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Problem-Based Learning Strategy in Improving Students' Religious Understanding in Islamic Religious Education Subjects

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Abstract*: This research aims to explore problem-based learning (PBL) strategies in enhancing students' religious understanding in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) subjects. PBL is an approach that prioritizes solving real-life problems relevant to everyday life, encouraging students to develop critical thinking skills and connecting religious teachings with social contexts. Research results show that the application of PBL in PAI learning can enhance students' understanding of Islamic teachings in a deep and practical manner. In addition, PBL also strengthens students' social skills, such as cooperation and communication, and enhances their learning motivation. However, there are challenges in implementing PBL, such as teacher readiness, time constraints, and the diversity of students' backgrounds. Therefore, it is recommended that teachers be provided with training related to PBL, as well as the development of relevant learning resources to address these challenges. PBL has proven effective in enhancing students' religious understanding in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) subjects.*

Keywords: Problem-Based Learning Strategies, Students' Religious Understanding, Islamic Religious Education

INTRODUCTION

Education is the main means of forming quality human resources, not only from an intellectual perspective, but also from a spiritual and moral perspective.(Tranggono et al., 2023). In the Indonesian national education system, Islamic Religious Education (PAI) has an important position as an integral part of the formation of students' character based on the values of faith and devotion to God Almighty. PAI not only aims to provide an understanding of religious teachings, but also to instill religious attitudes and behaviors that can be reflected in everyday life.(Rochbani et al., 2024). Therefore, the PAI learning process must be able to present meaningful and contextual learning experiences, so that students not only understand religion cognitively, but also internalize its values affectively and psychomotorically.

However, in reality, the PAI learning process still faces various challenges. One of the main problems is the learning approach which is still dominated by lecture and memorization methods, so that students become passive and less actively involved in the learning process. As a result, students' understanding of religious material tends to be shallow and non-contextual. This is certainly contrary to the main objective of PAI, which is to create a generation that not only knows about religious teachings, but is also able to internalize and practice them in real life.

In response to these conditions, innovation is needed in learning strategies that are able to activate students' participation in building knowledge independently and collaboratively. One strategy that is considered relevant to these needs is the problem-based learning strategy or Problem-Based Learning (PBL). This strategy is a student-centered learning approach, where students are invited to solve real problems related to the subject matter.(Krisno, 2016). In the context of Islamic Religious Education, this strategy can be used to raise religious issues that are relevant to everyday life, so that students can learn to understand Islamic values through experience and critical and reflective problem solving.

Problem-based learning is believed to increase students' active involvement, develop critical thinking skills, and strengthen understanding of religious concepts through exploration and discussion processes. Students are not only recipients of information, but also discoverers and interpreters of information through a challenging and meaningful learning process. Thus, students' understanding of religious teachings is not only theoretical, but also applicable and contextual, which can ultimately encourage strengthening of students' religious character.

Several previous studies have shown that the implementation of problem-based learning strategies has proven effective in improving students' conceptual understanding and attitudes towards the lesson. However, the application of this strategy in the context of Islamic Religious Education learning is still relatively limited and has not been studied in depth, especially in relation to improving students' comprehensive religious understanding. Therefore, this study aims to further explore how problem-based learning strategies can be implemented effectively in Islamic Religious Education subjects, as well as how they affect improving students' religious understanding.

METHODS

This study uses a literature study method or library study, which is a research approach carried out by reviewing, collecting, and analyzing various written sources that are relevant to the focus of the study. Literature study is a method used to explore

information and data from various theoretical and empirical references in order to gain an in-depth understanding of a topic without collecting field data directly.In this study, the author reviews various literatures that discuss problem-based learning strategies and their implementation in the context of Islamic Religious Education (PAI). The sources used include national and international scientific journals, academic books, scientific articles, previous research results, and other relevant and credible documents. In addition, information is also obtained from online sources such as official websites of educational institutions and digital academic publications that can be accounted for their validity.

The data collection process was carried out by searching the literature using keywords such as "problem-based learning strategies", "problem-based learning", "Islamic religious education", and "students' religious understanding". After the data was collected, the author selected literature that had high relevance to the research topic. The data that had been collected was then analyzed descriptively-qualitatively with the aim of identifying patterns, tendencies, and conclusions that could be drawn regarding the effectiveness of problem-based learning strategies in improving students' religious understanding. Through this literature study method, it is hoped that the research can provide a strong conceptual contribution in the development of Islamic Religious Education learning strategies, as well as being a reference for educators in designing more active, contextual, and meaningful learning for students.

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

The Concept of Problem-Based Learning Strategy Problem-Based Learning (PBL) is a learning approach that places students as the main subject in the learning process, by starting learning from relevant real problems (Boangmanalu et al., 2023). In this approach, students are invited to solve problems through group work, discussion, research, and application of knowledge gained to solve the problems. This approach emphasizes the development of critical thinking skills, problem-solving abilities, and active learning that encourages students to learn independently. PBL was first introduced by Barrows and Tamblyn (1980) as an alternative learning that emphasizes contextual learning. In PBL, teachers act as facilitators who help students organize information, explore knowledge, and connect it to real experiences and problems faced in everyday life. Therefore, PBL is very suitable to be applied in the context of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning, because it is able to link religious teachings with actual social issues, which are often faced by students (Siswanti & Indrajit, 2023).

In general, PBL involves five main steps consisting of: a. Problem identification: The teacher poses a relevant problem or topic and invites students to dig deeper. b. Problem investigation: Students conduct research and discussions to find solutions to the problems presented. c. Collaboration: Students work together in groups to discuss and solve problems. d. Presentation of results: Students present their findings and solutions in front of the class or other groups. e. Reflection: Students reflect on their learning, both in terms of the process and the results achieved (Aprina et al., 2024). PBL in Islamic Religious Education learning allows students not only to understand religious theory, but also to apply religious values in the context of everyday life. Thus, students can see the relevance of Islamic teachings to various social, ethical, and moral problems they face (Farbriani et al., 2024). PBL has the potential to increase student engagement in learning. PBL facilitates the development of critical thinking, communication, and teamwork skills, which are essential skills in

social life. In addition, this approach encourages students to take full responsibility for their learning process, increases self-confidence, and deepens their understanding of the material being taught (Sofyan & Komariah, 2016). With its active and contextual learning characteristics, PBL is very suitable for use in Islamic Religious Education learning, which requires students to not only memorize religious texts, but also understand and practice religious teachings in their lives. Implementation of PBL in Islamic Religious Education Learning The implementation of Problem-Based Learning (PBL) in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning provides an opportunity for students to develop a deeper understanding of Islamic religious values through active and contextual learning experiences.

This strategy does not only rely on religious theory taught verbally, but emphasizes more on the application of Islamic teachings in dealing with real problems that occur in everyday life (Primadoniati, 2020). The implementation of PBL in Islamic Religious Education begins with the introduction of problems that are relevant to students' social and religious lives. These problems must be linked to topics that are in accordance with the Islamic Religious Education curriculum, for example about social justice, tolerance between religious communities, the importance of honesty, or the application of Islamic teachings in modern life. For example, teachers can ask questions such as: "How does Islam teach us to resolve conflicts between friends?" or "What is the role of zakat in reducing social inequality in society?" After the problem is presented, students are then divided into small groups to discuss the problem. At this stage, students seek references from religious sources, such as the Qur'an, Hadith, and books of interpretation or fiqh, to find answers and solutions to the problems given. In this process, the teacher acts as a facilitator who guides the discussion, provides direction, and helps students dig deeper into Islamic values that can be applied in the concrete situations they face (Subhan & Ningsih, 2020).

During group discussions, students not only talk about theories, but are also asked to relate religious values to issues around them. For example, they can identify ways to practice tolerance in diversity or resolve conflicts peacefully based on Islamic teachings. This helps students not only understand religion from a cognitive perspective, but also apply religious teachings in their social lives. After the discussion, students are asked to present the results of their discussions in front of the class. In this presentation, groups of students explain how they solved the problems presented, and relate the solutions found to relevant Islamic teachings. This presentation provides an opportunity for students to hone their public speaking and communication skills, while strengthening their understanding of religious teachings. In the final stage, students reflect on the learning process they have undergone. They reflect on what they have learned, how they can apply the knowledge in real life, and how this learning can help them in facing similar problems in the future. This reflection also provides an opportunity for students to further explore Islamic values that can enrich their lives. In this way, PBL in Islamic Religious Education learning not only improves students' understanding of religious teachings, but also helps them develop critical thinking, cooperation, and communication skills. In addition, PBL also facilitates students to better recognize the relevance of Islamic teachings in their lives, as well as encourages them to become better and socially responsible individuals. Overall, the implementation of PBL in Islamic Religious Education has a positive impact on students' understanding of Islamic teachings in a deeper and more applicable way, and helps them to be more sensitive to the social and moral values

contained in religion.

PBL and Improving Students' Religious Understanding The application of Problem-Based Learning (PBL) in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning has great potential to improve students' religious understanding, both from cognitive, affective, and psychomotor aspects. Based on the results of studies on various literature, PBL can strengthen students' understanding of Islamic teachings in a more in-depth and applicable way, because this approach emphasizes the active involvement of students in the learning process and the application of religious concepts in real-life contexts (Albaab et al., 2025). One of the main aspects that supports the improvement of students' religious understanding through PBL is the strengthening of critical thinking. In problem-based learning, students are encouraged not only to receive religious information passively, but to study, analyze, and solve problems related to religious values. For example, by presenting real cases such as social conflicts or moral problems in everyday life, students are invited to think critically about how Islamic principles can be applied to solve these problems. This process strengthens their understanding of religious teachings, because they not only memorize religious texts, but also learn to apply them in various situations. Problem-based learning has been shown to strengthen students' understanding of religion because they actively seek and connect religious teachings with relevant social issues. In the study, students who were asked to solve social problems related to Islamic teachings showed a deeper understanding of religious concepts such as social justice, tolerance, and responsibility. This is because they can see firsthand the relevance of religious teachings in their lives, which makes learning feel more meaningful and applicable (Syukriah et al., 2024). In addition to the cognitive aspect, PBL also contributes to the affective dimension of students. By being directly involved in group discussions and seeking solutions together, students learn to appreciate other people's perspectives, work together, and strengthen attitudes of empathy and tolerance. In the context of Islamic Religious Education, this is very important, considering that Islamic teachings emphasize social values that teach compassion, mutual respect, and peaceful coexistence. Through discussion and collaboration in PBL, students learn to appreciate differences and understand the importance of working together to achieve common goals, in accordance with the principles of Islamic teachings (Mahfuzah & Mahmuddin, 2023).

The reflection process carried out at the end of the learning also has a positive impact on students' religious understanding. In this stage, students are given the opportunity to reflect on the lessons they have received, relate them to personal experiences, and dig deeper into the meaning of the Islamic teachings they have learned. This reflection not only strengthens their cognitive understanding of the material, but also builds their awareness of the importance of practicing religious teachings in everyday life. Thus, PBL not only helps students to understand religious teachings in theory, but also encourages them to apply religious values in their practical lives. Problem-based learning can increase students' motivation in learning religion. Because this learning is more interactive and relates the subject matter to real-life situations, students feel more interested and involved in learning. This has an impact on increasing their understanding of the material, because they feel the material is relevant to their lives and can be applied to everyday problems (Ali, 2024). Overall, PBL provides a significant contribution in improving students' religious understanding, both in terms of understanding religious concepts, critical thinking skills, and social and moral attitudes in accordance with Islamic teachings. By

integrating PBL in Islamic Religious Education learning, teachers can create a more dynamic, interactive, and applicable learning environment, which ultimately helps students to not only understand religion theoretically, but also practice it in their lives. Challenges and Solutions in Implementing PBL in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) Although Problem-Based Learning (PBL) has many benefits in improving students' religious understanding, the implementation of this strategy in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning is not without challenges. Several obstacles encountered in the implementation of PBL in PAI are related to factors such as teacher readiness, time constraints, and the diversity of student backgrounds.

Therefore, appropriate solutions need to be found to overcome these obstacles so that PBL can be optimized in PAI learning. One of the main challenges in implementing PBL in Islamic Religious Education is teacher readiness. PBL requires teachers to not only be teachers, but also as active facilitators in managing discussions and problem-solving processes. Many teachers are still accustomed to conventional learning approaches that are more about teaching directly, so they need training and a deeper understanding of the PBL method. In addition, the skill of designing relevant problems that are able to stimulate students' critical thinking is also a challenge for some teachers (Sapitriana, 2024). To overcome this challenge, it is important for schools and educational institutions to provide professional training for Islamic Religious Education teachers in implementing PBL. This training can include contextual problem design techniques, discussion management, and skills in guiding students to think critically. With adequate training, teachers can be more confident and effective in implementing PBL, while providing more meaningful and relevant learning for students (Lestari & Kurnia, 2023). PBL requires sufficient time to implement each stage of learning, from problem identification to final reflection. In reality, the PAI lesson schedule in schools is often limited, thus reducing the opportunity to implement PBL optimally. This lack of time can hinder in-depth exploration of the given problem and reduce the effectiveness of learning (Rachmat, 2023). One solution that can be taken is to optimize the available learning time through more efficient time management.

Teachers can design shorter and denser PBL activities, while still ensuring that the core learning is achieved. In addition, collaboration between subjects can be a way to maximize the available time, where PBL is applied in various subjects at once, so that students can relate religious concepts to other disciplines. The diversity of students' backgrounds, whether in terms of religious knowledge, life experiences, or critical thinking skills, can be an obstacle in implementing PBL. Students with stronger religious backgrounds tend to be more confident in discussing and contributing, while students with more limited religious knowledge or low critical thinking skills may find it difficult to follow the discussion and problem-solving process. This can create an imbalance in student engagement, which in turn affects learning outcomes. To overcome this challenge, teachers need to divide heterogeneous groups, where students with different abilities and backgrounds can work together and help each other. Teachers can also provide additional explanations or references for students who need more support in understanding the material or problems faced. Thus, each student has the opportunity to learn and develop according to their abilities, while still being involved in the group discussion process (Wathon, 2025). Quality and relevant learning resources to support PBL learning in Islamic Religious Education are often limited. Although there are many references in the form of classical books, translations and interpretations that are appropriate to

the context of modern life are not always available in sources that are easily accessible to students. In addition, the use of technology in PBL, such as online learning platforms or technology-based applications, has not been fully utilized in Islamic Religious Education learning. Schools and teachers can work together to develop technology-based learning materials, such as web-based learning modules, learning videos, and interactive applications that can be accessed by students to enrich their learning experience. Teachers can also utilize various additional reference sources, such as scientific articles, current research, and online sources that can provide a broader perspective on relevant religious issues (Salsabila & Muqowim, 2024).

Assessment in Islamic Religious Education learning often focuses on cognitive aspects, such as the ability to memorize and answer theoretical questions. This does not reflect critical thinking skills, collaborative skills, and the ability to apply religious teachings in real life, which are the main objectives of PBL. To overcome this, teachers need to design a more holistic assessment, which includes cognitive, affective, and psychomotor aspects. Portfolio-based assessments, projects, and presentations can be used to assess students' skills in critical thinking, collaboration, and applying religious values in everyday life. With more varied assessments, the PBL learning process can be more comprehensively reflected (Akbar et al., 2024). The implementation of PBL in Islamic Religious Education learning has challenges that need to be overcome, including teacher readiness, time constraints, student diversity, limited learning resources, and assessments that are still cognitive in nature. However, with teacher training, more efficient time management, and more holistic material and assessment development, these challenges can be overcome well. The implementation of these solutions is expected to optimize the implementation of PBL and improve students' religious understanding as a whole.

CONCLUSION

Based on the discussion that has been done, it can be concluded that Problem-Based Learning (PBL) has a very large potential in improving students' religious understanding in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) subjects. PBL provides a more active and contextual approach, where students not only learn religious theory, but also apply religious values in solving real problems that are relevant to their lives. This increases their understanding of Islamic teachings in a deep and applicable way.

In addition, the application of PBL in Islamic Religious Education also contributes to developing students' critical thinking skills, collaboration skills, and communication. In this way, students not only gain religious knowledge, but also learn how to think analytically and solve problems related to social and moral values taught in Islam. However, the implementation of PBL also faces several challenges, such as teacher readiness, limited learning time, diverse student backgrounds, and limited learning resources. To overcome these challenges, teacher training, more efficient time management, and more holistic material and assessment development are needed. Overall, PBL has a positive impact in improving students' religious understanding if implemented properly. Therefore, the application of PBL in Islamic Religious Education learning is highly recommended to continue to be developed, in order to create more relevant, active, and meaningful learning for students.

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