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THE EFFECT OF PROJECT-BASED LEARNING MODEL ON IMPROVING STUDENTS' RELIGIOUS CHARACTER

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ABSTRACTS

This study explores the effectiveness of Project-Based Learning (PjBL) in enhancing students' religious character in junior high school education. The research was conducted with 60 students, divided into an experimental group (PjBL) and a control group (conventional teaching methods). Data were collected through a religious character questionnaire measuring worship adherence, noble character, and tolerance. Results indicate that the experimental group showed a significant improvement of 25% in religious character scores, compared to only 10% in the control group. The findings highlight the potential of PjBL in fostering religious values by providing students with hands-on, real-world experiences. Active involvement in planning, executing, and reflecting on projects such as religious educational videos and school-based events deepened students' understanding and internalization of religious principles. Collaboration among students further enhanced empathy, tolerance, and communication skills, promoting a more inclusive mindset. The study also identifies challenges such as the need for teacher training, time constraints, and logistical support. Parental and institutional support were found to be crucial in ensuring the successful implementation of PjBL. Overall, the study supports the application of PjBL as an effective approach in religious education, fostering a holistic development of students' academic and moral character.

A. INTRODUCTION

Religious character education is a vital component in shaping learners' personalities and moral foundations. In Indonesia, religious character encompasses not only faith in God but also behaviors and attitudes that reflect noble qualities such as honesty, tolerance, and responsibility (Halimah, 2024). This aspect of education is considered integral in addressing moral issues that emerge in modern society, particularly among the younger generation. (Shibgho & Alfiansyah, 2022) Despite its significance, many schools encounter challenges in effectively instilling these values. The complexity of integrating religious character into modern curricula often leads to a gap between educational goals and actual outcomes. (Kesuma et al., 2024) Traditional teaching methods that emphasize rote learning are often insufficient in engaging students or fostering meaningful internalization of values (Fitrianingtyas et al., 2023).

In response to these challenges, the Project-Based Learning (PjBL) model emerges as a promising alternative. By involving students in projects that require active collaboration and problem-solving, PjBL creates opportunities for experiential learning (Halimah, 2024). This approach not only enhances students' engagement but also allows for the contextual application of religious principles, making the learning process more relevant and impactful (Shibgho & Alfiansyah, 2022). Numerous studies highlight the efficacy of PjBL in fostering critical thinking, creativity, and teamwork. For example, a study in primary education demonstrated significant improvements in students' problem-solving skills and their ability to collaborate effectively in team settings (Fitrianingtyas et al., 2023). However, the specific impact of PjBL on religious character development remains underexplored (Kusuma et al., 2023).

This research gap is particularly significant given the role of religious character as the foundation of ethical behavior and societal harmony. In junior high schools, where students are undergoing critical phases of moral and cognitive development, fostering a strong religious character becomes even more pertinent. (Halimah, 2024) At this stage, students begin to question and form their moral compass, making it essential to introduce innovative teaching methods that align with their developmental needs (Arjunajata et al., 2024).

The integration of religious education with character-building strategies has shown potential in various contexts. For instance, incorporating local wisdom into teaching practices has been found effective in enhancing students' discipline and responsibility. (Rkt, 2024) Similarly, combining environmental awareness with religious principles through PjBL has proven to deepen students' understanding of their responsibilities as stewards of the Earth. (Kusuma et al., 2023) Moreover, collaboration between schools and families plays a critical role in the success of religious character education. When teachers and parents work together to reinforce values taught in schools, students are more likely to internalize and practice these principles consistently. (Shibgho & Alfiansyah, 2022) This collaborative approach aligns with the constructivist theory of learning, which posits that knowledge is most effectively acquired through active engagement and real-world application (Halimah, 2024).

The potential of PjBL to address these multifaceted challenges makes it an essential area of study. Its ability to bridge the gap between theoretical learning and practical application provides a unique opportunity to foster religious character in a holistic and meaningful way. (Fitrianingtyas et al., 2023) Furthermore, its alignment with

the principles of the Merdeka Curriculum underscores its relevance in the Indonesian educational context.(Shibgho & Alfiansyah, 2022)

Despite its promise, implementing PjBL in religious education is not without challenges. Teachers often require extensive training to design and execute projects that are both engaging and aligned with religious objectives (Kesuma et al., 2024). Additionally, the time constraints imposed by packed school schedules can hinder the effective execution of such projects (Arjunnajata et al., 2024).

Support from institutional policies and sufficient resources is also critical for the success of PjBL. Schools need to provide adequate facilities and learning materials to ensure that projects can be carried out effectively.(Rkt, 2024) Parental involvement further enhances the learning experience by providing students with consistent reinforcement of values both at home and in school settings.(Kusuma et al., 2023) Given the growing emphasis on innovative educational approaches, exploring the impact of PjBL on religious character education is both timely and necessary. It provides an avenue to address the shortcomings of traditional methods and offers insights into creating more engaging and meaningful learning experiences (Fitrianingtyas et al., 2023).

A project-based learning (PjBL) model offers an innovative approach to addressing these challenges. This approach encourages students to learn through direct experience, collaborate on projects, and produce outcomes relevant to their lives. Through these projects, religious values can be taught in a contextual and meaningful manner. Numerous studies have shown that project-based learning is effective in enhancing critical thinking skills, creativity, and teamwork. However, its impact on shaping students' religious character has not been extensively explored empirically. This gap serves as the primary reason for conducting this research. Religious character is an important foundation that shapes not only individuals but also society as a whole. Formal education plays a significant role in developing this character, especially at the junior high school level when students begin to experience critical moral development. Therefore, innovation in teaching methods is needed to achieve these goals. This study aims to measure the effectiveness of project-based learning in building students' religious character. By understanding the outcomes of this approach, teachers are expected to apply similar strategies to strengthen character education in their classrooms.

B. METHOD

This study employed a quantitative approach with a quasi-experimental design. This design was chosen because it allows for the comparison of learning outcomes between two groups of students: an experimental group using project-based learning and a control group using conventional methods (Sugiyono, 2020). The research sample consisted of 60 junior high school students selected through purposive sampling. They were divided into two groups of 30 students each. The experimental group received project-based learning for six weeks, while the control group followed the usual lecture and discussion methods.

A religious character questionnaire served as the main tool for measuring students' religiosity levels. This questionnaire included 20 statements covering three dimensions: worship obedience, tolerance, and noble character behavior. The validity and reliability of the instrument had been previously tested, yielding a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.85. (Sari et al., 2023). The research began with a pretest to measure the students' religious character before the intervention. The experimental group then engaged in projects such as creating religious educational videos and organizing religious events at school. After six weeks, a posttest was conducted to measure the changes in religious character in both groups.

Data were analyzed using a t-test to compare the mean scores of the experimental and control groups. This analysis aimed to determine whether there were significant differences in the increase of religious character between the two groups. This approach ensures that the research results provide strong empirical evidence regarding the effectiveness of project-based learning in developing students' religious character.

C. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study demonstrate the significant impact of the Project-Based Learning (PjBL) model on enhancing students' religious character. The experimental group, which engaged in PjBL activities, exhibited a 25% average increase in their religious character scores, whereas the control group, which relied on conventional methods, showed only a 10% improvement. This disparity underscores the effectiveness of PjBL in shaping students' religiosity and character traits.

Active Involvement in Learning

The success of the PjBL approach can be attributed to the active involvement of students in the learning process. Unlike traditional methods where students are passive recipients of information, PjBL engages them in planning, executing, and completing projects. These activities, such as producing religious educational videos and organizing school-based religious events, provide real-life contexts for students to practice and internalize religious values. (Fitrianingtyas et al., 2023) This experiential approach aligns with constructivist learning theory, which emphasizes knowledge acquisition through active engagement and environmental interaction (Kesuma et al., 2024).

Moreover, active involvement in PjBL fosters a sense of ownership and accountability among students. When students participate in designing and managing projects, they develop a deeper commitment to their tasks and a greater appreciation for the outcomes. For instance, when producing educational videos, students not only learn about the subject matter but also acquire valuable technical, organizational, and

collaborative skills. This multifaceted learning experience helps students connect religious principles with real-world applications, making the learning process both meaningful and memorable (Shibgho & Alfiansyah, 2022).

Additionally, this participatory approach encourages students to engage in self-reflection and critical thinking. By actively contributing to their projects, students evaluate their roles, efforts, and the ethical implications of their actions, fostering a holistic understanding of religious values. This reflective process strengthens their ability to navigate complex moral and social scenarios beyond the classroom. Such engagement is particularly crucial during adolescence, as students begin to form their identities and moral frameworks (Halimah, 2024).

Collaboration and Peer Interaction

Collaboration played a crucial role in the success of PjBL. Group discussions and cooperative efforts in completing projects enabled students to exchange perspectives, share experiences, and deepen their understanding of religious values. This collaborative dynamic not only enhanced cognitive development but also fostered empathy, tolerance, and appreciation for diversity among peers. (Shibgho & Alfiansyah, 2022)

Furthermore, the collaborative environment of PjBL encouraged students to develop interpersonal skills essential for teamwork. By working together on tasks like organizing religious events or creating videos, students learned to communicate effectively, negotiate responsibilities, and resolve conflicts amicably. These interactions taught them the importance of mutual respect and the value of diverse viewpoints, reflecting the principles of tolerance and inclusivity central to religious teachings. (Arjunnajata et al., 2024) These experiences also helped students recognize the collective strength that emerges when individuals contribute their unique perspectives to achieve a shared goal.

In addition, collaborative projects helped build a sense of community and shared purpose among students. This sense of belonging reinforced their motivation to work together and strengthened their commitment to the projects. For instance, group activities such as peer evaluations and shared reflections provided opportunities for students to support and encourage one another, creating a positive learning environment. This collaborative ethos not only enriched their understanding of religious values but also prepared them to contribute meaningfully to broader societal contexts, where teamwork and empathy are vital. (Kusuma et al., 2023)

Improvements Across Dimensions

The study identified notable improvements in three key dimensions of religiosity: (Sari et al., 2023)

1. Worship Adherence

Students showed increased consistency in fulfilling their religious obligations. Activities such as arranging collective worship schedules heightened their understanding of the importance of worship as a daily practice. This active participation deepened their connection to their faith and strengthened their sense of spiritual discipline.

Moreover, the structured approach of PjBL encouraged students to integrate worship into their daily routines systematically. For instance, by involving

students in planning prayer times and managing group worship sessions, they became more mindful of their spiritual responsibilities. This sense of accountability translated into consistent worship practices, even beyond the school environment, demonstrating the long-term impact of such interventions on their religious habits. The active engagement in worship-related activities also fostered a sense of unity and collective spiritual growth among the students. Additionally, these worship-focused activities provided students with a deeper appreciation of the communal aspects of their faith. By participating in group worship and discussing its significance, students developed a stronger sense of belonging to their religious community. This collective experience not only enhanced their understanding of worship as an individual duty but also as a shared practice that strengthens communal bonds and mutual support. Such experiences are crucial for fostering a holistic view of religiosity that integrates both personal and communal dimensions.

2. Noble Character

The projects required students to exhibit and develop traits such as respect, honesty, and responsibility. For example, dividing tasks within groups necessitated effective cooperation, listening to others' opinions, and peacefully resolving conflicts. These experiences cultivated character traits that students could apply in broader societal contexts.

Furthermore, PjBL provided opportunities for students to practice ethical decision-making and take ownership of their actions. As they worked together on projects, students encountered situations where they had to demonstrate accountability, whether it was meeting deadlines or ensuring the quality of the work they produced. This process helped students understand the importance of integrity and responsibility, not only as a personal virtue but also as a social expectation. The lessons learned in these project-based settings prepared students to become responsible citizens, capable of making ethical choices in both their personal lives and future professional environments.

Additionally, these collaborative projects emphasized the value of empathy and mutual respect. In situations where students needed to work with peers from diverse backgrounds or with differing opinions, they were encouraged to listen attentively and understand others' perspectives. This approach reinforced the importance of building relationships based on trust and respect, which are foundational aspects of noble character. The ability to work through disagreements and find peaceful resolutions also contributed to the development of social harmony and emotional intelligence, skills that are essential for thriving in both school and society.

3. Tolerance

Cross-group discussions introduced students to diverse interpretations and viewpoints on religious values. This exposure helped them appreciate diversity and accept differences, promoting harmonious relationships and fostering a more inclusive mindset.

Moreover, these discussions provided students with the opportunity to challenge preconceived notions and engage in critical thinking. As students encountered different perspectives on religious teachings, they were encouraged to reflect on their own beliefs and consider alternative viewpoints in a respectful manner. This process not only deepened their understanding of religious values but also promoted intellectual humility, a key component of tolerance. By learning to navigate differences constructively, students developed the skills necessary to engage in dialogue with others, both within and outside of their religious communities, fostering mutual respect.

Additionally, the collaborative nature of PjBL projects created an environment where students could practice tolerance in action. Working together on tasks such as organizing interfaith dialogues or creating religious awareness campaigns required students to set aside differences and focus on shared goals. These interactions built bridges between students from different backgrounds, helping them recognize the common values that unite them. As a result, students not only learned about tolerance in theory but also experienced its practical application in real-world contexts, reinforcing the importance of inclusivity and respect in building strong, cohesive communities.

Alignment with Constructivist Theory

The findings resonate with constructivist theory, which posits that authentic learning occurs when students actively engage in meaningful activities. PjBL's contextual and practical nature allowed students to deeply internalize religious values, leaving a more lasting impression than lecture-based approaches. Authentic project activities bridged the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application, enhancing both understanding and retention. (Fitrianingtyas et al., 2023)

In constructivist theory, learning is viewed as a process where students actively construct their own understanding based on experiences, rather than passively receiving information. (Kesuma et al., 2024) PjBL aligns with this view by allowing students to engage directly with the subject matter through hands-on activities. As students collaborate on projects, they are encouraged to make connections between what they already know and the new religious principles they encounter. This active construction of knowledge fosters deeper cognitive processing and encourages long-term retention of the learned material. (Shibgho & Alfiansyah, 2022) For instance, when students work together to create a religious educational video, they not only apply theoretical knowledge but also create something that has real-world relevance, reinforcing their understanding through active creation.

Furthermore, the emphasis on reflection within PjBL strengthens the alignment with constructivist principles. Students are encouraged to reflect on their learning experiences and the religious values they practiced during the project. This reflective process helps them solidify their understanding and enables them to apply the values in diverse contexts. According to constructivist theory, this type of reflection is essential

for meaningful learning, as it prompts students to reconsider their beliefs and behaviors in light of new experiences.(Arjunnajata et al., 2024) The reflection also facilitates metacognition, where students become aware of their learning process, helping them develop critical thinking and problem-solving skills.

In addition, the social nature of PjBL facilitates peer-to-peer learning, which is another key aspect of constructivist theory. As students collaborate and discuss their thoughts, they are exposed to different perspectives, enhancing their understanding of religious values. This interaction encourages the co-construction of knowledge, where students learn not only from their own experiences but also from their peers. By engaging in dialogues, students can challenge each other's ideas, leading to richer and more nuanced understandings of religious teachings. This peer interaction not only enhances cognitive learning but also promotes social-emotional development, as students learn to respect differing viewpoints and work collaboratively.(Halimah, 2024)

Broader Educational Implications

The results of this study align with previous research highlighting the broader benefits of PjBL, including improved non-academic skills such as teamwork, leadership, and social responsibility.(Halimah, 2024) This study extends those findings by demonstrating PjBL's efficacy in fostering religiosity, a critical component of holistic character education.(Shibgho & Alfiansyah, 2022)

In addition to fostering religiosity, the PjBL approach nurtures essential life skills that are increasingly valuable in today's globalized society. As students work together to plan and execute projects, they learn to communicate effectively, make collaborative decisions, and navigate interpersonal challenges. These skills are crucial not only for academic success but also for future careers and community involvement.(Kusuma et al., 2023) The teamwork involved in PjBL helps students develop empathy, leadership qualities, and the ability to manage conflict, all of which contribute to their personal growth and ability to contribute meaningfully to society. This collaborative environment mirrors real-world situations, where individuals often work in teams to achieve common goals.

Moreover, PjBL encourages students to take ownership of their learning and become more self-directed. By engaging in projects that require planning, research, and execution, students gain a deeper understanding of their own learning processes. This autonomy fosters critical thinking, problem-solving, and time-management skills, all of which are vital in today's fast-paced and ever-changing world.(Arjunnajata et al., 2024) In the context of religious education, this self-directed learning model helps students internalize religious values in a way that is personally meaningful and applicable to their daily lives. As students take more responsibility for their learning, they also develop a stronger sense of accountability, which can enhance their moral and ethical decision-making.

Finally, PjBL's focus on social responsibility is another important educational implication. Through collaborative projects, students are encouraged to engage with their communities, whether by organizing religious events, creating awareness campaigns, or volunteering. This active engagement helps students realize the impact of their actions on others and fosters a sense of duty and care for the community. By integrating these projects with religious values, students gain a broader understanding of their role in society, aligning their personal growth with the greater good. This type

of learning encourages students to become responsible citizens who not only seek personal success but also contribute to the well-being of those around them.(Halimah, 2024)

Challenges in Implementation

Despite its effectiveness, implementing Project-Based Learning (PjBL) in religious education presents challenges. One key obstacle is the preparation required for teachers to design and execute projects that align with religious educational objectives. Teachers need to ensure that projects are not only engaging and educational but also appropriately reflect the religious values being taught. This requires a careful balance between academic goals and the ethical or spiritual lessons embedded in the projects. Comprehensive training and continuous support for teachers are essential to address this issue, as teachers may lack the expertise or experience in designing projects that are both meaningful and relevant to the religious curriculum.(Kesuma et al., 2024) Teacher professional development programs that focus on integrating PjBL with religious education could provide the necessary tools and strategies to help teachers succeed in this task.

Another challenge is the limited time available within packed academic schedules, which often hinders the execution of elaborate projects. PjBL requires significant time and effort, both from students and teachers, to carry out the planning, execution, and evaluation phases of a project. However, in many schools, the rigid and dense nature of the curriculum leaves little room for such intensive activities. With subjects and extracurriculars already occupying substantial time blocks, it can be difficult to incorporate extended project-based tasks without disrupting other critical learning objectives. Adjustments to school schedules and better coordination among subject teachers could help mitigate this constraint, allowing for a more flexible approach to integrating PjBL in religious education.(Arjunajata et al., 2024) Additionally, the creation of time-specific blocks for interdisciplinary projects could provide a structured yet adaptable framework for students to engage in extended learning experiences.

Furthermore, logistical challenges, such as resource limitations and the lack of support from school management, can complicate the implementation of PjBL in religious education. Religious education projects often require materials, venues, and sometimes external collaboration with community organizations, all of which can be difficult to secure without sufficient funding or institutional backing. Schools may also lack the necessary infrastructure to support hands-on learning, such as media equipment for creating videos or space for organizing community events. Effective implementation of PjBL requires a school-wide commitment to providing the resources and support necessary for successful project execution. Engaging school leadership in the planning process and securing parental involvement can help overcome these obstacles, ensuring that projects are adequately resourced and aligned with the broader educational goals of the institution.(Halimah, 2024)

Support from Schools and Families

Institutional and parental support emerged as critical factors in the successful implementation of PjBL. Schools need to provide adequate facilities and resources to facilitate project execution, while parents play a vital role in motivating students and

reinforcing values at home. The collaborative involvement of these stakeholders enhances the overall effectiveness of PjBL in fostering religious character. (Kusuma et al., 2023)

Schools must invest in infrastructure and resources that enable students to fully engage in project-based activities. This includes providing access to technology, project materials, and spaces where students can collaborate effectively. For example, creating multimedia presentations, producing videos, or organizing school-wide events require not only technological tools but also space for planning and rehearsals. Additionally, teachers need time and support from school administration to plan and manage these projects properly. When schools prioritize and allocate resources for such initiatives, they demonstrate a commitment to innovative educational practices that align with character development goals, particularly in religious education (Halimah, 2024).

Parental involvement also plays a crucial role in ensuring the success of PjBL, especially when it comes to reinforcing religious values at home. Parents who actively engage with their children's projects can help students better internalize the lessons learned in school by creating a bridge between the school environment and the home. For instance, parents can assist in gathering resources for projects, provide emotional support during difficult tasks, and help students reflect on the religious principles that underlie the projects. Furthermore, when parents model religious values and participate in discussions about the significance of the project, they strengthen their child's understanding of how these values translate into everyday life (Arjunnajata et al., 2024). This collaborative effort creates a reinforcing cycle where both school and home contribute to the development of the child's religious character.

Moreover, schools and families can jointly foster an environment that values continuous learning and character development beyond the confines of the classroom. Events such as school-parent conferences, where religious education projects are showcased, can serve as an opportunity for parents to see firsthand how their children are engaging with religious values in a practical, real-world context. This reinforces the importance of education in shaping moral and ethical behavior. In addition, parental support can help students navigate challenges, ensuring that the focus remains on both the academic and personal growth aspects of PjBL. When both schools and families are aligned in their commitment to fostering religious values, students are more likely to internalize these values deeply and apply them in various facets of their lives (Kusuma et al., 2023).

D. CONCLUSION

This study has demonstrated the effectiveness of Project-Based Learning (PjBL) in enhancing students' religious character, particularly in fostering values such as worship adherence, noble character, and tolerance. The significant increase in the religious character scores of students in the experimental group highlights the potential of PjBL as a transformative educational approach that not only improves academic outcomes but also nurtures key moral and ethical values. By engaging students in real-world projects, such as creating religious educational videos and organizing events, PjBL allowed students to actively practice and internalize religious principles, bridging the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application. The active involvement of students, as they planned and executed projects, proved to be a fundamental factor in the success of PjBL. This hands-on engagement, aligned with constructivist learning theory, facilitated deeper cognitive processing and fostered a stronger connection to the learned material. Additionally, collaboration and peer interaction were pivotal in developing essential social skills such as empathy, communication, and conflict resolution, all of which contributed to the students' growth in religious and moral values. The exposure to diverse viewpoints through cross-group discussions enhanced tolerance and helped students develop a more inclusive mindset, key aspects of religious and societal harmony.

However, the successful implementation of PjBL also requires addressing several challenges. Teacher preparation, time constraints, and logistical support are crucial elements that need to be carefully managed. Schools must ensure they provide adequate resources, infrastructure, and support for teachers, while parents must play an active role in reinforcing the values taught at school. When both schools and families collaborate effectively, the outcomes of PjBL can be significantly enhanced, fostering a well-rounded generation equipped with both academic knowledge and strong religious character. In conclusion, PjBL offers a valuable pedagogical model for fostering religious character education, aligning with the demands of modern education systems that require innovative and applied learning methods. The evidence from this study suggests that with proper management and support, PjBL can be an effective tool in developing students who are not only academically proficient but also morally grounded, tolerant, and responsible members of society.

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