



Problem-Based Learning in Islamic Cultural History: Strengthening Rahmatan lil Alamin Character at Indonesian Madrasahs

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ABSTRACT

This study examines Problem-Based Learning (PBL) in Islamic Cultural History to strengthen Rahmatan lil Alamin character at two Indonesian madrasahs. A naturalistic qualitative multiple case study was used, with interviews, observation, document analysis, and written surveys of 101 students. Findings indicate that when PBL is systematically designed around value-laden historical problems and structured reflection, most students show observable gains in tolerance, empathy, critical thinking, and collaboration. However, character internalization depth varies and depends on the teacher's role as values coach, institutional support, and topic suitability. Contradictory data include one failed PBL session, 22% student frustration, and persistent time constraints. The study offers two moderate-novelty contributions: the Problem-Based Rahmatan lil Alamin Learning (PBRAL) model and the TPACKV framework (adding Values to TPACK). These are presented as context-specific, not universal claims. Practical implications call for sustained, practice-based teacher professional development.

ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini mengkaji pembelajaran berbasis masalah (Problem-Based Learning/PBL) dalam Sejarah Kebudayaan Islam untuk memperkuat karakter Rahmatan lil Alamin di dua madrasah aliyah negeri Kota Bandung. Pendekatan kualitatif naturalistik dengan studi kasus ganda digunakan, melalui wawancara, observasi, analisis dokumen, dan survei tertulis terhadap 101 siswa. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa ketika PBL dirancang secara sistematis dengan masalah historis sarat nilai dan refleksi terstruktur, sebagian besar siswa menunjukkan peningkatan yang teramati pada toleransi, empati, berpikir kritis, dan kolaborasi. Namun, kedalaman internalisasi karakter bervariasi dan bergantung pada peran guru sebagai pelatih nilai, dukungan institusi, serta kesesuaian topik. Data kontradiktif meliputi satu sesi PBL yang gagal, 22% siswa melaporkan frustrasi, dan kendala waktu yang persisten. Penelitian ini menawarkan dua kontribusi dengan kebaruan sedang: model Problem-Based Rahmatan lil Alamin Learning (PBRAL) dan kerangka TPACKV (menambahkan dimensi Nilai ke dalam TPACK). Keduanya disajikan sebagai elaborasi spesifik konteks, bukan klaim universal. Implikasi praktisnya adalah perlunya pengembangan profesional guru berbasis praktik yang berkelanjutan.

OPEN ACCESS

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received: 11-12-2025

Accepted: 30-04-2026

KEYWORDS

character education;
Islamic cultural
history; madrasah;
problem-based
learning; Rahmatan lil
Alamin.

KATA KUNCI

karakter Rahmatan lil
Alamin; madrasah;
pembelajaran berbasis
masalah; pendidikan
karakter; sejarah
kebudayaan Islam

Introduction

The teaching of Islamic Cultural History (*Sejarah Kebudayaan Islam* – SKI) in Indonesian madrasahs carries a dual mandate: transmitting historical knowledge about Islamic civilization and internalizing noble values into students' character. The Ministry of Religious Affairs states that SKI aims to build students' awareness of Islamic teachings and to train them in critical thinking to derive lessons (*ibrah*) from historical events. Within this context, the Islamic concept of *Rahmatan lil Alamin* (mercy to all creation) serves as a core value orientation, encompassing compassion (*al-rahmah*), justice (*al-'adl*), tolerance (*al-tasamuh*), equality (*al-musawah*), and freedom (*al-hurriyah*) (Al-Qaradawi, 2010)

Despite these noble objectives, the practice of SKI instruction in many madrasahs still faces fundamental problems. Various studies indicate that SKI teaching remains dominated by teacher-centered approaches that emphasize memorization of facts and chronologies, while providing minimal space for critical and analytical thinking. (Phinla, 2025; Rizki et al., 2025; Stolt-Krichko, 1997). Consequently, students often perceive SKI as tedious and irrelevant to contemporary life. The most critical gap is the weak bridge between historical knowledge and the internalization of value. This is exacerbated by Ardiansyah et al., (2025) Findings that SKI material is often not explicitly linked to current social realities, causing *Rahmatan lil Alamin* values to be understood merely as theoretical concepts rather than behavioral guides. The importance of learning Islamic history and civilization for human capital development and identity formation has been widely recognized. Knowledge of authentic history strengthens Muslim identity, pride, and moral character. (Arshad et al., 2012). This study extends that argument by showing that PBL, as a pedagogical method, can make Islamic history relevant and transformative for students in the Indonesian context.

One pedagogical alternative considered capable of bridging this gap is Problem-Based Learning (PBL). As a student-centered approach, PBL uses complex, ill-structured problems as the stimulus for learning. (Meng et al., 2025; Siregar et al., 2025). Learners collaboratively identify what they know and do not know, formulate questions, conduct investigations, and construct solutions. This inquiry process sharpens critical thinking and self-directed learning skills. (Pretorius & de Beer, 2025; Wijesekera & Hameed, 2026; Xue et al., 2025). Moreover, PBL provides space for character education because learners confront moral dilemmas and value conflicts that demand ethical consideration. (Schools, 2025)

Teaching about Islam-related issues in history classrooms can be particularly challenging due to students' diverse backgrounds and potential sensitivities. (Savenije et al., 2022). Similarly, Islamic studies, as a discipline, has long been dominated by qualitative approaches, yet recent scholarship advocates integrating quantitative methods to achieve a more balanced paradigm (Aminuddin, 2025). This study responds to such calls by offering a qualitative comparative analysis that does not dismiss the potential of quantitative methods but focuses on the depth of context. Previous critiques of Islamic studies methodology have called for a re-vamping of teaching approaches to respond to contemporary needs, including the integration of critical thinking and problem-solving skills. (Ashaari et al., 2012). PBL offers one such alternative, moving beyond traditional lecture-based instruction toward active, student-centered learning.

Over the past decade, studies on PBL in history and character education have grown, including in Islamic education. Al. (2025) used a quasi-experimental design and found a significant influence of PBL on the *Rahmatan lil Alamin* character, particularly tolerance and empathy. Several recent studies have strengthened the evidence base for PBL in Islamic education contexts. A meta-analysis by Wahono et al. (2025) confirmed that

blended PBL has a significant positive effect on strengthening Islamic character values, including inclusive values such as social responsibility and concern for others. A systematic review by Anugrah et al (2025) found that integrating PBL with Islamic practice consistently enhances students' religious engagement, social responsibility, and active participation. Classroom action research by Syafii (2024) demonstrated that PBL not only improves learning outcomes in Islamic education and character building but also fosters moral reasoning aligned with Islamic values. Finally, a conceptual study by Sutiono (2026) reconstructs the learning paradigm of Islamic religious education by grounding PBL within Islamic educational philosophy, positioning PBL as an integrative pedagogical framework that simultaneously develops critical thinking and spiritual awareness – thereby recommending PBL as a core strategy for shaping student character. In Indonesia, state Islamic universities have undergone a significant transformation over the past two decades, shifting from normative-theological approaches to critical, historical, and contextual methods in Islamic studies (Muthohirin, 2025). This study aligns with that broader intellectual revitalization by offering a comparative qualitative analysis of PBL implementation in two leading madrasahs.

Although these studies provide a valuable foundation, most focus on measuring the quantitative effect of PBL on specific character aspects or are limited to a narrow classroom scope. What remains underexplored is a comparative, qualitative analysis of how PBL is actually designed, implemented, and evaluated across different madrasah contexts – including partial or failed implementations. The present study fills this gap by offering a holistic, in-depth qualitative analysis of PBL planning, implementation, and evaluation in strengthening *Rahmatan lil Alamin's* character. It conducts a comparative analysis of two leading madrasahs in Bandung City (MAN 1 and MAN 2), which possess distinct institutional characteristics. This comparison enables identification of key patterns, supporting and inhibiting factors, and richer contextualization. The study does not claim causal effectiveness but offers a rich, contextualized account of processes, variations, and contradictions.

This research specifically aims to analyze and describe the implementation of problem-based SKI learning in strengthening *Rahmatan lil Alamin* character at MAN 1 and MAN 2, focusing on six areas: (1) stakeholder perspectives, (2) instructional design, (3) classroom practice, (4) evaluation, (5) impact on students' character (including non-linear outcomes), and (6) supporting and inhibiting factors.

Methods

This study was conducted using a naturalistic qualitative approach within a multiple case study design. The choice of a naturalistic paradigm was deliberate, as the primary aim was to holistically and contextually understand the implementation of problem-based Islamic Cultural History (SKI) learning in strengthening the character of *Rahmatan lil Alamin* as it organically unfolded within the authentic settings of two madrasahs, without any manipulation of variables (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The research was designed as a multiple case study, with MAN 1 Kota Bandung and MAN 2 Kota Bandung each constituting a distinct, bounded case. This design enabled the researcher to first perform an in-depth analysis of each case individually to appreciate its unique contextual dynamics, a process known as within-case analysis, before proceeding to a cross-case synthesis to identify recurring patterns and analytically significant points of divergence. (Stake, 2010; Yin, 2018). The selection of these two particular madrasahs was purposive, grounded in their status as leading public madrasahs under the Ministry of Religious Affairs that are actively implementing the *Kurikulum Merdeka* and innovative pedagogies

like Problem-Based Learning, yet exhibit contrasting institutional cultures and implementation strategies, thus offering a fertile ground for comparative insight.

The researcher's presence in the field was sustained and intensive throughout the data collection period, which spanned three academic semesters from the odd semester of 2024/2025 through the odd semester of 2025/2026. To ensure that contextual changes (e.g., curriculum adjustments, teacher or student cohort shifts) did not go unnoticed, the researcher documented all major contextual factors at the beginning of each semester and verified stability with school administrators. The researcher served as the key instrument in the qualitative inquiry, assuming the role of a moderate participant observer during classroom observations. This stance involved direct observation of the learning process and interaction with the school community while refraining from active participation in instruction. (Spradley, 2007). The subjects of this study, who served as primary informants, were selected purposively based on their direct and substantive involvement in the planning, implementation, and evaluation of SKI instruction. At each madrasah, the key informants included one SKI teacher, the vice principal of curriculum, and the madrasah principal.

The strengthening of religious moderation and the character of *Rahmatan lil Alamin* has become a national priority in Indonesian Islamic education. (Afsinatun et al., 2025) found that digital da'wah exposure significantly influences religious moderation among Islamic university students, suggesting that innovative pedagogical approaches – including PBL – can be similarly effective in madrasah contexts. This study responds to the call by Wajdi et al (2025) for reconceptualizing Islamic education strategies in Indonesia, particularly by integrating student-centered, problem-based methods into the teaching of Islamic Cultural History.

To capture the student perspective comprehensively, written semi-structured interviews were administered to 101 students across both sites, comprising 48 from MAN 1 and 53 from MAN 2. Students were drawn from grades XI and XII (ages 16–18), with a gender distribution of 55% female and 45% male. They were selected to represent variation in academic performance (high, medium, low) and in classroom engagement (active, passive), as identified by their teachers, ensuring that both positive and potentially negative experiences with PBL were captured. The written interview method was specifically chosen to mitigate potential communication anxiety among adolescent participants and to provide them with adequate time for thoughtful reflection. (Opdenakker, 2006). However, a limitation is acknowledged: written interviews typically yield less depth than oral interviews. Therefore, findings from student written responses are interpreted cautiously and triangulated with observational data, teacher interviews, and document analysis. Supporting data regarding the manifestation of character outside the classroom were also gathered from extracurricular supervisors and guidance counselors.

Data were collected through the simultaneous application of three primary techniques to facilitate triangulation and strengthen the evidential base of the findings (Denzin, 2017). First, in-depth, semi-structured face-to-face interviews were conducted with teachers and administrators using flexible interview guides that allowed the exploration of emergent themes while maintaining focus on the research questions (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Second, participatory observation was carried out directly in the classroom during SKI lessons. Using a structured observation sheet, the researcher systematically documented the teacher's facilitation strategies, the dynamics of student collaboration within groups, the types of questions posed, and observable behavioral indicators of *Rahmatan lil Alamin* values such as tolerance, active listening, and equitable participation. A total of 22 classroom sessions were observed (10 at MAN 1, 12 at MAN 2). Third, a comprehensive documentation study was undertaken, involving the collection

and analysis of relevant artifacts, including teachers' instructional plans (*Rencana Pelaksanaan Pembelajaran*), academic syllabi, institutional curriculum policies, student portfolios, assessment rubrics, reports on extracurricular and religious activities, and supervision records.

Handling of contradictory (disconfirming) data was a deliberate part of the analysis. Negative cases were defined as observed sessions in which PBL failed to engage students (e.g., prolonged silence, the teacher reverting to a lecture) or student reports indicating no change or negative experiences. Such cases were explicitly coded and included in the Results section alongside positive findings, rather than being excluded or downplayed.

The analytical procedure adhered to the interactive model proposed by Miles et al (2020), which views analysis as a cyclical process comprising data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. Data condensation was the initial and ongoing process of selecting, focusing, simplifying, and abstracting the raw data from interview transcripts, field notes, and collected documents. Coding proceeded in two stages: first, initial open coding was performed manually on all transcripts and field notes to identify emergent themes. Second, thematic analysis was conducted using NVivo 14 to organize codes into broader categories (e.g., "teacher values coaching", "time constraints", "free-riding", "student resistance"). To enhance reliability, a second coder (a research assistant) independently coded 20% of the data; inter-coder agreement reached 86%, with disagreements resolved through discussion. These condensed data were subsequently organized and displayed as detailed narrative descriptions, comparative matrices, and thematic tables to facilitate the identification of patterns and relationships within and across the two cases.

The final stream of analysis involved drawing preliminary conclusions and rigorously verifying them. This verification process was conducted throughout the study through member checks, in which the researcher's tentative interpretations were presented back to 8 key informants (4 from each madrasah) to confirm their accuracy and resonance, and through peer debriefing sessions with academic colleagues (three sessions) to challenge and refine the emerging analysis. In addition, the researcher maintained a reflexivity journal documenting decisions, assumptions, and potential biases throughout the study, thereby reducing the risk of researcher-driven interpretations.

The trustworthiness of the study's findings was rigorously assessed using the criteria established by Lincoln and Guba (1985). Credibility was enhanced through prolonged engagement within the madrasah environments (three semesters), persistent observation of classroom practices, and the aforementioned triangulation of sources and methods. To address transferability, the researcher provided a thick description of the research context, including the socio-cultural milieu of each madrasah, the specific characteristics of the informants, and the detailed nuances of the pedagogical practices observed; this rich detail equips readers to make informed judgments about the applicability of the findings to their own contexts. (Geertz, 1960). Dependability and confirmability were established by maintaining a meticulous audit trail, a comprehensive record that chronologically documents all research activities, methodological decisions, raw data, analytical notes, and draft interpretations. This transparent record provides a verifiable pathway from the initial data to the conclusions, thereby affirming that the findings are firmly grounded in empirical evidence rather than merely a product of researcher bias or conjecture.

Results and Discussion

Results

The findings are organized around the six research questions that guided this study. Data were derived from in-depth interviews with teachers, vice principals, and principals; participatory observations; document analysis; and written semi-structured interviews with 101 students (48 from MAN 1 and 53 from MAN 2). The results are presented comparatively to highlight both shared patterns and contextual differences between the two madrasahs.

Perspectives of the Madrasah Community

Across both madrasahs, teachers and administrators expressed generally positive views of PBL, though with caveats. The SKI teacher at MAN 1 explained, "PBL works well for some topics, like the leadership of Umar. But for memorizing dynasties, it's a waste of time. I sometimes go back to lecture." The vice principal at MAN 1 added that not all teachers are ready to facilitate PBL effectively.

At MAN 2, the SKI teacher similarly appreciated PBL but noted: "I had to re-teach some content directly because the group discussion went off track." The vice principal affirmed that PBL helps students think critically, yet acknowledged that "if not designed well, discussion can become noisy without direction."

Student perspectives (from written interviews with 101 students) were more varied. Overall, 68% reported enjoying PBL, 22% expressed some frustration, and 10% were neutral. A MAN 1 female student stated: "Sometimes the problem is too broad, and we don't know where to start." A MAN 2 male student commented: "I prefer the teacher explaining first. Group work can be noisy and unfair." One MAN 1 student candidly wrote: "I still think my opinion is right. I just pretend to listen." A contradictory observation was also recorded: at MAN 1, one session on the Abbasid dynasty failed – students sat silent for seven minutes, after which the teacher reverted to a lecture.

Design of PBL Lessons

Teachers at both schools designed open-ended, ill-structured problems, but with different entry points. At MAN 1, problems were case-based and deductive (e.g., comparing Umar bin Khattab's justice policies with contemporary governance challenges). At MAN 2, problems were thematic and inductive-deductive (e.g., starting with current issues of interfaith tolerance and linking them to the history of Andalusia). Lesson plans at MAN 2 explicitly listed the Rahmatan lil Alamin values as learning objectives, whereas at MAN 1, integration was more implicit. Both teachers provided scaffolding, such as guiding questions, simplified readings, worksheets, and video clips.

Classroom Implementation

Classroom observations revealed a shift toward student-centered inquiry, though the depth of implementation varied across classrooms. At MAN 1, the teacher initiated each cycle with a historical vignette, followed by group work with assigned roles (information seeker, report writer, presenter). Reflection was informal and teacher-led. At MAN 2, the teacher used multimedia (video, news articles) and structured worksheets that specified individual roles; reflection was systematic, with explicit guidance to connect historical lessons to contemporary conduct.

However, challenges were evident. Free-riding (some group members contributing little) was reported by 41% of students at MAN 1 and 33% at MAN 2. One group at MAN 2 presented incorrect historical facts, which the teacher corrected during the Q&A session. The failed session at MAN 1 (Abbasid dynasty) further illustrates that not all content suits PBL – the teacher later admitted: "I should have just lectured on the dynasties and saved PBL for the ethical debates."

Evaluation

Both madrasahs employed authentic assessment using rubrics, portfolios, and process weighting. At MAN 1, the teacher allocated 40% to process, 30% to product, and 30% to an individual test. At MAN 2, process and attitudes were weighted at 50%, product at 25%, and test at 25%. Students appreciated that active participation was valued. However, rubrics still need to be calibrated across classes. A MAN 2 student observed: "We know the rubric before we start. That's fair," while the vice principal noted that rubric standardization is still ongoing.

Impact on Rahmatan lil Alamin Character

The majority of students reported positive changes. Approximately 70% or more indicated increased tolerance for different opinions, more active listening, and better collaboration. A MAN 2 student wrote: "I used to think my opinion was the only right one. Now I listen more." A MAN 1 student added: "I learned that even in Islamic history, there were different views. That helped me be less judgmental."

However, not all students experienced positive change. 15% (15 out of 101) reported no change in empathy, and 8% felt PBL made them more frustrated with peers. One MAN 1 male student wrote: "I still think my opinion is right. I just pretend to listen so the teacher doesn't get angry." Transfer evidence included increased participation in social service programs (e.g., "SKI Peduli Sesama") and study circles at both schools. The vice principal at MAN 2 noted, "We see more respectful dialogue in student council meetings. The habits from PBL are spilling over."

Supporting and Inhibiting Factors

Supporting factors included strong principal support, teacher dedication, and, at MAN 2, superior facilities (a multimedia room, reliable internet) and flexible scheduling. However, inhibiting factors were significant in both sites. The most pervasive constraint was time. A MAN 2 teacher explained: "One full PBL cycle takes 4–5 sessions. The syllabus expects 2 sessions. That's the biggest problem." Other barriers included limited internet access (especially at MAN 1), outdated library resources, and passive students. Both teachers agreed that not all SKI topics fit PBL; ethically rich subjects (leadership, tolerance, justice) worked well, whereas purely factual content (dynastic lineages, dates) did not.

Discussion

The findings from MAN 1 and MAN 2 suggest that Problem-Based Learning (PBL) can support the development of Rahmatan lil Alamin character, but not uniformly or automatically. The failed session at MAN 1 (Abbasid dynasty) and the 15% of students reporting no change in empathy indicate that effectiveness depends on topic suitability, teacher facilitation skill, and group dynamics. Free-riding was reported by 41% of students at MAN 1 and 33% at MAN 2, and 22% of all students expressed frustration with PBL.

These findings align with Savenije et al., (2022) who found that teaching about Islam-related issues in history classrooms can be challenging due to students' diverse backgrounds and potential sensitivities. Their analytical framework identifies three dimensions of distance and proximity between teachers and students: interpersonal relationships, perceived identities, and sources of knowledge. This study extends their framework by showing that in the madrasah context, PBL can help teachers navigate these sensitivities – but only when problems are carefully selected, and reflection is structured. The failed session at MAN 1 occurred precisely when the teacher chose a purely factual topic (Abbasid dynasties) that lacked the ethical dilemmas present in topics such as the justice of Umar ibn al-Khattab or tolerance in Andalusia. Thus, topic suitability is a critical mediating variable.

A key difference between the two cases was the systematicity of reflection. At MAN 2, the teacher structured reflection explicitly (written reflection, group discussion, teacher

reinforcement), and students more consistently articulated connections between historical values and contemporary conduct. At MAN 1, reflection was informal and teacher-led, and value internalization appeared less deep. A MAN 2 student noted: "We know the rubric before we start. That's fair." The vice principal observed, "We see more respectful dialogue in student council meetings. The habits from PBL are spilling over."

This finding supports Mezirow's (1997) transformative learning theory and refines it. Lickona (2009) tripartite model of character education (moral knowing, moral feeling, moral action). Structured reflection serves as a mechanism that transforms moral knowing into moral feeling and moral action. Without such structured reflection, students may acquire knowledge about Rahmatan lil Alamin without internalizing it as a behavioral disposition.

The importance of learning Islamic history and civilization for human capital development and identity formation has been emphasized by Arshad et al (2012), who argued that knowledge of authentic history strengthens Muslim identity, pride, and moral character. This study extends their argument by showing that PBL, as a pedagogical method, makes Islamic history relevant and transformative – but only when reflection is deliberately designed. Furthermore, Saada (2023) proposed that Islamic religious education should foster spiritual global citizenship, which includes moral reasoning, contextualizing religious interpretations, and recognizing diversity within Islam. The structured reflection phase in PBL directly supports these goals by requiring students to connect historical lessons (ibrah) to contemporary ethical dilemmas such as intolerance, social injustice, and conflict resolution. The constructivist principle that learners actively construct knowledge through experience and reflection is central to PBL. Ilma et al. (2025) demonstrated that a constructivist approach in designing Islamic religious education learning significantly enhances students' active engagement and meaning-making. Their findings support the present study's observation that structured reflection, as practiced at MAN 2, enables students to construct their own understanding of historical values rather than passively receiving them.

Observed character changes cannot be attributed solely to PBL. Alternative explanations include: (1) the teachers' personal commitment (both were highly dedicated), (2) the already moderate Islamic culture of the two madrasahs, and (3) social desirability bias in student self-reports. One student candidly admitted: "I just pretend to listen so the teacher doesn't get angry."

From an Islamic feminist perspective, Shahir et al (2025) argue that systemic gender oppression in education is often rooted in patriarchal distortions of Islamic teachings rather than Islam itself. While their study focused on Afghan female academics under Taliban rule, the implication for this study is that empowering teachers as "values coaches" – who model justice, compassion, and tolerance – can counter such distortions by grounding education in authentic Islamic values that affirm the dignity and agency of all learners, regardless of gender or background.

Additionally, Aown (2011) found that non-Muslim teachers can learn about Islam through informal learning, including independent reading and interaction with local Muslim communities. In this study, both teachers were Muslim. However, the findings suggest that even non-Muslim teachers in madrasah or Islamic school contexts could benefit from similar informal learning strategies to reduce epistemological distance with their students.

This study offers two theoretical elaborations, presented as moderate-novelty contributions rather than universal claims. Contribution 1: Problem-Based Rahmatan lil Alamin Learning (PBRAL) Model PBRAL integrates three components: (a) historically grounded problems selected for their value richness (justice, tolerance, compassion), (b) a structured reflection phase that explicitly links ibrah (lessons from history) to

contemporary ethical action, and (c) the teacher as a “values coach” who models and reinforces values throughout the inquiry cycle. Unlike generic PBL, which often focuses on cognitive outcomes, PBRAL makes value internalization an explicit design feature.

TPACK (Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge) was developed by (Mishra & Koehler, 2006). This study proposes an extension – TPACKV – where “V” stands for Values. In madrasah education, technology, pedagogy, content, and values are inseparable. The “V” dimension informs content selection (which historical episodes are richest in values?), pedagogical choices (how can discussion foreground ethical dilemmas?), and technology use (how can digital tools foster empathy or connect history to current events?).

The integration of Islamic principles into evaluation frameworks has also been proposed in other domains. Haniffah et al (2023) developed a performance measurement system based on Islamic principles that expands Sharia-compliant criteria to include qualitative assessments of shareholders, board conduct, employee relations, community issues, and environmental protection. Similarly, the TPACKV framework extends the logic of values-based assessment to teacher knowledge, arguing that effective madrasah teachers must integrate technology, pedagogy, content, and values into their instructional design.

The findings suggest several practical implications. First, teacher professional development should move beyond one-day workshops on PBL syntax. Sustained, practice-based training is needed including lesson study, peer coaching, and reflective practice that specifically addresses how to facilitate values-centered inquiry and structured reflection. Ashaari et al (2012) Critiqued Islamic studies methodology for failing to respond to contemporary needs and called for integrating critical thinking and problem-solving skills. PBL offers one such alternative, moving beyond traditional lecture-based instruction toward active, student-centered learning.

Second, curriculum designers should identify SKI topics that are most amenable to PBL (e.g., leadership, interfaith relations, justice, conflict resolution) and use more efficient methods for purely factual content. A MAN 1 teacher stated: “PBL works well for some topics, like the leadership of Umar. But for memorizing dynasties, it’s a waste of time.”

Third, school leaders should provide flexible scheduling and adequate digital resources. A MAN 2 teacher explained: “One full PBL cycle takes 4-5 sessions. The syllabus expects 2 sessions. That’s the biggest problem.” Without structural adjustments – such as block scheduling or interdisciplinary projects even well-designed PBL will be compromised.

In Indonesia, state Islamic universities have undergone a significant transformation over the past two decades, shifting from normative-theological approaches to critical, historical, and contextual methods in Islamic studies. (Muthohirin, 2025). This study aligns with that broader intellectual revitalization. Moreover, the integrative research approach adopted here – combining insider (subjective) and outsider (objective) perspectives – reflects what Irham (2026) calls an “intersubjective perspective” in Islamic studies, which bridges the dichotomy between normative and empirical inquiry. While this study employs qualitative methods, it responds to recent calls for a balanced quantitative-qualitative paradigm in Islamic studies. (Aminuddin, 2025). Future research could quantify the impacts of PBL on character outcomes while maintaining the qualitative depth achieved here.

Finally, the orientation of integrated Islamic schools towards customer satisfaction, strong inter-functional coordination, and technological enablement (Shaikh & Kazmi, 2021) may offer insights for scaling up PBL in other madrasah contexts. Such schools

already prioritize student engagement and institutional responsiveness both essential for successful PBL implementation.

This study has several limitations. Its qualitative design does not allow for causal claims; findings are contextual and transferable only through thick description. (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). The three-semester data collection period, while intensive, may not capture long-term character development. Written student interviews, though practical for adolescents, provided less depth than oral interviews. The research was conducted in only two madrasahs in Bandung, both urban leading schools; findings may not be generalizable to rural madrasahs, private Islamic schools, or pesantren.

The influence of school culture on character development is well documented. Rosadi et al (2025) found that a strong school culture combined with the habituation of religious activities – mediated by student discipline significantly contributes to both religious and national character. This aligns with the present study's finding that at MAN 2, where school culture was more explicitly supportive of innovation, religious values, and structured reflection, students showed deeper internalization of *Rahmatan lil Alamin* values compared to MAN 1.

Similarly, Wahyuni et al., (2025) demonstrated that the implementation of religious culture effectively instills Islamic values in students, reinforcing the importance of a conducive school environment for character formation. The habituation of religious activities (e.g., daily prayers, study circles, and social service programs such as “SKI Peduli Sesama”) at both madrasahs but more systematically at MAN 2 provided a cultural backbone that amplified the effects of PBL.

Additionally, Rosadi et al (2023) showed that innovative learning media, such as educational videos, can increase students' self-efficacy in PAI subjects. At MAN 2, the teacher's use of video clips and news articles as cognitive stimuli enhanced students' engagement and confidence in analysing historical problems. This suggests that technological scaffolding, when integrated with values-centered PBL, can reduce the perceived distance between teachers and students – a factor that Savenije, Wansink and Logtenberg (2022) identified as critical for teaching Islam-related issues.

Teacher performance is a critical factor in the success of any pedagogical innovation, including PBL. Murtado & Kurniawan (2025) demonstrated that participatory supervision, which involves teachers in collaborative reflection and feedback, significantly enhances teacher performance in Indonesian Islamic schools. This aligns with the present study's finding that at MAN 2, where the teacher received more structured support and had greater autonomy to innovate, the implementation of PBL was more systematic and yielded deeper character internalization compared to MAN 1. Sustained, participatory professional development may therefore be a key enabling condition for effective PBL implementation.

Future research should employ longitudinal designs to assess whether character gains are sustained over time. Mixed-methods approaches could quantify impacts while preserving qualitative depth. Comparative studies across different types of Islamic educational institutions (e.g., pesantren, private madrasahs, rural schools) would test the transferability of the PBRAL model and TPACKV framework. The development and validation of standardized instruments for measuring *Rahmatan lil Alamin* character – including self-report, peer report, and behavioral observation – is a priority. Finally, experimental or quasi-experimental designs could compare PBL with other pedagogies (e.g., direct instruction, project-based learning) to establish causal relationships more rigorously.

Conclusion

This study suggests that the systematic implementation of Problem-Based Learning in Islamic Cultural History instruction can support the strengthening of the Rahmatan lil Alamin character in madrasah students, as indicated by the comparative case study at MAN 1 and MAN 2 in Kota Bandung. The findings indicate that when historical content is reframed as authentic, value-laden problems requiring collaborative inquiry and structured reflection, many students show observable growth in tolerance, empathy, critical thinking, and a more nuanced, moderate religious identity. However, not all students experienced positive change: 22% expressed frustration with PBL, 15% reported no change in empathy, and free-riding remained a persistent challenge in both schools. One observed session at MAN 1 failed, and teachers cited time constraints as the most pervasive inhibiting factor.

This research reinforces prior findings by Fadli (2020). It extends them by explicating a crucial mediating mechanism: the depth of character internalization appears to be influenced by the intentionality and systematicity of the teacher's role as a "values coach" who designs, scaffolds, and facilitates discourse through the explicit lens of Rahmatan lil Alamin principles. The study offers two moderate-novelty contributions to the theoretical literature: (1) an integrated Problem-Based Rahmatan lil Alamin Learning (PBRAL) model, and (2) an extension of the TPACK framework into TPACKV, wherein the dimension of values is positioned as a foundational component permeating teacher knowledge. Both contributions are presented as context-specific elaborations for madrasah education, not as universal claims.

The practical implication of these findings is a mandate for madrasah policy and teacher education to invest in sustained, practice-based professional development that cultivates this specific pedagogical capacity. Future research should employ longitudinal designs to assess the durability of character gains, develop and validate standardized instruments for measuring Rahmatan lil Alamin character, and investigate the transferability of this integrated model across diverse Islamic educational contexts and subject areas.

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