

RECONSTRUCTING MEANINGFUL TRANSFORMATIVE ISLAMIC RELIGIOUS EDUCATION LEARNING AT SMP NEGERI 2 YOGYAKARTA

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the meaningfulness of Islamic Religious Education (IRE) learning, which tends to emphasize content mastery and cognitive achievement over religious reflection and value internalization. The study aims to analyze the construction of meaning in IRE learning and formulate directions for reconstructing a more integrative and transformative approach at SMP Negeri 2 Yogyakarta. A qualitative approach with a case study design was employed. Participants comprised two IRE teachers, Dwi Budiningsih and M. Gioaldi Afriadi, and six students purposively selected as two representatives from each of Grades VII, VIII, and IX based on their active participation in classroom learning and religious activities. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, classroom observations, and analysis of curriculum and instructional documents. Data analysis involved coding mapping, data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification based on Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, with qualitative interpretation informed by Creswell's principles of qualitative case study research. The findings indicate that content-oriented instruction and cognitive assessment remain dominant, limiting reflection, value internalization, and connections between learning and students' lived experiences. Therefore, IRE reconstruction requires a contextual, reflective, integrative, and student-centered approach.

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INTRODUCTION

Islamic Religious Education (IRE) at the junior secondary level is not merely intended to develop students' religious knowledge but also to support their ability to understand, internalize, and practice Islamic values in everyday life. This orientation is consistent with the position of religious education within Indonesia's national education system, which emphasizes understanding, internalization, and practice of religious values as important components of education (Government of the Republic of Indonesia, 2007). Within the current curriculum framework for primary and secondary education, the challenge of IRE is therefore not limited to delivering and assessing subject content but also

concerns how learning experiences become meaningful to students' lives (Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology, 2024). Meaningful IRE learning consequently needs to be understood as learning that connects religious knowledge with reflection, lived experience, values, and students' everyday practices (Shobihah et al., 2024).

In this study, meaningfulness in IRE is not equated with psychological "spiritual emptiness," nor is students' religiosity assessed through normative assumptions. Meaningfulness is operationally understood through four analytical indicators: the connection between IRE content and students' lived experiences, opportunities for religious reflection, the process of value internalization in students' meaning-making and behavior, and student engagement in learning (Hsbollah & Hassan, 2022; Nafisah et al., 2024). Meaningfulness is also closely related to students' active involvement in learning, as engagement provides an observable dimension through which students participate, respond, and interact with Islamic Religious Education activities (Rahmah et al., 2024). Conversely, a problem of meaningfulness refers to a condition in which learning remains largely centered on content mastery and cognitive achievement, making the connection between religious knowledge, personal reflection, and everyday life less visible in students' learning experiences. This conceptual clarification is important because the term "crisis of meaning" should function as an interpretive category derived from empirical evidence rather than as a predetermined normative judgment.

Recent empirical scholarship indicates that meaningfulness has become an important concern in IRE. Recent empirical scholarship indicates that meaningfulness has become an important concern in IRE. Recent evidence also demonstrates that meaningfulness in IRE has been examined through innovative learning environments, including augmented reality, with meaningful learning associated with problem-solving, critical thinking, and learning motivation (Albab et al., 2025). Shobihah et al. (2025) found that meaningful learning in IRE can be developed by integrating students' experiences with classroom learning, while Ibrohim et al. (2025) demonstrated that meaningful IRE requires connections between instructional content, students' experiences, and reflective processes. Another recent study found that linking religious lessons with lived experience, reflection, and religious practice can strengthen students' worship awareness and their understanding of religious values (Muntaha et al., 2025). These findings suggest that meaningfulness is not merely an additional pedagogical feature but is related to how students connect religious knowledge with the lives they actually experience (Shobihah et al., 2024; Ibrohim et al., 2025; Hermawan et al., 2025).

However, the issue should not be reduced to the assumption that IRE is uniformly formalistic or dominated by memorization. Research on IRE assessment within the Merdeka Curriculum shows that learning practices can incorporate cognitive, affective, and psychomotor dimensions through authentic assessment, feedback, and instructional adjustment (Aisyah et al., 2024). Similarly, research on value internalization demonstrates that religious values can be connected with students' everyday lives, although the process remains influenced by personal and school contexts (Aulia & Nafiisah, 2023; Putra & Hafiz, 2024; Sihotang et al., 2025).

Therefore, the present study does not seek to prove that IRE fails to develop students' spirituality. Instead, it examines more specifically how meaningfulness is constructed, constrained, and strengthened within actual school-based learning practices (Uroidli et al., 2024).

The development of reflective approaches further supports the need to understand IRE as an experience that extends beyond information transfer. Recent research on spiritually reflective IRE indicates that reflective activities can be associated with spiritual awareness, gratitude, emotional regulation, and religious commitment (Al Akhyar, 2026). Likewise, research on experience-based IRE suggests that direct engagement and reflection can move students' understanding of religion from predominantly textual knowledge toward interpreting religion as a lived reality (Jenuri et al., 2026). These findings indicate an emerging shift in IRE research from asking "what students learn" toward examining "how religious knowledge is interpreted, experienced, and connected to everyday life." (Nisak, 2025).

Nevertheless, the current state of the art reveals several limitations. First, studies of meaningful learning often focus on particular pedagogical practices or instructional strategies and therefore do not always explain how meaningfulness is shaped through the interaction of teaching orientation, students' experiences, and instructional materials (Hsbollah & Hassan, 2022; Ibrohim et al., 2025; Albab et al., 2025). Second, research on value internalization frequently emphasizes particular religious practices or outcomes, while the process through which students negotiate meaning during classroom learning remains less explored (Abrori et al., 2024; Anhar et al., 2025). Third, studies of assessment have demonstrated the importance of integrating cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains, but they do not always explain how reflective and spiritual experiences emerge within students' IRE learning (Wijaya et al., 2023; Aisyah et al., 2024). Fourth, although research on meaningful IRE in Indonesia is growing, public junior secondary schools still require context-specific case studies that examine the relationship between instructional practices and students' experiences of meaningful learning (Hasanah & Permana, 2025; Ibrohim et al., 2025; Amin et al., 2025).

This research gap is particularly important because meaningful learning is context dependent. What is intended in curriculum and instructional documents may not necessarily be experienced or interpreted in the same way by teachers and students. Qualitative inquiry is therefore necessary to examine the relationship between what teachers plan, what occurs in classrooms, and how students interpret their learning experiences. A case study design enables researchers to examine a clearly bounded case in depth while maintaining attention to its natural context (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Through this approach, meaningfulness in IRE can be examined not as an isolated variable but as a phenomenon shaped by pedagogical practices, classroom interaction, learning materials, assessment, and students' experiences.

The present study focuses on IRE learning at SMP Negeri 2 Yogyakarta. This bounded case provides an opportunity to investigate meaningfulness in depth

within a public junior secondary school while incorporating the perspectives of teachers and students across three grade levels. The participants consist of two IRE teachers, Dwi Budiningsih and M. Gioaldi Afriadi, and six students purposively selected as two representatives from each of Grades VII, VIII, and IX. Student selection considers active participation in IRE learning and religious activities, allowing the study to incorporate students' perspectives alongside teachers' accounts. The study does not seek to generalize the findings to all junior secondary schools in Yogyakarta; rather, it aims to generate contextual and analytical understanding of how meaningful IRE learning is constructed within a specific school setting.

Methodologically, the study employs coding mapping to identify patterns of meaning across interviews, classroom observations, and instructional documents. Data analysis follows the framework of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014), involving data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification, with coding used to organize units of meaning into categories and themes. This framework is appropriate for qualitative inquiry because it provides a systematic pathway from empirical data to patterns and interpretations, while the case study design maintains the connection between findings and their contextual setting (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Accordingly, the analysis is not intended to test causal relationships but to explain patterns of practices and experiences that shape the meaningfulness of IRE learning.

The novelty of this study lies in constructing an analytical account of meaningful IRE through the relationship among four dimensions: instructional orientation, students' reflective experiences, value internalization, and the connection between religious content and everyday life. Unlike studies that primarily evaluate particular instructional methods or specific religious outcomes, this study brings teachers' practices and students' experiences together within one analytical framework to examine how meaning is constructed and where limitations emerge. Its contribution is therefore not a causal model or population-level generalization but a contextual explanation of pedagogical processes through which IRE can move beyond content mastery toward more reflective and transformative learning experiences (Shobihah et al., 2024; Ibrohim et al., 2025).

Based on this argument, the study addresses two research questions: (1) How is meaningfulness in IRE learning constructed through instructional practices at SMP Negeri 2 Yogyakarta? and (2) How can instructional practices, reflection, value internalization, and connections between religious content and students' lived experiences provide a basis for reconstructing IRE learning toward a more integrative and transformative approach? The study aims to analyze the construction of meaningfulness in IRE and formulate directions for reconstruction based on empirical evidence from teachers, students, classroom observations, and instructional documents. The study is expected to contribute theoretically to scholarship on meaningful IRE learning and practically to the development of IRE pedagogy that moves beyond knowledge acquisition toward reflection, value internalization, and meaningful connections between religion and students' everyday lives.

METHODS

This study employed a qualitative approach with a single case study design focusing on Islamic Religious Education (IRE) learning at SMP Negeri 2 Yogyakarta. The case was bounded by IRE instructional practices, students' experiences of meaningful learning, religious reflection, value internalization, and the connection between IRE content and students' everyday experiences. SMP Negeri 2 Yogyakarta was selected because it provides a relevant context for examining how meaningfulness in IRE learning is constructed within a public junior secondary school. The unit of analysis comprised instructional practices and students' learning experiences in IRE (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Yin, 2018). The study was conducted from 10 to 25 September 2026.

The primary data sources consisted of two IRE teachers, Dwi Budiningsih and M. Gioaldi Afriadi, and six students selected purposively, comprising two students from Grade VII, two from Grade VIII, and two from Grade IX. Students were selected based on their active participation in IRE learning and religious activities at school, enabling them to provide relevant information concerning learning experiences, value understanding, religious reflection, and connections between instructional content and everyday life. Secondary data consisted of curriculum documents, IRE instructional plans and materials, teaching modules, and assessment instruments used in the learning process. Because some participants were minors, the study followed appropriate consent procedures, voluntary participation, confidentiality of participant identities, and the use of data exclusively for academic purposes.

Data were collected through in-depth interviews, non-participant classroom observations, and document analysis. Semi-structured interviews addressed instructional orientation, content mastery, reflective experiences, internalization of religious values, student engagement, assessment practices, and connections between IRE content and students' everyday experiences. Interviews were recorded with participants' permission and transcribed for analysis. Classroom observations focused on teacher-student interactions, instructional strategies, student engagement, opportunities for reflection, learning materials, and assessment practices. Document analysis was conducted to compare interview and observation findings with documented instructional planning and implementation.

Data analysis followed a consistent procedure based on Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014), comprising data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. The analysis began with coding mapping of relevant data units, followed by grouping codes into categories and themes. The analytical categories included instructional orientation, content mastery, religious reflection, value internalization, student engagement, assessment, and connections between learning and everyday life. The coded data were organized into matrices to compare teacher and student perspectives with observations and documentary evidence. Triangulation was conducted by comparing data across sources and collection techniques to examine the consistency of findings. The final interpretation focused on identifying patterns of meaningfulness in IRE learning

and using these patterns as a basis for reconstructing learning toward a more contextual, reflective, integrative, and student-centered approach (Miles et al., 2014).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This study examined the construction of meaningful Islamic Religious Education (IRE) learning at SMP Negeri 2 Yogyakarta based on data collected from 10 to 25 September 2026. Data were obtained through in-depth interviews with two IRE teachers, Dwi Budiningsih and M. Gioaldi Afriadi, six students comprising two students from Grade VII, two from Grade VIII, and two from Grade IX, classroom observations, and analysis of curriculum and instructional documents. The data were analyzed through coding mapping, data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification following Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014). The analysis identified four interconnected patterns in the construction of meaningful learning: instructional orientation, interaction and reflective space, internalization of religious values, and the connection between IRE content and students' lived experiences.

The teacher interviews indicate that meaningful IRE learning is not understood merely as students' ability to master instructional content. Content understanding and the achievement of learning objectives remain important, but teachers attempt to connect them with values and students' everyday lives. When asked about the main priority in teaching IRE, G1 explained, "What I prioritize is not only students' understanding of the material, but also how the material can be understood and applied in everyday life. After explaining the material, I try to guide students to understand the values contained in it, such as honesty, responsibility, discipline, and respect for others. However, understanding the material and achieving the learning objectives remain important because they have to be aligned with the established learning outcomes" (G1-W1). This response indicates that teachers position knowledge acquisition and value application as complementary dimensions of IRE learning.

This pattern is reinforced by G2's explanation of learning success. When asked how successful IRE learning is understood, G2 stated, "For me, students should not only be able to answer questions. More importantly, they need to understand why the material is being studied and demonstrate appropriate attitudes in everyday life. Therefore, I try to provide examples that are close to their lives" (G2-W1). The response indicates that learning success is not assessed solely through students' ability to reproduce knowledge but also through their understanding of the reasons, relevance, and possible application of the values being studied. Cognitive orientation is therefore retained but directed toward students' experiences and meaning-making.

This finding suggests that the issue of meaningful IRE learning does not lie in the existence of content or cognitive assessment but in how these elements are connected with students' experiences. Content mastery remains an important foundation because students need religious knowledge before they can interpret and reflect upon it. However, when learning stops at concepts, definitions, or

assessment-oriented answers, the relationship between knowledge and everyday life becomes less visible. When content is accompanied by examples, contextual questions, and opportunities to provide reasons, students gain greater opportunities to understand its relevance. The data therefore point toward the integration of cognitive, reflective, and applicative dimensions rather than treating them as competing orientations.

Interaction within the learning process represents another important finding. G1 explained that opportunities for students to express opinions are provided particularly when instructional content relates to their everyday situations. When asked whether students are given opportunities to express opinions or experiences, G1 responded, "Yes, especially when the material is related to everyday life. I usually provide questions or cases so that students do not only listen to the explanation but also try to express their opinions based on what they have experienced" (G1-W2). This response indicates an effort to establish interaction in which students respond to instructional content through their experiences. Nevertheless, this finding does not justify the conclusion that all learning processes are consistently dialogical. Interaction remains dependent on instructional content, learning objectives, and classroom conditions.

Value contextualization is also evident in teachers' explanations of how religious content is taught. G2 stated, "I usually do not stop at the meaning or definition. I try to provide examples and then invite students to see how the value can be practiced in their lives. For example, when discussing honesty, I relate it to situations they encounter at school, such as completing assignments or communicating with friends" (G2-W2). This data indicate that religious values are not positioned solely as normative concepts. Instead, teachers connect them with situations recognizable to students. Such a strategy provides opportunities for learners to consider the relationship between the values being studied and the actions they may encounter in school life.

Students' perspectives reinforce this finding. One student explained, "When the examples are close to everyday life, it is easier for me to understand. So it is not only about reading the material, but also knowing what the examples look like and how to apply them" (S1-W1). This statement indicates that everyday examples help students understand instructional content. From the student's perspective, meaningfulness emerges when the material is not received merely as information but can be recognized through concrete experiences and situations. The finding demonstrates that students' lived contexts can function as a bridge between religious concepts and practical understanding.

The relationship between experience and content is also visible in the coding process. G1's statement concerning instructional priorities was coded as content understanding and value application, while G2's statement concerning learning success was coded as understanding, attitude, and contextualization. G1's statement concerning questions and cases was coded as dialogue and student experience, whereas G2's explanation of honesty was coded as value contextualization. S1's response concerning everyday examples was coded as experience and understanding. These procedures indicate that the categories were

developed through mapping patterns within the interview data and subsequently considered alongside classroom observations and instructional documents.

The analysis further indicates that the four themes are related sequentially but should not be interpreted as statistically causal. Instructional orientation provides knowledge and learning objectives; interaction creates opportunities for students to respond; reflection allows them to consider the meaning of the content; contextualization connects values with experience; and lived experience provides a context for considering possible value application. Meaningful IRE learning can therefore be understood as a pedagogical process constructed through the relationship between what students learn and what they experience. The finding also demonstrates that meaningfulness does not automatically emerge simply because the subject matter concerns religion.

From the perspective of transformative learning, this pattern is relevant to Mezirow's (2000) emphasis on reflection upon experience and meaning perspectives. Students do not merely receive new information but have opportunities to consider how knowledge relates to their own experiences. Within IRE, reflection may emerge through questions about everyday situations, case discussions, dialogue concerning possible choices, and explanations of why a particular value matters. Transformative IRE learning therefore does not necessarily require a dramatic change in students' perspectives; rather, it can be understood as a pedagogical process that creates opportunities to connect religious knowledge with experience and value consideration.

However, value internalization needs to remain within the interpretive boundaries of the evidence. This study does not claim that particular learning activities directly cause behavioral change or produce a particular spiritual condition among students. The available evidence more strongly demonstrates the existence of pedagogical space for value meaning-making, through which students can understand, discuss, reflect upon, and connect religious values with their experiences. This boundary is important because behavioral change requires longer-term observation and potentially longitudinal evidence. Accordingly, "value internalization" in this study refers to a pedagogical process that enables students to connect religious knowledge with considerations in everyday life rather than a claim that behavioral change has been empirically established.

Based on the relationships among the themes, the study develops the conceptual synthesis lived context → content understanding → dialogue and reflection → value internalization → meaningful action. This sequence represents an analytical synthesis of qualitative data rather than a statistically tested causal model. Lived context provides an entry point through which IRE content becomes relevant. Content understanding establishes the religious knowledge foundation. Dialogue and reflection create opportunities for students to interpret the content. Value internalization connects understanding with orientations toward action, while meaningful action represents the pedagogical direction for applying values in everyday life. This synthesis constitutes the conceptual contribution of the study by explaining how meaningfulness may be reconstructed through relationships among instructional elements.

This reconstruction positions teachers as designers of learning experiences that connect religious substance with students' lived contexts. Teachers remain responsible for maintaining the accuracy of religious content and achieving learning objectives while also creating opportunities for questioning, dialogue, examples, reflection, and value consideration. Students are positioned as active subjects who construct meaning through interactions with content, teachers, peers, and their own experiences. This approach does not abandon content mastery but expands learning from knowing toward understanding, meaning-making, reflection, and consideration of value application.

The pedagogical implications of these findings point toward more contextual and reflective learning activities. Teachers may use school-life cases, reflective questions, students' experiences, value-oriented discussions, and assignments requiring students to explain the relationship between IRE content and real situations. Assessment can also be expanded without eliminating knowledge assessment by providing opportunities for students to explain reasons, interpret values, and describe how those values may be applied. Professional development can similarly focus on teachers' ability to integrate religious substance, lived context, dialogue, reflection, and assessment. Transformative learning therefore does not require adding activities disconnected from existing instruction but reorganizing relationships among instructional components.

This study has several limitations because it was conducted at a single school with a limited number of purposively selected participants. Interview data may also be influenced by self-report and the tendency of participants to provide responses perceived as appropriate to the research context. In addition, the interactional patterns identified should be interpreted within the duration and scope of the observations conducted. The findings are therefore not intended for statistical generalization but for providing a contextual understanding of the reconstruction of meaningful IRE learning. Further studies may expand the number of sites, participants, observation periods, and school contexts to examine the applicability of the proposed synthesis.

Overall, this study demonstrates that reconstructing transformative IRE learning does not mean replacing content mastery with reflection or replacing cognitive assessment with attitude assessment. The proposed reconstruction reorganizes the relationship among religious knowledge, students' experiences, dialogue, reflection, values, and action. Learning can therefore move from understanding content toward making meaning of content, followed by reflecting on values and subsequently connecting values with everyday action. The principal contribution lies in synthesizing these relationships within the context of SMP Negeri 2 Yogyakarta, positioning meaningful IRE learning as a pedagogical process constructed through the connection between what students learn, what they experience, what they reflect upon, and how religious values are considered in their everyday lives.

Table 1. Synthesis of Findings

Field data and code	Category	Theme	Analysis
G1-W1: teacher prioritizes content understanding alongside value application; G2-W1: learning success is not limited to answering questions	Content understanding, objectives, and value application	Instructional orientation	Learning retains content mastery as a foundation while directing it toward relevance for students' values and everyday lives.
G1-W2: teacher uses questions and cases to encourage students to express opinions based on their experiences	Dialogue, participation, and experience	Interaction and reflection	Interaction provides space for students to respond to content and connect it with experience, although dialogical interaction is not assumed to occur in every instructional situation.
G2-W2: teacher connects honesty with situations involving assignments and communication with peers	Value contextualization	Value internalization	Religious values are positioned as concepts that can be understood through everyday contexts rather than only as normative knowledge.
S1-W1: student understands material more easily when examples are close to everyday life	Concrete experience and understanding	Content-experience connection	Students' lived experiences function as a bridge between religious knowledge and practical understanding.
Synthesis of G1-W1, G2-W1, G1-W2, G2-W2, and S1-W1	Integration of knowledge, experience, dialogue, reflection, and values	Transformative IRE reconstruction	The data support the analytical synthesis lived context → content understanding → dialogue and reflection → value internalization → meaningful action. The synthesis is analytical and is not presented as a statistically tested causal relationship.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that reconstructing transformative Islamic Religious Education (IRE) learning at SMP Negeri 2 Yogyakarta requires strengthening the relationship among religious content mastery, students' lived experiences, dialogical interaction, reflection, value internalization, and application in everyday life. Based on interviews with two IRE teachers and six students, classroom observations, and instructional document analysis conducted from 10 to 25 September 2026, the findings indicate that content understanding and the achievement of learning objectives remain important components of IRE practice, while teachers also attempt to connect instructional content with values such as honesty, responsibility, discipline, and respect for others. The interviews further indicate that learning becomes more meaningful when teachers provide examples

related to students' everyday lives, pose questions or cases, and allow students to express opinions based on their experiences. Students' perspectives similarly suggest that connections between instructional content and everyday experiences facilitate more concrete understanding and help them recognize possible applications of religious values. These findings demonstrate that meaningful IRE learning cannot be constructed solely through content delivery and mastery but requires pedagogical processes that enable students to connect religious knowledge with experience, consider the meaning of values, and recognize their relevance to everyday life. Based on the synthesis of the identified themes, this study proposes the analytical sequence lived context → content understanding → dialogue and reflection → value internalization → meaningful action, which represents an analytical synthesis of qualitative evidence rather than a statistically tested causal relationship. Transformative IRE learning therefore does not require replacing content mastery with reflective activities or cognitive assessment with attitude assessment; rather, it requires reorganizing the relationship among knowledge, experience, dialogue, reflection, values, and action so that students move from merely knowing religious content toward understanding its meaning, reflecting on its values, and connecting them with everyday life. This reconstruction positions teachers as designers of learning experiences who maintain substantive religious content while creating opportunities for students to question, engage in dialogue, reflect on experiences, and consider the application of values, while students are positioned as active subjects in constructing meaning. Given that the study was conducted at a single school with purposively selected participants and interview data that may be influenced by self-report, the findings are not intended for statistical generalization but provide a contextual understanding of how meaningful IRE learning can be strengthened through the integration of religious content and students' lived experiences. The principal contribution of this study lies in this synthesis, which conceptualizes meaningful IRE learning as a pedagogical process moving systematically from understanding content, connecting it with experience, dialoguing and reflecting on values, internalizing those values in personal consideration, and ultimately directing them toward meaningful action in students' everyday lives.

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