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# THE IMPACT OF PROBLEM-BASED LEARNING ON STUDENTS' MOTIVATION AND LEARNING OUTCOMES IN ISLAMIC EDUCATION AT SMPN 1 PAJUKUKANG, BANTAENG REGENCY

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## ABSTRACT

This study aims to investigate the impact of the Problem-Based Learning (PBL) method on students' motivation and learning outcomes in Islamic Education (PAI) at SMPN 1 Pajukukang, Bantaeng Regency. A quantitative approach was employed using a quasi-experimental design with a non-equivalent pretest-posttest control group. Data were collected through observation, interviews, and documentation, and subsequently analyzed using appropriate statistical tests. The findings indicate that the implementation of PBL has a positive effect on both students' motivation and their academic performance. In the experimental group, the average learning motivation increased from 51.17% (pretest) to 71.87% (posttest), outperforming the control group, which only reached 54.04%. Furthermore, students' learning outcomes improved significantly, as reflected by the experimental group's average posttest score of 81.82, compared to 71.42 in the control group. PBL enables students to actively explore their abilities through real-world problem-solving, encourages them to express opinions confidently, and enhances their comprehension of learning material. Nevertheless, the successful implementation of this method requires thorough preparation by educators, particularly in designing structured learning steps and selecting relevant, contextually appropriate problems. In conclusion, Problem-Based Learning is shown to be an effective pedagogical approach for enhancing both motivation and learning outcomes in Islamic Education. As such, it presents a promising alternative to conventional teaching methods for improving instructional quality in schools.

**Keywords:** Problem-Based Learning; Student motivation; Learning outcomes; Islamic education

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Islamic Education (Pendidikan Agama Islam, PAI) is fundamentally aimed at shaping individuals who are faithful and devoted to Allah SWT, while also cultivating noble character traits such as honesty, justice, discipline, and responsibility. However, in practice, the teaching of PAI often emphasizes rote memorization and reasoning without offering sufficient opportunities for students to develop creativity, critical thinking, or reflective engagement.[1] As a result, students may become passive, disengaged, and may perceive the subject as uninteresting and irrelevant to their everyday lives. The teaching methods employed by educators play a pivotal role in determining the success of the learning process.[2] At SMP Negeri 1 Pajukukang, the instructional approach in PAI for Grade VIII students remains predominantly teacher-centered, relying heavily on lecture-based delivery and memorization tasks.[3] In this model, teachers serve as the primary source of information, actively explaining content while students are limited to passive roles – listening and taking notes. This conventional method contributes to student boredom, decreased motivation, and limited ability to relate learning materials to real-world contexts.[4]

In the context of contemporary educational reform,[5] there is a strong emphasis on active student participation, both intellectually and emotionally. The role of the teacher has shifted from being the sole transmitter of knowledge to becoming a facilitator of learning.[6] Teachers are now expected to create learning environments that foster critical thinking, interpersonal communication, adaptability, and problem-solving skills – qualities that are essential in preparing students for the challenges of the 21st century. One instructional approach that addresses these challenges is Problem-Based Learning (PBL).[7] PBL uses real-life problems as the central context for learning, allowing students to connect theoretical knowledge with practical applications.[8] This method encourages students to work collaboratively in small groups, think critically, and develop independent learning strategies, all under the guidance of the teacher as a facilitator.[9] According to Barrows and Tamblyn, PBL is an approach that employs problems as a starting point for acquiring and integrating new knowledge.[10] Through this method, learners identify gaps in their knowledge, seek out new information, and develop solutions through collaborative inquiry.

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The strength of PBL lies in its capacity to actively engage students in the learning process. Rather than focusing on memorization, PBL emphasizes the mastery and deep understanding of core concepts. It fosters analytical thinking, problem-solving capabilities, and informed decision-making. In the context of PAI, PBL not only enhances students' comprehension of religious material but also equips them to apply Islamic principles meaningfully in their daily lives.[11] At SMP Negeri 1 Pajukukang, the implementation of PBL in PAI instruction is especially relevant and timely.

By adopting this method, the limitations of conventional, passive learning can be effectively addressed. PBL encourages students to take greater responsibility for their own learning, improves their intrinsic motivation, and supports the development of higher-order thinking skills.[12] It promotes learner autonomy and engagement, which are essential in achieving both academic and moral educational goals. Moreover, modern educational curricula increasingly endorse student-centered pedagogies that emphasize experiential and active learning.[13] These approaches prioritize meaningful learning experiences, foster curiosity, and encourage students to independently explore knowledge. Teachers are therefore required to create conducive classroom environments that support the development of student competencies, in alignment with national education standards and curriculum objectives. In conclusion, the implementation of Problem-Based Learning in Islamic Education at SMP Negeri 1 Pajukukang holds significant promise for improving student motivation and learning outcomes.[14] This approach not only enhances conceptual understanding but also trains students to think critically, solve problems collaboratively, and apply Islamic values in everyday life situations, thereby bridging the gap between theory and practice in a meaningful and transformative way.

Based on the background outlined earlier, this study seeks to investigate the effectiveness of the Problem-Based Learning (PBL) method in the context of Islamic Education (PAI) at SMP Negeri 1 Pajukukang, Bantaeng Regency. Specifically, the study aims to explore whether the implementation of PBL has a significant impact on students' learning motivation. Additionally, the research investigates whether the use of the PBL method contributes to improved learning outcomes among students in the PAI subject. These questions guide the overall direction of the research and are central to evaluating the pedagogical effectiveness of PBL in this educational setting.

The main objective of this study is to examine the influence of the Problem-Based Learning (PBL) method on students' motivation and academic performance in Islamic Education (PAI) at SMP Negeri 1 Pajukukang. More specifically, the research aims to determine whether the use of PBL significantly enhances students' learning motivation and contributes to better learning outcomes. Through this investigation, the study seeks to provide evidence-based insights into the potential of PBL as an effective alternative to traditional instructional methods in religious education.

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## 2. METHODS

This study employed a quantitative research approach using a quasi-experimental method to investigate the influence of the Problem-Based Learning (PBL) model on students' learning motivation and outcomes in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) at SMP Negeri 1 Pajukukang, Bantaeng Regency. The primary objective was to determine whether the PBL method could significantly improve learning motivation and academic performance compared to conventional lecture-based instruction. The design utilized in this research was a nonequivalent pretest-posttest control group design. This involved two separate classes: an experimental group that received instruction through the PBL method and a control group that followed traditional methods. Prior to the intervention, both groups completed a pretest to assess their baseline levels of motivation and learning outcomes. After the intervention, a posttest was administered to determine the extent of improvement. The research was conducted during the second semester of the 2023/2024 academic year and lasted for three months, from March to May 2024, within the school setting of SMP Negeri 1 Pajukukang.

The population for this research consisted of all eighth-grade students enrolled in the second semester at the institution. Using purposive sampling, two classes were selected to participate in the study. Class VIIIA, comprising 22 students, was designated as the experimental group that would engage with the PBL method. Class VIIIB, consisting of 23 students, served as the control group and followed conventional lecture-based teaching. The independent variable in this study was the Problem-Based Learning (PBL) method, while the dependent variables included students' learning motivation and their outcomes in Islamic Religious Education (PAI). The selection of these variables was based on the assumption that the learning method plays a critical role in shaping both cognitive performance and affective engagement among students, especially in subjects with both theoretical and ethical dimensions such as PAI.

To gather accurate and comprehensive data, multiple methods were employed. Learning outcomes were measured through a structured test administered as both a pretest and posttest, containing 20 multiple-choice questions designed to evaluate comprehension of PAI materials. Observation was conducted to monitor both teacher and student activities throughout the learning process, using observation guidelines tailored for each group. For teachers, the observation sheets focused on the execution of the PBL method, while for students, the focus was on their engagement and learning motivation. Questionnaires were distributed to assess the level of student motivation before and after the instructional treatment. To ensure the credibility of the research instruments, a validity and reliability test was conducted. The test items were confirmed as valid based on $r_h$itung > $r_t$abel, and reliable with Cronbach's Alpha coefficients exceeding the threshold of 0.60. Thus, all instruments used in the study met acceptable standards for empirical educational research.

The research procedure began with administering a pretest to both the experimental and control groups to measure students' initial competencies and motivation levels. Following this, the experimental group was taught using the PBL method, which included presenting real-world problems for students to solve collaboratively, encouraging them to engage in critical thinking and independent inquiry. In contrast, the control group was taught using the lecture method, where teachers dominated the classroom interaction and students primarily listened and took

notes. Upon completion of the instructional sessions, both groups were given a posttest to evaluate their academic progress and changes in motivation. The data gathered from these activities were then analyzed quantitatively to determine the effectiveness of the PBL model compared to traditional methods. To support the analysis of data, several statistical tests were employed. The normality of data distribution was assessed using the Liliefors test, while homogeneity of variance between the groups was verified using Fisher's test. Finally, hypothesis testing was carried out using a t-test to examine whether significant differences existed between the experimental and control groups in terms of learning motivation and academic achievement. These tests ensured the robustness and validity of the conclusions drawn from the research data.

Observation results provided additional insights into the learning processes. In the experimental group, implementation of the PBL model adhered closely to the Lesson Plan (RPP). The teaching process was structured into three phases: initial activities, core activities, and closing activities. During the initial activities, teachers motivated students and clearly outlined learning objectives. In the core activities, students were provided with real-world problems to analyze and solve either individually or in groups, fostering active participation and collaborative learning. In the closing phase, teachers facilitated reflection, helped summarize key concepts, and integrated moral messages into the lesson. Over four meetings, a marked increase in student motivation and academic performance was observed. By the final meeting, the number of students achieving very high learning outcomes rose significantly – from none to 14 students – indicating the effectiveness of the PBL method.

In contrast, the control group, which relied on traditional lecture and question-and-answer techniques, did not experience comparable gains. Observations showed that students in the control group were less engaged, with limited participation and enthusiasm. Most students achieved only moderate to high learning outcomes, and improvements in motivation were negligible. Although there was some progress, the lack of student-centered activities and interaction limited the impact of the conventional teaching approach. Test results reinforced these observations. In the experimental group, students' posttest scores showed a significant increase compared to their pretest scores. Most students were categorized as having very high learning outcomes by the end of the intervention period. Meanwhile, the control group also demonstrated some improvement in learning outcomes, but the gains were modest. Only a small number of students moved into the higher achievement categories, suggesting that the traditional lecture method was less effective in enhancing student understanding and motivation compared to the PBL model. These findings affirm the potential of Problem-Based Learning to foster meaningful engagement, deepen conceptual understanding, and develop critical thinking skills in the context of Islamic Religious Education.

## 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study was conducted in two parallel classes—VIII A and VIII B—at SMPN 1 Pajukukang, Bantaeng Regency, involving 22 and 23 students respectively. The experimental group (Class VIII A) implemented the Problem-Based Learning (PBL) method, while the control group (Class VIII B) followed the conventional lecture-based method. The research design

included both pretests and posttests to evaluate student motivation and learning outcomes before and after the interventions. In terms of learning motivation, the experimental group demonstrated a significant improvement. The average motivation score increased from 51.17% in the pretest to 71.87% in the posttest, reflecting a 20.7% increase. In contrast, the control group showed only a marginal improvement from 50.48% to 54.04%, an increase of merely 3.56%. The normalized gain (N-Gain) score for the experimental group was 0.52, categorized as moderate, while the control group achieved only 0.02, categorized as low. This notable disparity highlights the effectiveness of the PBL method in enhancing student motivation.

Student responses further validated these findings. A majority of the experimental group reported positive experiences with the PBL method. Specifically, 57.5% strongly agreed that PBL made the learning atmosphere more enjoyable, 62.5% noted that it encouraged collaborative learning, and 47.5% felt that it helped them explore their potential. Moreover, many students agreed that the use of real-world problems in the learning process made the Islamic Education (PAI) material more meaningful and relevant, thereby increasing their intrinsic motivation to learn. With regard to learning outcomes, the posttest scores in the experimental class showed a substantial improvement, increasing from an average of 66.93 to 81.82, a gain of 14.89 points. The control group, on the other hand, experienced a less pronounced increase from 65.57 to 71.42, or a gain of 5.85 points. Based on these results, the experimental group's posttest scores were categorized as very high, while the control group's were merely high. The mean posttest score difference of 10.40 points between the two groups clearly suggests that the PBL approach was more effective in improving student achievement.

An evaluation of basic competencies (Kompetensi Dasar/KD) revealed that the experimental group consistently achieved higher average scores across the three competencies assessed, with a mean score of 8.50, compared to the control group’s 8.09. When comparing pretest and posttest scores, the experimental group exhibited a clear upward trend, underscoring the impact of PBL in enhancing both knowledge acquisition and application skills. This was further supported by the frequency distribution analysis, which showed a marked increase in the number of students categorized under “very high” learning outcomes in the experimental group. Additionally, the distribution of students with high learning motivation was more prominent in the experimental class, indicating that the PBL model fostered a more engaged and motivated learning environment. From a statistical standpoint, the results were robust. Normality tests showed that both pretest and posttest data in the two groups were normally distributed. The homogeneity test indicated that the pretest data were homogeneous, although the posttest data revealed differing variances, suggesting variance in learning effects between the groups. Crucially, hypothesis testing using the Mann-Whitney U Test yielded a significance value of 0.000, which is less than the 0.05 threshold, confirming that there was a statistically significant difference between the experimental and control groups.

These findings are consistent with previous studies that underscore the advantages of the PBL method in promoting active learning, critical thinking, and deeper student engagement. Compared to the conventional lecture method, which often results in passive learning and limited student interaction, the PBL method provides a learner-centered environment that fosters collaborative problem-solving and independent thinking. The conventional method’s limitations – particularly its teacher-centered approach – tend to inhibit student enthusiasm,

engagement, and the ability to relate content to real-life contexts. One limitation of this study lies in the issue of posttest data homogeneity. The non-homogeneous distribution suggests significant variance differences, which may restrict the generalizability of the findings to broader populations. Nevertheless, within the controlled setting of this study, the findings offer valuable insights into the effectiveness of PBL, particularly in the context of Islamic Education (PAI), a subject area that demands not only cognitive engagement but also ethical and spiritual reflection.

Furthermore, this study contributes to the existing literature by focusing specifically on the application of PBL in PAI instruction at the junior high school level, a relatively underexplored area. The statistical hypothesis testing confirmed the positive impact of PBL, with a significance value of 0.000, demonstrating that the differences observed between the experimental and control groups were not due to chance. This substantiates the conclusion that the Problem-Based Learning method is substantially more effective than traditional methods in enhancing students' motivation and learning outcomes in Islamic Education.

In conclusion, the PBL method offers a promising alternative to lecture-based instruction by actively involving students in the learning process, encouraging group collaboration, and fostering both cognitive and affective development. The weaknesses of the lecture method - such as minimal student participation and lack of meaningful interaction - underscore the need for more dynamic and student-centered approaches like PBL. Given the significant improvements observed in this study, the PBL approach is recommended for broader implementation, especially in subjects that aim to integrate knowledge acquisition with moral and ethical development.

This study explored the effectiveness of the Problem-Based Learning (PBL) method in enhancing student motivation and learning outcomes in Islamic Education (PAI) at SMPN 1 Pajukukang, Bantaeng Regency. The research was conducted in two parallel eighth-grade classes: Class VIII A (experimental group), which implemented PBL, and Class VIII B (control group), which used the conventional lecture method. Pretest results revealed that students in both groups began with relatively similar motivation levels – 51.17% in the experimental group and 50.48% in the control group – indicating comparable starting conditions for the intervention. After the PBL intervention, students in the experimental group demonstrated a notable increase in motivation, reaching 71.87%, compared to only a slight increase in the control group (54.04%). This significant difference was further confirmed by the normalized gain (N-gain) scores, where the experimental group achieved 0.52 (categorized as moderate), while the control group attained only 0.02 (categorized as low). These findings illustrate that PBL effectively stimulates student motivation by providing engaging, relevant, and student-centered learning experiences.

PBL's strength lies in its capacity to transform passive learning environments into dynamic spaces where students actively construct knowledge. In this study, students exposed to PBL were encouraged to engage with real-world problems related to Islamic values, fostering not only cognitive engagement but also emotional and spiritual connections with the subject matter. By working in groups, students learned to share ideas, negotiate meaning, and arrive at solutions collaboratively, all of which are essential skills for lifelong learning. These opportunities to

interact, ask questions, and apply knowledge to authentic situations greatly enhanced their sense of ownership over the learning process. The influence of PBL was also evident in the improvement of students' academic achievement. The experimental group's posttest scores averaged 81.82, compared to 71.42 in the control group, showing a substantial difference of 10.40 points. Moreover, the learning outcomes of the experimental group were categorized as "very high," reflecting the deep understanding and retention of PAI material achieved through this method. This supports the view that PBL is not only effective in increasing motivation but also in promoting meaningful and long-term learning outcomes.

These results are consistent with constructivist learning theories, which emphasize the active role of learners in constructing knowledge through experiences and social interaction. PBL, grounded in these theories, allows students to explore content through inquiry, critical thinking, and problem-solving, all while receiving guidance and scaffolding from the teacher. In contrast, the traditional lecture-based method, which characterized the control group's learning experience, tends to limit student participation, reduce critical engagement, and foster surface-level understanding. In this study, students taught through lectures demonstrated minimal improvement in motivation and learning outcomes, supporting critiques of teacher-centered pedagogy. Additionally, student responses during the study further confirmed the positive perception of the PBL approach. A majority of students in the experimental group reported that the learning process was more enjoyable, collaborative, and personally meaningful. They felt encouraged to express their opinions, explore their potential, and connect classroom learning with real-life experiences, particularly in the context of Islamic values and moral decision-making.

The relevance of PBL in Islamic Education is especially noteworthy. PAI subjects require more than the transmission of religious knowledge – they call for internalization of values, reflection on ethical dilemmas, and development of character. PBL facilitates these processes by situating religious content within real-world scenarios that demand thoughtful analysis and personal engagement. This method enables students to see the practical implications of their learning, thereby strengthening both their cognitive understanding and spiritual development. However, the implementation of PBL is not without challenges. It demands careful preparation by teachers, including the selection of relevant and stimulating problems, the design of structured yet flexible learning activities, and the management of diverse student needs and group dynamics. Teachers must also be skilled facilitators, capable of guiding inquiry without dominating the learning process. These requirements necessitate ongoing professional development and institutional support to ensure that PBL is implemented effectively.

In conclusion, the findings of this study strongly support the integration of Problem-Based Learning in the teaching of Islamic Education, particularly at the junior high school level. PBL not only enhances student motivation and academic performance but also cultivates critical thinking, moral reasoning, and cooperative learning—all of which are essential for preparing students to navigate the complexities of modern life with integrity and purpose. These results contribute to the growing body of evidence advocating for a shift from traditional teaching methods toward more active, student-centered pedagogies in religious and general education alike.

## 4. CONCLUSION

Based on the data analysis and discussion, it can be concluded that the implementation of the Problem-Based Learning (PBL) method in Islamic Education (PAI) has a significant and positive impact on both students' learning motivation and learning outcomes. The findings of this study demonstrate that PBL is not only effective in enhancing students' academic achievement but also in cultivating higher levels of engagement and motivation within the learning process. In terms of learning motivation, the results clearly indicate that students in the experimental class who were taught using the PBL method achieved a higher average motivation score (71.87%) compared to those in the control class (54.04%). Statistical analysis confirmed the significance of this difference, with hypothesis testing yielding a p-value below 0.05, thereby affirming that the increase in motivation was not due to chance. Moreover, qualitative feedback from students highlighted several aspects of increased motivation, including enhanced engagement, encouragement of self-directed learning, the development of critical thinking skills, and a greater sense of relevance in PAI lessons. These factors contribute to a more dynamic and student-centered learning environment, which is particularly important for the internalization of Islamic values.

Similarly, the PBL method was shown to have a positive effect on learning outcomes. The post-test average score of the experimental group was 81.82, placing them in the "very high" achievement category, while the control group reached only 71.42, categorized as "high." The improvement from pretest to post-test in the experimental group was significantly greater (an increase of 14.89 points) than that of the control group (5.85 points). Furthermore, the N-gain score for the experimental group was 0.52, categorized as moderate, while the control group only achieved 0.02, which falls into the low category. These differences indicate that students taught through the PBL method not only understood the material better but also retained and applied it more effectively.

In conclusion, this study provides clear empirical evidence that the PBL method is an effective pedagogical approach in the context of Islamic Education. It enhances students' cognitive engagement, improves their academic performance, and fosters essential skills such as problem-solving, critical thinking, and collaboration. Given these outcomes, it is strongly recommended that the PBL approach be adopted more widely in Islamic Education classrooms, particularly at SMP Negeri 1 Pajukukang, to improve the quality of teaching and learning processes. The results of this study underscore the value of adopting innovative, student-centered methods in religious education to better meet the intellectual and moral development goals of contemporary Islamic schooling.

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