



Transforming Islamic Moral Education: Applying Problem-Based Learning to Address Youth Socioreligious Issues

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ABSTRACT

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This study examines how Problem-Based Learning (PBL) in Islamic Religious Education (IRE) addresses adolescents' socioreligious challenges. Indonesian Muslim students navigate digital misconduct, peer problems, and cultural tensions requiring moral judgment. Conventional text-centered instruction may provide normative knowledge without developing ethical reasoning, social responsibility, or religious resilience. A qualitative case study was conducted at a pesantren-based high school in East Java, Indonesia. Data were collected through interviews, classroom observations, focus groups, and document analysis, thematically analyzed through condensation, display, and verification. First, PBL shifted students from memorizing religious texts toward contextual digital ethical reasoning. Students applied *tabayyun* and responsible speech to hoaxes, cyberbullying, online gambling, and social-media behavior. Second, PBL broadened piety from ritual observance toward empathy, inclusion, peer support, and environmental responsibility. Students interpreted *ukhuwah Islamiyah* as an obligation for care. Third, PBL created a safe space for discussing identity, popular culture, and relationships. Facilitated dialogue helped students resolve religious dissonance without abandoning Islamic principles. The study contributes a contextual-dialogic model integrating ethical reasoning, social piety, and religious resilience. Practically, it supports case-based curricula, facilitative teacher development, and student support.

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INTRODUCTION

Adolescents now construct moral identities where religious traditions, peer relations, and digital platforms continuously intersect. This condition matters beyond schools because online conduct can affect personal dignity,

family relationships, community trust, and social cohesion. Digital citizenship research demonstrates that responsible participation involves ethical judgment, critical engagement, and respect for others, rather than technical competence alone (Agus et al., 2025; Filk, 2025). Studies of adolescent online incivility further show that young people evaluate cyberbullying through combinations of rules, consequences, and character considerations (Luo et al., 2023; Pyżalski et al., 2022). Consequently, societies require diverse educational approaches that prepare adolescents not merely to recognize prohibited behavior, but to interpret ambiguous situations, anticipate harm, and justify responsible action. Religious education is strategically positioned to meet this need when its normative resources are connected to moral dilemmas through which adolescents negotiate belonging, authority, and accountability in contemporary life.

The social importance of this educational task extends beyond digital ethics. Adolescence is a formative period in which religious commitment, prosocial values, identity, and coping practices can shape relationships and patterns of participation. Religiosity may support prosocial behavior when religious commitments are mediated through kindness and concern for others (Abdul Kadir, 2024; Tsang et al., 2021), while broader evidence indicates that religious and spiritual processes influence adolescent development through relational, meaning-making, and contextual pathways (King et al., 2022). Nevertheless, religious learning limited to personal ritual compliance may not automatically generate empathy, communal responsibility, or resilience when students encounter competing cultural values. Islamic Religious Education must therefore help learners connect worship with social care, interpret external influences without passive imitation or rigid rejection, and discuss uncertainty without shame. Education integrating these dimensions contributes to healthier peer communities, responsible citizenship, and socially grounded religious commitment.

The problem underlying this study is the disjunction between the normative aims of Islamic Religious Education and the socioreligious problems adolescents experience in everyday life. Conventional instruction may privilege memorization of Qur'anic verses, hadith, doctrinal classifications, and predetermined moral answers. However, students must navigate misinformation, cyberbullying, online gambling, mental-health concerns, peer exclusion, popular culture, and intimate relationships. Research on digital religion in Indonesian educational settings shows that schools cannot simply isolate religious youth from digital culture; they must help students negotiate its moral possibilities and risks (Hefner, 2022; Larson, 2024). When instruction emphasizes textual reproduction without contextual inquiry, students may know that an action is forbidden yet remain unable to analyze stakeholders,

consequences, competing values, or appropriate interventions. This pedagogical gap weakens the practical relevance of religious knowledge and leaves adolescent questions vulnerable to peers, influencers, and unreliable online sources.

Preliminary field indications at the selected pesantren-based high school reflected this problem. Grade 11 students produced brief halal–haram judgments when responding to digital cases, but initially offered limited explanation of why actions caused harm or how Islamic principles should guide decisions effectively. Religious piety was described through prayer, fasting, Qur’anic recitation, and obedience, with less attention to isolated classmates, bullying, emotional distress, or shared environmental responsibility. Students also appeared hesitant to raise questions concerning popular culture, identity, and relationships with the opposite sex because they anticipated embarrassment or moral labeling. School personnel recognized that online disputes could spill over into classroom and dormitory relationships, while interpersonal tensions required responses that extended beyond educational punishment. These conditions indicated a need for pedagogy that could make religious texts contextually operative, convert individual commitment into social responsibility, and establish guided dialogue around sensitive socioreligious concerns.

Existing scholarship provides a basis for considering Problem-Based Learning as such a pedagogy. PBL organizes learning around authentic, ill-structured problems that activate prior knowledge, stimulate collaborative inquiry, encourage self-directed investigation, and support knowledge transfer (Amoa-Danquah & Carbonneau, 2025; Ertmer & Glazewski, 2024). Its quality depends on problem design, facilitation, group interaction, and assessment alignment rather than the mere presentation of topical cases (Olewnik et al., 2023). In Islamic education, Amirudin et al. (2025) demonstrate that PBL can contextualize religious learning within an Indonesian pesantren, while other IRE studies have largely emphasized conceptual understanding, classroom achievement, or critical-thinking improvement. Digital-citizenship scholarship, meanwhile, explains ethical online participation and adolescent moral decision-making (Choi & Park, 2023; Harrison & Polizzi, 2022), but rarely examines how Qur’anic and hadith-based principles become procedures for evaluating information, communicative harm, and responsibility. Thus, PBL and digital-ethics literatures remain insufficiently integrated within secondary Islamic education.

A body of literature illuminates social piety and dialogic safety but leaves a gap. Research associates adolescent religiosity with prosocial values and behavior (Mohd Yusoff et al., 2022) and shows that issue-centered learning can support moral sensitivity and reflection (Khilji, 2022). Dialogic teaching uses

classroom talk to advance thinking and problem-solving (Gillies, 2023), whereas psychological safety enables learners to take interpersonal risks without humiliation (Hardie et al., 2022). Indonesian Islamic education scholarship advocates openness, plural engagement, and firm religious conviction (Setiawan et al., 2026), yet these strands are seldom examined as interconnected outcomes of one instructional process. Prior studies treat critical reasoning, prosociality, classroom dialogue, or religious adaptation separately. They consequently provide limited explanation of how a pesantren-based IRE classroom can preserve Islamic commitments while encouraging students to disclose uncertainty, interpret cultural tension, develop empathy, and formulate responsible action.

The state of the art advanced by this study is a contextual-dialogic PBL model linking three transformations within one case: textual memorization into digital ethical reasoning, individual piety into social piety, and concealed uncertainty into religious resilience. This integration constitutes the study's novelty. Rather than measuring PBL through achievement or generic critical-thinking outcomes, the research examines how Islamic texts become analytical resources, how *Ukhuwah Islamiyah* becomes communal responsibility, and how psychologically safe dialogue enables principled engagement with sensitive issues. The model moves beyond the assumption that openness and religious normativity are incompatible. It proposes that students can question, compare, and reason while remaining guided by Qur'anic, hadith-based, and pesantren values. Resolving this issue is important because Islamic schools require pedagogies that neither shield adolescents unrealistically from contemporary culture nor leave them to negotiate its moral complexity without credible educational guidance.

Accordingly, this study asks how PBL is implemented in Grade 11 Islamic Religious Education and how it contributes to students' digital ethical reasoning, social piety, and religious resilience when confronting socioreligious issues. The guiding argument is that authentic problems alone are insufficient; transformative outcomes arise when contextual cases are combined with collaborative investigation, teacher facilitation, psychological safety, and disciplined interpretation of Islamic sources. Under these conditions, students are expected to move from citing rules to evaluating consequences, from affirming brotherhood to designing collective care, and from hiding moral confusion to constructing reasoned religious positions. Theoretically, the study integrates constructivist PBL, moral reasoning, prosocial development, dialogic pedagogy, and religious resilience in one explanatory sequence. Practically, it offers an evidence-based framework for curriculum design, teacher development, student-affairs coordination, and assessment in pesantren-based

schools seeking consequential, intellectually credible, and responsive Islamic Religious Education.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employed a qualitative case study design to investigate the implementation of Problem-Based Learning (PBL) in Islamic Religious Education (IRE) and its contribution to addressing socioreligious issues among adolescents. This design was selected because it enables an in-depth examination of a contemporary educational phenomenon within its real-life context, particularly when the boundaries between the phenomenon and its contextual conditions are not clearly defined (Muzari et al., 2022). It was also appropriate for exploring participants’ experiences, institutional practices, instructional processes, and pedagogical transformations within a specific Islamic educational setting (Miller et al., 2023). The case was bounded by the implementation of PBL in Grade 11 IRE classes, the participants directly involved in the instructional process, the institutional context, and the four months of data collection.

The study was conducted at an Islamic boarding school-based senior high school (SMA Pesantren) in East Java, Indonesia, whose name was pseudonymized to protect institutional confidentiality. The site was selected purposively because it integrates the Indonesian national secondary school curriculum with Islamic boarding school traditions, religious values, moral discipline, and communal life, thereby providing a relevant context for examining PBL-based IRE instruction. Grade 11 was selected because students at this developmental stage frequently encounter complex questions related to religious identity, digital ethics, peer relationships, morality, and social responsibility. Participants were recruited through purposive sampling based on their direct involvement in institutional leadership, curriculum planning, operational support, classroom teaching, or interaction with Grade 11 students. The study involved 13 institutional key informants and eight Grade 11 students, resulting in a total of 21 participants, all of whom were assigned structural codes to maintain anonymity.

Table 1. Categorization and Coding of Research Informants

Category	Informant Role / Position	Participant Code	Strategic Focus in Data Collection
Institutional Leadership	School Principal	P-1	Institutional policy, vision, and structural support for PBL
Institutional Leadership	Vice Principal of Curriculum	VP-C	Curriculum alignment, lesson planning, and pedagogical standards
Institutional Leadership	Vice Principal of Student Affairs	VP-SA	Mapping adolescent socioreligious behavior and

			student discipline
Institutional Leadership	Vice Principal of Public Relations	VP-PR	Community engagement, external influences, and school image
Operational and Financial Support	School Treasurer	ST-1	Resource allocation and funding for instructional media
Operational and Financial Support	Operational Administrator	OA-1	School demographic data, documentation, and operational records
Instructional Core	Grade 11 Homeroom Teacher	HT-11	Daily observation of Grade 11 student dynamics and moral development
Instructional Core	Grade 12 Homeroom Teacher	HT-12	Comparative insights into student maturity across grade levels
Instructional Core	Grade 10 Homeroom Teacher	HT-10	Baseline observation of incoming students' moral reasoning
Instructional Core	Senior Islamic Education Teacher 1	IT-1	PBL syntax implementation and contextualization of <i>fiqh</i> and <i>Akhlaq</i>
Instructional Core	Senior Islamic Education Teacher 2	IT-2	Management of classroom discussions on socioreligious issues
Instructional Core	Islamic Education Teacher 3	IT-3	Integration of classical Islamic texts (<i>turath</i>) into PBL
Instructional Core	Subject Teacher	IT-4	Cross-disciplinary integration of ethical values
Primary Target	Grade 11 Students	FGD-S1–FGD-S8	Reflections on PBL experiences and moral reasoning

Data were collected over four months through semi-structured interviews, participatory classroom observations, focus group discussions, and document analysis to facilitate methodological triangulation (Natow, 2020). Interviews were conducted with school leaders, administrative staff, Islamic Education teachers, and homeroom teachers to explore the challenges of teaching IRE, institutional support for PBL, instructional planning, and perceived changes in student behavior. Classroom observations were undertaken during Grade 11 IRE lessons to examine teacher facilitation, student engagement, critical questioning, collaborative problem-solving, use of Islamic sources, and moral reasoning in discussions of digital ethics, social media behavior, peer relationships, and other socioreligious issues. A focus group discussion involving eight Grade 11 students was used to explore their learning experiences, cognitive shifts, and perceptions of PBL. In contrast, syllabi, lesson plans, teaching modules, student reflection worksheets, institutional records, and behavioral logs were analyzed to corroborate the interview and observational findings.

Data were analyzed using the interactive qualitative analysis framework proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña in (Nasir & Sukmawati, 2023), consisting of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. During data condensation, interview and focus group recordings were transcribed, observation notes and documents were organized, and the data were coded and categorized into themes such as pedagogical transformation, PBL implementation, socioreligious problem identification, critical ethical reasoning, integration of Islamic sources, institutional support, and moral transformation. The categorized data were then displayed in thematic matrices, narrative summaries, and thematic networks to compare patterns across participant groups and data sources. Conclusions were developed iteratively and continuously verified through cross-source comparison, member checking, peer debriefing, and repeated examination of transcripts, field notes, focus group data, and institutional documents.

The trustworthiness of the study was established using Lincoln and Guba's criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Ahmed, 2024). Credibility was enhanced through prolonged engagement, source triangulation involving leaders, staff, teachers, homeroom teachers, and students, as well as methodological triangulation across interviews, observations, focus group discussions, and document analysis. Member checking was conducted with VP-C, IT-1, and HT-11 to verify the accuracy of interview summaries and preliminary interpretations. Peer debriefing was also used to assess the coherence of the coding and thematic analysis. Transferability was supported through detailed descriptions of the institutional setting, participant roles, and instructional context; dependability was maintained through systematic documentation of research procedures and analytical decisions; and confirmability was ensured by grounding interpretations in multiple forms of evidence and using reflexive notes to minimize researcher bias. Ethical principles were upheld through informed consent, voluntary participation, pseudonymization of the institution, and the use of participant codes in all research records and reports.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

From Textual Memorization to Digital Ethical Reasoning

The transition from textual memorization to digital ethical reasoning was operationally identified as a change in how Grade 11 students used Islamic knowledge when responding to contemporary digital dilemmas. Rather than merely reproducing Qur'anic verses, hadith, or categorical judgments concerning what was permissible and prohibited, students increasingly demonstrated the ability to identify causes, affected parties, potential consequences, and appropriate ethical responses. This transformation was particularly evident in

discussions of misinformation, online gambling, cyberbullying, and irresponsible social-media interaction. The finding therefore does not indicate the abandonment of textual religious knowledge; instead, it reflects a change in its pedagogical function, from an object of memorization into an interpretive framework for contextual moral reasoning.

Interviews with Islamic Education teachers, Grade 11 students, the Vice Principal for Curriculum, and the Vice Principal for Student Affairs consistently indicated that PBL encouraged students to move beyond short normative answers. Teachers observed that students initially relied on memorized evidence and categorical judgments, but gradually began to evaluate motives, consequences, and personal responsibility. Students reported that IRE became more relevant when Islamic principles were connected to their digital experiences. At the same time, institutional informants confirmed that digital misconduct required educational intervention rather than disciplinary sanctions alone.

Table 2. Interview Evidence on the Development of Digital Ethical Reasoning

Informant Position	Interview Excerpt	Indicator
Islamic Education Teacher, IT-1	"At the beginning, students could state that spreading false information was sinful, but they could not yet explain who would be harmed or what responsibility they had before forwarding it."	Initial reliance on textual recall and normative judgment
Islamic Education Teacher, IT-2	"When the cyberbullying case was discussed, students began to consider the victim's perspective and the long-term consequences of online humiliation."	Perspective-taking and consequence-based reasoning
Islamic Education Teacher, IT-3	"Students understood that <i>tabayyun</i> on social media meant checking the source, delaying reactions, and considering whether sharing information could damage another person."	Contextualization of Islamic principles
Islamic Education Teacher, IT-4	"In the online-gambling case, students connected addiction and family harm with Islamic principles concerning wealth, self-control, and responsibility."	Integration of causal analysis and Islamic ethics
Grade 11 Student, FGD-S2	"When we discussed social media and hoaxes, I realized that IRE was related to what we experience every day."	Perceived contextual relevance of IRE
Grade 11 Student, FGD-S4	"I used to forward messages because many others had shared them, but now I try to check the source and consider the consequences."	Reflective change in digital decision-making
Grade 11 Student, FGD-S6	"I learned that guarding one's speech also applies to comments, messages, and other online communication."	Transfer of religious principles to digital conduct
Vice Principal	"Students should not only memorize religious	Curricular support for

for Curriculum, VP-C	content; they must be able to apply Islamic values to emerging social and digital problems."	contextual reasoning
Vice Principal for Student Affairs, VP-SA	"Some conflicts began in online groups and later affected classroom or dormitory relationships, so they needed an educational response rather than sanctions alone."	Institutional recognition of digital misconduct

Table 2 demonstrates convergence among instructional, experiential, curricular, and behavioral evidence. Teachers described a progression from textual recall toward contextual moral reasoning, whereas students confirmed that this process influenced how they interpreted and responded to digital behavior. VP-C positioned the transition within the school's curricular orientation, while VP-SA connected classroom intervention with actual problems occurring in students' online and offline relationships. The data indicate that PBL did not displace Islamic texts from the learning process. Instead, Qur'anic and hadith-based principles became criteria for evaluating information reliability, communicative harm, individual responsibility, and the ethical consequences of digital participation. The strongest evidence of change was therefore not students' ability to quote additional religious texts, but their capacity to use those texts in making reasoned decisions.

Classroom observations reinforced the interview findings. At the beginning of several discussions, students tended to identify a behavior as sinful or prohibited without elaborating on its social implications. However, when teachers introduced probing questions such as who would be harmed, why misinformation spreads, what responsibility belongs to the sender and recipient, and how *tabayyun* should be practiced online students began to formulate more differentiated arguments. They compared alternative actions, anticipated possible consequences, and used Islamic values to justify their decisions. Lesson plans, teaching modules, and student reflection sheets similarly required students to identify stakeholders, analyze harm, select relevant Islamic principles, and formulate responsible responses. These observations show that ethical reasoning developed through guided inquiry, peer discussion, and reflective application rather than through memorization alone.

PBL helped students move from knowing religious rules to reasoning with those rules. The principle of *tabayyun*, for example, was no longer treated only as a textual command to verify information; it was translated into checking sources, delaying reactions, avoiding reputational harm, and accepting responsibility for the consequences of sharing digital content. Similarly, the Islamic obligation to guard one's speech was extended to comments, captions, messages, and other forms of online expression. The central transformation was therefore a change from passive textual obedience to critical Islamic ethical reasoning.

From Individual Piety to Social Piety

The transition from individual piety to social piety was operationally defined as a change in students' understanding of religious commitment from a predominantly personal and ritual orientation toward a socially enacted form of responsibility. Individual piety referred to prayer, fasting, Qur'anic recitation, personal discipline, and compliance with religious obligations. In contrast, social piety referred to empathy, solidarity, inclusion, environmental responsibility, and active concern for the welfare of others. In the field, this transition was evident in students' responses to mental-health difficulties, bullying, peer exclusion, interpersonal conflict, and environmental neglect. The development of social piety was particularly associated with the reinterpretation of *Ukhuwah Islamiyah* as an obligation to recognize and respond to the vulnerability of others.

Interviews with Islamic Education teachers, Grade 11 students, the Grade 11 homeroom teacher, and the Vice Principal for Student Affairs indicated that PBL broadened students' understanding of piety. Teachers reported that students initially associated religiosity primarily with personal worship, but problem-based discussions encouraged them to examine the social consequences of indifference, exclusion, and passive bystanding. Students described greater sensitivity toward peers experiencing emotional or social difficulties, while HT-11 and VP-SA provided observational and institutional confirmation of changes in class cohesion and conflict management.

Table 3. Interview Evidence on the Development of Social Piety

Informant Position	Interview Excerpt	Indicator
Islamic Education Teacher, IT-1	"Most students initially defined piety through prayer, fasting, Qur'anic recitation, and obedience, while very few mentioned helping distressed peers or preventing bullying."	Initial emphasis on individual ritual piety
Islamic Education Teacher, IT-2	"In the bullying case, students began to realize that those who watched, laughed, or remained silent also had a social responsibility."	Recognition of bystander responsibility
Islamic Education Teacher, IT-3	"Students learned that <i>Ukhuwah Islamiyah</i> means noticing when a friend becomes withdrawn, approaching the person respectfully, and seeking help when necessary."	Practical enactment of Islamic brotherhood
Islamic Education Teacher, IT-4	"Some groups proposed peer-support activities, kindness campaigns, confidential reporting, and regular discussions with the homeroom teacher."	Solution-oriented social action
Grade 11 Student, FGD-S1	"After discussing mental health, I understood that a quiet student might be facing a problem and may need someone to approach them first."	Development of empathy
Grade 11 Student, FGD-S3	"I realized that <i>ukhuwah</i> is not only about being close to our own friends but also about	Increased social inclusion

	including students outside our group.”	
Grade 11 Student, FGD-S5	“We proposed a small peer-support activity so that students could first speak with trusted classmates before seeking help from a teacher.”	Peer-support initiative
Grade 11 Student, FGD-S7	“I began to see keeping the school clean as part of our religious responsibility, not only as a school rule.”	Environmental social responsibility
Grade 11 Homeroom Teacher, HT-11	“Students became more attentive to classmates who were often alone and more willing to mix friendship groups during class activities.”	Behavioral change beyond IRE lessons
Vice Principal for Student Affairs, VP-SA	“Students became more able to identify the impact of conflict on others and propose reconciliation instead of waiting only for punishment.”	Institutional validation of prosocial development

Table 3 indicates that the development of social piety occurred through an interaction between classroom reasoning and lived communal experience. Teachers provided evidence of changes in students’ conceptual understanding and their ability to formulate practical responses. In contrast, students articulated changes in empathy, inclusion, and collective responsibility. HT-11’s account is particularly significant because it reflects behavior beyond formal IRE instruction, including daily peer interaction and class cohesion. VP-SA further connected these developments with the management of student conflict and disciplinary issues. The convergence of these perspectives suggests that PBL was most influential when Islamic concepts were applied to recognizable social problems and followed by opportunities to design feasible collective action.

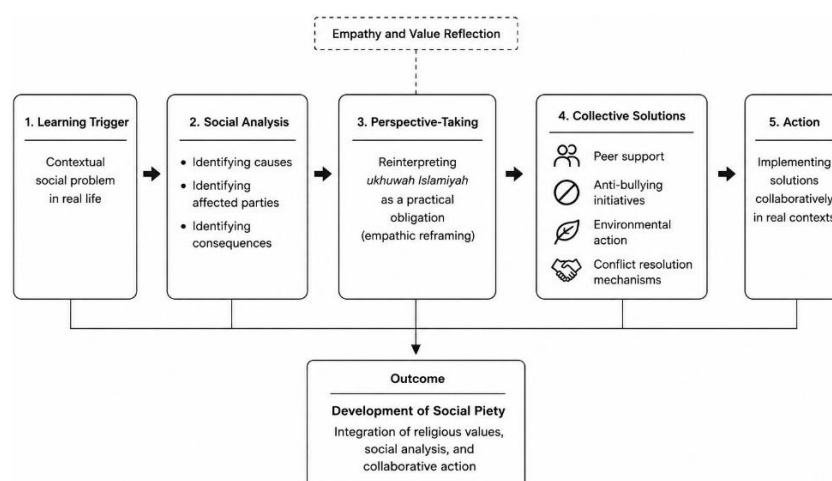


Figure 1. Analytical Pathway of PBL in Developing Social Piety

Figure 1 illustrates the analytical pathway through which PBL facilitated the movement from individual to social piety. A contextual social issue first functioned as the learning trigger, after which students identified its causes,

stakeholders, and consequences. Perspective-taking then enabled students to reinterpret *Ukhuwah Islamiyah* as a practical responsibility rather than a purely doctrinal concept. This empathic reframing informed the formulation of collective solutions, including peer support, anti-bullying initiatives, environmental action, and conflict-resolution mechanisms. Social piety consequently emerged through the integration of religious values, social analysis, and collaborative action.

Classroom observations supported the interview findings. During group discussions, students moved from general statements such as “Muslims must help one another” toward more specific proposals identifying who required support, what assistance was appropriate, and which individuals or institutional units should be involved. In discussions of bullying and mental health, students differentiated between perpetrators, victims, passive witnesses, peers, teachers, and student-support structures. Outside the classroom, some students demonstrated greater willingness to approach isolated classmates, create more inclusive working groups, and resolve misunderstandings before they developed into open conflict. Although the observed changes were not uniform among all students, they showed that moral learning became socially visible when students were required to translate Islamic principles into feasible communal responses.

PBL expanded students’ understanding of what it meant to be religiously observant. Personal worship continued to be regarded as fundamental, but religious commitment increasingly included attentiveness to the emotional, social, and environmental conditions of the community. Empathy, solidarity, inclusion, and collective problem-solving became visible expressions of *Akhlaq*. Social piety was therefore demonstrated not only through ritual observance or verbal statements of concern, but through the willingness to recognize another person’s difficulty, understand its context, and participate in an appropriate response.

PBL as a Safe Space for Dialogue on Taboo and Sensitive Issues

PBL as a safe space was operationally defined as a classroom condition in which students could articulate uncertainty, disagreement, or moral confusion concerning sensitive adolescent issues without anticipating ridicule, immediate condemnation, or punitive judgment. The issues included identity formation, K-pop and Western popular culture, relationships with the opposite sex, dating, and tensions between peer culture and Islamic expectations. Psychological safety did not imply the suspension of religious principles. Rather, it referred to a dialogic environment in which students’ questions were acknowledged, examined, and guided toward a reasoned Islamic position. Religious resilience was identified when students demonstrated the ability to engage external

influences without becoming uncritically permissive, defensive, or extreme.

Interviews with Grade 11 students, Islamic Education teachers, the school principal, and the Vice Principal for Public Relations indicated that PBL created a more open and psychologically safe learning environment. Students reported greater willingness to discuss questions they had previously concealed because of fear of judgment. Teachers explained that they deliberately delayed immediate correction, used probing questions, and guided students to compare their assumptions with Islamic sources. Institutional leaders confirmed that critical dialogue was considered compatible with pesantren values, provided that it remained respectful, evidence-based, and ethically guided.

Table 4. Interview Evidence on PBL as a Dialogic Safe Space

Informant Position	Interview Excerpt	Indicator
Grade 11 Student, FGD-S1	"The teacher first asked us to explain why we were confused, so I felt safer to speak."	Psychological safety
Grade 11 Student, FGD-S2	"We were not immediately told that everything in K-pop or Western culture was bad; we were asked to examine its messages and influences more carefully."	Critical engagement with popular culture
Grade 11 Student, FGD-S4	"The teacher did not laugh at our questions or immediately label us, even when our opinion was not correct."	Judgment-free classroom climate
Grade 11 Student, FGD-S6	"I now see IRE as a place where we can ask why something is prohibited and how to deal with it realistically."	Reframing of the IRE classroom
Grade 11 Student, FGD-S8	"We learned to identify which aspects of a trend were compatible with Islam and which should be avoided."	Selective cultural engagement
Islamic Education Teacher, IT-1	"When a student raises a sensitive question, I try not to respond with an immediate judgment."	Facilitative teaching
Islamic Education Teacher, IT-2	"Students may challenge an idea, but they may not insult the person presenting it."	Dialogic classroom norms
Islamic Education Teacher, IT-3	"We explain the context so that students understand the reasoning and wisdom behind Islamic guidance."	Contextual mediation of religious sources
Islamic Education Teacher, IT-4	"Correction still occurs, but students should not feel that asking a question is shameful."	Management of cognitive dissonance
School Principal, P-1	"Dialogue must remain open, respectful, and academically guided within clear Islamic principles."	Institutional support and normative boundaries
Vice Principal for Public Relations, VP-PR	"The school must help students interpret external cultural influences rather than respond only through prohibition."	Institutional response to sociocultural influence

Table 4 shows that psychological safety was jointly produced by students, teachers, and institutional leaders. Student accounts provide evidence of emotional security and greater willingness to disclose uncertainty, whereas teacher accounts reveal the pedagogical mechanisms that sustained such openness. These mechanisms included delayed judgment, active listening, respectful correction, comparative reasoning, and contextual interpretation of Islamic sources. P-1 and VP-PR demonstrate that the dialogic approach was institutionally supported and viewed as a means of protecting students from unreliable external sources. The data therefore indicate that openness and normative guidance were not treated as opposing principles. Instead, they operated together to create a learning environment in which students could process sensitive issues without abandoning Islamic ethical boundaries.

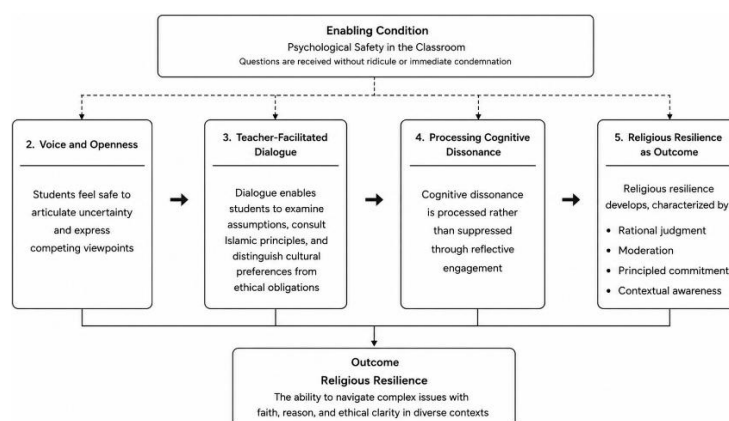


Figure 2. Psychological Safety as an Enabling Condition for Religious Resilience

Figure 2 presents psychological safety as an enabling condition for religious resilience. Sensitive issues first entered the classroom as authentic problems recognized by students. When questions were received without ridicule or immediate condemnation, students became more willing to articulate uncertainty and competing viewpoints. Teacher-facilitated dialogue then enabled them to examine assumptions, consult Islamic principles, and distinguish cultural preferences from ethical obligations. Through this process, cognitive dissonance was processed rather than suppressed, leading to a form of religious resilience characterized by rational judgment, moderation, principled commitment, and contextual awareness.

Classroom observations confirmed that psychological safety was created through specific interactional practices. Teachers frequently responded to sensitive comments with clarifying or probing questions rather than direct reprimands. Students were invited to explain the assumptions underlying their positions, compare interpretations, and support their arguments with religious and contextual reasoning. Students who initially appeared hesitant became

increasingly willing to participate after observing that disagreement did not automatically result in embarrassment or moral labeling. Peers also learned to challenge an argument rather than attack the person presenting it. Nevertheless, the discussion remained bounded by norms of respectful communication and by the expectation that conclusions would be evaluated in relation to Islamic values. This balance prevented dialogic openness from becoming unrestricted moral relativism.

PBL transformed sensitive issues from prohibited conversational territory into structured objects of religious inquiry. Students were neither encouraged to accept all external cultural influences nor instructed to reject unfamiliar practices without examination. Instead, they were guided to identify the values involved, articulate the source of their uncertainty, evaluate the issue through Islamic principles, and formulate a reasoned position. Religious resilience therefore appeared as the capacity to maintain commitment while engaging complexity. It involved neither rigid withdrawal nor uncritical accommodation, but a reflective negotiation between contemporary adolescent experience and Islamic ethical principles.

Discussion

The findings confirm the central proposition of problem-based learning: authentic, ill-structured problems stimulate knowledge activation, collaborative inquiry, reflection, and transfer beyond textbook recall. This pattern is consistent with Wynn (2022) account of PBL as facilitated problem solving and with Yew and Klamen et al. (2022) process model, which emphasizes prior-knowledge activation, self-directed investigation, and synthesis. However, the present study extends this literature by locating transfer within Islamic Religious Education rather than professional or disciplinary learning. The observed outcomes were not confined to conceptual mastery; they involved changes in digital judgment, peer responsibility, and willingness to discuss religious uncertainty. Thus, PBL in this pesantren-based setting operated simultaneously as a cognitive, moral, and sociocultural pedagogy. This multidimensional effect differs from studies that assess PBL through academic achievement, suggesting that its educational value depends on whether problems are embedded in students' moral worlds.

The first finding accords with digital-citizenship research that treats online participation as more than technical competence. Choi & Park (2023) and Harrison & Polizzi (2022) conceptualizes digital citizenship as involving ethics, critical participation, and informed engagement. Raza et al. (2025) similarly foreground respectful online conduct. The present findings support these positions because students moved from binary statements of prohibition toward examining harm, responsibility, verification, and victims' perspectives.

Nevertheless, this study adds a religiously grounded mechanism absent from much digital-citizenship literature: Qur'anic and hadith-based principles, particularly *tabayyun* and guarding speech, became interpretive procedures for handling hoaxes, comments, cyberbullying, and online gambling. The novelty is therefore not contextualizing digital ethics in Islam, but demonstrating how textual authority can be transformed from a memorized conclusion into a structured resource for deliberative ethical reasoning.

The second finding is consistent with Rohman (2022) observation that PBL can contextualize Islamic learning in pesantren, yet it advances by tracing movement from ritual observance toward enacted piety. Research on issue-based moral education indicates that complex social problems can develop moral sensitivity, reasoning, and reflection, although links between reasoning and action remain uneven (Van Der Leij et al., 2022). Arslantürk & Harput (2021) likewise found that adolescent religiosity relates to prosocial behavior through values such as kindness. The study aligns with both strands: *Ukhuwah Islamiyah* became a lens for recognizing exclusion, distress, bullying, and environmental neglect. Its contribution lies in documenting how students converted empathic interpretation into proposals for peer support, inclusion, reconciliation, and collective care. Social piety consequently appeared not as an assumed consequence of religiosity, but as a pedagogically mediated progression from problem recognition to communal action.

This finding corresponds with dialogic and psychological-safety scholarship. Gillies (2023) argue that dialogic teaching uses classroom talk to advance thinking and problem solving, whereas Antwi et al. (2026) defines psychological safety as freedom to take interpersonal risks without humiliation, ridicule, or shame. Students' willingness to discuss identity, popular culture, and relationships reflects these mechanisms. The finding also resonates with Mu'Ti (2023) vision of Islamic Religious Education combining firm conviction with openness and constructive engagement. A difference, however, is that the safe space observed was not value-neutral. Teachers delayed judgment and invited argument, but discussions remained bounded by respectful norms and Islamic sources. This combination challenges the assumption that openness requires relativism. Instead, safe dialogue enabled cognitive dissonance to become educative: students could expose uncertainty, evaluate competing cultural claims, and reconstruct a reasoned religious position without uncritical accommodation or defensive withdrawal.

Theoretically, the findings support a contextual-dialogic model of Islamic moral learning comprising interdependent processes: ethical interpretation, social enactment, and resilient identity negotiation. Kumar et al. (2025) distinguish religious coping, involving meaning, collaboration, and spiritual

support, from maladaptive religious struggle. Bal Koçak (2026) Phenomenological study in Türkiye and the Netherlands shows that religious and spiritual processes can promote adaptive adolescent development, although effects depend on relational and contextual pathways. The present study specifies an educational pathway: PBL converts socioreligious dissonance into guided inquiry, allowing students to reinterpret religious sources, consider others' welfare, and construct defensible responses. Religious resilience therefore emerges not from avoiding external values but from practicing principled engagement with them. This formulation contributes to theory by integrating constructivist PBL, moral reasoning, prosocial development, and religious coping within one explanatory sequence, rather than treating cognition, piety, social action, and identity stability as separate outcomes.

Practically, the findings imply that PBL in IRE requires more than inserting contemporary topics into lesson plans. Teachers need training in designing morally ambiguous but developmentally appropriate cases, asking probing questions, moderating disagreement, and reconnecting student arguments with Islamic sources without prematurely closing discussion. Firmansyah et al. (2026) caution that PBL quality depends on problem design, facilitation, group functioning, and assessment alignment; the present evidence confirms these conditions in religious education. Assessment should include source verification, stakeholder analysis, ethical justification, empathy, and proposed action, rather than rewarding textual recall alone. Schools should coordinate curriculum, student affairs, homeroom supervision, and counseling so that classroom solutions can be supported beyond the lesson. The practical impact may include earlier responses to digital misconduct, more inclusive peer relations, and safer disclosure of adolescent concerns, although the qualitative design does not establish causal effect sizes.

The novelty of this study lies in connecting transformations textual obedience to digital ethical reasoning, individual to social piety, and concealed uncertainty to religious resilience within one PBL process. Scholarship establishes that PBL supports inquiry and transfer (Bae et al., 2021; Sánchez-García & Reyes-de-Cózar, 2025), and Rohman (2022) demonstrates its relevance in pesantren education; however, the study explains how these mechanisms interact across digital, interpersonal, and identity domains. Its contribution is a process proposition: socioreligious problems generate dialogue, contextual interpretation, perspective-taking, and ethically justified action when psychological safety and normative guidance coexist. This proposition can influence curriculum design in Islamic schools seeking to address adolescent realities without weakening textual foundations. Because evidence derives from one case, transfer should be analytical rather than statistical. Future multi-site

and longitudinal research should test whether these transformations persist, generalize across institutional cultures, and produce behavioral outcomes.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that Problem-Based Learning can transform Islamic Religious Education from a predominantly text-reproductive practice into a contextual, dialogic, and action-oriented pedagogy. Its most important insight is that adolescents engage more meaningfully with Islamic teachings when religious texts are positioned not merely as answers to be memorized, but as ethical resources for interpreting digital dilemmas, responding to social problems, and negotiating sensitive questions of identity and culture. The study contributes theoretically by integrating problem-based learning, Islamic ethical reasoning, social piety, psychological safety, and religious resilience within a single explanatory framework. It also offers a practical contribution by showing how pesantren-based schools can maintain normative Islamic commitments while encouraging critical inquiry, empathy, and responsible action. Nevertheless, the findings are limited by the single-site qualitative case-study design, the relatively small and purposively selected participant group, and the absence of longitudinal or quantitative evidence regarding the durability and magnitude of behavioral change. Future research should therefore involve multiple Islamic educational settings, compare different institutional cultures, employ mixed-method or longitudinal designs, and examine whether the observed transformations persist over time and influence measurable patterns of digital conduct, peer relations, moral decision-making, and religious identity development.

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