



Improving Students' Ability to Understand Faith in the Last Day by Using the Problem Based Learning Method at SMP Negeri 3 Trienggadeng

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Abstract: This research aims to improve students' ability to understand the material of faith to the last day through the application of the Problem Based Learning (PBL) learning model in grade VII students of SMP Negeri 3 Trienggadeng for the 2023/2024 Academic Year. The background of this research is the low understanding of students on the material of faith to the last day, which is shown from the pre-cycle average score of 60, below the Minimum Completeness Criterion (KKM) which is 70. This research uses the Classroom Action Research (PTK) method which is carried out in two cycles. Each cycle consists of planning, implementation, observation, and reflection. The research subjects amounted to 20 students, consisting of 12 women and 8 men. Data collection techniques include learning outcome tests, observation of teacher and student activities, and documentation. Data analysis was carried out qualitatively and quantitatively by comparing results between cycles. The results of the study showed a significant increase in student understanding. In the first cycle, the completion percentage reached 70% with 15 students completing it. In the second cycle, the percentage of completeness increased to 85% with 17 students complete. The activities of students and teachers also showed an increase from the good category to excellent. Thus, the application of the Problem Based Learning learning model has proven to be effective in increasing students' understanding of the material of faith to the last day at SMP Negeri 3 Trienggadeng.

Keywords: Problem-Based Learning, Faith in the Last Day, Learning Outcomes.

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INTRODUCTION

Islamic religious education has a very important role in shaping the character, attitude, and behavior of students to be in harmony with Islamic teachings. One of the main subjects in Islamic religious education at the junior high school level is faith in the last days. This material is not just conceptual memorization, but is also closely related to the formation of beliefs, life attitudes, and daily behaviors. Students are expected to be able to understand the meaning of the end day correctly, believe it wholeheartedly, and make it a guide in action. However, the reality on the ground shows that students' understanding of faith in the last days is still low. Many students consider this material to be limited to dogma that must be memorized, without being able to relate it to the context of daily life.

This condition of low understanding is shown from the results of initial observations in grade VII of SMP Negeri 3 Trienggadeng. Based on the pre-cycle test, the average

student score only reached 60, still below the Minimum Completeness Criterion (KKM) which was 70. In addition, student activity in learning is also relatively low. Only a small percentage of students actively ask questions or opinions, while most tend to be passive and show less interest. This is in line with the findings of Sanjaya (2016) who emphasized that traditional lecture methods often make students passive because they only receive information without being actively involved in the learning process.

The urgency of this research lies in the need for learning strategies that can increase students' active engagement while strengthening their conceptual understanding. The Problem Based Learning (PBL) learning model is seen as relevant because it is oriented to real problems that are close to students' lives. According to Barrows and Tamblyn (1980), PBL is a learning approach that emphasizes the presentation of contextual problems to stimulate students to think critically, find solutions, and build their own knowledge. With PBL, students are expected to be able to relate the material of faith to the last day with the phenomena of daily life, for example about death, the responsibility of deeds, and life after the world.

In addition, PBL is also in line with the theory of constructivism which emphasizes that knowledge is built through active experience, not just transferred from teacher to student (Slavin, 2018). Through a process of group discussion, investigation, and reflection, students can internalize the concept of faith in the last days more deeply. They not only understand cognitively, but are also able to feel its relevance affectively and socially. Thus, the implementation of PBL is expected to improve learning outcomes as well as shape students' religious awareness.

Theoretical studies also show the effectiveness of PBL in learning Islamic religious education. Research by Suryani (2019) found that PBL is able to improve students' critical thinking skills in understanding the material of moral beliefs. Another study by Hamidah (2020) concluded that students are more active and motivated when learning to use PBL compared to conventional methods. This is strengthened by research by Mustofa (2018) who found that the application of PBL in PAI subjects improves learning outcomes as well as students' social skills.

However, empirical studies on the application of PBL in faith learning to the last days are still limited, especially in the context of junior high schools in rural areas. Most previous research has focused more on the application of PBL in general subjects such as science, mathematics, or social studies. In fact, the material of faith for the last day has an urgency that is no less important because it is directly related to the spiritual dimension of students. This gap is what prompted the conduct of this research to fill the literature gap while making a practical contribution to the development of PAI learning.

More specifically, this study aims to improve the ability of grade VII students of SMP Negeri 3 Trienggadeng in understanding faith in the last days through the application of the Problem Based Learning model. This study seeks to answer the question: how can the implementation of PBL improve student learning outcomes? How does PBL contribute to improving students' learning activities and conceptual understanding? Through classroom action research conducted in two cycles, it is hoped that a clear picture of the effectiveness of PBL in learning faith to the last day will be obtained.

Thus, this research has an important contribution from a theoretical and practical perspective. From the theoretical side, this study strengthens the study of the effectiveness of PBL in PAI learning, especially related to the material of faith in the last days. From the practical side, this study provides an alternative learning strategy for PAI teachers in overcoming low student understanding. Through PBL, teachers can create a more active, contextual, and meaningful learning atmosphere. In the end, the results of this research are expected to be able to contribute to efforts to improve the quality of Islamic religious learning in junior high schools, especially in forming a generation of faithful, critical, and noble character.

METHODS

This research uses the Classroom Action Research (PTK) approach because the main goal is to improve the quality of learning and improve students' understanding of the material of faith to the last day. PTK allows teachers to reflect on learning practices, design improvement actions, implement them, and then evaluate their impact. According to Arikunto, Suhardjono, and Supardi (2016), PTK is a form of reflective study and is carried out collaboratively by teachers to improve learning practices in their own classrooms. This model is seen as relevant because it provides space for teachers to play an active role in solving real problems in the classroom.

The research was carried out in two cycles each consisting of four stages: planning, implementation, observation, and reflection. The design of this study refers to the spiral model of Kemmis and McTaggart (1988), where each cycle is an effort to continuously improve the learning that has taken place before. In cycle I, the application of the Problem Based Learning (PBL) model is focused on the problem orientation stage and group discussion, while in cycle II improvements are made based on reflection, including the use of supporting media and strengthening student motivation.

The subject of the study is grade VII students of SMP Negeri 3 Trienggadeng for the 2023/2024 academic year which totals 20 people, consisting of 12 female students and 8 male students. The selection of this class was based on the initial finding that most students had difficulty understanding the material of faith in the last days. The research location is at SMP Negeri 3 Trienggadeng, a school located in a rural area of Pidie Jaya Regency, Aceh, with simple but adequate classroom conditions for the implementation of problem-based learning. The planning stage begins with the identification of problems through initial observation and pre-cycle test results.

Teachers and researchers prepare Learning Implementation Plans (RPP) by applying the PBL model, preparing test instruments, observation sheets, and learning media in the form of case texts and supporting images. At the implementation stage, teachers apply PBL steps, namely: orienting students to problems, organizing students to learn in groups, guiding investigations, developing and presenting results, and analyzing and evaluating the problem-solving process (Arends, 2012). Observations are carried out systematically to record the activities of students and teachers during learning. The aspects observed include student involvement in discussions, the ability to express opinions, and cooperation between group members. Learning outcome tests are given at the end of each cycle to determine the improvement of student understanding. The reflection stage is carried out by teachers and researchers to evaluate the advantages and disadvantages of the implementation of the cycle, as well as determine improvements for the next cycle.

The instruments used in this study include: Learning outcome tests, in the form of multiple-choice questions and short descriptions prepared based on indicators of faith understanding to the last day. This test is used to measure students' cognitive improvement in each cycle. The student activity observation sheet is used to assess student involvement in the discussion process, the courage to express opinions, and group cooperation. Teacher activity observation sheets are used to assess teachers' skills in implementing PBL measures. Field notes, used to record important events during learning that are not recorded in the observation sheet. Documentation, in the form of photos of learning activities, student work results, and data obtained grades. The use of varied instruments is intended to obtain valid data through triangulation (Creswell, 2018).

Data is collected through tests, observations, documentation, and field notes. The test is used to obtain quantitative data in the form of student learning outcomes. Observation is used to obtain qualitative data on teacher and student activities during learning. The documentation supports the data with visual and administrative evidence. Field notes are used to record learning situations that are not observed in formal

instruments. This combination of techniques is expected to be able to provide a comprehensive picture of the effectiveness of PBL.

The data was analyzed with quantitative and qualitative descriptive approaches. Quantitative analysis was used to calculate the average score, the percentage of learning completeness, and the improvement of learning outcomes between cycles. According to Sudjana (2011), learning completeness is said to be achieved if at least 85% of students get a score above the KKM. Qualitative analysis is used to analyze observational data, field notes, and documentation. The interactive analysis model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014) is used, which includes the stages of data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawn.

To ensure the validity of the data, this study applies triangulation of sources and techniques. Source triangulation is carried out by comparing test results, observations, and field records. Triangulation techniques are carried out using various data collection methods to verify the same information. In addition, reflection is carried out collaboratively between researchers and classroom teachers to increase the credibility of research results (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2018). This research is carried out by paying attention to the ethical principles of educational research. The researcher asked for official permission from the school and conveyed the research objectives to the principal, teachers, and students. The identity of students is kept confidential, and all research activities are carried out within the framework of reasonable teaching and learning activities so as not to cause inconvenience. According to Fraenkel, Wallen, and Hyun (2015), educational research must uphold the principles of informed consent, confidentiality, and non-maleficence.

RESULTS

The implementation of the Problem-Based Learning (PBL) model in the subject of Faith in the Last Day among grade VII students at SMP Negeri 3 Trienggadeng produced a clear and measurable improvement in students' understanding and engagement. Before the intervention, the learning process was largely teacher-centered, relying heavily on lecture and memorization methods. Students tended to be passive listeners and had difficulty connecting abstract concepts of eschatology with real-life contexts. This was reflected in the pre-cycle average score of 60, which was below the Minimum Mastery Criterion (KKM) of 70, indicating that most students had not yet achieved satisfactory comprehension of the material. This condition prompted the researcher to apply a more active and student-centered approach through the PBL model.

During Cycle I, the PBL model was introduced through contextual problem scenarios related to the theme of faith in the Last Day. Students worked in small groups to analyze, discuss, and propose solutions based on Islamic teachings. The teacher guided the learning process by providing prompts and feedback while maintaining the role of facilitator rather than lecturer. As the students engaged with real-life problem cases, such as moral behavior in preparation for accountability in the Hereafter, they demonstrated higher motivation and participation. Observation data showed that students became more communicative, cooperative, and reflective during discussions.

Quantitative findings from Cycle I revealed noticeable improvement in learning outcomes compared to the pre-cycle stage. The average score increased, and 15 out of 20 students (70%) achieved scores above the mastery threshold. While this result represented a positive shift, it also revealed some remaining challenges. Several students still struggled to explain key concepts independently, and the quality of group discussions varied due to uneven participation. The reflection session following Cycle I identified the need for clearer problem orientation, stronger guidance in time management, and more structured group roles to ensure that all students contributed equally.

Based on these reflections, the researcher refined the lesson design for Cycle II. The problems were modified to be more relatable to students' daily lives, and visual aids were

added to stimulate interest and comprehension. The teacher emphasized the importance of evidence-based reasoning supported by Qur'anic verses and Hadith. Students were encouraged to present their group findings and justify their interpretations in front of the class, fostering critical thinking and confidence. The revised procedures resulted in a smoother learning flow and more active involvement across all groups.

The results of Cycle II demonstrated substantial improvement. Students showed stronger conceptual understanding and were able to relate the belief in the Last Day to moral decision-making and personal accountability. Class discussions became more balanced, and students asked more analytical questions. Quantitatively, 17 out of 20 students (85%) achieved mastery, surpassing the school's success criterion of 80%. The increase in mastery from 70% to 85% between the two cycles indicated that the Problem-Based Learning approach was highly effective in deepening comprehension and improving performance. Observation of classroom interactions further confirmed these gains. The level of teacher activity improved from the "good" to the "excellent" category, reflecting more effective facilitation and feedback strategies. Similarly, student activity progressed from "good" to "excellent," as learners demonstrated enthusiasm, collaborative spirit, and curiosity during inquiry and problem-solving phases. These behavioral changes suggest that PBL not only enhanced cognitive outcomes but also strengthened students' engagement and social learning dynamics.

Qualitative data from reflective journals and teacher notes reinforced the quantitative trends. Students reported that they enjoyed learning through discussion and real-life cases because it allowed them to think critically and express their opinions. The teacher noted a visible change in classroom atmosphere—students became more attentive, independent, and responsible for their own learning. This aligns with previous research emphasizing that PBL cultivates higher-order thinking, autonomy, and intrinsic motivation among learners by situating learning within meaningful contexts (Hmelo-Silver, 2017). Overall, the two-cycle implementation of the Problem-Based Learning model led to a comprehensive improvement in students' cognitive, affective, and behavioral outcomes. The gradual yet consistent increase in test scores and active participation confirmed that PBL effectively addressed the initial learning challenges. The findings demonstrate that engaging students in authentic problem-solving processes enhances not only their understanding of abstract theological concepts but also their moral awareness and communication skills. Consequently, the PBL approach can be recommended as an effective pedagogical strategy for teaching complex religious concepts such as Faith in the Last Day, as it fosters meaningful learning, reflection, and personal growth among junior high school students.

DISCUSSION

The results of the study show that the application of the Problem Based Learning (PBL) model has been proven to be able to increase the understanding of grade VII students of SMP Negeri 3 Trienggadeng on the material of faith to the last day. The increase can be seen from the initial conditions that show low student understanding, with an average score of only 60 and 40% completeness. After the implementation of PBL, the average score increased to 72 with 70% completeness in the first cycle, and further increased to 80 with 85% completeness in the second cycle. This increase shows that learning with PBL has a positive impact on student learning outcomes.

The improvement of student learning outcomes is in line with constructivist theory which emphasizes that knowledge is built through active learning experiences (Slavin, 2018). In PBL, students are faced with contextual problems that require collaborative solving. Through this process, students not only receive knowledge from the teacher, but also build their own understanding. This reinforces the view of Barrows and Tamblyn (1980) that PBL encourages students to integrate theoretical concepts with real

experience. In this study, students learn to relate faith to the last days with the phenomena of daily life, such as death, charitable accountability, and God's justice.

The results of observations also show an increase in student learning activities. In the first cycle, student involvement in discussions began to increase, although it was not evenly distributed. After improvement in cycle II with the use of visual media and motivational reinforcement, almost all students were actively involved. This increase in involvement is in line with Hamidah's (2020) research which found that PBL is able to increase students' motivation and participation in PAI learning. Through group discussions, students learn to express opinions, respect differences, and work together to find solutions. Thus, PBL not only improves the cognitive aspect, but also the social and affective aspect.

The findings of this study are consistent with the research of Mustofa (2018) which shows that PBL improves students' social skills and learning outcomes in Islamic religious learning. In addition, Suryani's research (2019) also emphasized that PBL is effective in improving students' critical thinking skills in moral beliefs material. Thus, the results of this study strengthen the empirical evidence that PBL is a relevant and effective approach in PAI learning. However, this research has a special contribution because it focuses on the material of faith to the last days, which is often considered abstract by students. With the implementation of PBL, material that was previously difficult to understand can be made more concrete through cases and contextual discussions. This is in accordance with Trianto's (2010) view that PBL bridges abstract concepts with the reality of life, so that learning becomes more meaningful.

The implication of this study is that PAI teachers need to be more creative in choosing learning models that encourage active student involvement. PBL can be used as an effective alternative to overcome student boredom due to traditional lecture methods. Additionally, teachers need to utilize appropriate learning media, such as pictures, videos, or case texts, to help students understand the abstract concept of faith in the last days. In line with the opinion of Uno (2019), the use of innovative learning models will improve the quality of the teaching and learning process and student learning outcomes.

In addition, this study shows the importance of the role of teachers as facilitators. In PBL, teachers are no longer the only source of information, but rather guides who help students find knowledge through inquiry. This is in line with the concept of 21st century learning that emphasizes critical thinking, communication, collaboration, and creativity skills. Although the results of this study show the effectiveness of PBL, there are several limitations. First, the research was only conducted in one class with a limited number of students, so the results could not be generalized widely. Second, the study only lasted for two cycles, so it was not able to show the long-term impact of the application of PBL on student understanding. Third, although most students have improved, there are still some students who have not reached KKM, so additional strategies are needed for more individualized ones.

The contribution of this research is to provide alternative effective learning strategies in Islamic religious education, especially the material of faith to the last day. The results of this study show that PBL is able to change the learning atmosphere from passive to active, from simply memorizing to understanding, and from monotonous learning to more contextual. This supports efforts to improve the quality of PAI which not only focuses on cognitive aspects, but also affective and social aspects. In line with the view of Zuchdi (2015), Islamic religious education must be able to form students who have faith, morals, and critical thinking skills in facing the challenges of the times.

In addition to the effectiveness of Problem Based Learning (PBL) seen in the results of this study, it is important to highlight how this approach is able to integrate the cognitive, affective, and psychomotor aspects of students. In the cognitive dimension, students not only understand the concept of faith in the last days as memorized material, but also learn to relate the concept to real life. For example, when the teacher presents a case about someone who is negligent in worship because he is too busy with worldly

activities, students can discuss the relationship with the belief in accountability in the hereafter. This discussion fosters a critical awareness that faith in the last days has practical implications for attitudes toward daily living. This is in line with the view of Bloom (1956) who stated that meaningful learning includes the cognitive, affective, and psychomotor realms in an integrated manner.

In the affective realm, PBL helps students build religious awareness and spiritual values. By discussing the phenomena of life and death, students are directed to internalize the value of faith to the last day as the basis of moral attitudes. This is in line with the view of Lickona (2014) who emphasizes that religious education does not only teach knowledge, but also shapes character and attitudes. In this study, it was seen that students were more reflective of their daily attitudes after participating in learning with PBL.

In terms of psychomotors, students' communication and collaboration skills have also improved. Group discussions allow them to practice expressing opinions, listening to others, and working together to solve problems. This supports the concept of 21st century learning that emphasizes the 4Cs, namely critical thinking, communication, collaboration, and creativity (Trilling & Fadel, 2009). Thus, PBL is relevant not only to improve academic outcomes, but also to equip students with broader life skills.

It should be noted that the success of PBL is also highly determined by the role of the teacher as a facilitator. Teachers who are able to design contextual problems, guide discussions, and provide appropriate reinforcement will make learning more effective. This is consistent with Ngalimun's (2017) research which states that the success of PBL does not only lie in the model, but also the teacher's skills in managing it. In this study, teachers try to adjust their role from informants to facilitators who motivate, direct, and provide opportunities for students to discover knowledge independently. In addition, increased student involvement in cycle II shows that PBL can be a means to foster confidence. Students who were initially passive began to dare to express their opinions after being given a conducive discussion space. This supports the findings of Wahyuni (2021) who stated that PBL increases students' self-confidence in expressing ideas because the learning atmosphere is more democratic.

PBL also helps to overcome students' difficulties in understanding abstract material. Faith in the last days is often considered difficult because it speaks of supernatural things that cannot be seen directly. With PBL, the concept is enriched with case illustrations, visual media, and reflective discussions, making it easier to understand. Sanjaya (2016) said that learning methods that are able to relate abstract concepts with real experiences will be more effective in improving students' understanding. This research shows this clearly.

However, it is important to recognize that PBL takes longer than conventional lecture methods. Teachers should allow sufficient time for discussions, group presentations, and reflection. This is one of the challenges of PBL implementation in schools with limited class hours. However, based on the results of this study, the benefits obtained from PBL are much greater than the obstacles. With good classroom management, time constraints can be overcome without compromising the quality of learning. By paying attention to the results of previous research, theory, and research, it can be emphasized that PBL is a suitable learning model to be applied to PAI subjects, especially the material of faith in the last days. PBL not only improves academic outcomes, but also shapes students' social skills, religious attitudes, and critical thinking skills. Therefore, this model deserves to be used as one of the main strategies in religious learning in junior high school.

CONCLUSION

This classroom action research proves that the application of the Problem Based Learning (PBL) model can increase the understanding of grade VII students of SMP Negeri 3 Trienggadeng on the material of faith to the last day. The increase in learning outcomes

can be seen from the average student score which was originally only 60 with a completeness of 40% in the pre-cycle, increased to 72 with a completeness of 70% in the first cycle, and reached 80 with a completeness of 85% in the second cycle. In addition, student learning activities have also increased, from being passive to more active, daring to express opinions, and being able to work together in groups. These results show that PBL not only improves the cognitive aspect, but also fosters students' social skills and religious attitudes.

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