

# IMPLEMENTATION OF PROJECT BASED LEARNING MODEL TO IMPROVE STUDENTS' CREATIVE THINKING SKILLS IN ISLAMIC RELIGIOUS EDUCATION SUBJECTS: CASE STUDY AT SMP DARUL IKHSAN BOARDING SCHOOL PEKALONGAN

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## Abstract

Islamic Religious Education (PAI) plays a crucial role in shaping students' spiritual and moral values, particularly at the junior high school level. However, textual learning often hinders students' creative thinking abilities. This study aims to explore the application of the Project Based Learning (PjBL) method in PAI at SMP Darul Ikhsan Pekalongan, focusing on enhancing students' creative thinking skills and learning outcomes. This research employed Classroom Action Research (CAR) involving 30 eighth-grade students. Data were collected through interviews, observations, and written tests. During the pre-cycle phase, initial conditions were identified through observation and interviews. In Cycle 1, students created posters about noble character values using design applications. In Cycle 2, students developed videos of the stories of Prophet Muhammad SAW, which were uploaded to YouTube. The results showed a significant increase in students' creative thinking skills, from 30% in the pre-cycle to 70% in Cycle 1 and 90% in Cycle 2. The average learning outcomes also improved from 40 (pre-cycle) to 70 (Cycle 1) and 90 (Cycle 2), with a mastery level of 80%. The project activities encouraged students to deeply understand the material, appreciate Islamic values, and apply them in daily life. This study demonstrates that PjBL effectively enhances student engagement and provides meaningful learning experiences. It is recommended that this method be consistently integrated into PAI learning to foster students' creativity and comprehension sustainably.

**Keywords:** Project Based Learning, Creative Thinking, Islamic Education

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Islamic Religious Education (PAI) holds a strategic role in shaping students' spiritual, moral, and character values. At the junior high school level, the transitional phase toward adolescence highlights character reinforcement as a critical need in education. SMP Darul Ikhsan Pekalongan, as a boarding school-based educational institution, positions PAI as a primary foundation for instilling Islamic values in students' lives. Through PAI learning, students are expected not only to understand religious teachings theoretically but also to implement these values in their daily lives (Arifin, 2011).

However, field reality shows that the PAI learning process still faces various challenges. One of them is the teaching methods, which tend to focus on rote memorization without accompanying deep understanding. Consequently, Islamic values are not well internalized in students' behavior. According to Zuhdi (2006), religious education should integrate three main dimensions: cognitive, affective, and psychomotor, to holistically shape students' personalities. At SMP Darul Ikhsan Pekalongan, this issue is reflected in students'

behavior that still lacks representation of Islamic values in daily life, such as being impolite in interactions and not being orderly in performing worship.

Creative thinking ability is one of the essential 21st-century skills that need to be developed in PAI learning. Torrance (1974) defines creative thinking as the ability to generate new ideas relevant to solving problems. In the context of PAI, this ability is evident when students can understand noble character values and apply them in various life situations. This aligns with Munandar's (1992) opinion, which states that creativity is an essential element in learning that helps students understand concepts deeply and contextually.

Unfortunately, PAI learning in many schools remains monotonous and less applicable. According to Mulyasa (2013), a learning approach focused solely on knowledge transfer often fails to shape students' character. Methods relying solely on lectures or memorization tend to make students passive and less engaged in the learning process. Therefore, innovation in PAI learning is needed to actively and creatively engage students. One approach deemed effective in addressing this challenge is Project-Based Learning (PjBL). According to Thomas (2000), PjBL is a teaching method that encourages students to conduct in-depth investigations, think critically, and produce creative products relevant to their lives. This method integrates theory and practice, allowing students to learn through direct experience. In the context of PAI, PjBL can be used to provide more meaningful learning experiences, such as projects creating posters of noble character values or videos about the stories of Prophet Muhammad SAW.

Research in Indonesia also shows the effectiveness of PjBL in learning. For example, a study by Hermawan (2020) found that PjBL could enhance students' critical thinking and creativity in thematic learning. This supports the findings of Larmer and Mergendoller (2010), which state that PjBL provides project-based learning experiences relevant to students' lives, motivating them to learn. In PAI learning, this method is expected to increase student engagement while shaping Islamic character.

At SMP Darul Ikhsan Pekalongan, implementing the PjBL method has great potential to address challenges in PAI learning. Projects based on Islamic values, such as creating posters or videos, can provide students with opportunities to develop their creativity while deepening their understanding of religious teachings. This aligns with the goals of Islamic education: to form individuals who are faithful, pious, and of noble character (Hidayat, 2017).

This study aims to explore the application of the PjBL model in PAI learning at SMP Darul Ikhsan Pekalongan. The main focus of this research is to improve students' creative thinking skills and their learning outcomes. Through this approach, students are expected not only to deeply understand Islamic teachings but also to apply them in their daily lives in creative and meaningful ways.

Furthermore, this study provides both theoretical and practical contributions. Theoretically, it enriches the literature on the application of PjBL in value-based learning, particularly in PAI. Practically, the results of this research are expected to serve as a guide for teachers in designing and implementing PjBL methods that meet students' needs. Thus, this study is anticipated to offer an innovative solution for improving the quality of PAI learning in schools.

By utilizing the PjBL method, PAI learning will not only become more engaging but also more relevant to students' lives. Through interactive and meaningful learning experiences, students are expected to better internalize Islamic values and use them as a guide in their daily lives.

## *2.1 METHOD*

The type of research used in this study is Classroom Action Research (CAR). According to Arikunto (2006), CAR is research conducted by teachers in their own classrooms through systematic steps aimed at improving the learning process and outcomes. This research was conducted at SMP Darul Ikhsan in Pekalongan, Central Java, with 30 eighth-grade students as research subjects.

Data collection was carried out through interviews, observations, and written tests. Sugiyono (2017) stated that combining qualitative data collection techniques (interviews and observations) with quantitative ones (written tests) can provide a more comprehensive picture of the learning process and outcomes. Interviews were used to determine the initial condition of students regarding their creative thinking abilities in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning. The interview guidelines were prepared based on the creativity indicators formulated by Torrance (1974), which include fluency, originality, elaboration, and flexibility. Observations

were conducted to record student behavior during learning activities using observation sheets containing creative thinking indicators. According to Mulyatiningsih (2011), observation in educational research aims to directly observe the learning process so that the data obtained is authentic. Written tests were designed to measure students' learning outcomes based on the predetermined basic competencies. Kunandar (2013) explained that test instruments in CAR must be valid and reliable to objectively measure changes in learning outcomes.

The research steps began with the pre-cycle phase, which involved identifying initial conditions through interviews and observations. According to Arikunto (2006), the pre-cycle phase serves as a baseline to compare the effectiveness of actions in subsequent cycles. This was followed by Cycle 1, where students undertook a project creating posters on noble character values. This step refers to the PjBL model developed by Thomas (2000), in which students are encouraged to collaborate and produce creative products. Finally, Cycle 2 involved a project creating videos about the stories of Prophet Muhammad SAW. Larmer and Mergendoller (2010) stated that PjBL encourages students to engage in meaningful tasks relevant to real-life contexts.

### 3.1 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

#### 3.1.1 Results

##### 3.1.1.1 Creative Thinking Skills

In the pre-cycle phase, students' creative thinking skills were at 30%. This result was obtained from interviews and observations related to the topic of noble character values of Prophet Muhammad SAW during the pre-cycle session. From collective and individual observations and interviews, only about 30% of students were able to answer and present well, while 70% still struggled to provide appropriate and accurate responses. However, after the study was conducted, the results showed a significant improvement in students' creative thinking skills, increasing from 30% in the pre-cycle to 70% in Cycle 1 and reaching 90% in Cycle 2. This improvement reflects the success of the Project-Based Learning (PjBL) model in encouraging students to creatively process and apply Islamic Religious Education (PAI) materials.

During the pre-cycle phase, the researcher observed students' morals and behavior within the teaching and learning environment. Observations included learning activities, break periods, congregational prayers, and post-school activities. It was evident that many students had not yet implemented moral behavior aligned with the teachings of Prophet Muhammad SAW, such as eating and drinking while walking, being impolite when interacting with teachers, using harsh language, and showing a lack of discipline in worship activities. Although Islamic education is conducted formally through PAI subjects and informally through the study of *Akhlaq Lil Banin* texts, these efforts were insufficient to provide contextual understanding for the students. Additionally, interview results indicated that students had a very limited understanding of the moral lessons taught. Their understanding was limited to the content of the lessons but lacked deeper comprehension, resulting in their inability to implement these values in daily life.

With the implementation of the Project-Based Learning method, particularly in Cycle 1, students were invited to create posters about noble character values. Students were allowed to use laptops, as SMP Darul Ikhsan Pekalongan provides laptops for each student. They were encouraged to create posters using Canva, promoting moral behaviors such as proper waste disposal, anti-bullying, instilling the 5S culture (*Senyum, Sapa, Salam, Sopan, Santun*), and orderly and calm behavior during prayers.

Following Cycle 1, students showed better understanding and awareness of implementing the noble character values of Prophet Muhammad SAW. This occurred because students were not dictated to follow instructions but were instead encouraged to express creative ideas to promote good deeds. This created a sense of accountability and embarrassment if they promoted good behavior without exhibiting it themselves.

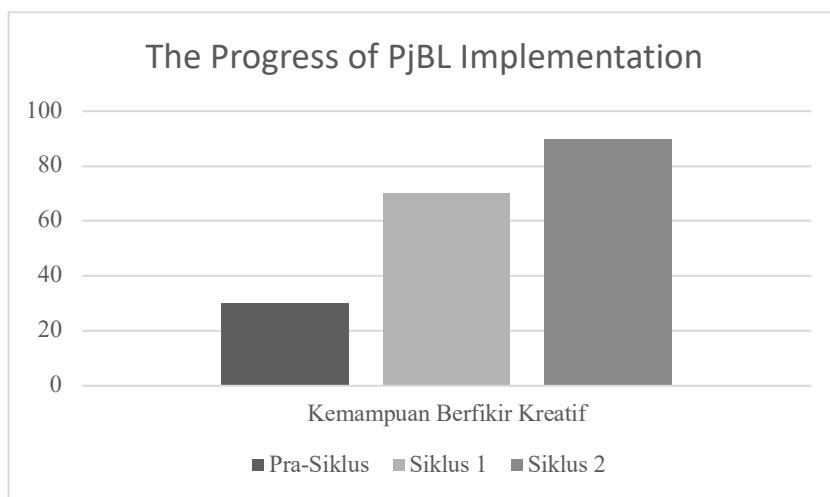
In Cycle 2, students were tasked with creating videos that narrated or dramatized the stories of Prophet Muhammad SAW. These videos were uploaded to YouTube and presented in front of the class. In this cycle, students were encouraged to be even more creative, moving beyond 2D projects to performance-based work. This approach allowed students to internalize the noble character of Prophet Muhammad SAW through storytelling or drama. Indirectly, students memorized and understood texts, integrating their ideas into the performance. This task contextualized the learning material, enabling students not only to know and

memorize but also to implement it.

It is not surprising that students' creative thinking skills improved from 30% in the pre-cycle to 70% in Cycle 1 and 90% in Cycle 2. This was due to the PjBL method stimulating students to generate creative ideas, which facilitated a better understanding of the material and its practical application in daily life.

According to Torrance (1974), creative thinking encompasses four main aspects: fluency, flexibility, originality, and elaboration. In the poster creation project during Cycle 1, students were encouraged to generate new ideas relevant to the theme, enhancing their originality. In Cycle 2, when students created videos about Prophet Muhammad SAW, elaboration was emphasized, as they had to detail the messages they wished to convey through creative media.

Thomas (2000) asserts that PjBL provides students with opportunities to explore ideas and develop them into meaningful products. In this study, project-based activities encouraged students to think beyond textbooks, integrating their understanding of Islamic values with their creativity.



### 3.1.1.2 Learning Outcomes

To further validate the impact of the Project-Based Learning method, student learning outcomes were assessed. This was measured using 30 questions consisting of 10 multiple-choice questions, 5 short-answer questions, 5 short essays, 5 advanced multiple-choice questions, and 5 creative essays. These assessments were conducted three times: during the pre-cycle phase, after Cycle 1, and after Cycle 2.

In the pre-cycle phase, the average student score was 40, with most correct answers coming from multiple-choice questions. The average scores improved from 40 (pre-cycle) to 70 (Cycle 1) and eventually 90 (Cycle 2). This improvement was also reflected in the mastery level, which rose from only 10% in the pre-cycle phase to 80% in Cycle 2. This indicates that PjBL enhances not only creativity but also the effectiveness of learning.

Susanto (2016) explains that learning outcomes are the abilities acquired by students after going through the learning process. In this context, PjBL facilitated direct experiential learning, such as creating posters and videos. These activities increased student engagement, which Dewey (1938) considers key to meaningful learning.

### 3.1.2 DISCUSSION

The results of this study show that the implementation of Project-Based Learning (PjBL) effectively enhances students' creative thinking skills and learning outcomes. This indicates that PjBL is a practical solution in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning, particularly in facilitating students to deeply understand the material, internalize Islamic values, and apply them in daily life.

For instance, the poster project on noble character values trained students to identify values such as honesty,

patience, and trustworthiness and to convey these messages creatively. According to Torrance (1974), creative thinking involves fluency, originality, flexibility, and elaboration. This activity encouraged students to generate new ideas (originality) and develop them into visual works. The project also cultivated students' sense of responsibility and teamwork, as they felt more engaged not only in learning but also in producing something meaningful to encourage others to do good. Larmer and Mergendoller (2010) emphasize that PjBL is a student-centered approach that motivates students to learn collaboratively and produce tangible products relevant to their lives. In the context of PAI, this relevance is crucial because Islamic values must be applied in daily life.

In the second cycle, creating videos about the life of Prophet Muhammad SAW helped students understand the Prophet's role as a model of noble character. This activity provided a deeper learning experience consistent with Piaget's constructivist theory (1964). Piaget states that learning becomes more effective when students interact directly with their learning environment. In this case, video production allowed students to engage in interactive and meaningful learning processes.

Additionally, Vygotsky (1978) highlights the importance of scaffolding, which is the support provided by teachers or peers to help students achieve higher abilities. The collaborative process in video production enabled students to share ideas, learn from one another, and create products together. This aligns with the principles of PjBL, which promotes team-based learning

#### **4.1 CONCLUSION**

This study demonstrates that the implementation of the Project-Based Learning (PjBL) method can significantly enhance students' creative thinking skills and learning outcomes in the Islamic Religious Education (PAI) subject. This is evidenced by the results in the pre-cycle phase, where students' creative thinking skills were only at 30%. However, through the application of the PjBL method involving a poster-making project in Cycle 1 and a video project on the stories of Prophet Muhammad SAW in Cycle 2, these skills improved to 70% in Cycle 1 and reached 90% in Cycle 2. This improvement occurred because PjBL encourages students to imagine, design, and produce creative products relevant to the values of noble character.

In addition to enhancing creative thinking skills, the average student learning outcomes increased from 40 in the pre-cycle to 70 in Cycle 1, and finally to 90 in Cycle 2. The students' mastery level also improved from 10% in the pre-cycle to 80% in Cycle 2. This indicates that PjBL not only supports the development of creativity but also enhances understanding and application of learning materials.

Project-based activities, such as creating posters and videos, provided students with deep and meaningful learning experiences. Students did not merely memorize material but also understood and applied Islamic values in their daily lives. This created active student engagement in learning, which, according to Dewey (1938), is the key to meaningful learning. The projects not only improved students' understanding of the material but also motivated them to internalize and implement noble character values, such as honesty, trustworthiness, and patience, in their daily lives.

This study suggests that the Project-Based Learning method should be consistently integrated into PAI learning to improve students' creativity and understanding. Teachers are also encouraged to adapt other innovative projects relevant to the needs and conditions of students in the future.

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