



Integrating Character Education and Islamic Values: A Project-Based Learning Approach

Parina Parina^{1*} and Syihabuddin Syihabuddin², Momod Abdul Somad³,
Aceng Kosasih⁴

^{1,2,3,4} Universitas Pendidikan, Indonesia

* Corresponding author: parina@upi.edu

Abstract. In this era of globalization, the moral and social challenges faced by students are increasingly complex. Therefore, integrating character education and Islamic values into learning is increasingly urgent. This article aims to discuss the implementation of Project-Based Learning in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teaching for elementary school students. This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach with narrative analysis methods. Data were obtained through observations of teacher learning practices, reviews of student project products, and documentation of classroom activities. The results show that projects designed in PAI learning can encourage active student involvement while fostering the character of responsibility, cooperation, and caring. Furthermore, these projects not only produce tangible products but also provide meaningful learning experiences, which contribute to strengthening students' morals and spiritual growth. These findings confirm that Project-Based Learning (PBL) is a relevant and effective approach to integrating character education with Islamic religious education in elementary schools.

Keyword : Character Education, Islamic Values, Project-Based Learning (PjBL), Islamic Religious Education (PAI)

INTRODUCTION

In the era of globalization, students are faced with increasingly complex moral and social challenges [1]. Character education is an urgent need to equip the younger generation with values that can guide them in facing these realities [2]. Character education encompasses not only responsibility and cooperation, but also the development of integrity, empathy, discipline, creativity, and spiritual awareness [3].

The UNESCO report emphasizes that 21st-century education must be oriented towards developing responsible, environmentally conscious global citizens who uphold social justice [4]. Meanwhile, the OECD (2018), through the Education 2030 initiative, emphasizes the importance of student agency, specifically the ability of students to take initiative, make decisions, and be responsible for their actions [5]. This demonstrates that character education has a global dimension that must be integrated into national and local curricula.

In the context of Islamic education, the integration of character education with religious values is not merely normative but essential [6]. This is because Islam views education as a process of forming a holistic human being, encompassing cognitive, affective, and spiritual aspects. According to Al-Attas [7], the goal of Islamic education is to produce *insan adabi* or civilized humans, namely humans who are able to place everything in its place according to the order of God's creation. Islamic education not only emphasizes academic achievement or practical skills, but also instills *adab* as the core of the educational process. Thus, character education from an Islamic perspective is an effort to form a civilized personality, one that recognizes the position of humans in relation to God, themselves, others, and the universe. This philosophical foundation emphasizes that the chosen learning model must be able to connect knowledge and practice, so that students can internalize values through real experiences.

Islamic Religious Education (PAI) in elementary schools plays a strategic role in shaping behavior and character from an early age [6]. Several studies have shown that Project-Based Learning (PjBL) is effective in encouraging student involvement while fostering responsibility, discipline, cooperation, and social awareness. For example, Zalsanudin and Masnawati [8] found that implementing PjBL in PAI can improve discipline, while Imron et al. [9] demonstrated the role of PjBL in fostering social character.

In addition, PjBL also contributes to the development of creativity [10], [11], critical thinking skills [12]–[14], and student communication. Bell [15] emphasized that PjBL trains 21st-century skills, while Nailul [16] shows its potential to strengthen religious values. Therefore, the integration of PjBL with Islamic values is believed to be a transformative

approach in Islamic Religious Education learning. However, studies on the application of PjBL in Islamic Religious Education in Islamic elementary schools, especially with an emphasis on the integration of Islamic values, are still limited.

Furthermore, Barron & Darling-Hammond [17] emphasized that project-based learning is a form of meaningful learning that is able to connect knowledge with real-life contexts. Trilling & Fadel [18] also emphasized that PjBL can develop 4C skills (critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, communication), which are the basis of 21st-century learning.

In addition, a recent meta-analysis by Zhang (2023) showed that PjBL consistently has a positive effect on student learning outcomes and affective attitudes compared to traditional learning, including in the dimensions of student motivation and satisfaction [19]. Goyal (2022) also found that PjBL significantly improves students' creativity, critical thinking, and collaborative abilities [20]. A study by Wijnia et al. (2024) confirmed that methods such as PjBL, problem-based, and case-based learning have a positive influence on students' intrinsic motivation and engagement in the learning process [21].

Project-Based Learning (PBL) has received widespread attention in global education literature. Kokotsaki, Menzies, and Wiggins [22] assert that PjBL has five main characteristics: the project is central to learning (centrality), begins with a fundamental question (driving question), encourages constructive investigation, provides space for student autonomy, and produces tangible products. The concept of centrality emphasizes that projects are not additional activities, but rather the core of the learning process. Thus, all learning objectives, whether cognitive, affective, or psychomotor, are integrated in the projects students work on. These characteristics align with the principles of Islamic education, which emphasize authentic experiences, active involvement, and internalization of values through real practice.

Therefore, the integration of PjBL with Islamic values is believed to be a transformative approach in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning. However, studies on the application of PjBL in PAI in Islamic elementary schools, focusing on the integration of Islamic values and character, are still limited, both in international and local literature.

This study aims to explore how PjBL in PAI can effectively connect character education with Islamic principles, thereby producing students with noble character and spiritual awareness.

2. METHODS

This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach with narrative analysis [23]–[25]. This approach was chosen because it is suitable for exploring students' experiences and the meanings that emerge during project implementation. Narrative is understood as a form of human experience communicated through stories, with certain sequences and consequences that provide meaning for the storyteller [24]. Therefore, narrative analysis allows researchers to capture how students interpret their involvement in the project, both through actions, speech, and the resulting products.

The research was conducted at an integrated Islamic elementary school in Jakarta during the even semester of the 2024/2025 academic year. The subjects were a class of approximately twenty students participating in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning using the Project-Based Learning (PjBL) model. The class's PAI teacher acted as the primary facilitator, guiding students throughout the learning process. The project focused on the Ramadhan Sharing Community Project, a Ramadhan gift-sharing activity for the community surrounding the school. The process of this activity follows the PjBL syntax as described by Thomas [26], Larmer et al. [27], which includes the stages of fundamental questions, project planning, scheduling, monitoring, product presentation, and reflection.

The research data were obtained through participatory observation during the project activities, document analysis in the form of group reports, posters, and greeting cards made by students, and activity documentation in the form of photos and teacher field notes. The collected data were then analyzed using narrative analysis as explained by Riessman [24]. Of the various narrative analysis models, this study used thematic narrative analysis, namely an analysis that emphasizes the content of the story or the meaning contained therein, rather than its structure. The analysis steps include a data reduction process to select relevant information, grouping themes based on character categories such as responsibility, empathy, cooperation, social concern, and spirituality, and compiling a complete narrative that describes the students' experiences in the project.

To ensure data validity, this study employed triangulation by comparing observational data, student products, and documentation, and conducted member checks by confirming the analysis results with the teacher. This validated the researcher's interpretations, ensuring that the narratives presented accurately reflected the students' experiences in the project activities.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The research results show that the implementation of Project-Based Learning in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) through the Ramadan Sharing Community Project (SPP) encourages active student involvement while strengthening Islamic character. The project began with a fundamental question: "How can we meaningfully share Ramadan gifts with the surrounding community?" This question sparked students' awareness of the importance of sharing and served as the basis for activity planning.

Students then designed activities by determining appropriate types of gifts, analyzing who should receive them, and developing collection and distribution mechanisms. During this stage, they learned to connect religious values with social realities. Monitoring was conducted under teacher guidance, while project results were presented through posters, group reports, and greeting cards. The activity concluded with a group reflection, where students shared their experiences and the values they learned from the sharing process.

Methodologically, research data were collected through three main channels: participant observation, short interviews or reflections, and document analysis in the form of student reports, posters, greeting cards, and activity photos. A summary of the data used in the study is presented in Table 1, which shows the relationship between data types, collection techniques, and sources.

TABLE 1. Summary of research data

Data Type	Technical	Source
Classroom process	Observation	Field notes, observation guidelines
Student reflection	Light interviews	Interview Guidelines
Project products	Document analysis	Student reports, posters, greeting cards
Documentation	Documentation studies	Photos of activities, teacher's notes

Next, the project implementation is mapped based on the Project-Based Learning syntax found in the literature [26],[27]. As seen in Table 2, each PjBL phase can be found in classroom learning practices. Fundamental questions spark students' awareness of the importance of sharing; planning is done through group discussions to determine the form of rewards and their recipients; the schedule is made simple so that students understand the work stages; the monitoring process takes place through teacher guidance; project results are presented through posters and reports; and reflection is done by sharing experiences verbally.

TABLE 2. PjBL syntax and its implementation in the Ramadhan project

Phase of PjBL (Literature)	Implementation in the Ramadhan Project
Fundamental questions	"How can we share the gifts of Ramadan meaningfully?"
Planning	Students discuss determining the form of the gift and who the recipient is
Scheduling	Define the timeline of preparation, collection, distribution
Monitoring	Teacher facilitates; students assess progress
Product presentation	Create posters & activity reports
Reflection	Students share their experiences & values learned

From the narrative analysis, five main themes emerged that illustrate students' character development: responsibility, empathy, cooperation, caring, and spirituality. A summary of these findings is presented in Table 3.

TABLE 3. Characters that appear in the Ramadhan project

Character	Narrative Data
Responsibility	Students set their own schedules and ensure gifts are ready to be packaged
Empathy	Students analyze who deserves to receive the prize
Cooperation	Students share assignments in groups
Care	Students show initiatives to help the surrounding community
Spirituality	Students associate sharing with the value of worship in the month of Ramadan

This finding is in line with previous studies which emphasize that PjBL can develop students' collaborative skills and responsibility [9],[10],[12]–[14],[28]–[30], as well as strengthen the moral and affective dimensions in religious education [11],[12],[16],[31],[32]. By integrating Islamic values into real projects, students not only produce products in the form of prize packages and posters, but also gain meaningful learning experiences. This experience confirms that character education cannot be separated from the context of students' real lives and must be practiced in everyday life, as emphasized by Lickona [2] and Al-Attas [7] about the importance of habituation and internalization of values.

Research findings indicate a strengthening of the values of responsibility, empathy, cooperation, caring, and spirituality. When students can organize their own schedules, analyze who deserves to receive gifts, and link sharing activities with Ramadan worship, they are practicing good manners, meaning putting things in their proper place. The value of responsibility is evident when students organize their schedules and ensure gifts are ready to be packaged. Empathy is fostered when they analyze who deserves to receive gifts. Cooperation is evident in the division of group tasks, while caring is demonstrated through initiatives to help the surrounding community. Spirituality is reflected when students link sharing activities with Ramadan worship.

This demonstrates that the project not only produces tangible products but also serves as a vehicle for *tadib* (civilized education), as Al-Attas emphasized that true knowledge is knowledge that is put into practice. Therefore, the Ramadhan Sharing Community Project can be viewed not merely as a social activity but as a form of spiritual experience that guides students toward the ultimate goal of Islamic education, namely the formation of civilized individuals. Character values can be more firmly embedded when practiced through real experiences, not just taught theoretically. Thus, the Ramadhan Sharing Community Project proves that Islamic Religious Education (PAI) is strategically positioned to instill moral and spiritual values.

Furthermore, the success of internalizing character values is determined not only by classroom activities but also by broader community involvement. In this project, students, teachers, parents, and the surrounding community collaborated, making the sharing experience more authentic. This process provided a space for students to understand that sharing is not just an individual obligation, but part of a broader socio-religious responsibility.

From Al-Attas's perspective [7], the values found in this study are a concrete manifestation of *adab*. When students organize their schedules, weigh who deserves what, and link sharing to Ramadan worship, they are truly placing things in their proper place according to God's order of creation. This demonstrates that the project not only produces tangible products but also serves as a vehicle for *tadib*, namely, education that directs humans towards becoming civilized beings.

Thus, the Ramadhan Sharing Community Project is not simply a sharing activity, but rather a vehicle for instilling noble morals through concrete experiences. This demonstrates that PjBL can be a relevant approach in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning, as it bridges the demands of the character curriculum with Islamic teachings that emphasize social awareness and strengthening spirituality. This project not only produces products but also transformative experiences that strengthen students' morals and spirituality. These findings support the literature that emphasizes the importance of integrating character education into learning practices through real-life projects based on Islamic values.

4. CONCLUSION

This research demonstrates that the implementation of Project-Based Learning in Islamic Religious Education (ISE) through the Ramadhan Sharing Community Project effectively integrates character education with Islamic values. The Ramadan gift-sharing activity, designed, implemented, and reflected upon by students, not only resulted in tangible products in the form of gift packages and posters but also provided a meaningful learning experience. Through this experience, students internalized character values such as responsibility, empathy, cooperation, social awareness, and spirituality, which are closely linked to Islamic teachings.

The findings of this research confirm that Project-Based Learning (PjBL) can be a relevant approach to bridging the character education curriculum with religious education, particularly in integrated Islamic elementary schools. Real-world projects based on Islamic values have been proven to train students to face moral and social challenges in the era of globalization, while strengthening their religious identity. Therefore, the implementation of Project-Based Learning (PjBL) in Islamic Religious Education (ISE) classes deserves further development as a learning strategy that encourages the formation of noble character through concrete experiences.

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