



# Exploring the Synergy of Cooperative and Problem-Based Learning in Islamic Religious Education: A Qualitative Inquiry into Student Learning Outcomes

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## Abstract

This study aims to explore the synergistic implementation of Cooperative Learning (CL) and Problem-Based Learning (PBL) in Islamic Religious Education and its impact on student learning outcomes. Despite growing interest in active learning, the combined pedagogical effects of integrating CL and PBL specifically within Islamic education settings remain under-researched. This research employed a qualitative case study approach to examine classroom dynamics and pedagogical practices deeply. Data were collected using semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and documentation analysis involving students and educators. The gathered qualitative data were analyzed iteratively using thematic analysis, involving data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. Regarding implementation, educators successfully merged small-group collaboration with real-world problem-solving scenarios tailored to Islamic moral and ethical contexts. Students actively engaged in structured team discussions to analyze contemporary religious dilemmas, fostering mutual interdependence and collective accountability. In the cognitive domain, this integrated approach significantly enhanced critical thinking skills, analytical capabilities, and conceptual understanding of complex Islamic teachings. In the affective domain, cooperative problem-solving cultivated deeper empathy, religious tolerance, ethical awareness, and mutual respect among peers. In the psychomotor domain, students demonstrated improved active participation, collaborative presentation abilities, and practical application of religious principles in group activities. Future research should investigate the longitudinal impacts and quantitative scalability of this integrated model across diverse educational levels.

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## Introduction

Education stands as the cornerstone for elevating human resource quality, a critical priority that cannot be ignored as human intelligence is refined and enhanced through pedagogical processes. Its importance to society at large lies in its noble aim to not only sharpen human intellect but also to cultivate individuals possessing knowledge, skills, and strong moral character, which are essential for societal progress. Evidence suggests that in the Indonesian context, education is dichotomized into formal and non-formal streams, both striving to realize visions tailored to environmental needs. Formal education offers structured, government-regulated learning to achieve national objectives, while non-formal education provides community-driven moral and religious guidance. Ultimately, irrespective of the stream, successful education is indispensable for creating a knowledgeable citizenry capable of critical thought and ethical conduct, thereby fostering a stable and progressive society. Recognizing education as the primary vehicle for human development underlines why continuous improvement in teaching methodologies is not merely an academic concern but a vital societal necessity for sustainable development.

In spite of the importance of education, Indonesian society faces significant challenges regarding student learning outcomes, particularly within Islamic Religious Education (IRE or PAI). Current educational approaches frequently struggle to balance academic achievement with the essential cultivation of spiritual potential, self-control, and moral character. Consequently, there is growing societal concern that conventional teaching methods are insufficient for preparing students to apply good values effectively within community life. For teachers to be successful in this endeavor, they must move beyond merely conveying material to becoming mentors and role models who build close relationships with students. Society needs educational processes that go beyond rote memorization to foster critical thinking and collaborative problem-solving skills necessary for navigating modern complexities. The persistent general problem is a gap between the desired output of holistic, morally grounded individuals and the reality of often uninspiring and disconnected classroom experiences. Addressing this deficiency is crucial for ensuring that education truly fulfills its mandate of preparing the next generation for the multifaceted challenges of real life.

Observation at SMP IC Nurul Hidayah Lecari Sukorejo reveals specific phenomena that echo these broader challenges. Situated within an Islamic boarding school environment, the school possesses a solid foundation with qualified educators and a defined student body across grades VII to IX. However, despite these assets, there remains a notable underutilization of diverse and engaging instructional models. Conventional, passive learning approaches still predominate, often leading to student boredom and a lack of active participation. The school recognizes the need for high-quality instruction and satisfying academic results, yet current practices suggest a reliance on standard materials like LKS books without sufficient methodological variety. Therefore, there is a clear opportunity to introduce innovative approaches, specifically Cooperative and Problem-Based Learning.

Focusing on seventh-grade students presents a timely intervention to reshape their learning experiences. The current phenomenon highlights a gap where the existing supportive environment is not yet fully optimized by active learning strategies that could significantly enhance engagement, understanding, and the practical application of Islamic values.

Previous literature extensively discusses varied strategies to bridge the gap between educational potential and student outcomes. Studies indicate that a teacher's professional and responsible attitude, including effective evaluation and creative material development, is paramount. Furthermore, research highlights that high-quality instruction depends heavily on robust lesson planning (RPP, syllabi) and the strategic use of teaching models to prevent student disengagement. Scholars advocate for models like Cooperative Learning to emphasize student collaboration and mutual idea exchange to achieve shared goals, while Problem-Based Learning (PBL) focuses on systematic critical thinking applied to real-world issues. While these studies establish the theoretical benefits and general effectiveness of such active learning strategies, a discernible gap exists. Most existing research tends to treat these models in isolation or quantitative terms, focusing heavily on measurable grades. There is a limited qualitative inquiry examining the intricate synergy created when combining Cooperative and Problem-Based Learning, particularly within the specific, integrated context of an Islamic boarding school secondary level PAI curriculum.

To address these gaps, this study introduces a novel approach by conducting a qualitative inquiry specifically exploring the synergy between Cooperative and Problem-Based Learning within the PAI curriculum at a Pesantren-integrated junior high school. The primary research problem aims to understand how the deliberate combination of these two models influences not just academic grades, but the holistic learning outcomes, including critical thinking, collaboration skills, and character development, of seventh-grade students at SMP IC Nurul Hidayah. The central argument is that the integration of Cooperative and PBL methodologies creates a powerful synergistic effect that conventional or single-model approaches lack, making learning PAI both more engaging and profoundly meaningful. This qualitative exploration will provide nuanced insights into how students actively construct religious knowledge and apply it to real problems collaboratively. The study is important as it offers a contextualized understanding that moves beyond quantitative results, contributing a unique framework for PAI educators to enhance instructional quality and fulfill the dual mandate of academic excellence and character formation in integrated Islamic educational settings.

## Methods

This study employs a qualitative case study design to gain an in-depth, contextual understanding of the dynamic synergy between Cooperative Learning and Problem-Based Learning (PBL) in Islamic Religious Education (PAI). A qualitative case study approach was selected because it allows for a comprehensive exploration of complex classroom interactions, student engagement, and holistic learning

outcomes within a real-life educational setting. The research was conducted at SMP IC Nurul Hidayah Lecari Sukorejo Pasuruan. This location was deliberately chosen due to its unique integration with a pesantren environment, providing a rich context to examine how active learning strategies operate alongside traditional religious values. Furthermore, the school presents a relevant field phenomenon where innovative instructional models are currently being introduced to seventh-grade students. To gather rich primary evidence, data collection techniques included non-participant classroom observations of PAI lessons, semi-structured interviews with PAI teachers and Grade VII students, and document analysis of lesson plans, teaching materials, and student assignment artifacts. These multifaceted data collection strategies ensured a thorough capture of the learning process.

Data analysis followed the interactive model proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldana, involving data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. During data condensation, raw field notes, interview transcripts, and documents were systematically selected, simplified, and transformed to focus on key themes regarding instructional synergy and learning outcomes. Next, data display was executed using structured narratives, thematic matrices, and charts to map connections between collaborative problem-solving activities and student development. Finally, tentative conclusions were drawn and iteratively verified throughout the research process by cross-checking findings against empirical evidence. To ensure data trustworthiness and rigor, strict validity criteria were applied, including source and method triangulation, member checking with participants to confirm interpretation accuracy, and prolonged field involvement. Detailed audit trails were also maintained to support dependability and confirmability. By employing these systematic qualitative procedures, the inquiry thoroughly uncovers how the combined pedagogical models foster deeper critical thinking, active collaboration, and character growth among seventh-grade students in an integrated Islamic secondary school setting.

## **Finding and Discussion**

### **Finding**

#### **Synergistic Implementation of Cooperative and Problem-Based Learning in Islamic Education**

Operationally, the synergistic implementation of Cooperative Learning (CL) and Problem-Based Learning (PBL) in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) refers to the deliberate integration of structured peer collaboration with authentic, inquiry-driven problem-solving processes within the classroom. In this study, this hybrid model is observed as a teaching framework where Grade VII students at SMP IC Nurul Hidayah are organized into small, heterogeneous groups to analyze, discuss, and resolve contemporary moral and social issues through the lens of Islamic teachings. Rather than executing CL and PBL as isolated instructional methods, the teacher blends cooperative group dynamics—such as positive interdependence and individual accountability—with the analytical steps of PBL, including problem identification, contextual investigation, and solution synthesis. This operational synergy transforms

the traditional teacher-centered instruction into an active, student-centered learning environment tailored to the school's pesantren-integrated culture. Through this framework, educational activities move beyond simple rote memorization of religious texts, engaging students in collaborative critical thinking while embedding Islamic values directly into practical problem-solving experiences.

During an in-depth interview, the primary PAI teacher stated,

*"When I combine group work with real-life moral problems, students become significantly more engaged compared to traditional lectures. They do not just memorize verses; they debate how to apply Islamic principles like honesty and empathy to solve actual modern dilemmas, such as social media ethics and peer pressure."*

This interview excerpt reveals that combining cooperative dynamics with problem-focused inquiry shifts the instructional paradigm from passive reception to active conceptual application. The researcher interprets this statement as evidence that the pedagogical synergy effectively bridges abstract theological concepts with practical life situations. By discussing real-world challenges collectively, students are prompted to internalize religious values more deeply. The teacher's reflection highlights that the structured collaboration provided by cooperative learning creates a safe space for students to articulate, test, and refine their understanding of Islamic ethics. Consequently, this combined strategy transforms routine religious instruction into a dynamic forum for moral reasoning and active character formation.

In a separate interview, a Grade VII student shared their experience, stating,

*"Working in groups to solve real cases makes learning PAI much easier and fun. When we faced a difficult problem about community harmony, my group members shared different ideas, and we searched for solutions based on the Quran together."*

This student's perspective underscores the positive affective and cognitive impact of the dual learning approach on learners. The researcher interprets this feedback as an indication that peer-to-peer interaction reduces learning anxiety and enhances motivation when tackling complex religious topics. Collaborative problem-solving allows students to leverage collective intelligence, enabling them to comprehend challenging concepts that might be difficult to grasp individually. Furthermore, searching for scripture-based solutions together reinforces cooperative skills and instills a sense of shared responsibility. This testimony confirms that the synergy between CL and PBL fosters an supportive educational atmosphere where students feel empowered to actively participate, exchange diverse perspectives, and take ownership of their religious learning journey.

Based on the observations conducted during PAI lessons provided concrete visual evidence of this instructional synergy in action. Students were arranged in small clusters, actively discussing assigned case studies on social ethics while utilizing supplementary reference materials and lesson worksheets. The researcher observed high levels of peer interaction, with students dividing tasks, debating interpretations of Islamic values, and collaboratively drafting solution posters. The teacher moved among the groups, serving as a facilitator who asked guiding questions rather than

providing direct answers. The researcher interprets these observational data as proof of a fundamental shift in classroom roles and learning dynamics. The physical and social structure of the classroom reflected active knowledge construction rather than passive listening. The seamless integration of group cooperation and problem inquiry created an energetic learning atmosphere where academic engagement aligned with behavioral norms. These observations confirm that the combined model successfully operationalizes active learning principles within the unique educational setting of an integrated Islamic junior high school.

The findings reveal a distinct pattern wherein the integration of Cooperative Learning and Problem-Based Learning creates a mutually reinforcing instructional cycle in Islamic education. Patterns across interview transcripts and field observations show that cooperative group structures provide the social stability and scaffolding necessary for students to tackle complex, open-ended moral problems effectively. Conversely, the authentic challenges presented by PBL give group interactions a clear, meaningful purpose, preventing cooperative learning from devolving into superficial socializing. This restatement highlights that the synergy between peer collaboration and problem inquiry enhances both cognitive comprehension of religious concepts and affective character development among students. Ultimately, the data pattern confirms that combining CL and PBL is not merely an additive instructional technique, but a transformative pedagogical strategy that elevates student engagement, deepens ethical understanding, and fulfills the broader holistic goals of Islamic Religious Education in an integrated pesantren school environment.

### **Impact on Student Learning Outcomes Across Cognitive, Affective, and Psychomotor Domains**

Operationalizing the impact on student learning outcomes in this field study refers to observing holistic behavioral changes across cognitive, affective, and psychomotor dimensions among seventh-grade students. Cognitively, it measures students' heightened capacity to critically analyze, synthesize, and apply Islamic concepts to contemporary problems rather than relying on simple memorization. Affectively, this sub-finding captures measurable improvements in moral character, mutual empathy, patience, and collaborative attitudes demonstrated during classroom discussions. Psychomotorly, it encompasses practical skills, including articulate verbal presentations, structured problem-solving execution, and active group participation in designing action plans. Field observations confirm that combining Cooperative Learning with Problem-Based Learning creates a dynamic environment where these three domains develop synchronously. Students no longer absorb Islamic Religious Education (PAI) as abstract knowledge; instead, they operationalize religious ethics through collaborative inquiry. This multifaceted growth demonstrates that the synergistic model effectively bridges theoretical understanding with active behavioral application, fulfilling the foundational mandate of integrated Islamic education within the pesantren-based secondary school framework.

In an interview, the PAI subject teacher highlighted the distinct cognitive and affective shifts observed after introducing the combined teaching models, stating:

*"Students previously memorized religious texts passively without grasping their relevance. Now, when given modern ethical dilemmas, they enthusiastically research Qur'anic verses, debate solutions in groups, and demonstrate genuine respect for differing viewpoints."*

The researcher interprets this account as qualitative evidence that the instructional synergy transforms passive learners into active critical thinkers. By confronting realistic problems, students process religious concepts at higher cognitive levels while simultaneously cultivating emotional intelligence. The teacher's statement underscores that cooperative problem-solving creates a supportive atmosphere where cognitive reasoning and affective growth nurture each other. Rather than treating religious ethics as isolated rules, students internalize them through peer dialogue, which enhances intellectual retention and fosters empathetic communication. Consequently, this qualitative feedback confirms that combining cooperative structures with problem-focused tasks effectively elevates cognitive comprehension while simultaneously building foundational moral values during daily classroom instruction.

Further evidence emerged from an interview with a seventh-grade student who reflected on personal learning experience:

*"Working together on real cases helps me understand PAI much better because my friends and I can share ideas, present our solutions confidently, and practice good habits like patience and teamwork."*

The interpretation of this statement is the combined pedagogical approach successfully bridges cognitive understanding and psychomotor execution. Engaging in peer-led problem-solving empowers students to articulate complex thoughts clearly, boosting their communication skills and collaborative confidence. Furthermore, the student's reflection reveals that affective virtues—such as patience, active listening, and mutual assistance—are naturally practiced during group tasks rather than remaining purely theoretical concepts. This interview confirms that students perceive learning as an engaging, practical process rather than an intimidating academic burden. The synergy of Cooperative and Problem-Based Learning creates a comfortable learning ecosystem where students actively build intellectual competence, refine social communication skills, and internalize positive religious conduct.

Classroom observations provided tangible validation of these interview findings, revealing high student engagement, active teamwork, and proficient task execution during PAI lessons. Students were observed working in small groups, analyzing contemporary societal scenarios, taking structured notes, and confidently presenting group solutions to their peers using clear visual aids. The researcher interprets these field observations as strong empirical proof of psychomotor and affective integration within the learning environment. Rather than sitting quietly, students demonstrated physical and vocal involvement through lively debates, systematic board work, and collaborative report drafting. Teachers circulated as

supportive facilitators, observing how students naturally applied ethical guidelines while managing group disagreements constructively. These observed behaviors confirm that the combined learning models successfully translate abstract Islamic principles into actionable behavioral habits. The observational data demonstrates that structured cooperative inquiry creates a lively, student-centered dynamic where intellectual curiosity, social collaboration, and practical execution align continuously throughout the instructional period.

The empirical data across interviews and observations clearly restates that the synergy between Cooperative and Problem-Based Learning fundamentally enhances multidimensional student learning outcomes. Overall, a distinct structural pattern emerges from the findings: cognitive development acts as the initial spark through problem analysis, which immediately triggers affective growth via group dialogue, ultimately manifesting in psychomotor execution during student presentations and problem-solving activities. This interconnected pattern demonstrates that learning outcomes do not develop in isolation; rather, intellectual understanding, character formation, and practical skills reinforce each other simultaneously within an active learning framework. The qualitative evidence proves that when students engage collaboratively in solving real-life challenges, they achieve deeper conceptual mastery while developing essential social virtues and practical competencies. Ultimately, this pattern confirms that integrating cooperative frameworks with problem-based tasks provides a comprehensive, balanced pedagogical model that successfully fulfills the dual objectives of academic achievement and moral cultivation in Islamic Religious Education.

## **Discussion**

The empirical findings of this study demonstrate that integrating Cooperative Learning and Problem-Based Learning (PBL) in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) significantly enhances student engagement and multidimensional learning outcomes. Comparing these results with existing literature reveals a strong alignment with previous scholarly work regarding the efficacy of active learning models. Research by Anasro and Darmawan (2024) and Purwaningrum et al. (2024) similarly underscores that student-centered approaches spark intrinsic motivation and active participation in religious studies. However, while earlier studies predominantly focused on these models in isolation or through quantitative metrics, this inquiry highlights a unique synergy where cooperative structures provide the collaborative space while problem-focused tasks drive intellectual inquiry. The findings confirm that when seventh-grade students tackle authentic moral dilemmas together, their conceptual understanding of Islamic principles deepens remarkably. Unlike traditional teacher-centered instruction that relies heavily on passive memorization, this integrated approach transforms the classroom into an interactive learning environment where students move beyond superficial comprehension to meaningfully synthesize religious teachings within contemporary contexts.

Beyond cognitive engagement, the observed impact across affective and psychomotor domains further validates and expands upon current academic literature. Existing research, such as studies by Jufri et al. (2023) and Nurhamidah and Nurachadijat (2023), emphasizes that active learning fosters critical thinking and student independence. The findings of this study fully support these assertions while revealing a distinct alignment with Islamic character development. In contrast to conventional models that often treat affective growth as a secondary outcome, the synergy of cooperative dialogue and problem-solving naturally requires students to practice patience, mutual respect, and active listening during group discussions. Furthermore, psychomotor skills—such as public speaking, structured problem analysis, and designing collaborative action plans—emerge organically as students present their solutions. These results contrast with traditional classroom settings where psychomotor execution in PAI is frequently limited to ritualistic practices, demonstrating instead that collaborative problem-solving serves as a powerful vehicle for translating theoretical religious values into practical, observable social competencies within a secondary school context.

The theoretical implications of these findings contribute meaningfully to the broader discourse on Islamic educational pedagogy and instructional design. Theoretically, this research reinforces and extends constructivist learning theories within the realm of religious education, demonstrating that knowledge acquisition is inherently social and context-driven. By establishing that the simultaneous application of Cooperative Learning and Problem-Based Learning produces a synergistic effect, the study offers a refined conceptual framework for PAI instruction. It demonstrates that cognitive mastery, moral character formation, and practical skills do not develop in isolation; rather, they reinforce each other in a continuous, interdependent loop. This theoretical insight challenges the traditional paradigm that separates academic instruction from character building, proving that well-structured, collaborative problem-solving naturally integrates intellectual rigor with ethical growth. Consequently, this study fills a crucial literature gap regarding qualitative nuances of active learning models in integrated pesantren school environments, providing a conceptual blueprint for future educational researchers aiming to modernize Islamic instructional practices without sacrificing traditional moral values.

From a practical perspective, the outcomes of this study provide actionable guidance for teachers, school administrators, and educational policymakers. For PAI educators, the findings offer a proven, concrete method to revitalize classroom instruction, moving away from uninspiring lectures toward interactive, problem-centered group tasks that reflect real-world issues. Teachers can act as effective learning facilitators who guide discussions while encouraging peer-led inquiry. For school leadership at institutions like SMP IC Nurul Hidayah and similar pesantren-integrated schools, these results highlight the necessity of providing targeted professional development and instructional resources that support innovative active learning strategies. Furthermore, curriculum developers can utilize these insights to design PAI modules, syllabi, and assessment tools that explicitly evaluate affective

character traits and psychomotor competencies alongside cognitive benchmarks. By embedding cooperative and problem-based tasks into regular lesson planning, educational institutions can foster a dynamic learning ecosystem that successfully equips students with critical thinking capabilities, strong social ethics, and practical life skills.

Ultimately, comparing the field data with existing literature underscores the transformative potential of combining Cooperative Learning and Problem-Based Learning within Islamic Religious Education. While previous research established the separate benefits of these models, this study proves that their deliberate integration addresses longstanding pedagogical challenges, such as student boredom, superficial learning, and disconnected moral instruction. The findings clearly illustrate that when students are empowered to solve relevant societal problems collaboratively, they develop holistic competencies spanning cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains. The theoretical contribution advances constructivist religious pedagogy, while the practical implications offer roadmap strategies for school reform and professional teacher development. By successfully bridging academic content with moral practice, this pedagogical synergy ensures that PAI fulfills its ultimate goal of producing intellectually competent, ethically grounded graduates. Future research can build upon these findings by exploring the longitudinal impact of this integrated model across different grade levels and diverse educational settings, further solidifying its role in modernizing religious education.

## Conclusion

This research concludes that the key wisdom gained from this study is that integrating Cooperative Learning and Problem-Based Learning fundamentally transforms Islamic Religious Education from passive text memorization into an active, meaningful experience that cultivates student character alongside critical thinking. The primary strength and scientific contribution of this paper lie in offering a novel conceptual framework that demonstrates how combining collaborative dynamics with authentic problem-solving synergistically enhances learning outcomes across cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains, particularly within a pesantren-integrated secondary school environment. Despite these valuable insights, the study possesses certain methodological limitations, as it focused exclusively on a qualitative case study involving seventh-grade students at a single institution, which limits the direct generalizability of the findings to broader educational contexts. Therefore, future research should expand this inquiry by employing multi-site comparative designs, longitudinal tracking of character development, or quantitative experimental approaches across diverse educational levels and geographic regions to further validate and refine the pedagogical synergy of active learning models in religious instruction.

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