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Problem-Based Learning Model as an Approach to Learning in Islamic Religious Education

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ABSTRACT
This article examines Problem Based Learning (PBL) as a relevant learning approach for Islamic Education (PAI) through a literature study. The study was conducted by collecting and analyzing scientific literature related to PBL and Islamic education, then synthesized descriptively based on four research objectives: concepts and basic principles of PBL, characteristics of PBL relevant for PAI, recent research findings, and theoretical and practical implications of PBL implementation. The results show that PBL emphasizes authentic problem-based learning, learner-centered, investigative, collaborative, and reflective. PBL characteristics are in line with Islamic education values, including critical thinking, deliberation, contextualization of religious values, and character development. A synthesis of recent research findings shows the consistent contribution of PBL in improving critical thinking skills, creativity, active engagement, concept understanding, and collaboration and communication skills.

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Keywords:

Problem Based Learning;
Islamic Education;
Critical thinking.

INTRODUCTION

Islamic Religious Education (PAI) is a subject that has a strategic role in shaping the character of students both spiritually, intellectually, and socially (Perwira & Gusmaneli, 2024). However, various studies show that PAI learning is still dominated by conventional approaches such as lectures and memorization, so that students lack opportunities to develop critical thinking and problem-solving skills (Fitriani et al., 2025). The teacher-centered learning model also causes students to be less able to relate Islamic teachings to real-life issues, even though the 21st century education context requires students to have analytical, collaborative, and creative abilities (Nurdin et al., 2024).

In this context, Problem Based Learning (PBL) is one of the relevant approaches. PBL places authentic problems as the basis of learning activities, so that learners are encouraged to think critically, investigate, and construct knowledge through cooperation and reflection (Elbanna & Muthoifin, 2024). Recent studies have shown that Problem-Based Learning (PBL) has the potential to improve higher order thinking skills (HOTS) and increase student engagement in the learning process (Utami et al., 2022). Furthermore, PBL encourages learners to develop advanced cognitive abilities through hands-on experience, which is essential to address contemporary educational challenges (Rosidah, 2018).

Furthermore, PBL aligns with the basic principles of Islamic Education. The values of tafakkur, tadabbur, i'tibar, and deliberation are foundations that are in line with the process of problem solving, group discussion, and reflection in PBL (Sidik et al., 2024). Qur'anic verses that encourage humans to think and take lessons from life phenomena indicate that dialogic, critical, and experience-based learning is part of the Islamic intellectual tradition (Zahraini & Rosidin, 2025). Therefore, the application of PBL in Islamic Education is not just a modern pedagogical demand, but also in line with the fundamental values in Islamic education (Asy'arie et al., 2023). Thus, the application of PBL in Islamic Religious Education not only improves students' critical thinking skills, but also strengthens their understanding of relevant religious values (Hidayati et al., 2024).

Although various studies have examined the effectiveness of PBL in various subjects such as science, mathematics, and social sciences, studies on the application of PBL in the context of Islamic Religious Education are still limited (Sidik et al., 2024). Many PAI teachers view PBL as a technical strategy, even though this model has very strong philosophical, epistemological, and pedagogical dimensions (Asy'arie et al., 2023). The lack of a comprehensive study on the conceptual relationship between PBL and PAI objectives is a research gap that needs to be filled.

In addition, the application of PBL in PAI faces several challenges, such as time constraints, teachers' lack of ability to design authentic problems, and students' passive learning culture (Asy'arie et al., 2023). Nevertheless, various studies have shown that PBL has a positive impact on the ability to understand religious concepts, social attitudes, and analytical skills of students (Moser & Abramovich, 2022). Therefore, it is important to develop strategies that can overcome these challenges and maximize the potential of PBL in the context of Islamic Religious Education. (Hidayati et al., 2024).

Based on this urgency, this study was designed to provide a comprehensive analysis of PBL as a learning approach in Islamic Religious Education. Specifically, this study aims to: 1) Describe the concept and basic principles of Problem Based Learning (PBL) model, 2) Explain the characteristics of PBL that are relevant for learning Islamic Education (PAI), 3) Synthesize the findings of recent research studies related to the application of PBL in education, and 4) Offer the theoretical and practical implications of the application of PBL in the learning process of Islamic Education.

This study has novelty in the form of an analytical approach that combines modern pedagogical perspectives and Islamic educational values in placing PBL as a comprehensive approach in Islamic Education learning. It is expected that the results of this study can be a theoretical reference for the development of PAI learning models as well as practical recommendations for teachers in implementing more meaningful and contextualized learning.

METHOD

This research used a library research approach by collecting and analyzing various relevant scientific sources on Problem Based Learning (PBL) and Islamic Religious Education (PAI). The reading sources used include academic literature in the form of books, journal articles on a national and international scale, and scientific publications published in the last five years. Literature searches were conducted through Google Scholar, DOAJ, and SINTA to obtain conceptual studies and empirical research results that support the analysis.

Data were analyzed using content analysis techniques, which is the process of reading, identifying themes, grouping concepts, and synthesizing findings from various sources systematically. The analysis was conducted through three stages: data reduction, thematic categorization, and descriptive inference. The literature study method with content analysis was chosen because it is appropriate to examine the concept of PBL and assess its relevance as a learning approach in Islamic Religious Education (Zed, 2019; Snyder, 2019; Krippendorff, 2019).

RESULTS

The results of the literature review are presented based on four research objectives, namely: (1) to describe the concepts and basic principles of PBL, (2) to explain the characteristics of PBL that are relevant for PAI, (3) to synthesize the findings of recent research studies, and (4) to prepare the basis for the theoretical and practical implications of the application of PBL in PAI.

Concepts and Basic Principles of Problem Based Learning (PBL)

According to the literature review, PBL is a learning model that emphasizes authentic problems as the initial foundation in the learning process. The core principles of PBL include: (Hamami & Nuryana, 2022)

1. Based on real problems to link learning material with the context of everyday life (Syafni et al., 2025). This model also encourages students to be active in the learning process, so that they can apply the knowledge gained in real situations (Woolley, 2023).

2. Student-centered, where the teacher acts as a facilitator (Waluyo et al., 2025). This model also develops students' critical and creative thinking skills, which are very important in facing challenges in the real world (Mutmainnah, n.d.).
3. Investigative learning, emphasizing independent or group investigation and problem solving (Moser & Abramovich, 2022).
4. Collaboration and group discussion, to encourage critical thinking and deliberation (Fitriani et al., 2025). This model provides opportunities for students to interact and collaborate, thereby improving communication skills and critical thinking abilities needed in today's global context (Pearsall, 2023).
5. Reflection on the learning process and results, helping learners assess the strategies and solutions produced (Asy'arie et al., 2023).The Problem Based Learning (PBL) model not only improves students' critical thinking skills, but also prepares them to face challenges in everyday life and the competitive world of work (Ifah et al., 2025).

These principles confirm PBL as an active, constructivistic, and relevant learning approach for contemporary education, including PAI.

Relevant Characteristics of PBL for Islamic Religious Education

The literature shows the compatibility between PBL principles and Islamic pedagogical values, among others:

- Critical and reflective thinking skills, in line with Qur'anic teachings such as tafakkur, tadabbur, and i'tibar (Mohidem & Hashim, 2023).
- Cooperation and deliberation, supporting the value of social morality in Islam. (Deif & Cochrane, 2022). PBL also encourages students to better understand and apply the principles of moderation in religion, which is important for building an inclusive and tolerant society (Fitriani & Marzuki, 2025).
- Contextualizing religious values, students relate Islamic teachings to real problems (Nurdin et al., 2024). Thus, the application of PBL in Islamic Religious Education can increase students' understanding of moderate values

and tolerance, and help them face socio-religious challenges in society (Fitriani & Marzuki, 2025).

- Character development, such as responsibility, empathy, and work ethics. (Heriyanto & Parni, 2025). The application of PBL in Islamic Religious Education is expected to strengthen students' social attitudes and build better character, in accordance with the values of Islamic teachings that prioritize tolerance and collaboration.

These characteristics indicate that PBL can be an Islamic Education learning approach that supports cognitive, affective, and socio-moral development.

Findings of Recent Research Studies on PBL

As per the third objective, the literature review from 2019-2024 publications showed a consistent pattern of qualitative findings:

- PBL encourages critical and analytical thinking skills (Arifin, 2021). Students in learning Islamic Religious Education, as well as increasing their active participation in group discussions (Fitriani & Marzuki, 2025). In addition, PBL has also proven effective in building inclusive and tolerant characters among students (Wafa, 2024).
- Develops creativity and problem solving (Moser & Abramovich, 2022).
- Increasing students' active involvement in learning (Asy'arie et al., 2023)
- Facilitates understanding of concepts through contextual experiences (Amin et al., 2021)
- Fosters collaboration and communication between learners (Mariyono, 2024).

These findings suggest that although most of the studies were not conducted in PAI, PBL principles can still be adapted and relevant in the context of religious education.

Basic Theoretical and Practical Implications of PBL in PAI

As per the fourth objective, the literature synthesis provides a basis for:

1. Integrating constructivistic learning models in PAI (Sidik et al., 2024) and applying a more active approach in learning, so that students can be more involved in the learning process and understand Islamic values better.

2. Develop learning activities that link religious values with real contexts (Hadi & Prayogi, 2025), and encourage students to collaborate and communicate effectively in groups. The application of PBL is expected to create a more dynamic and relevant learning environment for students in Islamic Religious Education ...
3. Encouraging teachers to act as active facilitators, not just material providers. (Fitriani et al., 2025). Thus, the role of the teacher as a facilitator is very important in implementing PBL, because it can create an interactive learning atmosphere and support maximum student involvement (Chumaidi, 2025).
4. Provide direction for the development of curriculum and learning strategies for Islamic Education that emphasize cognitive, affective, and social-moral (Love & Love, 1995). The application of PBL in Islamic Religious Education is expected to not only improve students' understanding, but also strengthen moderate values and tolerance in a complex socio-religious context (Fitriani & Marzuki, 2025).

DISCUSSION

The results of the literature review show that the Problem Based Learning (PBL) model has characteristics and principles that consistently support active, constructivistic and contextual learning. The following discussion addresses these findings from the perspective of Islamic education pedagogy and philosophy.

Concepts and Basic Principles of Problem Based Learning (PBL)

PBL emphasizes authentic problem-based learning, where learners actively find solutions. This principle is in line with the constructivistic approach that places learners as the center of learning. From the perspective of Islamic education philosophy, this model supports the development of aqal (reason) and fikr (critical thinking) as taught in the Qur'an (QS. Al-'Alaq: 1-5), which emphasizes reflection, observation, and learning based on understanding, not rote memorization.

In addition, constructivism in PBL allows PAI teachers to act as facilitators, not just teachers. This is in line with the views of Al-Ghazali and Ibn Khaldun who emphasized that learning should encourage students to think, internalize values,

and apply knowledge in real life. Thus, PBL is not just a method, but a pedagogical approach that is in line with the principles of Islamic education that integrates cognitive, affective, and spiritual aspects.

Relevant Characteristics of PBL for Islamic Religious Education

A review of the literature shows several characteristics of PBL that are relevant to the objectives of Islamic education:

1. Reflection and critical thinking - in line with the Qur'anic values of tafakkur, tadabbur, and i'tibar.
2. Collaboration and deliberation - emphasizes shura, which is deliberation as a social moral value.
3. Contextualization of religious values - students are able to connect Islamic teachings with real problems.
4. Character development - responsibility, empathy, and work ethics are part of moral learning.

From the perspective of Islamic education philosophy, PBL supports the integration of science and morals, so that learning does not only focus on cognitive aspects, but also on the formation of students' character and morals.

Synthesis of Recent Research Findings

The results of the 2019-2024 literature review show a consistent pattern of findings:

- PBL encourages critical and analytical thinking skills (Arifin, 2021). Students in learning Islamic Religious Education, as well as increasing their active participation in group discussions (Fitriani & Marzuki, 2025). In addition, PBL has also proven effective in building inclusive and tolerant characters among students (Wafa, 2024).
- Develops creativity and problem solving (Moser & Abramovich, 2022).
- Increasing students' active involvement in learning (Asy'arie et al., 2023)
- Facilitates concept understanding through contextual experiences (Amin et al., 2021)
- Fosters collaboration and communication between learners (Mariyono, 2024).

Although most of the studies were conducted on general subjects, these findings suggest that PBL can be effectively adapted for PAI, especially in linking religious values with real problems faced by learners.

Basic Theoretical and Practical Implications of PBL in PAI

Based on these findings, there are several important implications:

1. Theoretical: PBL strengthens the constructivistic approach in PAI, bridging Islamic values with modern learning methods. The model also provides a framework for further research development on innovative Islamic pedagogy.
2. Practical:
   a. PAI teachers can apply PBL to improve critical thinking, collaboration, and learner engagement.
   b. PAI curricula can adapt learning topics to contextual issues, so that religious values can be internalized practically.
   c. PBL can be used as a strategy to develop 21st century competencies, including problem solving, creativity, and character.

Overall, PBL is not only effective as a learning model, but also aligns with the principles of Islamic education, so it can be an integral approach for PAI.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the literature review, several conclusions can be drawn regarding the Problem Based Learning (PBL) model as a learning approach in Islamic Religious Education (PAI):

The concepts and principles of PBL emphasize authentic problem-based learning, learner-centered learning, independent investigation, collaboration, and reflection. These principles support active, constructivistic, and contextual learning.

The characteristics of PBL are relevant to the values of Islamic Education, especially in encouraging critical thinking, deliberation, contextualization of religious values, and the development of students' characters according to the principles of morals and Qur'anic education.

The findings of recent research studies show the consistent contribution of PBL in improving critical thinking, creativity, active engagement, concept understanding, and collaboration and communication skills. Although most of the studies were conducted on general subjects, PBL principles can still be adapted for PAI.

The theoretical and practical implications of PBL in PAI include strengthening the constructivistic approach, improving the quality of learning, integrating religious values with real contexts, and developing 21st century competencies, including critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, and character.

Overall, PBL can be used as an integral and relevant learning approach in Islamic Religious Education, connecting theory, practice, and Islamic pedagogical values.

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