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The Relevance of Edward L. Thorndike's Theory to the Consistency of Islamic Education Instruction at MI Al Azhar Center Baturaja

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Abstract

This study explores the relevance of Edward L. Thorndike's behaviorist principles to the consistency of Islamic Religious Education instruction at MI Al Azhar Center Baturaja. Behaviorist theory emphasizes observable behavior formed through stimulus-response interactions and reinforcement. Thorndike's laws Readiness, Exercise, Effect, and Attitude serve as the foundation for developing stable religious behavior in students. This research employed a descriptive quantitative approach with a sample of all 20 IRE teachers, using a Likert-scale questionnaire. Frequency distribution and descriptive statistical analyses indicated that teachers have actively promoted students' learning readiness, implemented repeated practice, provided positive feedback, emphasized the consequences of actions, and utilized prior experiences to reinforce religious behavior. Overall, teachers have perceived Thorndike's principles as highly relevant and consistently applied, contributing to a moderate level of consistency in IRE instruction (mean = 54.45; score range 40–63).

Keywords: : *Edward L. Thorndike; Behaviorist; Islamic Education Instruction; Maddrasah Ibtidaiyah.*

INTRODUCTION

In the dynamics of modern education, various learning theories have continuously emerged and evolved in an effort to understand the complex nature of the learning process. These theories function not only as conceptual foundations but also as practical guidelines for educators and learners in designing effective, meaningful, and well-structured learning experiences. The application of learning theories is expected to make the learning process more organized and efficient, thereby enabling the optimal achievement of educational goals. Essentially, a learning theory is a set of interrelated principles grounded in research findings and empirical evidence that seeks to explain

how humans acquire, process, and apply knowledge (Wahab & Rosnawati, 2011).

In general, learning theories are divided into three major schools of thought: behaviorism, cognitivism, and humanism. The behaviorist theory focuses on the formation of observable behavior as the result of the relationship between stimulus and response. In this view, learning is considered a change in behavior that occurs due to environmental influences and reinforcement. In contrast, the cognitive theory regards learning as an internal process involving mental activities such as thinking, understanding, and remembering, which are not always directly observable. Meanwhile, the humanistic theory emerges as a bridge between the two, emphasizing the importance of human values and viewing individuals as valuable beings who possess potential and the ability to direct themselves toward optimal development (Pratama, 2019).

Various learning theories have been developed and implemented to understand and optimize the teaching and learning process. One of the theories that has had a significant influence on the development of educational science is the behaviorist learning theory. This theory views learning as a change in behavior that can be observed, measured, and evaluated concretely. Such change occurs through the presence of stimuli that elicit specific reactions or responses. In other words, learning behavior is the result of interaction between the individual and the environment, both internal and external (Oktaria et al., 2023).

One of the key figures in the behaviorist school is Edward L. Thorndike, who is well-known for his Connectionism Theory an early theoretical framework that laid the foundation for the development of modern behaviorism. Thorndike's theory possesses a distinctive character, particularly in its emphasis on learning through direct experience and practical experimentation. Building upon these ideas, this paper seeks to explore Thorndike's educational thought in greater depth, as well as its relevance and implications for the consistency of Islamic Education learning within the context of contemporary education. The behaviorist theory focuses on observable behavior and how such behavior is formed through the influence of external stimuli. In the context of learning, this approach is manifested through the use of reinforcement both rewards and punishments to shape and maintain desired behaviors (Ihwanah & Astuti, 2024). Within Islamic Education, behaviorist principles have important implications for fostering the consistency of students' religious behavior. Through the application of positive reinforcement, such as giving appreciation to students who regularly perform



religious practices, educators can cultivate habits of discipline in upholding Islamic values. Meanwhile, negative reinforcement is applied wisely to help students become aware of and correct behaviors that are inconsistent with religious teachings. Thus, the behaviorist theory not only plays a role in shaping desired behavior but also in maintaining the order and consistency of students in practicing Islamic values in daily lives.

The national curriculum mandates that religious education must be provided in accordance with the religion of each student and taught by an educator of the same faith, as stipulated in Law No. 20 of 2003, Article 12(1)(a). This provision affirms the position of Islamic Religious Education teachers as professionals who hold authoritative responsibility for delivering religious instruction at the elementary school level, including within Integrated Islamic School settings. This structural legitimacy is further reinforced by Government Regulation No. 55 of 2007, which states that religious education at every pathway and level must be conducted by teachers who possess the appropriate qualifications and competencies in the religious field they teach.

These competency standards are elaborated further in Minister of National Education Regulation No. 16 of 2007, which establishes four domains of competence for Islamic Religious Education teachers pedagogical, professional, social, and personal thereby placing the management of religious instruction entirely within the professional scope of Islamic religious education teachers. The requirement to fulfill the standards of content and graduate competencies for Islamic religious education subjects, as stipulated in minister of religious affairs decrees no. 183 and no. 184 of 2019, further clarifies that Islamic religious education teachers serve as the primary authority in the planning, implementation, and evaluation of religious learning at both the elementary and secondary levels. The integration of these regulatory frameworks forms a strong academic foundation for any innovation in Islamic religious education instruction, while ensuring that the process of cultivating students' religious values remains under the guidance of educators who possess both curricular legitimacy and professional competence.

A previous study by Miftakhul Nuuril Azizah from Mercuru Buana University examined the relevance of behaviorist theory according to Edward Lee Thorndike and J.B. Watson to Islamic Religious Education through library research using content analysis. The results of the study indicated that behaviorist learning theory is relevant to Islamic Religious Education and can support the learning process because its principles,



such as classical conditioning, repetition, and reinforcement, align with Islamic values (Azizah, 2023). Very few studies have specifically examined how Thorndike's principles are operationalized to strengthen the consistency of Islamic Education Instruction. Moreover, empirical research that directly explores the relevance of Thorndike's concept of connectionism to the sustainable formation of religious character has remained limited. This gap has highlighted the need for research investigating the application of behaviorist principles within the practical dynamics of Islamic Education Instruction.

The primary innovation of this study lies in exploring the relevance of Edward L. Thorndike's thought within the framework of behaviorist learning theory and examining how its principles can be implemented to maintain the consistency of Islamic Religious Education learning. This study has asserted that Thorndike's concept of connectionism through the law of readiness, law of exercise, and law of effect remains profoundly significant in shaping students' learning behavior within the context of modern Islamic education. By understanding the relationship between stimulus, response, and reinforcement, Islamic Religious Education can design instructional patterns that foster order, discipline, and positive repetition in practicing Islamic values. Furthermore, this research offered a new perspective that the application of behaviorist theory does not merely only serve to shape observable behavior but also functions as a strategic means to cultivate students' religious consistency through repetitive and meaningful learning experiences. Thus, this study aimed to enrich the theoretical corpus of learning within Islamic education and provide a conceptual foundation for strengthening continuous religious character and behavior in educational practice.

METHODS

This study employed a descriptive quantitative approach, a research method aimed at systematically, factually, and accurately describing specific phenomena or conditions (Sugiyono, 2017). This approach was applied to assess the relevance of Edward L. Thorndike's thought to behaviorist learning theory and its implications for the consistency of Islamic Religious Education learning at MI Al Azhar Center Baturaja. The research sample included all Islamic religious education teachers at the school, selected using a total sampling technique to ensure the participation of all educators directly involved in the learning process (Sukabumi, 2022). Data were collected through a Likert-scale questionnaire designed to measure teachers' perceptions regarding Thorndike's principles, namely the law of readiness, law of exercise, and law of effect,



law of attitude, as well as the application of these principles in fostering students' learning consistency.

The research procedure employed a questionnaire instrument consisting of 10 statements designed to measure the level of consistency in Islamic Education instruction. Among these items, two statements P3 and P7 were constructed as negative items. The inclusion of negatively worded statements served to balance response patterns and minimized acquiescence bias, namely the tendency of respondents to agree with statements without critically considering their meaning. Therefore, these negative items were assigned reverse scoring to ensure consistent score interpretation, where higher scores always indicate a stronger level of instructional consistency. The questionnaire was administered to 20 Islamic Education teachers as research respondents. The collected data were then subjected to a validity test to ensure that each item adequately measured the intended construct, followed by a reliability test to assess the internal consistency of the instrument. Once the instrument was confirmed to be valid and reliable, the researcher conducted a frequency distribution analysis to examine the teachers' perception patterns for each item representing the research objectives.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Relevance of Edward L. Thorndike's Theory to the Consistency of Islamic Education Instruction at MI Al Azhar Center Baturaja

This study aimed to identify teachers' perceptions regarding the relevance of Edward L. Thorndike's ideas within behaviorist learning theory and their implications for the consistency of Islamic Religious Education instruction in Islamic elementary schools. Islamic Religious Education teachers at this level hold a pivotal role in shaping students' early religious and moral foundations, so instructional practices extend beyond the delivery of content to include the cultivation of habits and the development of religious attitudes. Data collection was followed by validity and reliability testing of the instrument to ensure the accuracy of the research findings.

1. Validity Test

Validity test aims to assess whether the instrument or questionnaire is capable of measuring what it is intended to measure. To evaluate validity, each item score is compared with the total questionnaire score using correlation; an item is considered



valid if it has a positive correlation and a calculated r value greater than the r table value. With a total of 20 respondents in this study, the r table at a 0.05 significance level was approximately 0.444, meaning that any item with a calculated r value above this threshold was deemed valid. The results of the validity test using SPSS version 27 are as follows:

Table 1. Results of the Questionnaire Validity Test

No	Item	r count	r table	Category
1	P1	0,866	0,444	Valid
2	P2	0,798	0,444	Valid
3	P3	0,590	0,444	Valid
4	P4	0,844	0,444	Valid
5	P5	0,792	0,444	Valid
6	P6	0,955	0,444	Valid
7	P7	0,747	0,444	Valid
8	P8	1,000	0,444	Valid
9	P9	0,522	0,444	Valid
10	P10	0,704	0,444	Valid

Based on the validity table, all questionnaire items had calculated r values greater than the r table value of 0.444, indicating that all statements in the questionnaire were valid. This demonstrated that each item was already capable of accurately measuring teachers' perceptions of the relevance of Edward L. Thorndike's thought within behaviorist learning theory and its implications for the consistency of Islamic religious education.

2. Reliability Test

Reliability test aims to assess the internal consistency of the questionnaire, ensuring that the instrument produces stable and trustworthy data. In this study, reliability was measured using Cronbach's Alpha coefficient, which evaluated the extent to which all questionnaire items were positively correlated and measure the same variable namely, teachers' perceptions of the application of Thorndike's principles in the consistency of Islamic Religious Education. Common criteria for reliability included a Cronbach's Alpha value of at least 0.60 for acceptability, 0.70–0.80 considered good, and above 0.80 considered high. The results of the reliability test using SPSS version 27 are as follows.



Table 2. Results of the Questionnaire Reliability Test

Reliability Statistics	
Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
,938	10

Based on the reliability test output, the Cronbach's Alpha value for the 10 questionnaire items was 0.938. This value fell into the very high category, indicating that the instrument has demonstrated excellent internal consistency.

3. Frequency Distribution Analysis

Frequency distribution analysis was conducted to examine the distribution of data across each category or score, allowing the identification of distribution patterns, central tendencies, and variations. This analysis helped the researcher understand how the data are spread and whether they tended to be evenly distributed or concentrated around certain values.

Table 3. Frequency Distribution of Item P1

P1					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	2	1	5,0	5,0	5,0
	3	2	10,0	10,0	15,0
	4	7	35,0	35,0	50,0
	5	10	50,0	50,0	100,0
	Total	20	100,0	100,0	

Based on the frequency distribution for Item P1, which stated, "Teachers understand that students' mental readiness and motivation affect the success of Islamic Religious Education," the majority of teachers provided high responses. Seven teachers (35%) selected a score of 4, and ten teachers (50%) selected a score of 5, while only two teachers (10%) chose a score of 3 and one teacher (5%) chose a score of 2. This indicated that most teachers have recognized the importance of students' mental readiness and motivation in achieving successful Islamic Religious Education outcomes.



Table 4. Frequency Distribution of Item P2

		P2			
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	3	3	15,0	15,0	15,0
	4	12	60,0	60,0	75,0
	5	5	25,0	25,0	100,0
	Total	20	100,0	100,0	

Based on the frequency distribution for Item P2, which stated, “Teachers encourage students’ learning readiness before starting Islamic Religious Education activities,” the majority teachers provided high responses. Twelve teachers (60%) selected a score of 4, and five teachers (25%) selected a score of 5, while three teachers (15%) chose a score of 3. This indicated that teachers actively have promoted students’ readiness to learn before commencing Islamic Religious Education activities.

Table 5. Frequency Distribution of Item P3

		P3			
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	4	14	70,0	70,0	70,0
	5	6	30,0	30,0	100,0
	Total	20	100,0	100,0	

Based on the frequency distribution for Item P3, which stated, “Teachers rarely apply repeated practice to reinforce students’ understanding of Islamic Religious Education” (a negatively worded item), the majority of teachers selected high scores on the reverse scale: 14 teachers (70%) chose a score of 4 (disagree) and 6 teachers (30%) chose a score of 5 (strongly disagree). It showed that most teachers did not agree with the statement that they have rarely conducted repeated practice, meaning that teachers actively have implemented repeated exercises to reinforce students’ understanding.

Table 6. Frequency Distribution of Item P4

		P4			
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	3	1	5,0	5,0	5,0
	4	7	35,0	35,0	40,0
	5	12	60,0	60,0	100,0
	Total	20	100,0	100,0	

Based on the frequency distribution for Item P4, which stated “Teachers provide repeated practice to reinforce students’ understanding in Islamic Religious Education.” the majority of teachers provided high responses. Twelve teachers (60%) selected a



score of 5, seven teachers (35%) selected a score of 4, and one teacher (5%) selected a score of 3. It revealed that teachers actively have implemented repeated practice in Islamic Religious Education, demonstrating the consistent application of Thorndike's Law of Exercise within behaviorist theory and supporting the reinforcement of students' understanding.

Table 7. Frequency Distribution of Item P5

P5					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	4	8	40,0	40,0	40,0
	5	12	60,0	60,0	100,0
	Total	20	100,0	100,0	

Based on the frequency distribution for Item P5, which stated, "Teachers provide positive feedback to reinforce students' religious behavior," all teachers gave positive responses. Twelve teachers (60%) selected a score of 5, and eight teachers (40%) selected a score of 4. This revealed that teachers consistently have provided positive feedback to students reinforcing religious behavior, demonstrating the effective application of Thorndike's Law of Effect within behaviorist theory, and supporting the consistency of Islamic Religious Education.

Table 8. Frequency Distribution of Item P6

P6					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	3	3	15,0	15,0	15,0
	4	6	30,0	30,0	45,0
	5	11	55,0	55,0	100,0
	Total	20	100,0	100,0	

Based on the frequency distribution for Item P6, which stated, "Teachers emphasize the importance of the consequences of students' actions to ensure consistent positive behavior," the majority teachers provided high responses. Eleven teachers (55%) selected a score of 5, six teachers (30%) selected a score of 4, and three teachers (15%) selected a score of 3. This indicated that teachers have stressed the importance of the consequences of students' actions to maintain positive behavior, demonstrating the consistent application of the Law of Effect in Islamic Religious Education.



Table 9. Frequency Distribution of Item P7

P7					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	3	1	5,0	5,0	5,0
	4	2	10,0	10,0	15,0
	5	17	85,0	85,0	100,0
	Total	20	100,0	100,0	

Based on the frequency distribution for Item P7, which stated, “Teachers ignore students’ prior experiences in shaping religious attitudes” (a negatively worded item), the majority teachers selected high scores on the reverse scale: 17 teachers (85%) chose a score of 5 (strongly disagree), 2 teachers (10%) chose a score of 4 (disagree), and 1 teacher (5%) chose a score of 3 (neutral). This indicated that teachers did not ignore students’ prior experiences, meaning that they have already considered students’ experiences in shaping religious attitudes. Consequently, the application of the Law of Attitude in Islamic Religious Education has been well-implemented, supporting the consistency of students’ religious behavior.

Table 10. Frequency Distribution of Item P8

P8					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	3	3	15,0	15,0	15,0
	4	6	30,0	30,0	45,0
	5	11	55,0	55,0	100,0
	Total	20	100,0	100,0	

Based on the frequency distribution for Item P8, which stated, “Teachers utilize students’ prior experiences to reinforce positive behavioral tendencies in Islamic Religious Education,” Most teachers provided high responses. Eleven teachers (55%) selected a score of 5, six teachers (30%) selected a score of 4, and three teachers (15%) selected a score of 3. It showed that teachers have actively utilized students’ prior experiences to strengthen positive behavior, demonstrating the consistent application of Thorndike’s Law of Attitude within behaviorist theory in Islamic Religious Education.

Table 11. Frequency Distribution of Item P9

P9					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	3	6	30,0	30,0	30,0
	4	12	60,0	60,0	90,0
	5	2	10,0	10,0	100,0
	Total	20	100,0	100,0	



Based on the frequency distribution for Item P9, which stated, “Teachers design Islamic Religious Education learning consistently in accordance with Thorndike’s behaviorist principles,” Most teachers provided high responses. Twelve teachers (60%) selected a score of 4, two teachers (10%) selected a score of 5, and six teachers (30%) selected a score of 3. This indicated that, in general, teachers have designed Islamic Religious Education consistently according to behaviorist principles, although a small portion of teachers selected moderate scores. Overall, the application of Thorndike’s theory in learning practice have remained fairly consistent.

Table 12. Frequency Distribution of Item P10

P10					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	2	1	5,0	5,0	5,0
	3	2	10,0	10,0	15,0
	4	9	45,0	45,0	60,0
	5	8	40,0	40,0	100,0
	Total	20	100,0	100,0	

Based on the frequency distribution for Item P10, which stated, “Teachers perceive that the behaviorist approach helps consistently build students’ religious character,” Most teachers provided high responses. Nine teachers (45%) selected a score of 4, eight teachers (40%) selected a score of 5, two teachers (10%) selected a score of 3, and one teacher (5%) selected a score of 2. This showed that most teachers have perceived the behaviorist approach as effective in consistently developing students’ religious character. It also demonstrated that the application of Thorndike’s principles in Islamic Religious Education learning has been relevant and has supported the formation of stable religious behavior.

Based on the frequency distribution analysis of the ten questionnaire items, it was evident that the majority of teachers have had a positive perception of the application of Edward L. Thorndike’s principles in Islamic Religious Education learning. Teachers have actively promoted students’ learning readiness, implemented repeated practice, provided positive feedback, emphasized the consequences of actions, and utilized prior experiences to reinforce religious behavior. Responses to negatively worded items indicate that teachers have rarely neglected repeated practice or students’ experiences, reflecting consistency in applying the Law of Exercise and the Law of Attitude. Thus, Thorndike’s behaviorist theory has been not only well understood by teachers but also has been consistently applied to support Islamic Religious Education learning and the development of students’ religious character.



4. Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive analysis is a statistical method used to describe and summarize data as it is, without drawing further conclusions. This analysis presents basic information such as minimum, maximum, mean, and standard deviation, allowing researchers to observe the patterns, trends, and key characteristics within the data.

Table 13. Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive Statistics					
	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Consistency of Islamic Education Instruction	20	40	63	54,45	6,909
Valid N (listwise)	20				

Based on the descriptive statistical results for the variable Consistency of Islamic Education Instruction with 20 respondents, the level of consistency in Islamic Education learning can be explained as follows: the scores obtained from the teachers' perception questionnaire was range from 40 to 63, with an average (mean) of 54.45, and a standard deviation of 6.909.

Table 14. Level of Consistency

Category	Score Range
High	≥ 61.36
Medium	47.54 – 61.35
Low	≤ 47.53

The descriptive statistical analysis showed that the consistency of Islamic Education instruction at MI Al Azhar Center Baturaja was generally at a moderate level. With scores ranging from 40 to 63 and an average score of 54.45, indicated that most teachers have demonstrated a fairly consistent implementation of Islamic Education learning, although variations have still existed among respondents. Based on the established category ranges, the mean value fell within the medium consistency category, suggesting that while the instructional practices have reflected a positive direction, there remained room for improvement to achieve a uniformly high level of consistency across all teachers.

CONCLUSION

Based on the research findings, it could be concluded that the application of Edward L. Thorndike's principles within the framework of behaviorist learning theory has been significant relevance to the consistency of Islamic Religious Education



instruction at MI Al Azhar Center Baturaja. Teachers have understood the importance of students' mental readiness and motivation, consistently implemented repeated practice, provided positive reinforcement, emphasized the consequences of students' actions, and utilized prior experiences to foster stable religious behavior. Frequency distribution analysis showed that the majority of teachers have already held positive perceptions regarding the implementation of Thorndike's laws, including the Law of Readiness, Law of Exercise, Law of Effect, and Law of Attitude, in their daily teaching practices. Validity and reliability test of the instrument indicated that the collected data were accurate and consistent, with a Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.938, reflecting a very high level of reliability. Descriptive statistical analysis showed that the consistency of Islamic Religious Education instruction fell into the moderate category (mean = 54.45; score range 40–63), suggesting that the application of Thorndike's behaviorist principles has been generally well-implemented, although there has remained room to enhance uniformity and overall instructional consistency among teachers. The author has contributed to the field by examining the practical relevance of Edward L. Thorndike's behaviorist principles in enhancing the consistency of Islamic Religious Education instruction, providing empirical evidence and insights that guide teachers in effectively cultivating students' religious behavior

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