

# Strategic Management of Project-Based Learning (PjBL) for Enhancing Religious Character Development Among High School Students

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## Suggested Citation:

Athori, Feri Firmansyah; Said, Basnang. (2026). Strategic Management of Project-Based Learning (PjBL) for Enhancing Religious Character Development Among High School Students. *Jurnal Iman dan Spiritualitas*, Volume 6, Number 2: 597–608. <https://doi.org/10.15575/jis.v6i2.51625>

## Article's History:

Received November 2025; Revised March 2026; Accepted March 2026.  
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## Abstract:

The implementation of the Project-Based Learning (PjBL) model at SMA Negeri 1 Ciracap and SMA Negeri 1 Surade, Sukabumi Regency, West Java, plays a crucial role in shaping students' religious character. This study aims to explain how PjBL management is implemented as a strategy for strengthening religious values in the Islamic Religious Education learning process. Using a qualitative descriptive case study approach, data were collected through in-depth interviews, observations, and documentation with Islamic Religious Education teachers, principals, and students. The results show that project planning was systematically structured by integrating spiritual values, such as digital da'wah materials, social and religious practices, and moral strengthening. Teachers acted as facilitators, guiding students to be responsible, collaborate, and relate each project to Islamic teachings. The evaluation process was comprehensive, not only assessing the final product but also evaluating the learning process, spiritual goals, and changes in students' religious behavior. The applied management emphasized active collaboration between teachers, students, and the school to create a religious, participatory, and character-building learning culture. In line with the Pancasila Student Profile, this study concludes that effective PjBL management is an innovative approach to improving students' religious character and providing practical guidance for Islamic Religious Education educators and school policymakers in developing a curriculum that balances academic, moral, and spiritual aspects.

**Keywords:** High School; Islamic Religious Education; learning management; Project-Based Learning; religious character.

## INTRODUCTION

To develop students who are devout, devout, and moral, religious education in schools is crucial. However, the task of cultivating religious character in the context of 21st-century education is becoming increasingly difficult due to the influence of globalization, social media, and digital culture, which often overlap with spiritual values. This challenge requires educators, particularly Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers, to navigate the difficulties posed by contemporary technological and cultural currents (Wilanda et al., 2025). Consequently, learning models and management are needed that prioritize cognitive performance and the instillation of religious values through relevant and contextual learning experiences. PjBL is one strategy that supports these goals. This learning paradigm emphasizes active student participation in completing real-life projects. Within the PAI framework, projects can be

created to incorporate religious values such as honesty, accountability, religious discipline, social awareness, and cooperation. PjBL has been proven to be an effective approach in strengthening students' spiritual dimensions, in line with the dimensions of Faith, Devotion to God Almighty, and Noble Character in the Pancasila Student Profile (Pribadi et al., 2024). However, the success of PjBL implementation depends heavily on how teachers methodically oversee the entire learning process, from planning, implementation, to evaluation. Learning management is the process of planning, organizing, implementing, and assessing teaching and learning activities to ensure they run successfully and efficiently (Mulyasa, 2020). In project-based learning, teachers act as managers and instructors, constantly supervising, encouraging, and assessing student learning activities. This dual role is crucial, as good teacher management is key to internalizing religious values through structured activities (Hunain et al., 2023).

Character development, particularly religious character, cannot be achieved solely through lectures or instruction but requires well-planned and controlled habits within the school environment (Hunain et al., 2023). Empirical data shows that Islamic Religious Education teaching methods in many institutions are still teacher-centered, leaving students powerless and lacking practical experience in internalizing religious beliefs. Although religious programs such as congregational prayer and regular social activities have been implemented, these programs have not been optimally coordinated within an integrated learning framework. This highlights the need for more methodical learning management to facilitate the internalization of religious beliefs through organized learning activities. Teachers have a significant opportunity to oversee a more interactive learning process focused on character development through the implementation of PjBL. Projects can be created to promote religious values, for example, through community service projects that develop empathy and social awareness, or digital da'wah projects that teach ethical media use (Wibowo & Hidayat, 2022). However, the success of these projects, just like the intelligence of the students, is determined by the teacher's ability to oversee the stages of learning from thorough preparation and cooperative implementation to reflective evaluation.

Theoretically, PjBL management is closely related to the concept of '*amal salih*' (good deeds) within the framework of Islamic education, where learning should result in tangible improvements in morality and behavior (Azizah & Khoir, 2021). Furthermore, religious ideals can be instilled through meaningful social interactions when students collaborate on spiritually infused projects (Rachman & Nurhanifansyah, 2024). Therefore, the key to developing a learning environment that contextually promotes religion, piety, and high morality is PjBL management. With this context in mind, the purpose of this study is to describe how PjBL is managed to improve students' religious character in two public schools in Sukabumi Regency. Lesson planning, lesson implementation, and learning evaluation are the three main areas of focus of this study. This study is expected to provide an in-depth understanding of how Islamic Religious Education instructors oversee the project-based learning process as a tactic to improve students' religious character. By encompassing these three key phases, this study aims to provide a comprehensive explanation of project-based learning management to improve religious character in high schools. These findings are expected to guide educators and educational policymakers in creating integrated learning management strategies that combine pedagogical and spiritual elements, in line with the Pancasila Student Profile values of faith, piety to God Almighty, and noble character (Pribadi et al., 2024). However, to date, there has been little research that comprehensively explains project-based learning management in the context of public schools with different socioeconomic characteristics across its three main stages: planning, implementation, and evaluation (Saputra et al., 2025). Most previous research has focused more on how well PjBL affects learning outcomes than on how to effectively implement it in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) classes. With a qualitative descriptive approach across schools, this study is unique in that it comprehensively investigates project-based learning management in two public high schools (Ciracap and Surade) representing two different religious and cultural backgrounds. This study contributes to developing a conceptual model for project-based learning management grounded in religious character to assist Islamic Religious Education teachers in implementing the Independent Curriculum.

In an effort to improve the quality of Islamic Religious Education learning, which is not only oriented towards cognitive aspects but also towards students' character and spiritual development, various studies have focused heavily on the use of project-based learning models (PJBL). The PJBL model is considered a strategic alternative to overcome the limitations of conventional learning, which tends to be passive and only focuses on academic achievement. Through a project-based approach, students are encouraged to learn actively and collaboratively, and are able to connect material to the realities of everyday life, especially in the internalization of religious values. Several previous studies have shown that the management of the PJBL model across various educational units has a positive impact on student learning activity, creativity, critical thinking skills, and the development of religious character. These studies provide an important foundation for seeing how PJBL management in PAI learning can be implemented effectively and contextually. Moreover, at the high school level, students' religious character faces

significant challenges due to the influence of digital culture, the secularization of values, and the increasingly strong globalization. Therefore, an in-depth study of the management of the PjBL model in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning in public schools with diverse social dynamics and student characteristics is highly relevant. Based on this urgency, this study will specifically examine how the PjBL model is implemented to improve students' religious character at SMA Negeri 1 Ciracap and SMA Negeri 1 Surade. This study aims to describe the planning, implementation, and evaluation strategies of the PjBL model and its relevance to the formation of students' religious character as part of an effort to strengthen character education based on Islamic values.

First, research conducted by Rahmawati Safithri, M. Edi Kurnanto and Nur Hamzah (2025) on "Project-Based Learning Model in Islamic Religious Education Learning at SMKN 1 Pontianak." Research on the application of the Project-Based Learning Model in Islamic Religious Education learning at SMKN 1 Pontianak shows that the use of PjBL is able to increase students' active participation in the learning process. Through this approach, students become more creative, hone their critical thinking skills, and experience improvements in academic achievement. Learning does not only focus on delivering material, but is designed in a transformative manner and based on spiritual values, thus encouraging students to understand and practice religious teachings more meaningfully in real life. Thus, PjBL is not only effective in stimulating cognitive development, but also strengthens the formation of students' religious character through contextual learning and oriented towards direct experience (Safithri et al., 2025).

Second, research conducted by Andi Della Delvia (2025) on "Implementation of Project Based Learning (PjBL) Learning Model in Islamic Religious Education Learning at SD Inpres 6 Lolu, Palu City." This research examines the implementation of Project Based Learning (PjBL) learning model in Islamic Religious Education subject at SD Inpres 6 Lolu, Palu. The results of the study show that PjBL is able to provide a more meaningful learning experience for students through direct involvement in learning projects that are relevant to everyday life. Through this approach, students not only understand religious teachings theoretically, but are also encouraged to internalize religious values in real behavior. The learning process becomes more active, collaborative, and participatory because students are involved in the preparation, implementation, and presentation of projects related to Islamic values. This contributes significantly to increasing students' understanding of religious teachings and the formation of religious characters such as discipline, responsibility, cooperation, and social concern. Thus, PjBL is considered effective as a learning model that not only develops cognitive aspects, but also strengthens the affective and moral aspects of students in a balanced manner (Delvia, 2025).

Third, research conducted by Eka Risma Junita (2023) on "Implementation of the Project Based Learning (PjBL) Learning Model in Shaping the Social Attitudes of Islamic Religious Education Students at SD Negeri 02 Rejang Lebong." This research highlights the application of the Project Based Learning (PjBL) learning model in Islamic Religious Education subjects, with the main objective of seeing how this model is able to improve students' understanding and religious character. Through a project-based approach, students are invited to be directly involved in contextual and applicable learning activities, so that they not only understand the material theoretically, but are also able to internalize and practice it in their daily lives. This model encourages students to work collaboratively, think critically, and be responsible in completing project assignments related to religious values. The research findings show that PjBL is not only effective in improving the understanding of religious concepts, but also strengthens character formation such as discipline, honesty, social concern, and cooperation. Thus, this approach is considered relevant as a learning strategy that is able to integrate mastery of knowledge with internalization of students' moral and spiritual values in a balanced and sustainable manner (Junita et al., 2023).

Fourth, research conducted by Zahrotul Inayah, Abdul Hakim Majid, Muhammad Lutfi Al Fatih, Aly Masyhar (2025) on "Project Based Learning (PjBL) Model and Its Relationship with Student Understanding in Learning." This research explores the relationship between the Project Based Learning (PjBL) learning model and increasing student creativity and learning outcomes, while highlighting its influence on the formation of religious character as part of student self-development. Through the implementation of PjBL, students are encouraged to think critically, generate innovative solutions, and actively collaborate in completing projects relevant to real life. This process not only improves academic achievement but also strengthens students' creativity and problem-solving abilities. In addition, PjBL also contributes to the internalization of religious values such as responsibility, discipline, cooperation, and social care, because each project carried out contains elements of contextual religious values. The research findings show that this model is effective in developing both cognitive and affective aspects of students in a balanced manner, making it a learning approach capable of forming a generation that is intellectually intelligent and has a religious character (Inayah et al., 2025).

Previous research has shown that the Project Based Learning (PjBL) model is highly effective in improving the quality of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) at various levels of education. PjBL consistently creates active, creative,

and meaningful learning by providing students with opportunities to learn through hands-on experiences and contextual projects relevant to real life. Through this approach, students not only cognitively understand the material but also experience reinforcement in affective aspects such as the formation of religious character, responsibility, cooperation, and Islamic social attitudes. In the context of PAI learning, PJBL has proven capable of presenting an educational process that is not only oriented towards knowledge transfer but also on the formation of spiritual and moral values. Learning becomes more humanistic, transformative, and reflective because students are invited to interpret the values of Islamic teachings through direct practice, rather than simply through lectures or memorization. PJBL is also in line with the demands of 21st-century education, which emphasizes the development of critical thinking skills, creativity, collaboration, and communication. This shows that PJBL is relevant to the needs of today's digital generation, which tends to be more responsive to experiential and exploratory learning. Thus, it can be concluded that PJBL is not only an innovative learning model, but also a comprehensive approach in creating a balance between mastery of Islamic Religious Education material, the development of higher-order thinking skills, and the development of students' religious character. The results of previous research provide a strong foundation that the development and implementation of PJBL in Islamic Religious Education learning needs to be continuously studied and expanded, to become more adaptive to the school context, local culture, and the challenges of the ever-evolving digital era.

## METHOD

This research was conducted in two schools in Sukabumi Regency, West Java: SMA Negeri 1 Ciracap and SMA Negeri 1 Surade, using a multiple case study design (Yin, 2018) combined with qualitative descriptive techniques. This method was chosen to fully understand how Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers implement PjBL instructional management while simultaneously enhancing their students' religious character. Methodological literature emphasizes that the purpose of qualitative research is to analyze the meanings emerging from interactions between participants and researchers to gain a deeper understanding of social processes (Creswell, 2018). Meanwhile, case studies (Yin, 2018) provide researchers with the opportunity to closely observe the dynamics that occur in a particular learning context, particularly those related to teachers' managerial practices in organizing, implementing, and assessing learning. Two schools with different characteristics but with the same status as public schools were used to select the research locations. SMA Negeri 1 Ciracap, located in the southern coastal area of Sukabumi Regency, has a diverse student body and numerous religious activities. In contrast, SMA Negeri 1 Surade is located in a more densely populated area with a long history of socio-religious customs and a strong religious culture. These two schools were chosen because they both use project-based learning methods for Islamic Religious Education but have different management styles. This allows for contextual comparisons that strengthen the research findings.

The research subjects were teachers, students, and administrators directly involved in the implementation of project-based learning in Islamic Religious Education. Informants were selected using purposive sampling, selecting participants based on predetermined criteria (Creswell, 2018). These criteria included the principal or vice principal responsible for the curriculum who understands the school's learning policies, students actively involved in religious projects, and Islamic Religious Education teachers who had used the PjBL model for at least one previous semester. The total informants were twelve students from the two schools that were the subjects of the research, four heads of study programs, and two Islamic Religious Education teachers. This study used three main techniques in the data collection process: observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation. The observation technique was carried out by directly observing the implementation of project-based Islamic Religious Education learning from the planning stage, implementation, to evaluation. Observations included aspects of time management, interaction patterns between teachers and students, and the level of student participation in various religious programs such as the Congregational Prayer Movement, digital-based da'wah activities, and other socio-religious activities. In-depth interviews were conducted to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the experiences, views, and reflections of educators, students, and principals regarding the implementation of the PjBL model. These interviews focused on three important aspects of learning management: planning, implementation, and evaluation, resulting in more structured and in-depth information. Documentation techniques were used to collect various supporting data, such as lesson plans, activity archives, student project reports, and visual documentation in the form of photos and videos during the learning process. School policy documents related to religious programs were also collected as analytical material to strengthen the research findings (Sugiyono, 2013).

The data collection process lasted for three months, starting with initial observations and continuing through the data verification stage. The collected data were evaluated using three main steps of the interactive analysis model: data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing/verification. Data relevant to the research focus

(planning, implementation, and evaluation) were selected and categorized by the researcher during the data reduction stage. Findings were organized narratively during the data presentation stage to show learning management trends at each institution. Using field data interpretation confirmed by triangulation of sources and techniques, the researcher reached conclusions during the verification stage. To maintain data validity, triangulation methods were used, including source triangulation (comparing findings from interviews with instructors, students, and the principal) and method triangulation (combining the results of observations, interviews, and documentation) (Creswell, 2018). Informants were also asked to review interview summaries as part of the member checking process to prevent misunderstandings. The researcher was the primary instrument directly involved in data collection and processing throughout the entire research process. The researcher used data recording as a kind of audit trail, field notes, and personal reflections to maintain objectivity. This research was conducted in accordance with the ethical principles of qualitative research. Research permission was officially obtained from the campus and the principal at both loci. All participants (teachers, students, and the principal) were asked to sign informed consent before interviews and observations; for underage students, parental/guardian consent was also sought in accordance with school policy. Participant identities and sensitive data were disguised to maintain anonymity, and recordings and transcripts were used only for research purposes. Member checking and method triangulation processes were used to ensure the validity of interpretations.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Implementation of Project-Based Learning Management (PjBL) in the context of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) in two public high schools with different characteristics. This study describes an academic journey that raises contemporary issues regarding the challenges of religious character formation in the digital era, where the influence of globalization and social media is increasingly shifting traditional spiritual values. The research setting spans two schools with unique characteristics: SMA Negeri 1 Ciracap, located in the southern coastal area of Sukabumi Regency, with diverse students and dynamic religious activities, and SMA Negeri 1 Surade, located in an area with a strong religious culture and deep-rooted socio-religious traditions. These two schools serve as natural laboratories to observe how project-based learning management can be applied in different contexts but with the same goal of strengthening students' religious character. This study uses a descriptive, qualitative approach with a multiple-case study design, allowing researchers to explore the complexities of learning management across two settings. Through in-depth observations, intensive interviews with PAI teachers, principals, and students, and comprehensive documentation, researchers weave a rich narrative of meaningful educational practices. This article reveals three fundamental pillars in effective PjBL learning management: systematic planning, collaborative implementation, and reflective evaluation. The study findings indicate that these three key factors determine how well PjBL learning management strengthens students' religious character. Together, these three elements create a management cycle that facilitates the achievement of comprehensive Islamic Religious Education learning objectives. These results support the assertion (Pribadi et al., 2024) that character education will not be successful without systematic, well-organized, and long-term learning management.

### Systematic PjBL Learning Planning

Despite the different characteristics and school environments, research findings indicate that the PjBL learning management in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) at SMA Negeri 1 Ciracap and SMA Negeri 1 Surade has completed a comprehensive planning process. This systematic planning demonstrates the teachers' ability to design contextual projects. To select project subjects relevant to students' religious lives, curriculum representatives, principals, and PAI instructors at SMA Negeri 1 Ciracap held a coordination meeting. The "Digital Da'wah" and "Congregational Prayer Movement at School" initiatives were created by the Ciracap PAI instructors as part of the PAI thematic learning, which combines social, technological, and spiritual elements. Meanwhile, the PAI instructors at SMA Negeri 1 Surade focused on programs centered on social responsibility, such as "Islamic Social Service" and "Friday Charity Movement." To align with PjBL principles, lesson plans (RPPs) were adjusted to include project objectives, implementation stages, and student success metrics covering religious knowledge, attitudes, and abilities. Teachers at both schools have integrated religious beliefs into every aspect of learning, as evidenced by their planning. For example, teachers use affective indicators such as moral responsibility for group projects, cooperation in good deeds, and religious discipline in addition to cognitive achievement when determining indicators of success. To help students understand the religious significance of each project activity, teachers also create project worksheets and reflection guides. "We want children not only to understand religious material intellectually, but also to personally apply Islamic values in real-life activities," said an Islamic Religious

Education (PAI) teacher in Ciracap in an interview. These results demonstrate the importance of PjBL planning in helping students internalize religious values through relevant activities. This supports the idea put forward by (Hunain et al., 2023) that character education needs to be methodically planned to instill moral principles in behavior. Therefore, Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers must create project ideas that combine Islamic spiritual ideals with 21st-century skills.

### **Implementation of Collaborative PjBL**

The second pillar is collaborative implementation, demonstrating the transformation of the teacher's role from a traditional instructor to a learning facilitator guiding students through meaningful projects. The PjBL concept, which emphasizes teamwork, active student participation, and the practical application of religious beliefs, is implemented in the educational process at both institutions. The project implementation process at SMA Negeri 1 Ciracap begins with a project briefing. Small groups of students are assigned specific project topics, such as planning a congregational prayer event or creating digital Islamic da'wah content for the school's social media accounts. The instructor serves as a facilitator throughout this process, providing guidance and direction without taking over the group. Students actively conduct small-scale research, participate in discussions, and complete assignments according to the project plan as part of the implementation of the principle of learning by doing. This facilitator role also reflects the teacher's role as a learning manager (Damayanti, 2023). In Ciracap, students enthusiastically express their creativity through digital da'wah content. According to one Ciracap student: "Religious studies are usually just lectures and memorization. However, this digital da'wah initiative taught me how to use short videos to spread Islamic teachings. It was fun and enhanced my understanding of religious principles." Meanwhile, the project was implemented in a more socially conscious manner at SMA Negeri 1 Surade. Instructors encouraged students to plan straightforward charitable activities, such as fundraising and volunteering at an orphanage. At each stage of the project, teachers not only managed the logistical process but also instilled the values of cooperation, responsibility, and sincerity. "Project activities are not just school assignments, but practice in practicing Islamic ideals in real life," emphasized Teacher Surade. These implementation results are consistent with findings (Rachman & Nurhanifansyah, 2024) which emphasize that social interactions between students in relevant project situations lead to effective learning and improved religious character. Students experience religious principles such as empathy and mutual assistance through group communication and collaboration. In addition, effective time management was crucial for the project's success, demonstrated by Surade instructors' flexible time management, combining the project with religious extracurricular activities, while Ciracap teachers planned project activities outside of regular class hours. The implementation of PjBL in both schools demonstrated that, when carefully managed, authentic activities can serve as a vehicle for character development.

### **Reflective Evaluation of PjBL**

The third pillar is reflective evaluation, which measures not only academic outcomes but also changes in students' religious behavior. Assessment of the process, outcomes, and modifications in students' religious behavior is part of a comprehensive and rigorous learning evaluation conducted at both schools. Islamic Religious Education teachers at SMA Negeri 1 Ciracap evaluated student participation using observation sheets. In addition to evaluating the final product (e.g., a worship video or activity report), the assessment also examined collaboration, discipline, and responsibility throughout the process. In Surade, Islamic Religious Education teachers created a self-reflection-based assessment tool. After completing a project, students were encouraged to write reflective notes about their spiritual experiences during the project. "I used to think that helping the underprivileged was only an adult's job," wrote one student. "However, after completing community service, I realized that giving alms can also increase feelings of contentment and peace." The instructor led an in-depth class discussion to explore the meaning of the religious principles that emerged in the project. This evaluation approach aligns with findings (Saputra et al., 2025) that emphasize that moral reflection must be an integral part of the character development process, as it is through contemplation of religious values that students' behavior can be truly internalized.

The instructor also conducted a managerial assessment of the project implementation process, focusing on time efficiency, student engagement, and school support. According to the Ciracap principal, "The implementation of the PjBL went well because the Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teacher actively coordinated with other teachers and involved the school's OSIS (Islamic Student Council) and IRMA (Islamic Student Association) administrators." This finding aligns with findings (Talahatu et al., 2024) regarding school managerial support. The concept of continuous improvement, which uses evaluation findings to improve subsequent project operations, is demonstrated in this comprehensive assessment. Evaluation is a tool for continuous improvement as well as for

evaluating outcomes. This article makes an important contribution to the development of religious character education theory and practice by presenting a learning management model adaptable to school contexts. This research demonstrates that the PjBL approach, when well-managed across the three core functions of planning, implementation, and evaluation, can bridge theoretical learning with practical experiences rooted in spiritual values. This research narrative offers a practical blueprint for Islamic Religious Education (PAI) educators to implement project-based learning that not only improves academic achievement but also strengthens students' religious character. Both schools exhibited varying patterns in their implementation of PjBL, but both successfully integrated religious values into learning projects. SMA Negeri 1 Surade excelled in socio-religious activities, while SMA Negeri 1 Ciracap excelled in religious communication and technical innovation (Emilya & Nurlaili, 2025). This variation demonstrates the flexibility and adaptability of PjBL implementation to the unique circumstances of each school. This finding aligns with the spirit of the Pancasila Student Profile, which emphasizes the formation of individuals who are faithful, pious, and have noble character, particularly regarding the elements of "faith, piety to God Almighty, and noble character." Therefore, project-based learning management is a strategic tool for developing students' religious character today, as well as a pedagogical approach. This article describes an educational innovation rooted in tradition yet relevant to the demands of the times, offering hope for a more meaningful and impactful transformation of religious education.

### **PjBL in Islamic Religious Education as an Adaptive Strategy to the Spirituality Crisis of the Digital Era**

PjBL in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) has emerged as an effective adaptive strategy to address the spiritual crisis affecting the younger generation in today's digital era. Globalization and the rapid development of digital media have not only transformed learning methods but also altered the perspectives and spiritual patterns of students who face a flood of information and the vulnerability of spiritual values. Research shows that PjBL in PAI is not simply a creative and enjoyable learning method, but rather a form of strategic resistance to this phenomenon, by prioritizing real-world practice as a means of internalizing religious values into students' lives (Faisal et al., 2023). One example of the adaptive implementation of PjBL is the "Digital Da'wah" project at SMA Negeri 1 Ciracap, which demonstrates a concrete response to digital challenges by utilizing digital media as a means of da'wah and spiritual education. Meanwhile, SMA Negeri 1 Surade implemented the "Friday Charity Movement" project to address the social empathy crisis, which is also part of the current spiritual crisis. These two projects illustrate that PjBL is able to adapt contextually to the social and spiritual needs of students while providing religious practice experiences that are relevant to real-world situations (Ananda & Malik, 2025).

From a pedagogical perspective, PjBL in Islamic Religious Education addresses contemporary educational theory's demand that religious learning not only stop at the cognitive and doctrinal dimensions but also lead to real, meaningful daily-life practices for students. The Islamic Religious Education learning philosophy is shifting from the "teaching religion" paradigm, which is oriented towards normative teaching, to the "living religion" paradigm, which places religious experiences in students' real lives as the center of learning (Ananda & Malik, 2025). The research findings also reinforce criticism of the old paradigm of Islamic Religious Education learning, which was dominated by lecture and memorization methods, which have now proven less relevant to facing a digital reality that is highly visual, rapidly changing, and demands the involvement of experiential learners. PjBL appears as an epistemic bridge connecting the world of school with the real world, so that the function of religious education is not only to provide knowledge, but also to shape the character, religious attitudes, and social skills of students who are responsive to changing times. The implementation of the PjBL learning model in Islamic Religious Education requires the strategic role of teachers as facilitators and spiritual companions. Teachers must not only deliver material but also assist students in reflecting on religious values within the context of their life experiences, enabling them to deeply internalize them. This mentoring is crucial for developing an Islamic character that is not at odds with digital dynamics but instead serves as a means to strengthen students' spirituality (Faisal et al., 2023).

In the digital era, another challenge facing Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning is low digital literacy and disparities in access to technology among students. Therefore, adaptive PjBL strategies must also involve increasing the digital literacy capacity of educators and students, so that the use of digital media and technology in learning can be optimal and does not distort religious messages. In other words, PjBL as a learning strategy must be integrated with strengthening digital literacy while being rooted in the Islamic values of *rahmatan lil 'alamin* (mercy for the universe) to become a relevant and inclusive learning agenda. PjBL also provides space for students to actively collaborate and participate independently in religious learning, so that learning becomes more meaningful and contextual. The process includes evaluating project results, assessing social attitudes, and constructive feedback from teachers, all of which contribute to the formation of character and a holistic religious

attitude. However, PjBL implementation still faces challenges such as limited time and resources, so full support from schools, teachers, and families is a critical factor for success (Faisal et al., 2023). Furthermore, the application of PjBL in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) emphasizes the epistemic relationship between the classroom learning world and the real social world, where educational projects serve as a vehicle for students to apply religious values concretely in their daily lives, both in digital and social contexts. This aligns with the view that religious education must transcend the theoretical dimension and dogmatic application, toward a form of life experience capable of maintaining spirituality amidst the onslaught of modern world values. PjBL as an adaptive strategy in Islamic Religious Education learning addresses the contemporary needs of religious education that emphasizes character formation and spiritual strengthening of students. With a real-world practical approach relevant to today's digital and social world, PjBL demonstrates itself as a learning solution that is not only innovative but also resistant to the spiritual crisis experienced by the younger generation in this digital era.

### **Islamic Religious Education (PAI) Learning Planning Based on PjBL**

PjBL-based Islamic Religious Education lesson planning involves not only technical aspects such as the development of Lesson Implementation Plans (RPPs), indicators, and assessment rubrics, but also crucial ideological elements. PAI teachers consciously integrate Islamic values and the mission of character building into these plans, ensuring that learning is not simply confined to modern, secular methods.

First, the research results show that the affective indicators in PjBL planning are specifically structured and directly related to moral and religious values such as moral responsibility, collaboration in good deeds, and discipline in performing worship. This confirms that Islamic Religious Education teachers not only operationalize the PjBL method technically, but also "Islamize" it, that is, integrate learning methods with Islamic values rooted in the mission of religious education. Thus, learning planning becomes a direction-conscious ideological strategy, not merely administrative (Astuti et al., 2024). Theoretically, this planning is closely related to the concept of the Islamization of knowledge put forward by contemporary Islamic thinkers such as Al-Attas and Naquib al-Attas. They emphasize the importance of science and educational methods not simply being adopted from the West but rather adapting and filtering them through Islamic values so that education can shape individuals who are not only intelligent but also possess Islamic morals. The implementation of the Islamization of knowledge is seen in the planning of Islamic Education PjBL which has the noble goal of building students' character through fundamental Islamic values (Astuti et al., 2024).

Second, systematic planning in this context involves structured steps ranging from analyzing student needs, determining learning objectives based on Islamic principles, selecting relevant materials, methods that support active and affective learning, to developing assessment indicators that measure spiritual, moral, and social aspects. All of this demonstrates that Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning planning should not be viewed merely as an administrative or technical task, but rather as an ideological act with broad implications for shaping a generation of Muslims with character and Islamic integrity.

Third, the integration of Project Based Learning (PjBL) methods in the context of Islamic Religious Education is not a rejection of modernity, but rather an effort to align modern learning approaches with the principles of Islamic teachings. Through PjBL, teachers can design learning projects that require collaboration among students in the practice of good deeds, such as social activities or the development of a spirit of mutual assistance, so that Islamic values are brought to life in real activities relevant to the needs of the times. Learning does not stop at mastering theory, but is directed at internalizing values through direct, contextual experiences. For example, projects that require students to maintain discipline in worship, such as setting prayer times or developing a religious activity program, are effective media for instilling an attitude of responsibility, obedience, and spiritual awareness. Thus, PjBL provides space for students to develop intellectual competence and religious character in a balanced manner. This approach provides a more meaningful and profound learning experience, because students not only understand Islamic teachings conceptually but also apply them in their daily lives. Through this synchronization, PjBL not only keeps pace with the progress of modern education, but also ensures that Islamic values remain the main foundation in forming a generation with noble character and adaptability to changing times (Faisal et al., 2023).

The implementation of this planning also strengthens the role of teachers as ideological agents who not only teach religious knowledge but also instill Islamic values, attitudes, and character through consciously and strategically designed learning. Teachers are the main actors in transforming these Islamic values in the learning process so that they do not get trapped in merely learning innovations that are only technically creative without spiritual and moral content. PjBL learning planning in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) is an example of

systematic and ideological planning. Systematic means having structured and measurable steps, and ideological means that its main goal is the formation of Islamic character in students that is inseparable from religious values. This study emphasizes that religious education must Islamize learning methods so that religious education is not only technically creative and innovative but also able to answer religious and social missions. Based on the theory of the Islamization of knowledge, Islamic Religious Education teachers as learning managers must elevate learning planning as a strategic platform for instilling Islamic values in an integral and holistic manner.

### Collaboration as a Mechanism for Internalizing Values

Collaboration as a mechanism for internalizing values explains that collaboration in PjBL in Islamic Religious Education not only strengthens students' social interactions but also serves as a primary mechanism for internalizing collective religious values. The findings of the Ciracap and Surade studies illustrate two distinct collaboration models that serve the same function: connecting religious values with students' concrete affective experiences. The Ciracap collaboration model emphasizes digital creativity with a collaborative-aesthetic approach, while the Surade model is more communal-social or collaborative-empathetic. These two styles present different nuances in the learning experience, but both reinforce religious values through meaningful and affective interactions. This aligns with Vygotsky's theory on the importance of social interaction in effective learning processes. However, this study expands on this assertion by demonstrating that worship-themed social interactions provide a deeper spiritual internalization force than ordinary academic interactions. PjBL in the context of Islamic Religious Education activates the affective domain in a concrete way, not just through narrative measurement or textual memorization. This means that learning occurs not only cognitively but also emotionally and spiritually through continuous social conditioning. Collaboration as a learning process allows students to experience religious values directly in their social context, strengthening the reproduction of religious values through concrete collective experiences (Emilya & Nurlaili, 2025).

Other research also supports that collaboration in religious learning can increase tolerance, moderation, and social cooperation, which are part of the internalization of religious values. Learning models such as problem-based learning (PBL) in Islamic Religious Education not only improve students' critical thinking skills but also instill social and religious values such as *tawasut* (moderation) and *tasamuh* (tolerance), which are relevant in today's socio-religious context. Through this collaborative learning, students not only engage in discussions and group activities that strengthen togetherness but also connect religious values to real-life contexts, thus creating a more authentic and spiritually meaningful learning experience (Abdul Azis, 2024). This process strengthens the internalization of religious values in an authentic and sustainable manner, not merely through knowledge transfer or memorization. Collaboration in PjBL as a mechanism for internalizing values in Islamic Religious Education is effective because it integrates cognitive, affective, and social aspects. The collaborative model is not only a pedagogical strategy but also a medium for social habituation that makes religious values a real part of students' daily lives. Thus, PjBL not only improves academic abilities but also reproduces religious values through social interactions with nuances of worship, strengthening students' spiritual and moral experiences directly in the context of togetherness and real socio-cultural activities (Hamzah et al., 2025).

### Reflective Evaluation in the context of Islamic Religious Education

Reflective evaluation in the context of Islamic Religious Education as discussed in this study marks a significant paradigm shift from conventional evaluation, which only measures learning outcomes, to an in-depth assessment process oriented toward changing students' self-awareness. This evaluation approach, which focuses on spiritual reflection, views education not merely as the transfer of knowledge or mastery of cognitive competencies, but as a journey of *tazkiyatun nafs* (purification of the soul), integral to religious education. This represents a breakthrough highly relevant to the maqashid (objectives of religious education) that emphasize the balance between sharia and reality in learning (Faelasup & Astuti, 2025). In the modern education system, evaluation is often limited to quantitative measures such as exam scores and report card scores, which essentially assess only cognitive and technical aspects. However, religious education actually requires students to develop inner awareness, namely muhasabah (self-reflection), a process of continuous self-investigation and self-correction aimed at achieving spiritual perfection. By presenting reflective evaluation based on changes in consciousness, this study integrates the concept of muhasabah from the Sufism tradition into modern learning practices, thereby enriching the spiritual dimension of education.

Contemporary educational philosophy, emphasizing reflective practice, as proposed by Dewey and Schön, also strengthens the relevance of this method. Dewey emphasized that learning is a process of critical and

reflective thinking that enables students to internalize experiences into meaningful knowledge and readiness to act. Meanwhile, Schön developed the concept of reflective practice, which requires educators and students to continuously review actions and decisions within the learning context as an effort for self-improvement and professional development. Thus, reflective evaluation in PjBL not only optimizes mastery of the material but also facilitates changes in students' spiritual awareness and character (Dewi et al., 2025). The findings of this study indicate that when evaluation is directed at the dimension of self-awareness rather than just quantitative results, PjBL moves from being a mere learning method to fostering authentic spiritual character (Widigdo et al., 2024). This represents a step forward in the transformation of religious education, which has so far received little serious attention in the formal education system, which prioritizes conventional academic standards. The emphasis on reflection as the final maqashid necessitates that the main goal of religious education is not only the mastery of knowledge, but the development of character, values, and spiritual awareness that reflects ma'rifatullah (knowledge of Allah) internally.

The practical implications of this approach are far-reaching. The Islamic Religious Education curriculum design must be revised to integrate reflective evaluation as an essential component, not simply as an additional assessment tool. A curriculum oriented toward changing self-awareness enables teachers to guide students holistically, integrating cognitive, affective, and spiritual aspects into the learning process. Furthermore, a reflection-centered evaluation philosophy fosters a more humanistic and transformative learning model that aligns with the goals of both classical and contemporary Islamic education. Placing reflection as the final maqasid (the ultimate goal) of Religious Education is a form of actualization of the maqasid of sharia that transcends legal and regulatory aspects but also prioritizes the essential goals of education: the formation of a perfect human being and tazkiyatun nafs (the self-righteous). Thus, evaluation becomes not merely an academic measurement tool but also an instrument for spiritual and moral development. This also raises awareness that religious education is inseparable from the profound spiritualization process that shapes students into individuals with spiritual awareness and integrity (Hasan et al., 2024). This reflective evaluation positions reflection as both the ultimate goal and the central method in Religious Education, theoretically and practically enriching the paradigm of Islamic education, which has often focused on cognitive and ritualistic aspects. This opens up space for religious education that is truly rooted in inner experience and the construction of spiritual awareness, the result of which is not merely mastery of material but also authentic and meaningful transformation of the students' souls.

## CONCLUSION

Project-Based Learning (PjBL) management is crucial for enhancing students' religious character at SMA Negeri 1 Ciracap and SMA Negeri 1 Surade, according to the study's findings. Results obtained through a qualitative descriptive case study methodology indicate that successful PjBL implementation relies on engaging project design and efficient learning management, encompassing three key components: planning, implementation, and evaluation. Islamic Education teachers demonstrated their ability to plan learning aligned with students' needs and religious principles. Initiatives including community service, religious activities, and digital da'wah (Islamic outreach) were methodically planned to foster social awareness, discipline, and a sense of responsibility. Teachers acted as learning managers and facilitators during the implementation phase, encouraging teamwork, innovation, and active student participation in real-world learning opportunities. As students were able to apply their theoretical understanding of religious principles to their daily lives, learning became more relevant. Teachers conducted comprehensive and introspective evaluations covering procedures, outcomes, and changes in students' religious practices. In addition to evaluating the effectiveness of the project, the evaluations provided teachers and students with a way to reflect and continuously improve. All things considered, the PjBL learning management has successfully established an interactive, student-centered learning environment focused on religious character formation. This study suggests that a strategic model for religious education in secondary schools could be a planned and directed learning management approach. Islamic Religious Education teachers are encouraged to continuously improve their administrative skills to oversee project-based learning while taking into account the unique circumstances of their respective institutions. For religious project activities to be sustainable, schools must provide infrastructure and policy support. To improve holistic learning outcomes, further research could expand the focus to include other elements of the Pancasila Student Profile, including independence and collaboration. This research enhances the development of project-based Islamic Religious Education learning management in secondary schools, particularly by creating a methodical, measurable management model to foster students' religious character.

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