

IMPROVING ISLAMIC RELIGIOUS EDUCATION LEARNING OUTCOMES THROUGH THE PROBLEM-BASED LEARNING MODEL IN SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL

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ABSTRACT

The low achievement of students in the subject of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) indicates the urgency of pedagogical innovations that can simultaneously escalate engagement and academic performance. In relation to this, this study aims to analyze the effectiveness of implementing the Problem-Based Learning (PBL) model in optimizing the learning outcomes of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) for 11th-grade students at SMAS Nurul Hikmah Jonggol. This study applies the Classroom Action Research (CAR) design based on the Kemmis and McTaggart model, conducted in two cycles, where each cycle includes the phases of planning, action implementation, observation, and reflection. The subjects of the study consisted of 36 students, with data collection instruments in the form of learning outcome tests and instructional activity observation instruments. Data analysis was conducted using a mixed-methods approach; quantitative data were descriptively processed to calculate the class average and the percentage of classical learning completeness, while qualitative data were explored to represent the degree of participation and engagement of students during the learning process. The research results confirm a significant improvement in learning outcomes following the implementation of the PBL model. This is reflected in the fluctuation of the average class score, which increased from 72 at the pre-cycle stage to 80 in Cycle I, and reached 92 in Cycle II. In line with this, the percentage of classical learning completeness also experienced a progressive increase from 66.6% to 86.1% in Cycle I, and up to 97.2% by the end of Cycle II. These findings demonstrate that the PBL model is effective in stimulating learning outcomes, active participation, critical thinking skills, and collaborative skills in PAI learning. Based on this empirical evidence, PBL can be positioned as an innovative and contextual alternative learning strategy to continuously improve the instructional quality of PAI at the secondary education level.

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INTRODUCTION

In the contemporary educational landscape, empirical evidence shows that the effectiveness of learning is more significantly influenced by instructional design compared to merely content delivery. The implementation of active learning strategies, for example, has been reported to improve student performance by 15%, engagement by 14%, and practical skills by 20% compared to conventional lecture approaches (Awwad, 2025). The adoption of the flipped classroom model also shows a measurable improvement in academic performance. The effect size in that model indicates learning outcomes that are significantly superior to traditional methods (Naing et al., 2023). Additionally, another study noted an improvement of approximately 13% in exam scores thru the implementation of an innovative student-centered approach (Bansal et al., 2022). These findings emphasize that the effectiveness of learning is closely correlated with the structure of the instructional process. Therefore, the discourse on learning effectiveness has transformed from mere content transmission to the design of comprehensive learning experiences. The success of education is no longer measured solely by the mastery of material by educators, but rather by the quality of the learning architecture designed and implemented in the classroom. All components of learning consist of approaches, strategies, models, techniques, and methods that interact with each other to form an ecosystem that supports the achievement of optimal learning outcomes (Azizah, 2024; Maisyarah & Lena, 2023).

The synergistic interaction between teachers and students is a crucial determinant for educational success. This interaction demands a learning design that is not only systematic and structured but also aligned with the national educational goals to be achieved (Trullàs et al., 2022). Without alignment between curriculum design and field practice, the process of transferring values and knowledge will lose its relevance in facing the challenges of the times. One of the fundamental challenges faced by educators in the modern era is the heterogeneity of students. Each individual in the classroom brings unique characteristics that encompass cognitive capacity, socio-economic background, and diverse psychological conditions. This diversity is not an obstacle, but rather an objective reality that must be managed by teachers with effective classroom management strategies (Nugrohadi & Anwar, 2022).

If these individual differences are ignored and teachers continue to use a uniform (one-size-fits-all) approach, the risk of failing to achieve learning targets will increase. Therefore, instructional innovation becomes a necessity. This innovation serves as an instrument to bridge the diverse learning needs of students while also encouraging active engagement at every stage of the learning process (Ge et al., 2025; Wahyuni & Bhattacharya, 2021). Through innovation, teachers can create an inclusive classroom atmosphere where each student feels facilitated according to their individual learning styles. In the context of Islamic Religious Education (PAI), there is a specific challenge that continues to be a concern for academics and education practitioners, namely the consistently low achievement of student learning outcomes. This phenomenon often stems from the dominance of teacher-centered learning methods. In this traditional model, student participation becomes very limited, which in turn causes them to tend to be passive, easily lose focus, and experience a degradation in learning motivation (Fajhira et al., 2025).

In fact, essentially, PAI learning carries a greater responsibility than merely the transfer of cognitive knowledge. PAI is expected to serve as a means for students to deeply internalize Islamic values. This internalization can only occur if students are engaged in meaningful and participatory learning experiences (Abror et al., 2023). If PAI learning is only trapped in the realm of memorization without touching on the affective and

psychomotor aspects through active involvement, then the noble goal of Islamic education to shape characters with noble morals will be difficult to achieve. Empirical data from the field underscores the urgency of this change. The findings show that the average student achievement in the PAI subject is still at 72, with a significant percentage of students unable to surpass the Minimum Completeness Criteria (KKM). This figure reflects a significant discrepancy or gap between the expected competency standards and the actual achievements of students at the school.

Previous studies have confirmed that the conventional one-way approach has proven less effective in boosting student achievement compared to more interactive and student-centered approaches (Nasution et al., 2025; Rahman et al., 2021). This condition underscores the need for restructuring the learning model in schools, especially in subjects considered theoretical like PAI, so that they can be presented in a more dynamic and applicative manner. One of the innovative learning models that has received widespread recognition in educational literature is Problem-Based Learning (PBL). This model positions students as active subjects by presenting real-world problems as the basis for investigation and knowledge construction. Through PBL, students are prompted to develop critical thinking skills, collaborate in peer teams, and hone systematic problem-solving abilities. Pedagogically, PBL transforms the role of the teacher from the primary source of information to a facilitator who guides the inquiry process. As a result, learning becomes more contextual, relevant, and highly meaningful for students (Anugrah et al., 2025; Trullàs et al., 2022). Through confrontation with real-world problems, students are no longer trapped in skepticism regarding the relevance of the material being studied. This is because they directly actualize that knowledge in formulating applicable solutions.

The effectiveness of the PBL model is not merely a theoretical proposition, but has been consistently validated by various credible empirical research findings. Numerous studies show that the implementation of PBL positively correlates not only with improved learning outcome scores but also with increased student activity, motivation, and analytical sharpness (Astriana et al., 2025). Recent research reports a significant increase in academic achievement following the implementation of PBL interventions, accompanied by increased active participation during class discussions (Elinda et al., 2024; Roni, 2025; Syafii, 2024). Furthermore, PBL has proven capable of fostering students' intrinsic interest in learning and equipping them with the ability to participate in high-quality academic discussions (Nasution et al., 2025). This indicates that PBL is a comprehensive model for simultaneously developing all aspects of student competence.

Although evidence of the advantages of PBL has been extensively documented, studies specifically exploring its application in the domain of Islamic Religious Education at the Senior High School (SMA) level are still relatively rare. Most PBL research has been conducted in the fields of science or mathematics. However, the characteristics of PAI material, which are rich in moral values and social issues, are very potential to be explored through a problem-based approach. The lack of literature that systematically examines the improvement of PAI learning outcomes through PBL at the high school level indicates a significant research gap that needs to be addressed. Further empirical investigation is needed to provide a more comprehensive picture of the extent to which this model can be adapted in the context of religious education, which has unique characteristics (Bonwell & Eison, 1991).

Based on the considerations and background that have been presented, this research is directed to deeply examine the effectiveness of the Problem-Based Learning (PBL) model in improving student learning outcomes in the PAI subject at SMAS Nurul Hikmah

Jonggol. The focus of this research lies in how the PBL process can transform cognitive learning outcomes and student engagement in the classroom.

The theoretical contribution of this research is aimed at enriching the literature on innovative learning typologies, particularly within the scope of Islamic education. On a practical level, the results of this investigation are expected to serve as a stimulus for PAI practitioners to adopt a more participatory pedagogical approach. This aims to ensure that the transformation of the quality of religious education in secondary schools does not occur partially, but rather grows sustainably (Hilabi et al., 2025). Thus, PAI learning is no longer viewed as a memorization subject, but rather as a dynamic process of intellectual and spiritual development.

METHOD

The research design used in this study is Classroom Action Research (CAR) oriented toward improving learning practices directly in the classroom. In the tradition of action research, the investigation process is conceptualized as a continuous reflective cycle focused on the escalation of the quality of instructional actions, rather than merely stopping at data collection. Therefore, the action research approach is considered highly relevant to be implemented in order to improve the quality of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning and student learning outcomes in a specific classroom context (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1998). This research was conducted at SMAS Nurul Hikmah Jonggol, involving 36 eleventh-grade students as research subjects. The selection of all students in the class was based on the essential purpose of the research, namely the holistic improvement of the learning process within a single study group.

The implementation of the research is designed in two cycles. Each cycle adopts the Kemmis and McTaggart model, which includes four main stages: planning, action implementation, observation, and reflection. The planning stage involves the preparation of learning devices, teaching materials, and research instruments. Next, the action implementation stage is realized thru the application of the designed learning model in the classroom. During the learning process, the observation stage is carried out thru systematic observation of students' activities. This series of cycles concludes with a reflection stage focused on evaluating the strengths and weaknesses of previous actions, to serve as a foundation for comprehensive improvements in the next cycle (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1998).

The intervention applied in this study is the Problem-Based Learning (PBL) model. The PBL syntax used refers to five main phases, namely orientation of students to the problem, organization of students for learning, guidance of individual or group investigations, development and presentation of work results, and analysis and evaluation of the problem-solving process (Arends, 2012). Data collection was carried out using learning outcome test instruments and observation sheets. Quantitative data were analyzed descriptively thru the calculation of the class average score and the percentage of classical learning completeness, while qualitative data were analyzed descriptively based on field observation notes. As a benchmark, the success indicators in this study are set based on achieving a minimum class average score of 75 with a classical learning completeness level of at least 75%.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result: Cycle I

The implementation of actions in Cycle I of the Islamic Religious Education (PAI) subject was carried out through a series of interventions divided into two systematic instructional meetings. Post-activation of the Problem-Based Learning (PBL) model, evaluation was conducted through a post-test instrument designed to measure the efficacy of students' cognitive learning outcomes after being exposed to the active learning model. Based on the analysis of the obtained quantitative data, it was found that the average academic achievement of the XI grade at SMAS Nurul Hikmah Jonggol shows a significant figure, namely 80.00. If viewed from the parameters of classical success, the level of learning mastery in this cycle has reached a percentage of 86.1%. In terms of individual distribution, the data shows that out of a total of 36 students who were the subjects of the study, 31 students have successfully exceeded the minimum completeness criteria set. Meanwhile, further identification shows that there are still 5 students whose learning achievements are below the expected qualification standards at this stage.

Table 1. Student Learning Outcomes in Cycle I

Value Range	Frequency
95-100	0
85-94	14
75-84	17
< 75	5
Average	80
Completion	86,1%

These findings indicate that, at the classical level, learning mastery was successfully achieved, as more than 75% of students met the established criteria. Nevertheless, several challenges were still identified, including students' limited confidence in presenting discussion outcomes and the presence of a small proportion of students who remained less actively engaged during the learning process.

Cycle II

The implementation of Cycle II in this action research is a reinforcement phase designed based on critical reflection on the obstacles found in Cycle I. The intervention at this stage focuses on optimizing the teacher's role as a facilitator through enhanced instructional guidance, consistent strengthening of students' intrinsic motivation, and the application of more structured and responsive group discussion management. The restructuring of this strategy aims to minimize the learning obstacles that were still present in the initial cycle. Post-implementation of the teaching intervention in Cycle II, evaluation through post-test instruments showed a very significant escalation in students' academic performance. Quantitatively, the 11th-grade class at SMAS Nurul Hikmah Jonggol successfully achieved a collective average score of 92. This surge aligns with the classical learning completeness rate, which reached 97.2%, an achievement that surpasses the success indicators set at the beginning of the research.

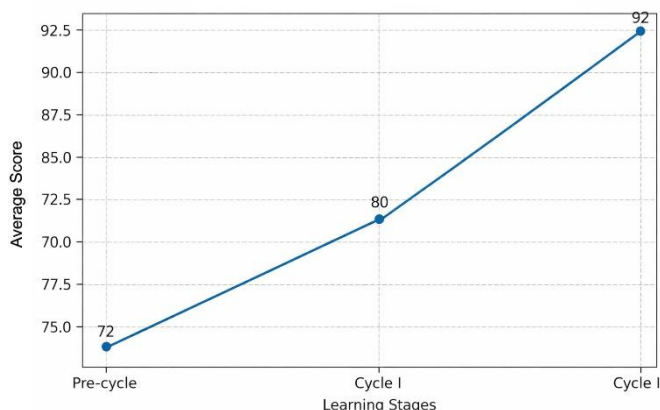
A review of the distribution of individual scores confirmed that 35 students have successfully met, and even exceeded, the required minimum completeness criteria. From the total subjects of the study, only one student was recorded as having academic performance below the expected qualification standards. The empirical findings in Cycle II logically indicate that the Problem-Based Learning (PBL) model, supported by appropriate managerial improvements, has a very high efficacy in enhancing Islamic Religious

Education (PAI) learning outcomes and creating a more competitive and meaningful learning ecosystem.

Table 2. Student Learning Outcomes in Cycle II

Value Range	Frequency
95-100	21
85-94	9
75-84	5
< 75	1
Average	92
Completion	97,2%

Figure 1. Graph of Learning Outcome Improvement



Graph of the Increase in Average Scores of PAI Learning Outcomes at the Pre-Cycle, Cycle I, and Cycle II Stages. This visual representation shows the progressive escalation of students' cognitive achievements after the implementation of the Problem-Based Learning (PBL) model at SMAS Nurul Hikmah Jonggol.

Discussion:

The findings in this study provide strong empirical confirmation that the implementation of the Problem-Based Learning (PBL) model is linearly correlated with a substantial improvement in student learning outcomes in the subject of Islamic Religious Education (PAI). This transformation is clearly depicted through the consistent progression of average scores, starting from the pre-cycle phase at 72, increasing to 80 in Cycle I, and peaking at 92 by the end of Cycle II. This significant increase not only occurred in the class average but also in the classical learning completeness rate, which skyrocketed from 66.6% to 97.2%. This data confirms that problem-based instructional strategies play a crucial role in elevating the effectiveness and quality of the learning process holistically. This success aligns with the argument that PBL is capable of breaking the rigidity of traditional lecture methods, replacing them with a dynamic learning ecosystem where students are prompted to achieve higher academic standards through challenging problem-solving (Roni, 2025; Syafii, 2024).

From a theoretical perspective, these findings are very much in line with the principles of constructivist learning. This theory postulates that knowledge is not a static entity merely transferred from teacher to student, but rather the result of active construction by learners through interaction with meaningful experiences. The PBL model facilitates this process by involving students in authentic problem-solving activities that require the integration of prior knowledge with new information. In the corridor of Islamic Religious Education, this approach finds very deep relevance. Islamic Religious Education (PAI) is not only oriented toward cognitive transfer but also toward the internalization of spiritual values. By placing students as subjects who seek solutions to life's problems in the light of Islamic teachings, PBL supports a deeper and more functional conceptual understanding. This is in line with active learning strategies in modern Islamic education that emphasize student participation as the main pathway for value internalization (Abror et al., 2023; Hilabi et al., 2025). Students no longer just memorize religious texts, but begin to understand the reasons behind the teachings in the context of solving real-world problems.

The improvement in learning outcomes observed in this study is also reinforced by evidence that PBL inherently hones critical thinking and problem-solving competencies. These findings are supported by previous literature stating that involvement in the PBL cycle trains students to independently analyze, synthesize, and evaluate information (Ge et al., 2025; Nasution et al., 2025). In the context of PAI, critical thinking skills are essential. Students are required to be able to interpret religious teachings contextually amidst the complex dynamics of the times. Through PBL, students are equipped with the ability to meaningfully apply Islamic principles in their daily lives, so that religion is no longer seen merely as a dogma detached from social reality, but rather as a solution-oriented life guide. Although classical completeness has shown a positive trend since Cycle I, this research still identifies several challenges in the early phase. One of the main obstacles is the low self-confidence of students in presenting the results of group discussions in front of the public. This indicates that students are still in a transitional phase or adaptation process from the conventional learning paradigm to a student-centered approach (Elinda et al., 2024; Rahman et al., 2021).

This condition is consistent with previous studies that state that the implementation of PBL indeed requires an adjustment period. Students need time to build learning autonomy and transform passive learning behaviors into active ones. Therefore, minor failures in the early cycles are not an indication of model failure, but rather a part of the process of developing student independence (Aziz et al., 2022). The much more prominent success in Cycle II is a direct result of the managerial improvements implemented by the researcher. The improvement in the quality of teacher facilitation, the strengthening of motivational support, and the more structured design of group discussions have proven to create a much more conducive learning environment. These measures have resulted in increased student engagement and self-confidence (Harahap et al., 2025).

This fact emphasizes that the effectiveness of PBL highly depends on the quality of implementation and the teacher's ability to act as a facilitator, rather than as a single source of authority. Teachers in PBL act as guides who provide "scaffolding" or appropriate assistance when needed, without taking over the students' thinking process itself (Anugrah et al., 2025; Trullàs et al., 2022). In addition to cognitive aspects, the improvement in student performance is also driven by increased intrinsic motivation and active participation. The PBL model encourages collaboration, horizontal interaction among students, and collective responsibility sharing. This mechanism not only boosts exam scores but also hones students' social competencies.

A collaborative learning environment creates a sense of ownership over the knowledge being studied. When students feel responsible for their group's success, their motivation to delve into the material becomes stronger. This reinforces the proposition that an active and collaborative learning environment is a key prerequisite for sustainably improving academic performance (Aziz et al., 2024; Hilabi et al., 2025). The results of this study highlight the importance of accurately selecting instructional models that align with the characteristics and learning needs of students. Teachers play a central role in designing strategies that can trigger meaningful engagement. PBL has proven to provide a more contextual and relevant learning experience, which ultimately enables students to achieve a more substantial understanding of PAI material (Anggreani et al., 2023).

Although it provides promising results, this study has several limitations that need to be acknowledged. First, the scope of the research, which is limited to one class with a relatively small sample size, may restrict the generalization of the findings to a broader context. Second, the Classroom Action Research (CAR) design without a control group limits the researchers' ability to claim that the improvement in learning outcomes is entirely due to the PBL model without the influence of other external variables. In addition, the short duration of the study and reliance on cognitive-based assessments may not fully capture learning outcomes in the affective domain and values comprehensively (Nurhasanah & Chusni, 2025).

Based on these limitations, future research is recommended to adopt a more rigorous research design, such as experimental or quasi-experimental approaches with larger and more diverse samples. Longitudinal studies are also highly necessary to review the long-term effects of PBL on students' character development and academic achievement. Additionally, the integration of the PBL model with digital platforms or blended learning environments is a very promising research direction to be further explored to enhance student engagement in the digital era (Alifiyah, 2023; Wahyuni & Bhattacharya, 2021)

CONCLUSION

This research presents conclusive empirical evidence that the implementation of the Problem-Based Learning (PBL) model significantly elevates student learning outcomes in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) subjects. The consistent trend of increasing average scores and the expansion of classical completeness levels in each action cycle affirm the effectiveness of PBL in orchestrating an active, dynamic, and student-centered learning ecosystem. These findings validate the research hypothesis and demonstrate that PBL not only contributes to strengthening academic performance but also to the comprehensive transformation of the quality of the instructional process. Theoretically, the results of this study reinforce the fundamental principles of constructivism by highlighting the urgency of active involvement and problem-solving mechanisms in the process of knowledge construction. In the horizon of Islamic education, PBL emerges as a pedagogical approach capable of simultaneously integrating the development of cognitive aspects with the process of internalizing religious values. This allows for the creation of more meaningful, relevant, and contextual learning experiences for students in understanding religious teachings amidst social realities. At a practical level, this research underscores the crucial importance of precise instructional design and the strategic role of teachers as facilitators in optimizing the impact of PBL in the classroom.

These findings recommend PBL as an effective transformative teaching strategy to stimulate student engagement, sharpen critical thinking skills, and foster a culture of collaborative learning. At the policy level, the integration of problem-based learning

approaches into the national curriculum is seen as a strategic step to improve the quality of education and align pedagogical practices with the demands of 21st-century competencies. Although showing positive results, this study has limitations in its classroom-based design (action research), relatively small sample size, and limited intervention duration, which may potentially restrict the generalization of findings broadly. Therefore, future research is recommended to implement a more rigorous experimental design with a more representative sample scope and a longer observation period. Additionally, the exploration of integrating PBL into digital learning environments (blended learning) and its impact on a broader spectrum of educational outcomes presents a highly promising direction for future research.

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