



STRENGTHENING STUDENTS' ACADEMIC COMPETENCE THROUGH EXPERIENCE-BASED LEARNING ACROSS VARIOUS COURSES AT IAI PADANG LAWAS

PENGUATAN KOMPETENSI AKADEMIK MAHASISWA MELALUI PEMBELAJARAN BERBASIS PENGALAMAN LAPANGAN PADA BERBAGAI MATA KULIAH DI IAI PADANG LAWAS

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Abstract

Higher education is required to integrate theoretical mastery with contextual experience to produce academically and professionally competent graduates. This study aims to analyze the implementation of experience-based learning across several courses at the Institute of Islamic Studies (IAI) Padang Lawas, including Learning Theories and Instructional Methods, the Indonesian Legal System, Listening Skills in Language Learning, Mathematics Learning Methodology, Elementary School Mathematics, Educational Assessment, and Educational Evaluation. A descriptive qualitative approach was employed using observation, interviews, and documentation. The findings reveal that experience-based learning consistently enhances students' conceptual understanding, analytical ability, and reflective skills across disciplines. These results confirm the relevance of contextual learning approaches in strengthening students' academic competence in higher education.

Keywords : Experience-Based Learning, Contextual Learning, Educational Assessment, Educational Evaluation.

Abstrak

Pembelajaran di perguruan tinggi dituntut mampu mengintegrasikan penguasaan teori dengan pengalaman kontekstual agar menghasilkan lulusan yang kompeten secara akademik dan profesional. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis implementasi pembelajaran berbasis pengalaman pada berbagai mata kuliah di Institut Agama Islam (IAI) Padang Lawas, meliputi Teori Pembelajaran dan Metode Pembelajaran, Sistem Hukum di Indonesia, Keterampilan Menyimak dalam Berbahasa, Metodologi Pembelajaran Matematika, Matematika Sekolah Dasar, Asesmen Pendidikan, dan Evaluasi Pendidikan. Penelitian menggunakan pendekatan deskriptif kualitatif dengan teknik observasi, wawancara, dan dokumentasi. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa pembelajaran berbasis pengalaman secara konsisten meningkatkan pemahaman konseptual, kemampuan analitis, dan keterampilan reflektif mahasiswa lintas disiplin. Temuan ini menegaskan bahwa pendekatan pembelajaran kontekstual relevan untuk memperkuat kompetensi akademik mahasiswa di perguruan tinggi.



Kata Kunci : Pembelajaran Berbasis Pengalaman, Pembelajaran Kontekstual, Asesmen Pendidikan, Evaluasi Pendidikan.

1. INTRODUCTION

Recent studies emphasize that effective higher education learning must move beyond mere content transmission toward meaningful engagement with real-world contexts (Biggs & Tang, 2011; Prince, 2004). Learning processes that are dominated by theoretical delivery often limit students opportunities to develop higher-order thinking skills and to relate academic knowledge to authentic academic, professional, and social practices (Nugraha, 2023). As a result, students may achieve surface-level understanding without fully developing the analytical and reflective competencies required in contemporary higher education (Amir & Nugraha, 2023).

In response to this challenge, experience-based learning has been widely recognized as a pedagogical approach that bridges the gap between theory and practice by positioning students as active participants in the learning process (Kolb, 1984; Lave & Wenger, 1991). Through direct engagement, observation, analysis, and reflection, students are encouraged to construct knowledge meaningfully rather than passively receiving information. Previous studies have demonstrated that this approach is effective in improving conceptual understanding, critical thinking, learning motivation, and professional readiness (William, 2011; Boaler, 2016).

Despite the growing body of literature on experience-based and contextual learning, most existing studies tend to focus on single disciplines or specific educational contexts. Empirical research that examines the implementation of experience-based learning across multiple disciplines, particularly within Islamic higher education institutions, remains limited. This gap is important to address, as Islamic higher education institutions are characterized by the integration of religious values, academic knowledge, and professional competence, which requires instructional approaches that are both contextual and holistic.

This study addresses this gap by examining the implementation of experience-based learning across diverse courses at the Institute of Islamic Studies (IAI) Padang Lawas, including Learning Theories and Instructional Methods, the Indonesian Legal System, Listening Skills in Language Learning, Mathematics Learning Methodology, Elementary School Mathematics, Educational Assessment, and Educational Evaluation. Unlike previous studies that concentrate on a single subject area, this research adopts a cross-disciplinary perspective to provide a more comprehensive understanding of how experience-based learning contributes to strengthening students' academic competence in higher education.

Furthermore, this study is expected to provide empirical evidence that can inform instructional design and curriculum development in higher education, particularly in institutions with diverse disciplinary orientations. By highlighting the relevance of experience-based learning across different fields of study, this research offers practical implications for



lecturers and academic institutions seeking to enhance the quality of teaching and learning processes in higher education.

In addition, this research seeks to position experience-based learning not merely as a complementary instructional strategy, but as a core pedagogical approach capable of responding to contemporary challenges in higher education. By examining its implementation across multiple disciplines within an Islamic higher education context, this study provides insights into how experience-based learning can support academic rigor, contextual relevance, and value-based education simultaneously. These insights are expected to contribute to both theoretical discourse and practical innovation in higher education pedagogy.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a descriptive qualitative research design, which is appropriate for exploring learning processes, academic experiences, and the implementation of instructional approaches in natural educational settings (Yin, 2018). The qualitative approach was selected to obtain an in-depth understanding of how experience-based learning was implemented across different courses and how it contributed to students' academic competence (Nugraha, 2025).

The research was conducted at the Institute of Islamic Studies (IAI) Padang Lawas. The participants consisted of undergraduate students enrolled in several courses, including Learning Theories and Instructional Methods, the Indonesian Legal System, Listening Skills in Language Learning, Mathematics Learning Methodology, Elementary School Mathematics, Educational Assessment, and Educational Evaluation. Lecturers teaching these courses were also involved as key informants to provide complementary perspectives on the learning process.

Data were collected using three main techniques. Observation was carried out to examine learning activities, instructional strategies, and student engagement during the learning process. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with selected students and lecturers to explore their perceptions of the effectiveness of experience-based learning in supporting conceptual understanding and academic skills. In addition, documentation was used to analyze relevant learning materials, student assignments, and reflective reports to support and triangulate the findings.

Data analysis followed an interactive model consisting of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. This process allowed the researcher to systematically organize, interpret, and synthesize the data to identify meaningful patterns and themes related to the research focus. To ensure the trustworthiness of the study, triangulation of data sources and techniques was applied, and findings were continuously reviewed to maintain consistency and credibility.

In conducting observations and interviews, the researchers followed a systematic procedure to ensure data consistency and depth. Observation activities focused on capturing recurrent instructional patterns, student interactions, and learning dynamics across different courses. Interview protocols were designed to guide discussions while allowing flexibility for



participants to elaborate on their learning experiences and perspectives, thereby enriching the qualitative data.

Ethical considerations were also taken into account throughout the research process. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study and their voluntary involvement, and confidentiality was maintained by anonymizing participant identities in the reporting of findings. These measures were implemented to ensure that the research adhered to ethical standards and respected participants' rights.

To enhance the credibility and dependability of the findings, member checking and peer debriefing were applied at selected stages of data analysis. Participants were given opportunities to confirm the accuracy of interpreted data, while peer discussions were conducted to minimize researcher bias. These strategies strengthened the rigor of the qualitative analysis and increased the trustworthiness of the study's conclusions.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study indicate that the implementation of experience-based learning across various courses at IAI Padang Lawas had a positive and consistent impact on students' academic competence. The results are presented by synthesizing patterns that emerged from observations, interviews, and documentation, followed by a discussion that relates the findings to relevant theoretical and empirical studies. Overall, the findings demonstrate that experience-based learning facilitates deeper learning by enabling students to actively engage with academic content, contextualize theoretical knowledge, and reflect on their learning experiences across disciplines.

a. Enhancement of Conceptual Understanding and Analytical Skills

Across pedagogical, legal, linguistic, and mathematical courses, students demonstrated a deeper understanding of course content when learning activities were connected to authentic academic and practical contexts. In courses such as Learning Theories and Instructional Methods and Mathematics Learning Methodology, students were able to analyze instructional strategies and relate them to theoretical frameworks, indicating improved conceptual clarity and analytical ability.

Students not only identified different instructional approaches but were also able to explain the theoretical rationale underlying their use. This indicates a shift from surface learning toward deeper conceptual engagement, where students actively interpret and evaluate academic content rather than memorizing it. Such engagement reflects students' ability to make meaningful connections between theory and practice, which is a key indicator of higher-order learning in higher education.

Moreover, observational and interview data revealed that students increasingly used academic terminology accurately and demonstrated logical reasoning when discussing course-related issues. This suggests that experience-based learning facilitated the internalization of key concepts and supported students in organizing knowledge systematically. As a result,



students were better equipped to construct arguments, justify instructional decisions, and critically assess academic practices across disciplines.

This finding supports previous research suggesting that experience-based learning promotes meaningful learning by enabling students to actively construct knowledge rather than passively receive information (Kolb, 1984; Biggs & Tang, 2011). By engaging in observation, analysis, and reflection, students developed higher-order thinking skills such as analysis, synthesis, and evaluation, which are essential in higher education learning contexts (Prince, 2004).

In addition, the enhancement of analytical skills observed in this study indicates that experience-based learning encourages students to adopt a reflective stance toward knowledge. Rather than accepting concepts at face value, students questioned assumptions, compared alternative perspectives, and evaluated the relevance of theoretical frameworks in practical contexts. This analytical orientation is crucial for preparing students to engage with complex academic and professional challenges.

Overall, the improvement in conceptual understanding and analytical skills demonstrates that experience-based learning plays a significant role in fostering deep learning and intellectual maturity among university students. These findings reinforce the argument that learning approaches emphasizing active engagement and contextual understanding are essential for achieving the core objectives of higher education..

b. Development of Contextual and Applied Knowledge

In the Indonesian Legal System course, students showed an increased ability to interpret legal concepts within institutional and societal contexts. Rather than understanding legal principles as abstract and normative ideas, students were able to relate them to real institutional practices, legal structures, and social realities. This contextual understanding enabled students to perceive the relevance of legal theory to practical governance and public life.

Through experience-based learning activities, students demonstrated greater awareness of how legal norms are implemented, interpreted, and sometimes challenged within institutional frameworks. They were able to analyze the roles of legal institutions and identify the interaction between legal rules and social dynamics. This indicates that students developed applied legal knowledge that extends beyond textual understanding toward functional and contextual comprehension.

Similarly, in Educational Assessment and Educational Evaluation, students demonstrated an improved understanding of assessment and evaluation as systematic and purposeful processes aimed at improving educational quality. Students became more aware of the roles of formative and summative assessment, as well as the function of evaluation in educational decision-making, program improvement, and quality assurance. This understanding reflects a shift from viewing assessment merely as a grading tool toward recognizing its formative and developmental purposes.

Furthermore, students showed increased ability to critically evaluate assessment practices and to consider ethical and practical implications in their implementation. This



applied understanding is essential for prospective educators, as it supports informed decision-making and responsible professional practice in educational contexts.

These results align with studies emphasizing that contextual learning enhances students' ability to apply theoretical knowledge in real-world settings (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Shulman, 1987). Experience-based learning allows students to bridge the gap between academic theory and professional practice, thereby strengthening applied competence, academic relevance, and professional readiness. By situating learning within authentic contexts, students are better prepared to engage with complex and dynamic challenges in their future academic and professional roles.

c. Improvement of Reflective and Communication Skills

The findings also reveal that experience-based learning contributed to the development of students' reflective and communication skills, particularly in the Listening Skills in Language Learning course. Students became more aware of effective listening strategies, communication barriers, and the importance of active engagement in oral communication contexts.

Through reflective activities, students were encouraged to evaluate their learning experiences critically, identify strengths and weaknesses, and propose strategies for improvement. This reflective process supported the development of metacognitive awareness, enabling students to better regulate their learning processes.

This finding is consistent with sociocultural learning theory, which emphasizes the role of interaction and reflection in cognitive development (Vygotsky, 1978). Moreover, reflective practices have been shown to enhance learning depth, self-regulated learning, and long-term academic achievement in higher education (Wiliam, 2011).

d. Experience-Based Learning in Mathematics Education

In Mathematics in Elementary Schools, students developed a stronger understanding of learner-centered and developmentally appropriate instructional approaches. They recognized the importance of using concrete, contextual, and meaningful learning strategies to support elementary students' mathematical understanding.

Students demonstrated increased awareness that effective mathematics instruction should move beyond procedural teaching toward conceptual understanding. This awareness reflects a pedagogical shift toward meaningful mathematics learning that emphasizes reasoning, problem-solving, and conceptual clarity.

These findings support previous research highlighting the effectiveness of experiential and conceptual approaches in mathematics education (Hiebert et al., 2005; Boaler, 2016). Experience-based learning enables prospective teachers to understand not only what to teach but also how and why specific instructional approaches are effective in supporting students' mathematical development.

Cross-Disciplinary Implications of Experience-Based Learning

One of the key contributions of this study is its cross-disciplinary perspective. The findings demonstrate that experience-based learning is not limited to specific subjects but can



be effectively applied across diverse academic fields, including education, law, language, and mathematics. This supports the argument that experience-based learning functions as an integrative pedagogical approach capable of enhancing academic competence in higher education.

From a broader perspective, these results extend previous studies by providing empirical evidence from an Islamic higher education institution, a context that has received limited attention in the existing literature. The integration of experience-based learning across disciplines contributes to a more holistic learning experience that aligns with the goals of higher education in developing knowledgeable, reflective, and professionally competent graduates who are able to apply academic knowledge ethically and contextually.

4. CONCLUSION

This study concludes that experience-based learning represents an effective and relevant pedagogical approach for strengthening students' academic competence across diverse courses at the Institute of Islamic Studies (IAI) Padang Lawas. The integration of theoretical knowledge with contextual and experiential learning activities enables students to engage more actively in the learning process and to construct knowledge in a meaningful and reflective manner.

The findings indicate that experience-based learning contributes not only to the enhancement of conceptual understanding and analytical skills, but also to the development of reflective thinking, communication abilities, and applied academic competence. The cross-disciplinary implementation of this approach in pedagogical, legal, linguistic, and mathematical courses demonstrates its adaptability and effectiveness across different fields of study. These results suggest that experience-based learning can function as a unifying instructional strategy that supports coherent learning experiences in higher education.

Furthermore, the findings highlight the strategic relevance of experience-based learning for Islamic higher education institutions, where academic learning is closely linked to ethical values and professional responsibility. By encouraging students to reflect on both cognitive and value-based dimensions of learning, experience-based learning aligns with the holistic educational philosophy of Islamic higher education, which emphasizes the balanced development of intellectual, moral, and social competencies.

From a practical perspective, this study implies that lecturers and higher education institutions should consider systematically integrating experience-based learning into curriculum design and instructional planning. Such integration may enhance learning quality, student engagement, and academic relevance across disciplines. However, this study is limited by its qualitative scope and focus on a single institution. Future research is recommended to involve broader institutional contexts, apply mixed or quantitative methods, and explore the long-term impact of experience-based learning on students' academic and professional outcomes.

Overall, this study reinforces the importance of experience-based learning as a pedagogical strategy capable of enhancing the quality of higher education and preparing



students to meet academic and professional challenges in an increasingly complex educational landscape.

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