

PROJEK BASED EVALUATION OF ISLAMIC RELIGIOUS

EDUCATION LEARNING IN ENHANCING STUDENTS’

UNDERSTANDING OF ISLAM

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Submitted: Citation: <i>Ramadhani, R., Munafiah, S. N., & Alfiah, S. N. (2025). Project-Based Evaluation of Islamic Religious Education Learning in Enhancing Students' Understanding of Islam. As-Sunniyyah: Journal of Islamic Studies and Education, 1(1), 000–000.</i>	Islamic Religious Education (IRE) in Indonesian schools has long been dominated by teacher-centered approaches such as lecturing and rote memorization, which inadequately support students' in-depth understanding and practical application of Islamic values. This study aims to evaluate the effectiveness of project-based learning (PBL) in IRE in enhancing students' understanding of Islam across cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains. A qualitative case study approach was employed, involving 30 eighth-grade students at a junior high school that implemented PBL in IRE instruction. Data were collected through participatory observation, in-depth interviews with teachers and students, and analysis of project documents and products. The findings indicate that PBL significantly improved students' understanding of Islamic teachings, increased their engagement and learning motivation, and fostered the development of social skills, critical thinking, and creativity. Moreover, positive attitudinal and behavioral changes were observed as students became more inclined to apply Islamic values in everyday life. This study concludes that project-based IRE is an effective and contextually relevant approach to improving the quality of Islamic religious education in schools, and should be systematically expanded across educational institutions. Keywords : <i>learning evaluation, Islamic Religious Education, project-based learning, understanding of Islam</i>

I. Introduction

Islamic Religious Education (IRE), widely known in Indonesia as Pendidikan Agama Islam (PAI), is one of the most strategically significant subjects in the school curriculum. Its primary purpose extends beyond imparting religious knowledge; it aims to shape students' character and strengthen their capacity to understand and apply Islamic principles in everyday life.

In practice, however, IRE instruction in many schools continues to rely heavily on teacher-centered methods such as lectures and memorization. These conventional approaches provide insufficient opportunities for students to engage with Islamic teachings in a meaningful, critical, or applied manner. As a result, students' understanding of Islam often remains at a superficial, textual level and fails to translate into genuine behavioral or attitudinal change.

Project-Based Learning (PBL) has emerged as a promising alternative to address these limitations. In PBL, students are engaged with authentic, real-world challenges that require the integration of knowledge and skills to develop solutions collaboratively. This approach enables students to engage with Islamic teachings in a more applied, contextual, and reflective way, making the learning experience both deeper and more meaningful.

Learning outcomes are generally understood as the measurable competencies students develop through instruction, encompassing knowledge (cognitive), attitudes (affective), and skills (psychomotor). These outcomes are shaped by a range of internal factors including motivation, interest, and learning style and external factors such as teacher quality, curriculum design, the learning environment, and the availability of instructional facilities and resources.

The characteristics of IRE as a subject particularly its emphasis on values, practical religious observance, and social responsibility make it particularly well-suited for project-based approaches. Through PBL, students can plan and execute projects that connect Islamic concepts directly to contemporary social issues and daily life, transforming abstract religious principles into lived experience.

This study therefore aims to evaluate the effectiveness of project-based IRE instruction in improving students' understanding of Islam, and to identify its broader impact on student engagement, motivation, and skills development.

II. METHOD

This study employed a qualitative approach using a case study design. The qualitative method was selected because the research seeks to gain an in-depth understanding of the processes, dynamics, and outcomes of project-based IRE learning

within a natural school setting, rather than to measure variables statistically.

The research participants consisted of 30 eighth-grade students at a junior high school that had implemented project-based learning in its IRE program. Data were collected through three primary methods: (1) participatory observation, to directly observe the implementation of PBL activities in the classroom; (2) in-depth interviews with IRE teachers and students, to gather data on their perceptions, experiences, and learning development; and (3) analysis of project documents and student-produced project outputs, which served as tangible evidence of learning achievement.

Primary data were obtained directly from fieldwork through observation and interviews. Secondary data were gathered from a range of relevant literature, including academic books, peer-reviewed journals, theses, and prior research reports on project-based learning and IRE evaluation. The evaluation process encompassed an analysis of students.

understanding of Islamic teachings before and after participating in PBL, as well as an examination of the development of social and cognitive skills that emerged during project activities. Data analysis was conducted using descriptive-interpretive techniques and triangulation to ensure the validity and reliability of the findings.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Enhancement of Students' Understanding of Islamic Teachings

The implementation of project-based IRE demonstrated a significant improvement in students' understanding of fundamental Islamic concepts. Three major projects were undertaken during the course of the study, each targeting different aspects of Islamic knowledge and practice.

First, the Islamic Da'wah Video Project. Students were tasked with producing a short video conveying moral messages and Islamic teachings on themes such as noble character (akhlaq), the obligation of zakat, and the importance of prayer (shalat). Through this project, students deepened their understanding of zakat by connecting it directly to

issues of poverty alleviation and social welfare. The production process required students to conduct research, engage in collaborative discussion, and synthesize their understanding of the practical value of zakat in contemporary life.

Second, the Islamic-Based Social Counseling Project. Students conducted community outreach on hygiene and health, grounded in the Islamic principle that cleanliness is part of faith (al-nazhafatu minal iman). This activity helped students understand how Islamic teachings provide a moral and spiritual foundation for social responsibility, particularly with respect to the care of one's body, community, and natural environment.

Third, the Islamic Article Writing Project. Students wrote articles on the application of Islamic values in everyday contexts, including social interaction, business ethics, and behavior on social media. This project required students to critically examine various aspects of Islamic teaching and communicate them clearly in a format accessible to a general audience.

Following the completion of these projects, students reported marked improvements in their understanding of the moral and social dimensions of Islam. They demonstrated a greater capacity to relate religious teachings to practical daily life including acts of sharing, environmental stewardship, and honest interpersonal conduct.

2. Increased Student Engagement and Motivation

Project-based learning significantly increased students' engagement and motivation in IRE. Unlike conventional instruction, which often positions students as passive recipients of information, PBL actively involved students in every phase of the learning process from project planning and execution through to the presentation and evaluation of outcomes.

Students reported heightened motivation arising from their ability to see a direct connection between what they were learning and its relevance to their lives. For example, through the da'wah video project, students expressed a sense of pride and purposefulness in knowing that their work could contribute to the dissemination of Islamic values within their wider community. This sense of real-world impact proved to be a powerful motivational driver.

3. **Development of Social and Collaborative Skills**

Project-based learning provided students with authentic opportunities to develop social skills, including teamwork, effective communication, and negotiation in group decision-making. Working collaboratively on each project, students shared ideas, supported one another, and jointly worked toward shared goals.

In the social outreach project on cleanliness, for instance, students were required to plan activities collectively, develop educational materials, and communicate their messages to community members. This process not only strengthened their social competencies but also fostered a deeper appreciation for collaboration as an expression of the Islamic values of brotherhood (ukhuwah) and mutual assistance (ta'awun).

4. **Development of Critical Thinking Skills and Creativity**

In addition to social skills, project-based learning fostered the growth of students' critical thinking abilities and creativity. Across all projects, students were required to engage in analytical thinking identifying problems, evaluating available information, and devising solutions grounded in Islamic principles.

In producing the da'wah video, for example, students needed to present Islamic teachings in an engaging and accessible way suitable for diverse audiences, which demanded both creative vision and careful judgment. Similarly, the article writing project required students to critically analyze contemporary social issues and propose Islamic-informed solutions. Rather than passively receiving information, students were consistently challenged to analyze, evaluate, and construct knowledge through an Islamic lens.

5. **Positive Impact on Student Attitudes and Behavior**

The impact of project-based learning extended beyond cognitive development to encompass meaningful changes in students' attitudes and behavior. Many students reported that, following their participation in PBL, they had become more empathetic toward others, more consistent in their religious observance, and more conscious of the importance of embodying Islamic values in daily life.

Several students noted that they had previously paid little attention to social and charitable activities, but had since become more actively engaged in such practices. This indicates that project-based IRE is effective not only in producing cognitive gains but in catalyzing broader attitudinal and behavioral transformation aligned with the goals of Islamic character education.

6. Discussion: Project-Based Evaluation in IRE

The findings of this study are consistent with a growing body of research affirming the effectiveness of project-based approaches in improving learning quality. PBL actively engages students by providing opportunities to investigate, analyze, and synthesize issues relevant to real-world situations (Wati & Zainurrahmah, 2022). Students are then guided to plan, develop, and present products that address the identified problems, while teachers act as facilitators who assess and provide feedback throughout the process.

In the context of IRE evaluation, project-based assessment enables all students to participate actively in an authentic, ongoing evaluation process. This evaluation is carried out through both individual and group reflection on the activities and outcomes of their projects (As'ari et al., 2022). Consequently, project-based evaluation in IRE functions simultaneously as an instructional strategy and an integrated assessment tool.

The integration of project-based assessment into IRE also supports students in bridging religious concepts with real-world situations. This approach can enhance the application of Islamic beliefs in practical activities and strengthen students' practical religious knowledge (Irsyad, 2021). Project-based evaluation in IRE is therefore not merely a measurement tool but an integral component of the learning process itself.

Project-based learning is characterized by several key features: (1) students actively identify and formulate the problem to be addressed; (2) the conceptual framework and project plan are developed by students collectively; and (3) students share collective responsibility for managing information in order to reach a solution. These features position PBL as an approach that simultaneously builds students' collaboration, communication, self-directedness, and problem-solving abilities (Kristanti et al., 2016).

Nevertheless, project-based learning is not without limitations. From an operational standpoint, it requires greater financial resources and instructional time than conventional methods. Not all students possess equivalent information-gathering skills or the capacity for independent project management, which means that intensive teacher facilitation and well-structured group organization are essential to ensure equitable and meaningful participation for all learners.

IV. CONCLUSION

Based on the findings and discussion presented in this study, it can be concluded that the integration of project-based learning into Islamic Religious Education (IRE) instruction has a significant positive impact on student learning outcomes. Project-based IRE has been demonstrated to be effective in improving students' understanding of Islamic teachings across cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains.

Specifically, this study found that project-based IRE is capable of: (1) enhancing students' conceptual and practical understanding of Islamic values; (2) significantly increasing student engagement and learning motivation; (3) developing social and collaborative skills through cooperative project work; (4) fostering critical thinking abilities and creativity; and (5) producing positive changes in students' attitudes and behavior toward the embodiment of Islamic values in everyday life.

These findings affirm that project-based learning represents an effective alternative for addressing the limitations of conventional IRE instruction, which tends to be theoretical, monotonous, and insufficiently contextualized. It is therefore recommended that schools expand and systematically develop the implementation of this approach, accompanied by investment in teacher professional development to enhance educators' capacity to design and facilitate projects that are relevant to students' lived experiences and responsive to the demands of contemporary society.

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