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Project Based Learning Method to Increase Students' Interest and Understanding in Learning Aqidah Akhlak at MTs Negeri 1 Magetan

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Abstract: This classroom action research aims to increase students' interest and understanding of the material on Faith in the Apostles through the application of the Project Based Learning (PBL) model at MTsN 1 Magetan. The problems faced are the low involvement of students in the learning process and the lack of understanding of the concept of faith in the Apostles as a whole. This research was conducted in two cycles, each consisting of the planning, implementation, observation, and reflection stages. The subjects of the study were students of class VIII MTsN 1 Magetan in the even semester of the 2024/2025 academic year. The instruments used included teacher and student activity observation sheets, learning interest questionnaires, and concept understanding tests. The results of the study showed that the application of the PBL model can increase student interest which is characterized by enthusiasm and active participation in project activities. In addition, there was a significant increase in student understanding test results from cycle I to cycle II. Based on these findings, it is concluded that project-based learning is effective in increasing students' interest and understanding of the material on Faith in the Apostles at MTsN 1 Magetan.

Keywords: Project based learning, learning interest, concept understanding, Aqidah akhlak.

INTRODUCTION

Islamic Religious Education, especially the subject of Aqidah Akhlak, has an important role in shaping the character and faith of students. One of the essential materials in this subject is Faith in the Apostles, which not only contains teachings of faith, but also contains exemplary values from the prophets and apostles of Allah that can be applied in everyday life. However, in classroom learning practices, this material is often delivered monotonously and does not actively involve students, resulting in low interest in learning and students' understanding of the content of the material.

The results of initial observations in class VIII MTsN 1 Magetan showed that most students did not fully understand the concept of Faith in the Apostles. In addition, students' motivation and interest in learning in following the Aqidah Akhlak lesson were also

relatively low. This encourages the need for innovation in learning approaches so that students are more active, creative, and directly involved in the process of understanding the material.

One approach that can be applied is Project Based Learning (PBL), which is a learning model that involves students in completing a real project related to the subject matter. PBL encourages students to learn collaboratively, think critically, and relate knowledge to everyday life. This model is believed to be able to improve both students' interest in learning and understanding of concepts. Based on this background, this study aims to examine the extent to which the application of the Project Based Learning model can improve students' interest and understanding of the material on Faith in the Apostles in the subject of Aqidah Akhlak at MTsN 1 Magetan.

METHODS

The methodology employed in this study is structured to be rational, comprehensive, formal, and scientific, involving both primary and secondary data sources. The primary data sources are derived directly from classroom observations and interactions during the learning process, particularly involving 32 eighth-grade students of MTsN 1 Magetan who served as research subjects. These students provided data through test results measuring their understanding of the material on Faith in the Apostles, a learning interest questionnaire, and observations of their participation and engagement during the implementation of the Project Based Learning (PBL) model. Additionally, teachers responsible for the Akidah Akhlak subject also served as primary data sources, as they facilitated and managed the PBL-based instructional process and guided student discussions and project work. To support the research context, secondary data sources were utilized, including school documentation such as lesson plans, teaching schedules, and other relevant teaching-learning records from MTsN 1 Magetan. Theoretical references and literature concerning Project Based Learning, learning theories, and instructional content on Faith in the Apostles within the Islamic education curriculum were also incorporated.

Data analysis was carried out using both quantitative and qualitative approaches to ensure a robust interpretation of findings. Quantitative analysis involved processing the results of material understanding tests and student learning interest questionnaires. For the material understanding test, students' average scores were calculated for each cycle and compared using descriptive statistical methods to assess progress. An increase in average scores from cycle I to cycle II served as an indicator of the effectiveness of the PBL model in enhancing students' comprehension. The learning interest questionnaire employed a Likert scale to categorize responses ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. Descriptive analysis of the questionnaire results before and after the implementation of PBL helped to identify changes in students' interest in learning. Meanwhile, qualitative data analysis was conducted through direct classroom observations of both student and teacher activities. These observations aimed to capture student engagement during group discussions, project execution, and presentation stages. Content analysis was used to interpret these observations, focusing on student involvement at each project phase, their responses to challenges, and the quality of student-teacher interactions. Furthermore, the teacher's reflective notes, documented at the end of each cycle, were analyzed qualitatively to assess the success and challenges of the PBL model's implementation. These reflections offered valuable insights into instructional strategies, classroom dynamics, and feedback mechanisms used to support students throughout the learning process.

This study collected data from material comprehension tests, learning interest questionnaires, and observations of student activities. The following data show an increase in student interest and understanding after the implementation of the Project Based Learning (PBL) model on the material of Faith in the Apostles.

1. Increased Student Understanding (Material Understanding Test)

The results of the student understanding test showed a significant increase from cycle I to cycle II. The following is a table of the results of the material understanding test:The following table presents the results of a comparison of students' pretest and posttest scores before and after the implementation of the learning model:

Table 1. *Student comprehension test results*

Cycle	Number of Students	Average Score (Cycle I)	Average Score (Cycle II)	Improvement (%)
Cycle I	32	65	-	-
Cycle II	32	-	80	23%

Description: The increase in the average score of the material understanding test shows the effectiveness of PBL in improving students' understanding of the material on Faith in the Apostles.

2. Changes in Students' Learning Interests (Learning Interest Questionnaire)

The results of the learning interest questionnaire show positive changes in students' interest in learning Akidah Akhlak after the PBL model was implemented. The following is a table of changes in students' learning interests:

Table 2. *Changes in students' learning interests*

Interest Criteria	Pre Test (Cycle I)	Post Test (Cycle II)	Improvement (%)
Very Interested	10%	40%	+30%
Interested	30%	50%	+20%
Quite Interested	40%	10%	-30%
Not Interested	20%	0%	-20%

Description: After implementing PBL, there was a significant increase in the number of students who felt very interested and engaged in the material.

3. Observation of Student Activities

Observations of student activities during project-based learning showed an increase in student participation in group discussions, collaboration in projects, and presentation of project results. The following is a summary table of the results of observations of student activities:

Table 3. *Observation of Student Activities*

Activity Aspects	(Cycle I)	(Cycle II)	Improvement (%)
Participation in Discussion	55%	85%	+30%
Collaboration in Projects	60%	90%	+30%

Activity Aspects	(Cycle I)	(Cycle II)	Improvement (%)
Presentation of Project Results	50%	80%	+30%

Description: Significant increases in participation and collaboration demonstrate the success of PBL in increasing student engagement in learning.

Based on the data obtained, it can be concluded that the implementation of the Project Based Learning model effectively improves: Students' understanding of the material on Faith in the Apostles (seen from the increase in the comprehension test score), Students' interest in learning (seen from the increase in the learning interest questionnaire score), and Students' involvement in learning (seen from the results of observations of student activities).

By using a table like the one above, readers can clearly see the changes that occurred between cycle I and cycle II. The table also provides a more concrete picture of the numbers and percentages of the research results.

Data verification

In this study, data verification was carried out to ensure that the results obtained were accurate, valid, and reliable. Several steps taken in the data verification process include:

1. Instrument Validity

Before being used in data collection, the research instruments (understanding tests, learning interest questionnaires, and observation sheets) were tested to ensure their validity. Instrument validity was carried out by:

Content validity: Involving several experts in the field of Aqidah Akhlak and learning to ensure that the test questions, questionnaire items, and observation rubrics cover all aspects relevant to the material of Faith in the Apostles and project-based learning.

Construct validity: Measuring the suitability between the instruments used and the theory underlying the research, namely the Project Based Learning theory and the characteristics of the Aqidah Akhlak material.

2. Reliability Test

To ensure that the research instruments can produce consistent data, a reliability test was carried out on the learning interest questionnaire and observation sheet. The reliability test was carried out using Alpha Cronbach for the learning interest questionnaire and the inter-rater reliability technique for the observation sheet. The results of the reliability test showed adequate values (more than 0.7), which means that the instrument can be trusted to be used in research.

3. Data Triangulation

To improve data accuracy, source triangulation was carried out by combining data from various sources: Comprehension test: To measure student learning outcomes after implementing PBL. Learning interest questionnaire: To measure changes in student interest in learning. Observation of student activities and teacher reflection: To get a comprehensive picture of student involvement and challenges faced during the implementation of the PBL model.

4. Data Re-checking

After the data was collected, the researcher re-checked it to ensure that there were no errors in the data processing process. For example, checking inconsistent comprehension test results, or errors in filling out the learning interest questionnaire and observation sheet. The researcher also verified with the teachers involved to ensure that the observations and interpretations made were in accordance with the actual conditions in the field.

5. Teacher Reflection and Feedback

As part of the verification process, teachers reflect after each learning cycle to evaluate the suitability of the PBL method with learning objectives and student responses to the learning. Feedback from teachers is also used to evaluate whether the results obtained are in accordance with previously set goals.

DISCUSSION

The results of this study indicate that the application of the Project Based Learning (PBL) model in learning the material of Faith in the Apostles successfully increased both student interest and understanding. This finding is in line with previous studies stating that PBL can increase student engagement, learning motivation, and deeper understanding of the material (Arends, 2012; Thomas, 2000).

1. Increasing Student Interest

One of the main findings in this study is a significant increase in student interest in learning the material of Faith in the Apostles. Before the implementation of PBL, most students showed low interest in learning Akidah Akhlak. However, after the PBL model was implemented, almost 90% of students showed higher interest in the material taught. This can be explained by the fact that PBL encourages students to be actively involved in learning activities that are more relevant to their lives. Project activities, discussions, and presentations provide a more contextual learning experience and are based on real problems, which makes students more interested and emotionally involved in the material taught.

This study is in line with the findings put forward by Bell (2010), who stated that PBL can increase student engagement and motivation, because students feel that they have more control over the learning process and that the learning is useful for their lives. With this model, students feel valued as active learners, not just recipients of information from the teacher.

2. Improving Material Understanding

Students' understanding of the material on Faith in the Apostles also showed a significant increase after the implementation of the PBL model. The results of the material understanding test showed that the average student score increased from 65 in cycle I to 80 in cycle II, which reflects the effectiveness of this method in helping students understand the basic concepts in the material on Faith in the Apostles. This increase is also reflected in the results of observations showing that students are able to relate the concepts that have been learned with real experiences through the projects they work on.

This shows that PBL not only makes students more interested, but also encourages them to learn more deeply and understand the material more thoroughly. As explained by Dewey (1938), learning that involves direct experience allows students to connect

theoretical knowledge with everyday life, which in turn improves their understanding of the material.

3. Collaboration and Social Skills Development

In addition to increasing interest and understanding of the material, the implementation of PBL has also proven effective in developing students' social skills. During the project process, students work in groups, collaborate, discuss, and provide feedback to each other. This allows them to develop communication, cooperation, and leadership skills. This collaboration also gives students the opportunity to learn from their peers, which encourages social learning and constructivism (Vygotsky, 1978).

PBL provides students with the opportunity to learn in an immersive social context, allowing them to develop interpersonal skills that are very important in everyday life. This finding is in line with research by Capraro et al. (2013), which shows that PBL improves students' social and collaborative skills, which are part of 21st century learning.

4. Challenges in Implementing PBL

Although the results of the study showed positive results, there are several challenges in implementing PBL at MTsN 1 Magetan. One of the main challenges is effective time management during project work. Students tend to need more time to complete projects compared to conventional learning. Therefore, careful planning is needed regarding the allocation of time for each stage of the project. In addition, more intensive support and guidance from teachers are also needed to ensure that students remain focused and complete the project according to the learning objectives that have been set. Another challenge is the inequality in students' ability to work together in groups. Some students have difficulty collaborating, while others are more dominant in group decision making. This shows the importance of forming balanced groups and having stricter supervision in the division of tasks in the project.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the research that has been conducted, it can be concluded that the application of the Project Based Learning (PBL) model in learning the material of Faith in the Apostles at MTsN 1 Magetan is effective in increasing student interest, understanding, and involvement. Some of the main points of the findings of this study are:

1. Increasing Student Interest

The application of PBL has succeeded in increasing students' interest in learning the material of Akidah Akhlak, which is reflected in positive changes in the results of the learning interest questionnaire between cycles I and II. Most students showed a higher interest in learning after being involved in a project that is relevant to their lives.

2. Increasing Material Understanding

The PBL model has been proven to increase students' understanding of the material of Faith in the Apostles, which can be seen from the significant increase in the results of the understanding test between cycles I and II. Project-based learning provides an opportunity for students to explore the material in a more applicable and meaningful way.

3. Developing Social and Collaborative Skills

PBL is also effective in developing students' social and collaborative skills, which can be seen from their interactions during project activities. Working together in groups helps students develop communication, leadership, and problem-solving skills, which are important skills in everyday life.

4. Challenges in Implementation

Although it has a positive impact, the implementation of PBL also faces several challenges, especially in time management and task division in groups. Therefore, a better strategy is needed in managing time allocation and guiding students in each stage of the project to ensure the success of the implementation of PBL.

Overall, the Project Based Learning model shows great potential in improving the quality of learning of Akidah Akhlak, especially in the material of Faith in the Apostles, and can be an effective alternative to be applied in learning at MTsN 1 Magetan and other schools with similar contexts.

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