

Cultivating Social Character through Project-Based Learning in Islamic Elementary Schools in Semarang

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ABSTRACT

Article Info: By Project Based Learning, students of Elementary School in Semarang can develop their social-caring character. In this digital era, helpful character, tolerance, social act, and good morality are declining. This research assesses if project-based learning instills those characters in the students. This qualitative research used NVivo software to analyze interviews, observation, document analyses, and Focus Group Discussions. Principles, instructors, and students from various elementary schools in Semarang which apply project-based learning participated in the research. Morning alms, visits to orphanages, donations on Fridays, anti-bullying socialization, and incidental activities such as sharing takjil and social fundraising varied in each initiative. Those projects enable students to use their talents in real-life situation. Project based learning develops social skill of students although the plan and the implementation are difficult. Students' social awareness, teamwork, and empathy increase significantly. Project based learning has been proven can significantly help elementary school students improve their social-caring character so that it gives valuable contribution to character education and becomes model for other schools.

Keywords: Social-Caring Character; Project Based Learning; Elementary School Learning

ABSTRAK

Melalui *Project Based Learning*, siswa MI/SD di Semarang dapat mengembangkan sifat peduli sosial. Pada era digital, sifat suka menolong, toleransi, aksi sosial, dan akhlak mulia semakin terpuruk. Penelitian ini menguji apakah pembelajaran berbasis proyek menanamkan sifat-sifat ini pada siswa. Penelitian kualitatif ini menggunakan software NVivo untuk menganalisis wawancara, observasi, analisis dokumen, dan *Focus Group Discussion* (FGD). Kepala sekolah, instruktur, dan siswa dari berbagai MI/SD Semarang yang menggunakan pembelajaran berbasis proyek berpartisipasi. Sedekah pagi, kunjungan ke panti asuhan, donasi di hari Jumat, sosialisasi anti-bullying, dan kegiatan insidental seperti berbagi takjil dan penggalangan dana sosial berbeda-beda di setiap inisiatif. Proyek-proyek ini memungkinkan siswa menggunakan bakat mereka dalam situasi dunia nyata. Pembelajaran berbasis proyek mengembangkan keterampilan kepedulian sosial pada siswa, meskipun perencanaan dan pelaksanaannya sulit dilakukan. Kesadaran sosial, kerjasama tim, dan empati siswa meningkat secara signifikan. Pembelajaran berbasis

proyek telah terbukti membantu anak-anak MI/SD mengembangkan karakter peduli sosial, sehingga memberikan kontribusi yang berharga bagi pendidikan karakter dan menjadi model bagi sekolah lain.

Kata-kata Kunci: Karakter Peduli Sosial; Pembelajaran Berbasis Proyek; Pembelajaran MI/SD.

1. INTRODUCTION

Humans are essentially social creatures that rely on one another to meet their basic requirements. Consequently, it is indisputable that people are unable to satiate their own demands (Wahid & Firdaus, 2022). As a result, empathy and attentiveness are required. Social concern refers to a consistent mindset and behavior to support individuals and communities in need (Daryanto, 2013). Social care plays an important role in improving the welfare of families, neighbors and the wider community. The development of a sense of appreciation, the establishment of harmony and comfort, and the development of mutual affection are some advantages of social care. Within the framework of the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia (NKRI), citizenship foster intergroup dependency (Winarno, 2020).

According to Saraswati et.al, (2020), social care is currently decreasing. Apathy or disinterest in the environment or fellow humans is easily examined. Moreover, the digital era leads individuals to adopt an individualistic attitude. For instance, no one feels compelled to help someone who has an accident. Indeed, some people capture the moment of the accident in videos or photos, which they subsequently post to social media (Muhamad Arif, Jesica Dwi Rahmayanti, 2021). David's case is one of other examples of the abstain of the social care for other. David was abused in such a way by Mario Dandy Satrio, without any help from his friends, on February 20, 2023 at 20.30 WIB in Pesanggrahan, South Jakarta. As a result, David spent a considerable amount of time unconscious, even in a coma. Regardless of the motivation, this action is definitely not defensible in any way

Indicators of social concern include helpfulness, tolerance, involvement in social action, and high moral standards (Kurniawati et al., 2023). Therefore, it is very important to instill the ideals of social care in children from an early age as a component of character education (A. Wardani et al., 2015). Knowing the importance of social care, children are able to internalize the value and actively apply it in everyday life, including in the classroom, school or madrasah, and local community (Novi Setiawatri, 2019). Three steps can be taken to address the need to instill a socially conscious mindset in schools: increasing students' skills, fostering social caring behavior, and instilling a habitual tendency towards a social caring character (Muhamad Arif, Jesica Dwi Rahmayanti, 2021). This habituation is a commendable effort aiming to foster certain values or character (Isbakhi, 2018).

Project-based learning approach can effectively foster character traits in children, such as social empathy and concern for others (Santika et al., 2022; Najiha & Saputri, 2023). Project Based Learning (PjBL) is an educational approach that uses projects and activities as the main teaching method. Students engage in processes of inquiry, evaluation, interpretation, synthesis, and accumulation of knowledge to create various types of learning outcomes (Daryanto, 2014). In the Project Based Learning (PjBL) framework, the instructor plays the role of facilitator, who actively promotes and motivates students. Educators in PjBL primarily function as facilitators to not only convey information and knowledge but also provide resources. Meanwhile, students are positioned as individuals who are involved in problem solving, decision making, and learning activities. Students gain skills in teamwork, communication, and collaboration, enabling them to express ideas or results effectively to peers, parents, and the community (N. S. Wardani, 2014).

Extensive research has been conducted regarding project-based learning. Nila Lestari's research reveals that the use of project-based learning (PjBL) has effectively increased the academic achievement and engagement of fifth grade students at Ar-Rahman Misriadi Elementary School in Stabat Lama Langkat village (Lestari, 2019). Likewise, Project Based Learning (PjBL) improves the students' engagement in the teaching and learning process as shown by Putri Dewi Anggaraini and Siti Sri Wulandari in their study (Putri Dewi Anggraini, 2021). In addition, Lutfiana Indah Sari, et. al, (2015) disclose that Project Based Learning (PjBL) is able to improve the speaking skill of students in elementary schools. Prior studies have demonstrated the efficacy of project-based learning approaches or models in enhancing student learning outcomes. However, despite an enormous amount of research, there is still a dearth of studies on project-based learning that particularly focus on how social care behaviors develop in elementary school students.

Therefore, it is important to examine the use of project-based learning approaches in encouraging the development of students' compassionate and empathetic dispositions. The aim is to foster a comprehensive understanding that not only includes cognitive development but also the affective and psychomotor components of elementary school students.

Previous research has not provided significant consideration to the role of social concern in project-based learning in elementary schools. Therefore, this research is expected to photograph the implementation of the project-based learning model in elementary schools in Semarang City, aiming at cultivating the character of social care and examining the subsequent impacts. The implementation of a project-based learning approach in elementary schools in Semarang has had a noticeable impact. This success can become a blueprint for other cities to encourage the development of the social care character of children in their respective elementary schools. Therefore, this research

provides a valuable contribution to understanding the nature of social care in education at the elementary level and provides additional resources for the implementation of project-based learning in elementary schools.

2. METHODS

This research uses a qualitative methodology in order to present a comprehensive and nuanced overview of the phenomenon under investigation. The respondent's comments and in-depth descriptions given in their natural environment were examined ([Iskandar, 2009](#)). The primary goal of this research is to investigate how Islamic elementary schools in Semarang, Indonesia, use project-based learning methodology to foster social care character. Researchers made journals or field notes to record their thoughts and observe them while collecting data. An audio recorder was used to capture interviews or Focus Group Discussions (FGD) for later analysis. Transcription software, such as NVivo, MAXQDA, or ATLAS, were used to convert audio or video recordings into written form to aid in the organization and analysis of statistical data. This study owns several steps. The research topic was initially identified by the researchers by selecting a subject that has not been adequately discussed in previous research. Second, initial observation of schools that have implemented project-based learning to realize a social caring character was conducted to determined participants of the study. The principals, teachers, and students at SD Islam Nurul Qomar, SD IT al-Firdaus, SD Islam Nurul Islam, MI Miftahul Akhlaqiyah, and MIT Darul Ulum were then chosen as the participants of this study. The third step of the data collection consisted of conducting interviews with school administrators, instructors and students ([Risnayanti, 2004](#)), and continued with document analysis, focus group Discussion, and observation of project-based learning implementation in the elementary schools ([Arikunto, 2002](#)). The fourth step in data processing and analysis was recognizing, categorizing, and understanding the collected qualitative data. In the end, this research described and found out how Islamic elementary schools in Semarang can build social caring character through project-based learning

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

a. The Implementation of Project-Based Learning in Islamic Elementary Schools in Semarang

The model of project-based learning applied in Islamic Schools in Semarang has various kinds of activities. Interview, observation, and documentation in four Islamic schools in Semarang were conducted. Project-based learning is applied in three main stages: planning, implementation and report, and evaluation ([Hamidah et al., 2020](#)). Project-based learning takes students into a deeper and more contextual learning.

Chen and Yang argue that project-based learning has more positive impacts compared to traditional learning (Chen & Yang, 2019). The transition from traditional learning to project-based learning can significantly change the experiences of students and teachers in the classroom such as how they teach, how they learn, and how they interact (Maros et al., 2023). These projects are designed to make students aware of real-world situations and provide them the opportunity to apply the knowledge and skills they are learning in a practical setting. In this process, students learn about theoretical concepts as well as how such concepts relate to and are useful in the daily life (Thomas, 2000). Researchers discovered a number of project-based learning activities that had impacts in accordance with indicators of social care character (Fauzi et al., 2017; Samani, 2012). The social care indicators were applied in the form of activity projects. The following is the implementation of project-based learning in Islamic elementary schools in Semarang:

1) Planning

Islamic Elementary schools in Semarang city have various plans in realizing the social care character of students. Planning for the formation of social caring character through project-based learning was designed at the micro (by educators and students) and macro (included in school work program planning) level. The macro planning of project-based learning at SDI Nurul Islam was designed in the form of morning alms (*sedekah pagi*) activities. This activity was planned by educators and students within a period of 1 month. The aim of this activity is to familiarize students with helpfulness for people in need. In resonance with this, MIT Darul Ulum planned project-based learning in incidental activities such as sharing takjil, giving zakat fitrah, and raising social funds for sick friends or people suffering from natural disasters.

Meanwhile, Nurul Qomar Islamic Elementary School which designed project-based learning at a macro level, where social care character was formed through an orphanage visit activity project. This project was designed during the planning of the school work program which was handled directly by the student affairs sector. This activity project was carried out once a year on the 1st of Muharram (Islamic New Year) as a momentum to create learning that develops a sense of empathy, mutual love for fellow humans, especially towards orphans as a command from Allah and the Prophet to love and care for orphans

In another school, MI Miftahul Akhlaiyah, the project was designed at the macro level by all of homeroom teachers in the form of infaq Jum'at (Friday's donation). Friday's donation serves as a means of teaching pupils and their parents the value of giving to others. According to the plan, Friday's donation was used as social assistance funding, orphan aid, or natural disaster relief. In addition to Friday's donation, project-based learning was designed through the habituation of students' tawadu (humble) behavior in front of teachers. Students were taught how to behave when walking in front

of the teachers. MI Miftahul Akhlaiyah also proposed anti-bullying socialization to students in grade 5 and 6 to prevent bad effects on the school's social life.

2) Implementation and Report

a) Morning Alms for Prosthetic Legs

In Nurul Islam Islamic Elementary School, the morning alms project was applied by providing students with piggy banks from eco-friendly unused goods. Every morning, before starting the class, students were encouraged to save their money without any minimum amount. After a month, savings were opened and the total nominal amount of savings was used to buy prosthetic leg. The students handed over the prosthetic legs directly to people in need.

b) Orphanage Visit

The orphanage visiting visit began with the formation of a committee. After the committee was formed, it continued with fundraising from various parties. The donors for this orphanage visit included parents, entrepreneurs, and industrial companies collaborated with the school. Following the fund-raising, the committee surveyed orphanages that had been selected in accordance with the validity of the data provided about the children under their care. This was to guarantee that the money that is raised was not misused. This [figure 1](#) activity was carried out not only for students, but also for student guardians or parents, school committees, and all teachers.



Figure 1. Orphanage Visit

This event protocol consisted of the opening, the holy Qu'ran reading, committee report, remarks from the school principal and orphanage administrator, Maudhoh Hasanah (Islamic speech for good advice), and closing with the handing over of donations to the orphanage. The donations were given directly to orphanage administrators and orphans. The donations were in the form of cash and goods for daily needs such as school supplies, toiletries, religious equipment, and groceries. This activity was also interspersed

with tambourine performances from the orphanage children and then closed with prayers from the ustad (preacher) from the school and the orphanage caretakers.

c) Infaq Jumat (Friday's Donation)

The purpose of this project is to help students develop a socially conscious and compassionate attitude toward the people in their neighborhood, particularly their friends who are economically disadvantaged. It focused not only to students, but also to parents, by educating them of the importance of this project through offline meetings or online via WhatsApp Group information. This activity was carried out in an administrative order. Financial records on a daily, weekly, monthly, and annual basis are thoroughly recorded. In fact, until this research was carried out, Friday's donation balance was close to 50 million. These funds were used for various things such as helping schools' academic community who are in difficulties. Every semester, a large number of impoverished students gained benefit from this fund to help them pay tuition fees. In addition, Friday's donation cash was given out to visit sick students, assist people suffering from natural disasters, and provide compensation for orphaned kids.

d) Anti-Bullying Socialization

This activity was carried out by MI Miftahul Akhlaiyah as the program of school's principal. Bullying as one of the three major educational sins has dangerous social impacts. Therefore, grade 5 and 6 students need to know this because they are going to move on to high schools. As part of training process, the school invited persuasive speakers to change students' perspectives and increase their awareness of the harmful effects of bullying. This confirms that school's engagement and function are crucial in shaping the students' personalities ([Riyanto & Tohirin, 2017](#)).

e) Incidental Activities

Project-based learning to create socially concerned character was mostly implemented through incidental activities in Islamic Schools in Semarang. Three of the various social activities that are used to promote the development of a socially concerned character were carrying out takjil (snacks for breaking the fast) sharing activities, distributing zakat fitrah, and raising social funds.

f) Social Caring Character Habituation

The social care character habituation project was carried out in almost all schools becoming research objects. This project's implementation, however, was carried out without rigorous, ongoing control and oversight, making it challenging to measure and witness the final product. Additionally, because the project's emphasis was on teachers modeling for socially concerned behavior, relatively little student involvement or contribution was needed. Of the several schools studied, MI Miftahul Akhlaqiyah was one of the schools that implemented this project concretely. The implementation of this project can be measured and observed from the attitude or behavior of students when walking in front of teachers or older people by bowing and saying "nderek langkung"

(excuse me). Researchers observed this directly in the school. This project was also monitored and evaluated directly by teachers when they find students who do not use these words and attitudes.

3) Evaluation

Education aims to develop the character and values that guide a person's attitudes and behavior in addition to imparting academic knowledge. The development of a socially compassionate attitude—that is, the capacity to experience empathy and pay attention to the needs and suffering of others around us—is a crucial component of character development (Carvalho, 2020). In the educational setting, social care character is crucial to the development of people who make constructive contributions to society and the environment. There are a lot of intriguing things and enticing evaluation notes from the project's execution since Islamic schools in the city of Semarang implement a highly broad range of project activities in building social care character. Evaluations of various project-based learning implementations differ due to the diversity of the projects. Nonetheless, it must be recognized that putting project-based learning into practice presents some obstacles. First, this approach requires careful planning and meticulous arrangement. Teachers must design projects that fit the curriculum and learning objectives, and ensure that the necessary resources are available. Project evaluation can also be complex due to the subjective aspects involved (J.Krauss, 2007).

For instance, the "morning alms for prosthetic legs" project was evaluated as having been successful in fostering in pupils a sense of empathy for those in need since the social care character instilled in them the value of being aware of and sensitive to the sentiments of others. This ability not only creates stronger social relationships, but also helps reduce social inequality and increase harmony in society (H.Arnold, 2006). On the other hand, projects that focus solely on prosthetic legs restrict students' ability to imagine how much more complicated and wide-ranging the social issues are in their community, forcing the teacher to go into greater detail to clarify that prosthetic legs are just one social phenomenon that is used as a catalyst to care about the environment.

To sum up the evaluation of the projects, technically, incidental activities were carried out according to the momentum of time or certain conditions, meaning that the projects were conducted only in specific circumstances. Meanwhile, the good habituation project was lack of control and supervision from teachers making it difficult to measure and observe the output. Character assessment instruments, including social care character, should be developed adequately, validly, and reliably (Lestari & Harjono, 2021).

b. The Impacts of Project-Based Learning Implementation in Islamic Elementary School in Semarang City

Overall, project-based learning is an interesting and fruitful approach to education. It provides opportunities for students to develop knowledge, skills and attitudes relevant to the real world. While it presents challenges, its profound and relevant

benefits make it an attractive option for creating meaningful learning experiences for future generations of students (L. Helle, P. Tynjälä, 2006). Project-based learning has many advantages (Ernawati, 2021). Students become more engaged and motivated in learning because they recognize a real purpose behind their works. In the context of projects, they develop problem-solving, creativity, and collaboration skills in an effort to complete complex tasks. The activities also emphasize teamwork and effective communication, which is beneficial in preparing students for real-world challenges (Blumenfeld, 2006).

In addition, project-based learning also gives students the chance to have a better comprehension of the material. They comprehend the connections between ideas and how they function in actual circumstances in addition to simply recalling facts. It aids in the development of critical and analytical thinking abilities in students, which are crucial for solving problems in the real world (J.R. Mergendoller, 2006). According to Nisfu Ema Fatimah and Nurodin Usman, activities in schools can be optimized to support student character formation (Fatimah & Usman, 2017), including social caring character. Through project-based learning, students can build socially conscious personalities that have a positive influence on their own growth and yield substantial advantages for society at large (R.J. Jagers, M.V.Rizzo, 2019). From several project-based learning models in Islamic Elementary School in Semarang City, there are several impacts that can be seen from the four indicators of social caring character as follows:

1) The Character of being Responsive to the Social Environment

Seriousness, knowledge of one's obligations, and sensitivity in reacting to surroundings are all indicators of responsive character. A responsive attitude is one of the attitudes that supports students' educational success (Riskilia Maharani, 2022). Jabir bin Abdillah Realizing and putting into practice the fact that people need and love one another is a necessary step toward sensitivity. According to the Prophet's explanation in Jabir bin Abdillah's narrative, if a person is unresponsive to helping others and showing compassion, Allah would withhold His support and compassion from them (Al-Bukhari, 2011). Students will exhibit social sensitivity as a responsive character during social interactions. This needs to be instilled in children at a young age, when it is still relatively simple to accept and adjust to. When kids socialize in their surroundings and go on to the next stage of development, these behaviors will follow them (Isnaeni et al., 2018).

In Islamic Elementary Schools in Semarang City, project-based learning through ancillary activities like sharing takjil and social fundraising has aided in the development of responsive character, a sign of the development of a socially compassionate character. Students are invited to see the reality around them and do things that can benefit those around them. Their response indicates that they care about the neighborhood. Students will feel more shook up, more excited, and more likely to adopt responsive attitudes when they witness phenomena firsthand (Safitri et al., 2021). Responsive students will be able

to pay attention and be actively involved, so that a positive impact on students will be obtained in the learning process (Paksuniemi et al., 2020). In addition, the responsive character of the projects that have been implemented encourages students to relate well to their social environment (Budiman, 2017) and behave in uphold good character values (Ali, 2018). Sensitivity to the problems faced in the surrounding environment makes students familiar with analysis and research from an early age.

2) Empathic Behavior

Empathy is the willingness to understand the conditions or situations experienced by other people (Nata, 2018), indeed empathy is the capacity to feel the emotions of others (Montero-Carretero et al., 2021). The capacity to comprehend others is a lifelong skill that is called empathy. While cognitive talents do form the basis of this behavior, social skills are also learnt and comprised of these abilities (Sumijati, 2022). Amidst the decrease of the empathy of Indonesian children (Rohmah & Salim, 2020), empathic behavior needs to be one of concerns, especially in education. In addition, many problems link with the empathy of students in elementary schools. For instance, SDN Nogotiro (Rahma & Kurniawati, 2016) dan SDN 1 Sibangkaja (Anastasya & Wulandari, 2022) demonstrates the lack of social awareness in elementary school students by acting in a way that makes them enjoy seeing other people's problems, puts their own interests first, and treats others disrespectfully.

The projects implemented in Islamic elementary schools in Semarang City are directed at forming a socially caring character and have a significant impact on students. Students who have visited an orphanage, for instance, have a strong sense of empathy for the plight of orphans. Students loved and respected their parents more as a result of completing the project. They are even more grateful to Allah for their parents' existence. Furthermore, empathy promotes the same emotions in students; they will be joyful when others are happy, sorry when others are sad or unfortunate, and even assist in relieving other people of their problems. After observing the phenomenon of other people's difficulties, students with empathy will be inspired to take action to help eliminate other people's difficulties. At this point, an empathetic attitude can shape students' leadership character (Grigoropoulos, 2020). Islam has harshly condemned Muslims for their disregard for other Muslims' problems, citing the prophetic sayings narrated by al-Tabrani (Al-Tabrani, n.d.).

3) Mutual Cooperation Behavior

Cooperation is the endeavor of individuals or organizations to accomplish a common objective (Soekanto, 2007). This behavior is an indicator of the success of forming a social caring character in Islamic Elementary Schools in Semarang City. The emergence of this cooperative behavior make it easier for children to interact with their surroundings. Moreover, the cooperative behavior will work better when integrated into project-based learning (Rahayu et al., 2020). In this research, projects such as "morning

alms for prosthetic legs" had a significant impact on the formation of cooperative behavior between students. (Viranthi & Wulandari, 2022). With the help of the Morning Alms Project, they are collaborating to purchase prosthetic legs for those in need. Working on a project as a team creates a sense of responsibility and encourages involvement in positive things (Dyson et al., 2021). In this regard, the Qur'an promotes communal living among people as a means of fostering mutual understanding (QS. al-Hujurat/49: 13) since humans were designed to be feeble (QS. al-Nisa'/4: 28). Therefore, Muslims expect everyone to work together to uphold goodness and piety (QS. al-Maidah/5: 2) to create a peaceful and prosperous life (Mukhtar, 2021).

4. CONCLUSION

Research indicates that Project-Based Learning (PjBL), which includes morning alms, orphanage visit, Friday donations, anti-bullying outreach, and other accidental activities, has imparted students the importance of caring for others. Through projects based on real events, Students get an understanding of the value of sharing, caring for others, and help others. PjBL implementation in the schools under the study necessitated extensive preparation and collaboration from teachers, students, and the community. Student projects like serving breakfast to the underprivileged and visiting orphanages demonstrate that they are learning concepts as well as becoming more socially conscious and sympathetic. Evaluations of these projects show that students become more aware of the needs and suffering of others, and they learn how important their role is in society. The benefits of PjBL are very important for shaping students' social character, despite being difficult to plan and assess. This research significantly advances our knowledge about how PjBL can be used to help elementary and high school students develop good social skills. The findings of this study suggest that PjBL can be a helpful teaching method that aids students in developing both personally and academically. It also demonstrates the significant positive effects that project-based learning can have on students and their communities. This reinforces the notion that social values should be taught in elementary schools and madrasas. It is recommended that more extensive studies can be conducted in the future to see how PjBL influences the development of students' social skills over time. Further studies could also examine how different types of projects can influence other parts of character development and how parents and communities can be more involved in PjBL implementation. In addition, it is also important to create more valid and accurate character assessment instrument to measure the extent to which projects influence students' character.

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