as character development, spiritual literacy, and problem-solving skills. Consequently, this study not only contributes to the empirical evidence regarding the effectiveness of the CORE model but also offers new directions for pedagogical innovation in religious education at the secondary school level.

This study confirms that the CORE learning model (Connecting, Organizing, Reflecting, and Extending) has a significant impact on enhancing students' learning outcomes at the C5 cognitive level in Islamic Religious Education at SMP Negeri 36 Bandar Lampung. The improvement in evaluative skills observed in the experimental group indicates that the CORE syntax effectively facilitates higher-order thinking processes

through the activation of prior knowledge, systematic organization of information, guided reflective activities, and the application of concepts in novel contexts. These findings provide empirical evidence that constructivist learning is not only effective for foundational cognitive domains but is also highly relevant for developing evaluative competencies, which constitute a core aspect of 21st-century learning outcomes (Ramadannita, 2023).

#### **4. CONCLUSION**

The impact of this study is reflected in the enhancement of the quality of the learning process, whereby students become more analytical, reflective, and capable of making judgments based on logical reasoning. Practically, this research provides significant implications for IRE teachers to adopt instructional models that emphasize reflective activities and the construction of meaning, enabling students to optimally develop their evaluative abilities. The study also offers a theoretical contribution by reinforcing the evidence that the CORE model can be effectively implemented in value- and spirituality-based subjects without the need for additional digital media support.

However, this study has several limitations that need to be considered. The focus of the research, which only evaluates cognitive abilities at the C5 level, hinders the generalization of the CORE model's effects to other cognitive levels (C1–C6). Additionally, the relatively short duration of the intervention and the limited sample size, confined to only two classes, may affect the depth of students' evaluative skill development. Lastly, the scope of the study, limited to a single public school, does not allow for an analysis of the variation in students' social, cultural, or initial ability characteristics in a more diverse context.

Given these limitations, further research is recommended to explore the effects of the CORE model on other cognitive levels, particularly C4 (analyzing) and C6 (creating), to gain a more comprehensive understanding of its effectiveness. Future studies could also expand the context to schools with different characteristics, extend the intervention duration, or integrate digital media to test the potential synergy between the CORE model and technology in enhancing higher-order thinking skills. Thus, future research holds the potential to generate a more adaptive, innovative, and contextually relevant learning model aligned with the demands of IRE in the modern era.

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