

Implementing Problem-Based Learning to Enhance Motivation and Skills among Islamic Education Students

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Abstract. This study examines the implementation of Problem-Based Learning (PBL) as a student-centered instructional model for enhancing motivation and core learning skills among Islamic education students. Responding to the persistence of lecture-dominated instruction, the study employs a qualitative literature review by systematically identifying, selecting, and synthesizing scholarly publications on PBL, learning motivation, critical thinking, collaborative learning, and Islamic education. The review indicates that PBL can strengthen students' motivation by connecting Islamic concepts with authentic social and moral issues, while promoting autonomy, collaboration, reflective inquiry, and evidence-based reasoning. Beyond its commonly reported educational benefits, the synthesis highlights that PBL aligns with key objectives of Islamic education by integrating cognitive development, ethical decision-making, character formation, and social responsibility through contextual problem-solving. However, its effectiveness depends on carefully designed problems, lecturer facilitation, adequate learning resources, and assessment strategies aligned with both academic and moral learning outcomes. The study concludes that PBL is pedagogically relevant for Islamic education when implemented through contextual, value-oriented, and well-scaffolded learning experiences.

keywords: *problem-based learning; islamic education; learning motivation; critical thinking; collaborative learning*

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Introduction

One of the central aims of education is to develop learners who are motivated to continue learning, broaden their intellectual horizons, and transform knowledge into meaningful action. In higher education, motivation is not merely a psychological supplement to instruction; it is a decisive condition for academic persistence, active participation, and the development of professional competence. Harahap et al. (2021) define motivation as an internal change of energy that is expressed through affective readiness and goal-directed action. Apriana (2020) similarly explains motivation as an inner drive that directs students toward particular goals and shapes both the intensity and quality of their learning behavior. From this perspective, student motivation functions as the engine of learning because it determines whether students become passive recipients of information or active constructors of understanding.

In Islamic education, the issue of motivation has a particular pedagogical significance. Islamic education is not limited to the transmission of religious doctrines, legal categories, or historical facts; it is also concerned with cultivating reflective understanding, ethical reasoning, spiritual awareness, social responsibility, and the ability to respond to real problems in Muslim communities. Students of Islamic education are expected to interpret religious concepts in relation to contemporary life, evaluate moral dilemmas, and apply values in educational, social, and professional settings. Consequently, instructional methods that rely primarily on memorization and teacher-centered explanation are often insufficient for developing these competencies. While lectures remain useful for delivering foundational concepts, overdependence on lectures may reduce students' curiosity, weaken critical inquiry, and limit opportunities to practice reasoning in authentic contexts.

The shift from teacher-centered to student-centered learning has therefore become an important agenda in contemporary higher education. Akhmad et al. (2024) emphasize that higher education plays a strategic role in building a sustainable educational system and must continuously innovate to respond to social, scientific, and technological change. In a student-centered paradigm, lecturers are not positioned as the sole source of knowledge but as facilitators who design learning environments, guide inquiry, and provide feedback. Students are expected to question, investigate, discuss, collaborate, and reflect on what they learn. This orientation is consistent with the demand for twenty-first-century skills, including critical thinking, communication, collaboration, creativity, leadership, information literacy, and lifelong learning.

Problem-Based Learning (PBL) is one pedagogical model that directly supports the student-centered paradigm. Although the original manuscript occasionally used the phrase Program-Based Learning, the conceptual explanation consistently refers to Problem-Based

Learning; therefore, the present English version uses the academically established term Problem-Based Learning (PBL). PBL places complex and meaningful problems at the beginning of the learning process. Students are encouraged to identify what they already know, determine what they need to learn, search for relevant information, discuss possible explanations, and propose solutions. Hung (2019) explains that the quality of problem design is central to PBL because a well-constructed problem activates prior knowledge, creates cognitive conflict, and directs students toward purposeful inquiry. Hertina et al. (2024) further describe PBL as an innovative learning method in which lecturers facilitate students' initiative rather than simply delivering predetermined answers.

Recent meta-analytic evidence strengthens the relevance of PBL for motivation. Wijnia et al. (2024) examined problem-based, project-based, and case-based learning across multiple educational domains and found a small to moderate positive effect on students' motivation, particularly on beliefs, values, attitudes toward learning, and perceptions of task importance. This finding is important because it clarifies that PBL does not automatically increase every type of motivation equally; its effect depends on the quality of implementation, the academic domain, the nature of the problem, and the level of instructional support. In other words, PBL is not effective simply because it is labelled innovative. It becomes effective when the problem is authentic, intellectually challenging, aligned with learning outcomes, and supported by facilitation that helps students regulate their learning process.

The motivational mechanism of PBL can also be understood through Self-Determination Theory. Ryan and Deci (2020) argue that high-quality motivation develops when learning environments support the needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness. PBL supports autonomy because students participate in determining inquiry directions and constructing solutions. It supports competence because students face optimally challenging problems and receive feedback that helps them improve. It supports relatedness because students learn through discussion, peer collaboration, and shared responsibility. Guay (2022) emphasizes that educational practices grounded in autonomy support can strengthen student engagement when students perceive learning tasks as meaningful. This theoretical explanation is highly relevant to Islamic education, where students need to experience learning not only as a requirement for grades but as a meaningful process of understanding, interpreting, and practicing values.

In the context of Islamic education, PBL can be designed around cases that reflect real ethical, social, and educational problems. Examples include religious moderation in plural communities, ethical use of digital media, environmental responsibility from an Islamic

perspective, zakat and social welfare, Islamic responses to bullying, family communication, educational leadership in madrasah contexts, and the integration of faith and civic responsibility. Such cases allow students to connect normative Islamic teachings with concrete social realities. Mintasih (2022) argues that life-based PBL can strengthen information literacy and prepare prospective educators to face contemporary challenges. Abdullah and Munawwaroh (2024) also show that PBL can improve critical thinking because students are required to analyze problems, compare alternatives, and justify solutions.

Several studies cited in the original manuscript demonstrate the broader pedagogical benefits of PBL across educational domains. Trullas et al. (2022) report that PBL is widely used in undergraduate education to encourage active inquiry and applied understanding. Sharma et al. (2023) found that PBL in nursing education can improve critical thinking, analysis, and evaluation when compared with traditional teaching. Arruzza et al. (2023) similarly show that PBL in radiation science education is received positively by students and can strengthen clinical reasoning, communication, and problem-solving. Although these studies were conducted in health-related contexts, their instructional principles are transferable to Islamic education: learning begins from a meaningful problem, students investigate collaboratively, and knowledge is applied to complex situations rather than memorized in isolation.

However, the transfer of PBL into Islamic education requires conceptual caution. Islamic education has distinctive learning goals that differ from purely technical or clinical domains. It aims not only to improve problem-solving ability but also to develop ethical sensitivity, reflective judgment, spiritual maturity, and responsible social action. Therefore, PBL cases in Islamic education should not be reduced to technical tasks. They need to include value clarification, textual reasoning, contextual interpretation, and consideration of social consequences. Problems should invite students to examine Qur'anic and hadith-based principles, scholarly interpretations, local cultural realities, and contemporary educational challenges. In this way, PBL can become a bridge between religious knowledge and lived experience.

The importance of this bridge becomes clearer when considering the limitations of conventional learning. In many classrooms, students are still evaluated mainly through recall-based assessments. Such evaluation may measure short-term memory but often fails to reveal whether students can reason, communicate, collaborate, and apply concepts to real problems. Darwati and Purana (2021) argue that PBL can develop critical thinking and improve learning quality because students are invited to examine problems rather than merely receive explanations. Setyowati et al. (2022) also demonstrate that PBL can improve students' motivation

and learning outcomes in classroom action research. These findings suggest that PBL can be a relevant alternative for addressing low participation and weak conceptual retention.

Collaboration is another reason PBL is important for Islamic education students. Islamic educational practice often requires future educators, counselors, community facilitators, and religious instructors to work with diverse groups. Through PBL, students learn to share information, negotiate different interpretations, evaluate evidence, and reach reasoned decisions as a team. Hariani and Siregar (2019) explain that PBL can develop learning character through academic discussion, while Morais et al. (2021) show that project-oriented collaborative learning can increase student engagement. These collaborative experiences are not merely procedural; they train students to listen, respect differences, and take collective responsibility, which are essential values in Islamic educational practice.

PBL also contributes to leadership and self-evaluation. In group-based problem solving, students may serve as discussion leaders, information seekers, presenters, evaluators, or coordinators. Kouzes and Posner (2024) emphasize that student leadership involves practice, reflection, and the capacity to mobilize others toward shared goals. Within PBL, leadership is learned through concrete participation rather than abstract instruction. Students must manage group tasks, maintain focus, distribute responsibilities, and make decisions under uncertainty. In addition, the reflective stage of PBL trains students to evaluate both the quality of the proposed solution and the effectiveness of their learning process. Nurhayani et al. (2024) view self-understanding and group process as valuable learning experiences because they help students recognize personal strengths, limitations, and roles within a team.

Despite these potential benefits, implementing PBL is not free from challenges. Zakaria et al. (2019) note that PBL requires careful planning, sufficient resources, and readiness from both lecturers and students. Students who are accustomed to lecture-based learning may initially feel confused because PBL demands autonomy and self-directed inquiry. Lecturers may also experience difficulty in designing problems that are sufficiently complex but still aligned with students' prior knowledge. Resource limitations, large class sizes, inadequate access to literature, and unclear assessment criteria can weaken PBL implementation. Wijnia et al. (2024) warn that problem-driven learning can lose its motivational value when the facilitation process erodes, for example when problems become routine, group work becomes superficial, or lecturers become too directive.

For these reasons, a systematic review of PBL in Islamic education is needed. While many studies have examined PBL in science, medical, nursing, and general higher education, fewer

studies have synthesized how PBL can be conceptually adapted for Islamic education students. The present study fills this gap by reviewing literature on PBL, motivation, student-centered learning, collaboration, critical thinking, information literacy, leadership, authentic assessment, and implementation challenges. The study aims to answer the following question: how can Problem-Based Learning be implemented to enhance students' motivation and learning skills in Islamic education? By addressing this question, the article contributes to the development of a more contextual and reflective model of Islamic education that moves beyond memorization toward inquiry, ethical reasoning, and meaningful application.

Methods

This study used a qualitative literature review design. The method was selected because the purpose of the study was not to measure the effect of an intervention in one classroom, but to synthesize concepts, findings, and implementation patterns from previous studies on Problem-Based Learning, student motivation, and skill development in higher education and Islamic education. A literature review enables researchers to compare evidence across contexts, identify recurring themes, and formulate a conceptual understanding of how PBL may be implemented in Islamic education.

The data consisted of secondary sources, including journal articles, books, conference papers, and relevant academic publications. The primary topics used to select sources were Problem-Based Learning, student motivation, Islamic education, critical thinking, collaborative learning, self-directed learning, authentic assessment, leadership, and information literacy. Sources from the original manuscript were retained where relevant, including Harahap et al. (2021), Apriana (2020), Agusdianita et al. (2023), Hung (2019), Darwati and Purana (2021), Trullas et al. (2022), Sharma et al. (2023), Arruzza et al. (2023), Wardani (2023), and Zakaria et al. (2019). Additional recent references were added to strengthen the theoretical and empirical basis, particularly Ryan and Deci (2020), Guay (2022), Anggraeni et al. (2023), and Wijnia et al. (2024).

The review followed four analytical stages. First, relevant sources were identified and read to determine their connection with the research focus. Second, information was reduced by selecting arguments and findings directly related to PBL, motivation, skills, and implementation challenges. Third, selected findings were coded into thematic categories, including motivational effects, active learning, collaborative learning, critical thinking and problem solving, leadership and reflection, information literacy, assessment, and implementation barriers.

Results

The literature synthesis produced four main findings. First, PBL supports student motivation by making learning more meaningful and connected to real-life problems. In contrast to lecture-dominated instruction, PBL places students in situations where they must investigate, discuss, and justify solutions. Harahap et al. (2021) and Apriana (2020) explain that motivation grows when learners perceive a goal and are moved to act toward it. In PBL, the problem functions as a motivational trigger because it creates curiosity and a need to understand concepts. Wijnia et al. (2024) add that problem-driven learning has a positive effect on motivation, especially when it increases students' perceived value of the task and their beliefs about competence.

Second, PBL strengthens higher-order thinking skills. Studies reviewed in the manuscript indicate that PBL can improve critical thinking, analysis, evaluation, and problem solving. Sharma et al. (2023) found that PBL produced positive effects on critical thinking and analytical competence in nursing education. Anggraeni et al. (2023) also conclude that PBL is effective for fostering critical thinking across reviewed studies. In Islamic education, this finding is relevant because students need to interpret values, compare arguments, examine social realities, and formulate responsible solutions rather than merely reproduce definitions.

Third, PBL develops collaborative, communicative, and leadership skills. The reviewed studies show that students working in PBL groups learn to divide tasks, share resources, evaluate information, and negotiate different views. Wardani (2023) argues that PBL opens opportunities for collaboration and skill development, while Morais et al. (2021) demonstrate that project-based collaborative learning can improve engagement. In Islamic education, these skills are essential because graduates may work as educators, community facilitators, religious counselors, or organizational actors who must cooperate with others in addressing educational and social problems.

Fourth, the effectiveness of PBL depends on implementation quality. The literature identifies several recurring challenges: insufficient time, limited learning resources, students' low readiness for self-directed learning, uneven group participation, and lecturers' limited experience in facilitation. Zakaria et al. (2019) emphasize that PBL requires structured planning and appropriate support. Wijnia et al. (2024) further show that problem-driven learning can produce stronger motivation when problems are well designed and when facilitation maintains a balance between guidance and student autonomy. Therefore, PBL in Islamic education must be supported by clear learning outcomes, contextual cases, access to credible references, group monitoring, and authentic assessment.

Table 1.
Thematic Synthesis of Problem-Based Learning Implementation

Theme	Synthesis of Findings	Implication for Islamic Education
Motivation	PBL increases task value, curiosity, and perceived relevance when problems are authentic and meaningful.	Learning cases should connect Islamic concepts with real social, ethical, and educational issues.
Critical thinking	PBL trains students to analyze problems, evaluate evidence, and justify solutions.	Students should be guided to compare arguments, textual sources, and contextual realities.
Collaboration	Group inquiry strengthens communication, peer learning, and responsibility.	PBL should include structured roles, discussion norms, and reflection on teamwork.
Leadership and reflection	Students practice decision-making, coordination, and self-evaluation.	Lecturers can rotate leadership roles and require reflective journals or group evaluations.
Implementation challenges	Time, resources, student readiness, and facilitator competence influence outcomes.	Curriculum alignment, lecturer training, and authentic assessment are needed.

Discussion

The findings indicate that PBL is pedagogically suitable for Islamic education because it transforms learning from passive reception into active inquiry. This is important because Islamic education requires students to understand values and apply them responsibly in changing social contexts. When students are given contextual problems, they are encouraged to ask why the issue matters, what Islamic principles are relevant, what evidence should be considered, and what solution is ethically defensible. This process makes learning more meaningful than memorizing doctrinal explanations alone.

From the perspective of motivation theory, PBL can support autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Autonomy appears when students are trusted to explore questions and develop solutions. Competence develops when students successfully analyze complex issues and receive constructive feedback. Relatedness emerges through group discussion and shared responsibility. This interpretation is consistent with Ryan and Deci (2020) and Guay (2022), who emphasize that educational environments become more motivating when they support learners' psychological needs. However, the findings also suggest that PBL must be carefully scaffolded. Too much freedom without guidance can create confusion, whereas excessive lecturer control can reduce inquiry and return the class to a teacher-centered pattern.

The reviewed literature also clarifies that PBL has a broad but not unlimited effect. It is useful for increasing motivation, critical thinking, collaboration, leadership, and information literacy, but it does not automatically solve every instructional problem. Wijnia et al. (2024) show

that problem-driven learning has a positive but heterogeneous effect on motivation. This means that implementation factors matter. In Islamic education, weakly designed problems may become superficial discussion prompts rather than genuine inquiry tasks. For example, a case that asks students only to list moral values may not stimulate deep reasoning. By contrast, a case that presents a dilemma involving religious moderation, social conflict, digital ethics, or community welfare can encourage analysis, interpretation, and practical judgment.

The results also show that evidence from health, nursing, and science education can inform Islamic education, but it must be adapted rather than copied. Medical education uses PBL to train clinical reasoning, while Islamic education should use PBL to train ethical, pedagogical, and contextual reasoning. Both domains share the same instructional logic: students learn by confronting uncertain problems and constructing reasoned solutions. However, the content, criteria of judgment, and intended outcomes differ. Therefore, PBL cases in Islamic education should integrate religious sources, educational theory, social context, and moral responsibility.

The role of lecturers is central. In PBL, lecturers are not passive observers. They design cases, clarify learning objectives, monitor group dynamics, ask probing questions, provide feedback, and ensure that students use credible sources. Lecturer training is therefore essential. As Alrajeh (2021) argues, teacher preparation is necessary for successful project-based and problem-based learning because facilitators need pedagogical knowledge, assessment skills, and confidence in managing student inquiry. Communities of practice among lecturers can also support implementation by enabling educators to share cases, rubrics, and facilitation strategies.

Assessment must also be aligned with PBL. If students are asked to solve complex problems but are assessed only through recall tests, the learning system becomes inconsistent. Sokhanvar et al. (2021) show that authentic assessment can improve learning experience and employability-related skills in higher education. In Islamic education, authentic assessment may include case analysis reports, group presentations, reflective journals, lesson designs, community-based problem proposals, or debates on ethical issues. Such assessments allow students to demonstrate reasoning, communication, collaboration, and value-based judgment.

Finally, the synthesis suggests that PBL can contribute to a more transformative model of Islamic education. It encourages students to become active learners who do not separate religious knowledge from real-world responsibility. When implemented with contextual problems, collaborative inquiry, credible references, and reflective assessment, PBL can help students develop motivation, critical thinking, leadership, and practical problem-solving skills. These competencies are necessary for graduates who are expected to participate in educational

institutions and communities facing increasingly complex moral, social, and technological challenges.

Conclusion

Problem-Based Learning is a relevant instructional model for Islamic education because it enables students to experience learning as an active, contextual, collaborative, and reflective process rather than as the passive reception of information. The literature shows that PBL can strengthen motivation and develop essential skills such as critical thinking, problem solving, communication, leadership, self-directed learning, and information literacy when learning problems are authentic and aligned with course outcomes. Its effectiveness, however, depends on the lecturer's ability to design meaningful cases, provide balanced facilitation, ensure access to credible resources, manage group processes, and use authentic assessment. Therefore, PBL should be implemented not as a temporary teaching technique, but as a structured pedagogical strategy that connects Islamic concepts with ethical, social, and educational realities so that students can develop deeper understanding and responsible practical competence.

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