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Emotional Intelligence and Learning Interest in Islamic Religious Education and Character Building among Students at High School

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ABSTRACT

Learning interest is a critical determinant of students' success in the instructional process. In practice, however, many students continue to display low enthusiasm, limited concentration, and minimal engagement during Islamic Religious Education and Character Building (PAI and BP) lessons. Emotional intelligence has been proposed as a factor associated with this problem. This study examined the relationship between emotional intelligence and learning interest among students enrolled in PAI and BP at High School 3 Bandar Lampung, Indonesia. A quantitative correlational, ex post facto design was employed. The population consisted of 233 tenth-grade students, from which 70 respondents were drawn using Slovin's formula (10% margin of error) and a simple random sampling technique. Data were collected through a validated and reliable Likert-type questionnaire and analyzed using Kolmogorov-Smirnov normality tests, linearity tests, and Pearson product-moment correlation. The analysis yielded a correlation coefficient of $r = 0.460$ with a significance value of $p = 0.000$ ($p < 0.05$), indicating a statistically significant, positive relationship of moderate strength between emotional intelligence and learning interest. Students with higher emotional intelligence tended to report higher learning interest, and vice versa. These findings suggest that emotional intelligence plays a meaningful role in fostering learning interest and should be considered in efforts to improve the quality of Islamic religious education instruction.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Education plays a central role in shaping and improving the quality of a nation's human resources. Through education, individuals acquire the knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed to face life's challenges and to contribute to national development (Cong, 2025; Talan & Tyagi, 2020). This aligns with the mandate of Law No. 20 of 2003 on the National Education System, which stipulates that education functions to develop capabilities and to build the character and civilization of a dignified nation as

part of the effort to educate the nation's life. Consequently, the stronger a nation's education system, the greater its opportunity to cultivate an intelligent, productive, and competent society (Shavkidinova et al., 2023).

Education is not limited to the development of intellectual ability; it also plays a substantial role in shaping personality and character (Cholifah, 2024; Hasibuan et al., 2026). Character formation is closely linked to emotional intelligence, the capacity of an individual to recognize, manage, and appropriately express emotions, both toward oneself and toward others (Antonopoulou, 2024; Wan et al., 2023). By cultivating emotional intelligence through the educational process, students are expected to develop courteous attitudes, noble character, and behavior that reflects social and moral values (Alfarezel, 2025; Susanti & Nukman, 2024). Students with well-developed emotional intelligence tend to manage their emotions appropriately throughout the learning process, whereas those who struggle to regulate their emotions are more prone to diminished learning interest (Sari et al., 2025; Suprpto, 2025). Developing both emotional intelligence and learning interest is therefore essential to improving the quality of classroom instruction.

From an Islamic perspective, emotional intelligence is grounded in the Qur'an and Hadith (Qureshi, 2025; Wahab, 2022). QS. Ali 'Imran (3): 159 illustrates the importance of gentleness, compassion, and self-restraint as prerequisites for effective teaching and learning: the verse describes how the Prophet's mild and forgiving disposition—rather than harshness—drew people closer to him, and it further counsels' consultation and reliance on God once a decision has been made (Anam, 2022). Applied to education, the verse implies that teachers are expected to manage their own emotions, understand their students' circumstances, and build harmonious relationships so that a safe and conducive learning environment can be created; students, in turn, are encouraged to develop self-awareness, regulate negative emotions, and cultivate mutual respect. Islamic religious instruction is thus oriented not only toward cognitive achievement but also toward the formation of character and noble conduct (Muzakki & Nurdin, 2022).

Emotional intelligence refers to an individual's ability to recognize and understand one's own feelings as well as the feelings of others (Chung et al., 2023; Usman et al., 2024). This ability enables a person to manage emotions appropriately, maintain self-motivation, and build positive relationships with others (Filice & Weese, 2024). Emotions originate from one's deepest feelings; when properly acknowledged and understood, they provide deeper insight into oneself and one's surroundings. With well-developed emotional intelligence, individuals can channel their emotions constructively to support adaptive thinking and behavior in daily life (Drigas et al., 2023).

Emotional intelligence is widely regarded as an important factor in enhancing students' learning interest, since it shapes how students manage their emotions, sustain self-motivation, and maintain enthusiasm throughout the learning process (Martínez-Rodríguez & Ferreira, 2025; Rahman et al., 2024). Students who can regulate their emotions tend to display greater interest, enthusiasm, and active participation in lessons. Understanding the extent to which emotional intelligence contributes to learning interest

can therefore inform efforts to create a more positive learning environment that supports students' academic development (Arias et al., 2022; Santos et al., 2023).

A preliminary study conducted at High School 3 Bandar Lampung—comprising observation and interviews with a PAI and BP teacher and two students—indicated several concerns. The teacher reported that some students displayed limited ability to manage their emotions, such as becoming easily bored, lacking confidence, and struggling to regulate their attitudes when faced with the demands of learning, which in turn was reflected in low active participation. This pattern was evident in students' limited attention during lessons, minimal participation in discussions, and insufficient diligence in completing assignments. Underdeveloped emotional intelligence appeared to hinder students' ability to motivate themselves, build positive relationships with teachers and peers, and internalize the values taught in PAI & BP, thereby limiting the achievement of learning objectives. A subsequent preliminary questionnaire administered to tenth-grade students confirmed that emotional intelligence levels were relatively low. The self-awareness indicator recorded the lowest percentage (17%), suggesting that many students struggled to recognize and regulate their own emotions and that their intrapersonal competence lagged their interpersonal competence. On the learning-interest questionnaire, the involvement indicator likewise recorded the lowest percentage (21%), reflecting limited active participation in asking questions, engaging in discussion, and expressing opinions during lessons. These findings indicate that both the internal dimension of emotional intelligence (self-awareness and self-regulation) and the behavioral dimension of learning interest (active involvement) warrant particular attention.

Learning interest can be defined as a factor that drives students to learn, grounded in a sense of attraction, enjoyment, and willingness to engage with the material (Fitri & Hasbi, 2025; Kharisma et al., 2025; Mutmainah et al., 2025). Its importance is likewise reflected in Islamic teaching, as in QS. At-Taubah (9):122, which explains that not every believer is required to go to battle; rather, a group from each community should remain behind to deepen their religious knowledge so that, upon returning, they may guide and caution their people. Applied to education, the verse underscores that pursuing knowledge—including religious knowledge—enables individuals to understand, practice, and disseminate Islamic teachings to others. Learning interest in Islamic religious education is therefore a valuable starting point for shaping devout and socially beneficial Muslim individuals (Sholeh et al., 2024).

Emotional intelligence and learning interest are conceptually interrelated (Arias et al., 2022). Individuals with strong emotional intelligence tend to understand and manage their feelings more effectively, making them more likely to feel drawn to, focused on, and motivated for learning (Noor & Gamilina, 2026). As students' emotional intelligence increases, their interest in the learning process is expected to increase correspondingly; conversely, low emotional intelligence is associated with reduced interest and a greater tendency to lose motivation (Saudagar et al., 2024). Emotional intelligence thus helps students remain focused and motivated, thereby facilitating the cultivation of learning interest.

Several prior studies support a positive association between emotional intelligence and learning interest. Mulyadi et al. (2025) found that higher emotional intelligence corresponded with higher learning interest among students. Noor and Gamilina (2026) reported a comparable positive relationship between emotional intelligence and learning interest. Debyo et al. (2024) found that emotional intelligence and learning interest jointly influenced academic stress, underscoring the relevance of both constructs to a healthy learning climate. Santoso and Rukmini (2021) examined the same relationship within civics education and found a significant but low-strength correlation. Rijatno et al. (2021) working in a vocational-school context, found that emotional intelligence and study habits contributed to students' understanding of accounting. Collectively, these studies point to the consistent importance of emotional intelligence for learning-related outcomes, helping students remain motivated, focused, and resilient in the face of academic challenges.

Despite this body of evidence, a research gap remains: few studies have specifically examined the correlation between emotional intelligence and learning interest within the PAI and BP subject, particularly with respect to the topic of Islamic Civilization in the Modern Era, in senior high schools in the Bandar Lampung region. Most prior research has focused on emotional intelligence and learning interest in general academic subjects, leaving the context of Islamic religious education comparatively underexplored. The present study addresses this gap by examining the correlation between emotional intelligence and learning interest specifically within the topic of the role of Islamic scholars in the spread of Islam in Indonesia among students at SMA Negeri 3 Bandar Lampung—a setting with its own distinct student and environmental characteristics.

This study is warranted because learning interest is a key determinant of successful instruction, and observations at High School 3 Bandar Lampung indicate that some students remain insufficiently active, enthusiastic, and attentive during PAI & BP lessons. Such conditions may be linked to students' emotional functioning. Accordingly, this study investigates the correlation between emotional intelligence and learning interest, with the aim of informing the development of PAI and BP instruction that attends not only to learning interest but also to students' emotional needs. Based on the foregoing discussion, this study tests the hypothesis that emotional intelligence is significantly and positively correlated with learning interest among students in the PAI and BP subject at High School 3 Bandar Lampung.

2. METHOD

This study employed a quantitative correlational design using an ex post facto approach, in which the variables under investigation were observed as they naturally occurred, without experimental manipulation. The design was intended to determine the direction, strength, and statistical significance of the relationship between emotional intelligence (independent variable) and learning interest (dependent variable) among students. The study was conducted during the even semester of the 2025/2026 academic year at High School 3 Bandar Lampung, Indonesia.

The population comprised all 233 tenth-grade students at High School 3 Bandar Lampung. The sample size was determined using Slovin's formula with a 10% margin of error, yielding a sample of 70 respondents. Respondents were selected using probability sampling, specifically simple random sampling, which affords every member of the population an equal chance of selection (via lottery, a random-number table, or an equivalent random-selection procedure). This technique minimizes selection bias, although it requires complete population data to be implemented accurately.

Primary data were collected using a non-test instrument in the form of a structured questionnaire. Emotional intelligence was measured across five indicators: self-awareness, emotional self-regulation, self-motivation, recognition of others' emotions (empathy), and relationship management, represented by 15 items. Learning interest was measured across four indicators: enjoyment, involvement, interest, and attention, likewise represented by 15 items.

Instrument validity was assessed by correlating each item score with the total instrument score using the Pearson product-moment formula, to determine whether each item appropriately measured the intended construct. Reliability, which reflects the internal consistency of the instrument across repeated administrations, was assessed using Cronbach's alpha coefficient; an instrument was considered reliable if the coefficient exceeded 0.70.

Prior to hypothesis testing, a normality test (Kolmogorov-Smirnov) was conducted to determine whether the residual data were normally distributed, and a linearity test was conducted to determine whether the relationship between emotional intelligence and learning interest was linear, both of which are prerequisites for parametric analysis. Hypothesis testing was then carried out using inferential parametric statistics, specifically Pearson product-moment correlation, to quantify the strength and direction of the linear relationship between the two variables. All statistical analyses were performed using SPSS.

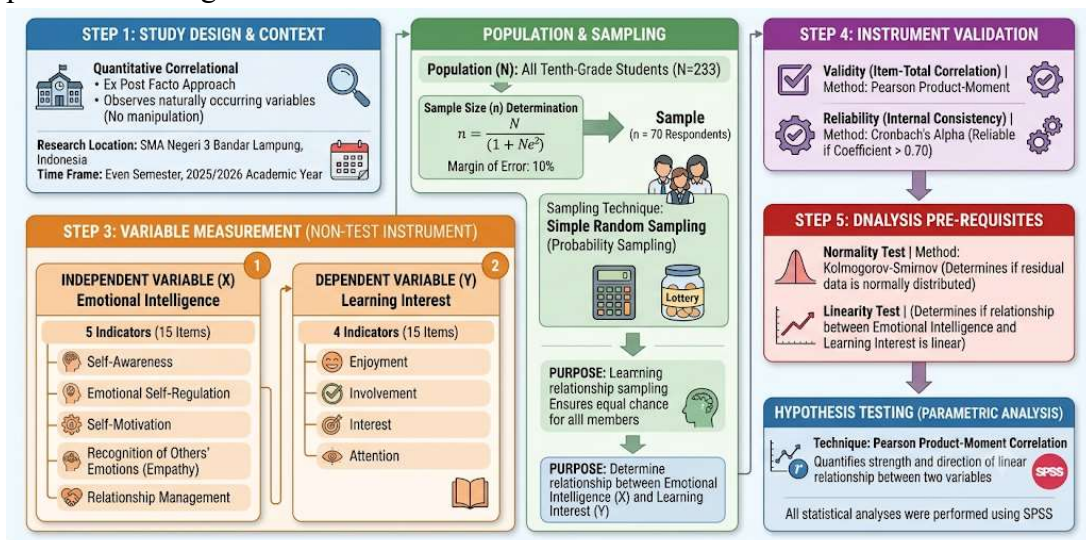


Figure 1. Quantitative Correlational Design Using an Ex Post Facto Approach

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Instrument Testing

Prior to data analysis, the research instrument was tested for validity and reliability to ensure that the questionnaire was appropriate for data collection.

Validity Test

Table 1. Validity Test Results — Emotional Intelligence (X)

Item	r-calculated	r-table
X01	0.819	0.235
X02	0.783	
X03	0.715	
X04	0.793	
X05	0.772	
X06	0.779	
X07	0.752	
X08	0.736	
X09	0.786	
X10	0.758	
X11	0.753	
X12	0.761	
X13	0.729	
X14	0.848	
X15	0.822	

As shown in Table 1, all items of the emotional intelligence variable yielded r-calculated values (ranging from 0.715 to 0.848) that exceeded the r-table value of 0.235. All items were therefore deemed valid and suitable for use as a research instrument.

Table 2. Validity Test Results — Learning Interest (Y)

Item	r-calculated	r-table
Y01	0.689	0.235
Y02	0.799	
Y03	0.643	
Y04	0.763	
Y05	0.686	
Y06	0.755	
Y07	0.785	
Y08	0.779	
Y09	0.717	
Y10	0.798	
Y11	0.847	
Y12	0.739	
Y13	0.750	
Y14	0.736	
Y15	0.713	

Table 2 shows that all items of the learning interest variable produced r-calculated values (ranging from 0.643 to 0.847) that exceeded the r-table value of 0.235, indicating that all items were valid and that the instrument met the requirements for further analysis.

Reliability Test**Table 3.** Reliability Test Results — Emotional Intelligence (X)

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
0.952	15

Table 3 shows a Cronbach's alpha of 0.952 for the emotional intelligence instrument, exceeding the 0.70 threshold and indicating a very high level of internal consistency.

Table 4. Reliability Test Results — Learning Interest (Y)

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
0.943	15

Table 4 shows a Cronbach's alpha of 0.943 for the learning interest instrument. As both coefficients exceed 0.90, the two instruments are classified as highly reliable, with excellent internal consistency.

Prerequisite (Assumption) Tests**Normality Test****Table 5.** One-Sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov Normality Test

Statistic	Value
N	70
Mean (residual)	0.0000000
Std. Deviation	8.24633336
Absolute	0.074
Positive	0.073
Negative	-0.074
Test Statistic	0.074
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	0.200

The Kolmogorov-Smirnov test produced an Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed) value of 0.200, which exceeds 0.05. The null hypothesis of normal distribution is therefore retained, indicating that the residual data were normally distributed and satisfied the assumption required for subsequent hypothesis testing.

Linearity Test**Table 6.** Linearity Test Results

Source of Variation	F	Sig.	Remarks
Linearity	19.137	0.000	Linear
Deviation from Linearity	1.137	0.348	No deviation from linearity

The linearity test in Table 6 shows a significance value of 0.000 for the Linearity component (< 0.05), indicating a linear relationship between the two variables. The Deviation from Linearity component yielded a significance value of 0.348 (> 0.05), confirming no meaningful deviation from linearity. The relationship between emotional intelligence and learning interest is therefore linear and satisfies the assumptions required for correlational analysis.

Hypothesis Testing

Table 7. Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Results

		Emotional Intelligence	Learning Interest
Emotional Intelligence	Pearson Correlation	1	0.460**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0.000
	N	70	70
Learning Interest	Pearson Correlation	0.460**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	
	N	70	70

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The Pearson correlation analysis yielded a correlation coefficient of $r = 0.460$ with a significance value of $p = 0.000$. Because $p < 0.05$, the relationship between emotional intelligence and learning interest is statistically significant, and the research hypothesis (H1) positing a significant relationship between the two variables is accepted. The coefficient of 0.460 indicates a positive relationship of moderate strength: students with higher emotional intelligence tend to report higher learning interest, and students with lower emotional intelligence tend to report lower learning interest.

Discussion

The findings indicate that emotional intelligence contributes meaningfully to students' learning interest. Emotional intelligence encompasses the ability to recognize, understand, and manage one's own emotions as well as those of others. Students with well-developed emotional intelligence tend to be better able to regulate negative emotions—such as laziness, boredom, anxiety, and discouragement—during the learning process, which in turn helps them remain focused, motivated, and interested in learning activities.

The capacity to manage emotions appears to enable students to derive greater enjoyment from learning, devote closer attention to instructional content, and sustain a stronger desire to acquire new knowledge. Conversely, students with limited emotional regulation are more prone to difficulties such as poor concentration, a tendency to give up easily, and low motivation—conditions that ultimately depress learning interest. These findings are consistent with Goleman's theory of emotional intelligence, which characterizes emotional intelligence as the ability to recognize one's own and others' feelings, to motivate oneself, and to manage emotions effectively within relationships (Al Jaber et al., 2024; Surti, 2026). The component processes identified in this study—self-awareness, self-regulation, self-motivation, empathy, and social skills—correspond closely to Goleman's framework and appear to create the psychological conditions conducive to learning, thereby supporting greater learning interest.

The results also align with Murayama (2022) conceptualization of learning interest as a sense of enjoyment and attraction toward a learning activity, undertaken without external coercion. Consistent with Dewi (2025) framework, students with high learning interest in this study demonstrated greater attention, involvement, and enjoyment during lessons, as reflected in the enjoyment, involvement, interest, and attention indicators

used to operationalize the construct. Taken together, the two theoretical perspectives suggest that stronger emotional intelligence facilitates the development of a more positive orientation toward learning, thereby elevating learning interest; conversely, weaker emotional regulation appears to inhibit learning interest by increasing susceptibility to boredom, distraction, and motivational decline.

The present findings corroborate several prior studies. Consistent with Mulyadi et al. (2025) and Noor and Gamilina (2026), and related work by Ridho et al. (2025), students with higher emotional intelligence in the current sample tended to show greater interest in learning and stronger self-awareness supportive of effective engagement. The magnitude of the correlation observed here ($r = 0.460$, moderate) is comparable to that reported by Debyo et al. (2024), who found a significant association between emotional intelligence, learning interest, and academic stress, and is notably stronger than the low-magnitude correlation ($r = 0.209$) reported by Santoso and Rukmini (2021) in the context of civics education. In a related but methodologically distinct study, Rijatno et al. (2021) found that emotional intelligence and study habits jointly and significantly predicted accounting achievement ($p = 0.000$), reinforcing the broader relevance of emotional intelligence to learning-related outcomes across subject domains.

Variation in correlation strength across studies—from low to moderate—may reflect differences in subject matter, student population, and contextual factors such as school culture and teaching practices. Nonetheless, the overall pattern across these studies, including the present one, consistently points to a positive association between emotional intelligence and learning interest, extending this evidence specifically to the domain of Islamic religious education (PAI) and character building (BP), where such research has previously been limited. These findings suggest that PAI and BP teachers and school administrators may benefit from incorporating socio-emotional learning strategies—such as guided reflection, emotion-recognition activities, and collaborative discussion instruction—alongside efforts to strengthen students' self-awareness and self-regulation. Given that the self-awareness indicator recorded the lowest percentage in the preliminary data, targeted interventions addressing this specific dimension may be particularly beneficial.

This study is subject to several limitations. First, the sample was confined to tenth-grade students at a single school, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other grade levels, institutions, or regions. Second, the cross-sectional, correlational design precludes causal inference; longitudinal or experimental designs are needed to establish directionality. Third, data is collected via self-report questionnaires, which may be subject to social desirability bias. Future research could employ larger, multi-site samples, incorporate qualitative methods to enrich understanding of the mechanisms linking emotional intelligence and learning interest, and examine additional variables—such as teacher support, family environment, or peer relationships—that may moderate or mediate this relationship.

4. CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates a statistically significant, positive relationship of moderate strength between emotional intelligence and learning interest among students in the Islamic Religious Education and Character-Building subject at High School 3 Bandar Lampung ($r = 0.460$, $p = 0.000 < 0.05$). The research hypothesis positing a relationship between the two variables is accepted. Higher levels of emotional intelligence were associated with higher levels of learning interest, and vice versa. These findings indicate that students' ability to recognize, understand, and manage their emotions plays an important role in fostering learning interest. Students who regulate their emotions effectively tend to be more focused, motivated, attentive, and interested in acquiring knowledge. Accordingly, strengthening emotional intelligence—through both classroom instruction and broader psychosocial support—may serve as a meaningful strategy for enhancing students' learning interest and, ultimately, the effectiveness of Islamic religious education.

Given the statistically significant and moderate positive relationship between emotional intelligence (EI) and learning interest established in this study ($r = 0.460$), future educational policies and pedagogical frameworks should systematically integrate emotional intelligence development into the Islamic Religious Education (IRE) curriculum. School administrators and educators are encouraged to transition from traditional, purely cognitive-centric teaching methods toward emotionally responsive pedagogy by implementing structured psychosocial support, mindfulness practices, and collaborative learning activities that nurture students' self-awareness and emotional regulation. Furthermore, future researchers should expand the generalizability of these findings by conducting longitudinal or experimental studies across diverse demographic regions, while also exploring potential mediating or moderating variables—such as teacher-student dynamics, digital learning environments, or parental involvement—to provide a more comprehensive blueprint for enhancing student engagement in religious and character education.

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