



From Passive to Active: Problem-Based Learning as a Catalyst for Improving Islamic Education Performance among 11th-Grade Social Science Students

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ABSTRACT

This classroom action research examines the effectiveness of the Problem-Based Learning (PBL) model in enhancing student activeness and learning outcomes in Islamic Education at SMA Al Muslim, Bekasi, Indonesia. The study involved 32 eleventh-grade social science students and was conducted over two cycles following the Kemmis and McTaggart framework. Data were collected through observations, interviews, achievement tests, and documentation. In the first cycle, student activeness remained moderate, with limited initiative in questioning and expressing opinions. By the second cycle, however, observable indicators of participation—including voluntary questioning, peer collaboration, and critical argumentation—increased substantially. Concurrently, class average test scores rose significantly, exceeding the minimum mastery criterion. Teacher reflections also noted heightened student motivation and more positive attitudes toward Islamic subject matter. The PBL model proved particularly suitable for Islamic Education, enabling students to examine religious concepts—such as ethics, worship, and social responsibility—not merely as theoretical doctrines but as applicable frameworks for daily life. Through small-group discussions and authentic problem-solving tasks, learners developed collaborative skills, communication competence, and higher-order thinking. This student-centered approach shifted the classroom dynamic from teacher-dominated instruction to active, inquiry-based exploration. These findings affirm that PBL is an effective pedagogical innovation for Islamic Education at the secondary level. The study contributes empirical evidence to the growing literature on active learning in religious education contexts, particularly in Indonesia. It recommends further implementation of PBL in other religious and moral education subjects, with adjustments for class size and time allocation.

KEYWORDS

Problem-Based Learning, student activeness, learning outcomes, Islamic Education, classroom action research

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Introduction

Islamic Religious Education in Indonesia continues to face a significant challenge regarding low student engagement in the learning process. In many classrooms, this subject remains dominated by teacher-centered, transmission-based approaches where students act as passive recipients of religious knowledge without being encouraged to



connect Islamic teachings with their everyday realities. This situation has resulted in religious education becoming less meaningful, leaving students struggling to internalize Islamic values deeply. Yet the purpose of Islamic education extends beyond cognitive development—it aims to shape character and moral attitudes as well. In the 21st century, students need critical thinking, collaboration, and problem-solving skills, competencies that simply cannot be developed through conventional lecture methods. Something must change. We cannot keep relying on outdated approaches when the world around us is evolving so rapidly. This is precisely why innovative learning models are urgently needed—to shift the paradigm from teacher-centered to student-centered instruction and create more interactive, applicable learning experiences. Such transformation holds the key to simultaneously improving both student engagement and academic achievement in Islamic Religious Education.

Previous studies have extensively examined the effectiveness of Problem-Based Learning in improving learning outcomes across various educational levels. Research consistently shows that PBL enhances critical thinking skills and academic performance in diverse subject areas. Within the context of Islamic Education, several studies have been conducted at elementary and junior high school levels. For instance, Romadhoni and Basyari (2025) implemented PBL in fifth-grade Islamic Education and found measurable improvements from the first to second cycle. Similarly, a study at SDN Balerejo 3 reported an increase in mastery learning from 36% to 89%, while research at SMP Satu Atap Reudeup confirmed PBL's effectiveness in boosting Islamic Education outcomes. What is notable, however, is that most of this research remains concentrated at the elementary level and tends to focus narrowly on cognitive outcomes alone. Very few studies have examined how PBL simultaneously enhances both student engagement and learning achievement in Islamic Education at the senior high school level—particularly within social science classrooms where students possess distinct learning characteristics that deserve more scholarly attention.

Building upon the identified research gap, this study aims to examine the effectiveness of implementing the Problem-Based Learning model in enhancing student engagement and learning outcomes in Islamic Religious Education at SMA Al Muslim, Tambun Selatan, Bekasi. Specifically, this research seeks to answer three core questions: (1) How does the implementation of PBL improve student engagement among 11th-grade social science students in Islamic Education? (2) To what extent do students' learning outcomes improve following PBL



implementation compared to their initial baseline performance? (3) How do students respond to PBL implementation that integrates Islamic values with real-life contextual issues? This study employs a Classroom Action Research method conducted over two cycles, involving 32 students from the 11th-grade social science class. Data collection utilizes classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, achievement tests, and documentation. Engagement indicators include participation in group discussions, frequency of questioning, ability to express opinions, and collaborative skills, while learning outcomes are measured through written tests assessing conceptual understanding, case analysis, and practical application of Islamic values.

This research argues that implementing PBL will significantly enhance both student engagement and learning outcomes in Islamic Religious Education. The student-centered, inquiry-based nature of PBL has the potential to transform classroom dynamics from passive reception to active participation by immersing students in authentic problem-solving scenarios relevant to Islamic teachings. Through small-group discussions, students are naturally encouraged to voice their opinions, exchange arguments, and reach collective agreements—processes that sharpen critical thinking and collaborative skills. The teacher transitions from being the sole knowledge provider to a facilitator who presents authentic problems and guides the inquiry process. Research by Diana et al. (2026) confirms that PBL increases active student participation, while Romadhoni and Basyari (2025) reported notable gains in learning outcomes following PBL implementation. We hypothesize that both engagement and academic achievement will demonstrate meaningful improvement from the first to second cycle. This argument rests upon constructivist learning theory and is reinforced by empirical evidence from multiple educational levels, suggesting that PBL holds genuine promise for revitalizing Islamic Education pedagogy.

Methods

Research Design

This study employs a Classroom Action Research (CAR) design following the Kemmis and McTaggart model, which is widely recognized as an appropriate framework for improving educational practices through systematic, reflective inquiry (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988). The model consists of four interconnected stages that form a cyclical process: planning, action, observation, and reflection (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988). This cyclical nature allows for continuous improvement, where each cycle builds upon the



findings and reflections of the previous one. The research was conducted over two cycles, with each cycle following the complete sequence of planning, action, observation, and reflection. The decision to use two cycles aligns with best practices in classroom action research, which emphasizes iterative improvement rather than one-time implementation (Amirudin et al., 2025). By the end of the second cycle, the researcher expected to see meaningful improvements in both student engagement and learning outcomes, with the reflection from the first cycle serving as the foundation for strengthening the second cycle's implementation.

Research Setting and Participants

The research was conducted at SMA Al Muslim, Tambun Selatan, Bekasi, during the academic year 2025/2026. This school was selected purposefully based on several considerations. First, the school demonstrated openness to implementing innovative teaching approaches and was committed to enhancing the quality of its Islamic Education instruction. Second, the researcher had established collaborative relationships with the Islamic Education teachers at this school, which facilitated smooth coordination throughout the research process. The participants of this study were 32 students enrolled in the 11th-grade social science class (XI IPS). This class was specifically chosen because observations indicated that students in this class exhibited relatively low engagement during Islamic Education lessons, making them appropriate subjects for examining the potential impact of PBL on student activeness and learning outcomes (Ni'mah et al., 2026). The students represented a mix of academic abilities, which strengthened the research by allowing the researcher to observe how PBL affected students across the ability spectrum.

Research Procedure

The research procedure followed the four stages of the Kemmis and McTaggart model across two cycles (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988). In the planning stage of Cycle I, the researcher prepared comprehensive learning tools aligned with the PBL model, including a detailed lesson plan, learning materials presenting authentic problems related to Islamic teachings, group discussion worksheets, and evaluation instruments. In the action stage, the researcher implemented the PBL model according to the prepared lesson plan. Students were divided into small groups of four to five members to discuss and solve contextual problems related to Islamic teachings, such as ethical dilemmas and



social responsibility in daily life (Yaqzhani et al., 2025). Throughout the action, the teacher acted as a facilitator, providing guidance and scaffolding as needed while allowing students to take ownership of their learning. In the observation stage, the researcher and collaborator systematically observed the learning process using prepared observation sheets focused on student activeness indicators. In the reflection stage, the researcher and collaborator analyzed the data to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of Cycle I implementation, identifying areas for improvement that became the basis for revising the action plan in Cycle II.

Data Collection Techniques

This study employed multiple data collection techniques to ensure comprehensive and triangulated findings (Amirudin et al., 2025). First, classroom observation was conducted using structured observation sheets designed specifically to measure student activeness, containing specific indicators with a rating scale to quantify the level of student participation and engagement during the learning process. Observations were conducted by both the researcher and the collaborating teacher to minimize subjectivity. Second, semi-structured interviews were conducted with both the Islamic Education teacher and selected students to gain deeper insights into the learning process, exploring perceptions of PBL implementation, challenges encountered, and observed changes in student behavior (Ni'mah et al., 2026). Third, achievement tests were administered at the end of each cycle to measure student learning outcomes, consisting of multiple-choice questions and essay questions designed to assess not only factual recall but also conceptual understanding and analytical thinking. Fourth, documentation was collected throughout the research process, including photographs of classroom activities and samples of student work, serving as physical evidence of the action implementation.

Data Analysis

Data analysis employed both quantitative and qualitative approaches to provide a comprehensive understanding of the research findings (Yaqzhani et al., 2025). Quantitative data analysis involved calculating the percentage of student activeness based on observational indicators, with students scoring above 75% on engagement indicators categorized as highly active. Additionally, the mean score of student learning outcomes was calculated for each cycle and compared between Cycle I and Cycle II to



measure the extent of improvement. The percentage of students achieving the minimum mastery criterion was also calculated to demonstrate the broader impact of PBL on class performance. Qualitative data analysis was conducted through thematic analysis of field notes and interview transcripts, identifying recurring themes and patterns related to student engagement, collaboration, critical thinking, and attitudes toward Islamic Education (Ni'mah et al., 2026). By combining quantitative and qualitative approaches, this research generated robust evidence regarding the effectiveness of PBL in improving both student engagement and learning outcomes in Islamic Religious Education at the senior high school level.

Result and Discussion

Cycle I Findings: Moderate Engagement Levels

The implementation of the Problem-Based Learning model during the first cycle revealed moderate levels of student engagement across most observed indicators. Data collected through structured observation sheets showed that the average student activeness score in Cycle I was 64.3%. This indicates that while students began to show some involvement in learning activities, engagement remained uneven across the class. Observations documented that several students started to demonstrate initiative by asking questions, recording important points presented by the teacher, and participating in group discussions, although active participation was still dominated by a few specific students. The interactive nature of PBL activities began to stimulate students' curiosity, yet some learners remained passive and required additional encouragement from the teacher to engage meaningfully. Teacher reflections noted that time management during group discussions posed a significant challenge, with several groups struggling to complete their problem-solving tasks within the allocated time. Despite these challenges, the initial enthusiasm for the PBL approach indicated potential for improvement in subsequent cycles.

Cycle II Findings: Significant Improvement in Engagement

The second cycle demonstrated substantial improvement across all indicators of student engagement and active participation. Observations revealed that the average student activeness score increased significantly to 81.7%, representing a notable gain of 17.4 percentage points from Cycle I. This improvement was attributed to the teacher's strategic changes in learning approaches, particularly through the implementation of



Problem-Based Learning in the form of case studies. The case study activities required students to think critically, collaborate effectively, and take active roles in solving authentic problems relevant to their daily lives. This approach encouraged students to express opinions more freely, listen attentively to their peers' perspectives, and actively participate in formulating collective solutions to the problems presented. The quality of group discussions improved notably, with students demonstrating deeper analytical thinking and more meaningful connections between theoretical Islamic concepts and their practical application in everyday situations.

A detailed description of classroom dynamics reveals transformative changes in student behavior and learning processes throughout the two cycles. In Cycle I, students often appeared hesitant and required frequent teacher prompts to engage in discussions, with many group members remaining silent while others dominated conversations. By Cycle II, however, classrooms became vibrant learning environments where students eagerly took turns speaking, asked probing questions, and challenged each other's viewpoints respectfully. The collaborative problem-solving process evolved from superficial task completion to deep, meaningful discussions where students drew connections between Islamic ethics and contemporary social issues. Students demonstrated increased accountability for their group's success, with stronger individuals actively supporting struggling peers. The teacher's role shifted noticeably from directing activities to facilitating learning, providing occasional scaffolding while allowing students to navigate their inquiry journey independently. This behavioral transformation contributed significantly to the improved engagement outcomes observed in Cycle II.

Students exhibited increased learning motivation and self-confidence in expressing their ideas throughout the learning process. The classroom atmosphere became more dynamic and conducive to learning, as evidenced by the active involvement of all students in the learning process. The teacher's role as a facilitator, providing guidance and feedback during discussions, proved essential in supporting student engagement. Equitable role distribution within groups also helped previously passive students become more active, as they felt a sense of responsibility toward their group's outcomes. Observations documented that students showed improved ability to listen actively to their peers, participate in collaborative problem-solving, and contribute meaningfully to group discussions. The case study approach particularly resonated with



students because the problems presented were relevant to their daily experiences, making abstract Islamic concepts tangible and personally meaningful. This relevance significantly enhanced students' intrinsic motivation to engage deeply with the learning material.

Overall observation results demonstrate that the PBL approach successfully enhanced student learning activeness significantly across multiple dimensions. Student activeness was not only evident through verbal participation but also through various forms of engagement, including writing activities, active listening, and teamwork collaboration. Students demonstrated improved note-taking skills, recording important points discussed during group work and teacher explanations. Active listening behaviors increased notably, with students showing greater attentiveness to their peers' contributions and building upon others' ideas constructively. Teamwork collaboration improved substantially, as students learned to coordinate tasks, share responsibilities, and support each other in achieving group objectives. These comprehensive indicators of activeness confirm that the PBL model effectively engages students in multiple ways, creating a richer and more meaningful learning experience compared to traditional lecture-based instruction. The findings strengthen the evidence that instructional models involving direct student participation can significantly enhance engagement and comprehension of subject matter.

The substantial improvement in student engagement from 64.3% in Cycle I to 81.7% in Cycle II can be interpreted through the lens of constructivist learning theory, which posits that meaningful learning occurs when students actively construct knowledge through experience and social interaction. In the context of Islamic Education, PBL's effectiveness stems from its ability to bridge theoretical religious concepts with students' lived experiences. When students grappled with authentic case studies—such as ethical dilemmas in social media use or social responsibility in multicultural communities—they internalized Islamic values more deeply because the learning was personally relevant and immediately applicable. The collaborative group work fostered social engagement, allowing students to learn from diverse perspectives while developing communication and critical thinking skills essential for 21st-century citizenship. The role of the teacher as facilitator rather than sole knowledge provider empowered students to take ownership of their learning, increasing intrinsic motivation



and investment in the learning process . This pedagogical shift transformed the classroom dynamic from passive reception to active meaning-making.

Several key factors contributed to the successful implementation of PBL in this study. First, the authentic case studies were carefully designed to resonate with students' daily lives, making abstract Islamic concepts tangible and personally meaningful . Second, the collaborative group structure provided multiple opportunities for peer learning, enabling students to co-construct knowledge and develop social skills simultaneously . Third, the teacher's developing expertise in PBL facilitation allowed for more effective scaffolding in Cycle II, addressing the challenges identified during reflection . The equitable role distribution within groups helped previously passive students become more active because they felt accountable for their group's outcomes. The teacher's consistent feedback and guidance during discussions supported students in developing their critical thinking and collaborative skills. Additionally, the supportive school culture played a crucial role, as the school administration encouraged innovation in teaching practices and provided resources for implementing student-centered approaches . These factors collectively contributed to the significant engagement improvements observed from Cycle I to Cycle II.

The findings of this study carry significant implications for the broader practice of Islamic Education pedagogy, particularly at the senior high school level. Traditional approaches to PAI instruction, which often prioritize memorization and transmission of religious knowledge, appear insufficient for developing the critical thinking and problem-solving skills students need in contemporary society . This research demonstrates that PBL offers a viable alternative that simultaneously enhances academic achievement and meaningful engagement with Islamic values . The observed improvements in both cognitive engagement and behavioral participation suggest that PBL supports holistic Islamic education, addressing not only the intellectual dimension but also spiritual and character development. Teachers and curriculum developers in Islamic schools should consider integrating PBL principles into their instructional design to create more engaging, relevant, and effective learning experiences. However, successful implementation requires adequate teacher training, sufficient time allocation, and institutional support to overcome challenges such as diverse student abilities and time constraints . With these considerations addressed, PBL can serve as a transformative pedagogical strategy for Islamic Education in the 21st century.



The research findings conclusively demonstrate that the Problem-Based Learning model significantly enhances student activeness in Islamic Religious Education at SMA Al Muslim. The substantial increase in student engagement from 64.3% in Cycle I to 81.7% in Cycle II confirms that PBL effectively promotes active learning participation across multiple dimensions, including verbal contributions, active listening, writing activities, and collaborative teamwork. The improvement was not merely quantitative but qualitative, as students transitioned from passive recipients of information to active co-constructors of knowledge who confidently expressed opinions and proposed solutions to complex problems. These results align with previous studies conducted at various educational levels, which consistently found that PBL enhances student engagement and learning outcomes. The success of this implementation reinforces the importance of student-centered pedagogical approaches in Islamic Education and provides empirical evidence supporting the adoption of PBL as an innovative instructional strategy in Islamic secondary schools throughout Indonesia.

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