



Reframing Arabic Reading Pedagogy through Problem-Based Learning: An Intrinsic Case Study in Islamic Senior High School

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ABSTRACT

Background: Arabic reading instruction in Madrasah Aliyah is often dominated by literal and transmissive approaches, limiting students' engagement and higher-order thinking.

Objective: This study aims to analyze the implementation of Problem-Based Learning (PBL) in Arabic reading instruction, focusing on student engagement, learning processes, and contextual factors influencing its application.

Method: Employing a qualitative approach with an intrinsic case study design, this research involved two Arabic teachers and 30 purposively selected tenth-grade students. Data were collected through participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis, and analyzed using reflexive thematic analysis.

Results: The findings reveal that PBL transforms reading instruction into a dialogic and problem-oriented process through authentic text problematization and collaborative inquiry. This approach enhances students' cognitive, emotional, and social engagement, particularly in developing inferential comprehension and critical interpretation of texts. Supporting factors include teachers' pedagogical competence and a collaborative school culture, while challenges involve time constraints and diverse student abilities.

Conclusion: This study contributes theoretically by extending constructivist reading pedagogy into the context of Arabic literacy in Islamic education, highlighting how PBL facilitates meaning-making through socio-religious texts. Practically, it offers an implementable framework for designing contextual and dialogic Arabic reading instruction that promotes critical literacy. These findings provide new insights into how and why PBL works in complex linguistic and cultural learning environments.

Keywords: Arabic, Madrasah Aliyah, Problem Based Learning, Reading Skills.

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INTRODUCTION

Indonesia ranked 72nd out of 79 participating countries in the 2018 PISA (Program for International Student Assessment), indicating relatively low reading performance compared to other countries. Several analyses noted a decline in scores in 2018 compared to the previous period and highlighted the adaptive computer-based test format as a factor complicating comparisons (Patria, 2021; Santi, Hasari, & Handayani, 2024). PISA studies and multivariate statistical analyses/linear mixed models identified a range of home, school, and individual background factors significantly associated with reading scores. Many studies cited socioeconomic status, ownership and access to ICT and reading materials at home, the quality of teacher guidance and classroom climate, school behavior, and psychological factors such as growth mindset and motivation (Kyeremeh et al., 2025; Safari, 2020; Santi, Hasari, & Handayani, 2024).

In Arabic, reading skills are a fundamental competency at the Madrasah Aliyah (Islamic Senior High School) level. Reading is not only a process of decoding linguistic symbols but also a meaning-constructing activity that involves integrating linguistic knowledge, cognitive strategies, and social context. Arabic reading skills are positively related to academic achievement and language proficiency, support transfer to other languages, and increase speed and accuracy of comprehension through intervention (Bernhofer & Tonin, 2022; Mahmud, Saleh, & Fiddienika, 2024). Poor reading skills, particularly in Arabic, negatively impact learning outcomes and reading fluency, weaken text comprehension, including aspects of orthography and morphology, and hinder the transfer of skills to other languages (Harun & Hasnah, 2025; Nachmani, 2016). Weak reading skills affect decoding, orthographic processing, and morphological comprehension—all essential components for comprehending Arabic texts. Research shows that mastery of orthography and morphology explains additional variance in reading comprehension beyond decoding and listening, so deficits in these components reduce overall text comprehension (Aini, Yunus, & Aminatusshalihah, 2023; Elbeheri et al., 2012). Therefore, improving reading skills, especially in Arabic, is crucial.

Many methods have been used to improve reading skills in Arabic, including learning strategies (Asse et al., 2024; Azhari, Akhsan, & Husna, 2024; Fikri, Aflisia, & Harisah, 2023), the use of additional applications (Acebes et al., 2025; Erlina, 2018), the involvement of university stakeholders, the use of integrated learning methods, the establishment of student dormitories, and increasing budget allocations (Sultan & Yahya, 2024).

One relevant model is Problem-Based Learning (PBL). PBL is a learning approach that uses authentic problems as a starting point for building knowledge and skills (Golightly et al., 2023). Conceptually, PBL is rooted in constructivist theory, which emphasizes that knowledge is actively constructed through social interactions and learning experiences. PBL's syntax, which includes problem orientation, learning organization, investigation, development, and presentation of results, and reflection, enables students to engage in the learning process actively.

Numerous studies have been conducted on improving Arabic reading skills, including those using the PBL method (Fikri Aflisia & Harisah, 2023), Arabic learning models (Syafei, Suleman, & Robanda, 2024), and word-by-word recognition (Atouf & Issa, 2025). However, empirical evidence on the impact of PBL on reading skills, especially in Arabic, is limited, and the results are highly variable (Setiadi, Khairunnisa, & Chaiza, 2025; Sufian et al., 2025), so studies on improving reading skills in Arabic are needed to enrich the findings and strengthen existing empirical evidence. Furthermore, several previous studies have focused primarily on

quantitative measurement of learning outcomes, without providing an in-depth description of the process of implementing PBL syntax in the context of Arabic's complex linguistic characteristics. In fact, learning to read in Arabic presents its own challenges, such as morphological and syntactic structures that differ from students' primary language, namely Indonesian.

Although previous studies have examined the effectiveness of Problem-Based Learning (PBL) in improving reading skills, most focus primarily on quantitative outcomes and general literacy contexts. These studies measure learning gains without adequately explaining how PBL operates in linguistically complex and culturally specific learning environments, such as Arabic reading in Islamic schools.

Moreover, existing research has not adequately theorized how constructivist learning principles embedded in PBL interact with the unique characteristics of Arabic texts, including morphological complexity and the construction of socio-religious meaning. As a result, there remains a theoretical gap in understanding how PBL facilitates meaning-making, engagement, and critical literacy within this specific context.

Therefore, this study addresses this gap by exploring not only the implementation of PBL but also the underlying pedagogical processes and contextual dynamics that shape its effectiveness in Arabic reading instruction.

Based on this gap, this study aims to analyze the implementation of Problem-Based Learning (PBL) in Arabic reading instruction within the Madrasah Aliyah context, examine how it shapes students' cognitive, emotional, and social engagement, and identify the pedagogical and contextual factors that influence its implementation. More importantly, this study seeks to explain how and why PBL facilitates meaning-making and critical literacy in Arabic reading, thereby contributing to the theoretical development of constructivist reading pedagogy in Islamic education.

METHODS

Study Design and Participants

This research employed a qualitative approach with an intrinsic case study design. This design was chosen because the research aimed to gain an in-depth understanding of the implementation of Problem-Based Learning (PBL) in teaching reading skills (*maharah qirā'ah*) in the specific context of Madrasah Aliyah (Islamic Senior High School). Intrinsic case studies allow researchers to holistically explore phenomena in real-life contexts, particularly when the boundaries between the phenomenon and its context cannot be clearly separated (Yin, 2018).

The research was naturalistic, observing the learning process as it unfolded authentically, without manipulating variables. The research focused on understanding the learning process, interaction dynamics, and the context of PBL implementation, rather than testing causal relationships.

The selection of an intrinsic case study design was based on the unique characteristics of the research context, in which the implementation of Problem-Based Learning (PBL) in Arabic reading instruction reflects a complex interaction among linguistic, pedagogical, and socio-religious dimensions. This case was not chosen to generalize findings, but to gain an in-depth understanding of a particular phenomenon that is contextually rich and theoretically significant. The Madrasah Aliyah setting represents a distinctive educational environment in which Arabic is not only a language subject but also closely tied to religious and cultural meaning-making processes. Therefore, this case provides valuable insights into how PBL operates in a specific, underexplored context.

The research was conducted at a State Islamic Senior High School (MAN) in Lamongan Regency, Indonesia. The location was selected purposively because the school had implemented the PBL model in Arabic language instruction.

Participants consisted of two Arabic language teachers and 30 tenth-grade students participating in reading skills instruction. Participant selection used a purposive sampling technique based on suitability to the research focus (Creswell & Poth, 2016). Participant criteria included: (1) teachers who had implemented PBL for at least one semester, and (2) students actively participating in PBL-based reading instruction. The number of participants was determined based on the principle of data saturation, which occurs when data collection no longer yields new, relevant information or themes (Braun & Clarke, 2021).

Research Instruments

In qualitative research, the researcher acts as the primary instrument (human instrument) responsible for data collection and interpretation (Creswell & Poth, 2016). To maintain consistency and systematic data collection, observation guidelines based on PBL syntax, semi-structured interview guidelines, and a document analysis format were used. All instruments were developed based on theoretical studies and consulted with experts to ensure appropriateness of the content and focus of the research.

Data validity was ensured by applying the trustworthiness criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Credibility was achieved through triangulation of sources and techniques, as well as member checking. Transferability was strengthened by the presentation of in-depth contextual descriptions (thick descriptions). Dependability and confirmability were maintained through systematic documentation and an audit trail of the entire research process.

Data Collection

Data were collected through participant observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation analysis to ensure triangulation of sources and techniques (Denzin, 2017). Participant observation was conducted throughout the learning process to identify the stages of PBL syntax, teacher-student interaction patterns, and forms of student cognitive and social engagement in understanding reading texts. The researcher acted as a non-interventionist observer to ensure the learning dynamics remained natural. In-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with teachers and selected students. The interviews aimed to explore participants' perceptions, experiences, and reflections regarding the implementation of PBL in reading instruction. All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. Documentation included teaching modules, lesson plans, reading materials, and student worksheets. Document analysis was used to strengthen the observation and interview findings and provide a contextual overview of the learning implementation.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted using reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2021), involving several iterative stages. First, the researchers familiarized themselves with the data through repeated reading of interview transcripts, observation notes, and documents. Second, initial codes were generated by identifying meaningful data segments related to student engagement, PBL processes, and contextual factors. These codes were developed inductively and continuously refined throughout the analysis.

Third, codes were organized into broader categories, which were then interpreted to develop initial themes. For example, codes such as “student questioning,” “peer discussion,” and “text interpretation” were grouped under the theme of cognitive engagement. In contrast, codes such as “enthusiasm,” “confidence,” and “interest” contributed to the theme of emotional engagement.

Finally, themes were reviewed, defined, and refined to ensure coherence and alignment with the research objectives. The analysis process was recursive, allowing the researchers to move back and forth between data, codes, and themes to construct meaningful interpretations.

RESULTS

Implementation of Problem-Based Learning as a Reading Skills

Learning Model at MAN

The application of Problem-Based Learning (PBL) in learning reading skills at MAN is carried out through three main stages, namely: (1) planning, (2) implementation, and (3) evaluation.

Planning Stage

The planning stage is the primary foundation in PBL implementation. At this stage, teachers design learning tools that integrate PBL syntax into maharah qir'ah learning. Planning is carried out through needs analysis, the formulation of authentic problems, the setting of learning objectives, the development of PBL-based teaching modules, and the development of evaluation instruments. Based on the results of document analysis and interviews, the findings are presented in Table 1.

Table 1 PBL Planning Stage Results

No	Planning Components	Description of Findings
1	Needs analysis	Previous learning was still predominantly teacher-centered
2	Authentic problem formulation	Texts based on socio-religious contexts and students' lives
3	Formulation of objectives	Developing literal and inferential understanding
4	Preparation of teaching modules	Contains PBL syntax: orientation, investigation, presentation, reflection

Referring to Table 1, the findings indicate that the planning stage was systematically designed and aligned with the characteristics of the PBL model, namely, making authentic problems the starting point of learning. Planning was not merely administrative in nature, but integrated student needs analysis, the formulation of objectives based on higher-order thinking skills (HOTS), and the development of a coherent learning syntax between problem-oriented, investigative, and reflective learning. This indicates the teachers' pedagogical awareness in shifting the learning paradigm from teacher-centered to student-centered learning. Furthermore, the integration of objectives, materials, strategies, and evaluation instruments demonstrates that the learning design meets the principle of constructive alignment, enabling the implementation process to proceed in a directed, consistent manner with the PBL conceptual framework. Thus, the planning stage in this study can be categorized as thorough, reflective, and oriented toward developing critical and contextual reading skills.

Implementation Stage

The implementation phase is the direct implementation of the developed design. Based on observations, the learning follows the PBL syntax, which includes:

- a) Authentic problem orientation
- b) Organizing students into small groups
- c) Independent and collaborative investigation
- d) Solution development and presentation
- e) Evaluative reflection

The teacher begins the lesson with analytical and inferential prompting questions. These questions are designed not only to test literal understanding but also to encourage students to make predictions, interpret implied meanings, and connect the text to the broader context. This strategy serves as a cognitive trigger, activating students' initial schemata before entering the in-depth investigation phase.

Students then work in groups to identify main ideas, analyze text structure, and draw meaningful inferences. This indicates that students developed inferential reading skills, particularly in interpreting implicit meanings and connecting textual ideas to broader contexts. For instance, one student explained, "The text does not directly say the message, but we can understand it from the context and the discussion. We tried to relate it to real situations in our daily life." (Student 5). This suggests that PBL facilitates deeper cognitive processing beyond literal comprehension.

Furthermore, text structure analysis and inference-drawing activities demonstrate that learning does not stop at surface comprehension but rather progresses toward more profound understanding. Students are trained to identify relationships between ideas, understand the author's communicative purpose, and deduce implicit messages within the text. Thus, PBL implementation at this stage is effective in developing critical reading skills and higher-order thinking skills in an integrated manner.

Table 2 Implementation of PBL Syntax in Reading Learning

No	Syntax PBL	Implementation Form	Activity Indicator
1	Problem Orientation	Analytical and contextual questions	Students ask critical questions
2	Organization	Small group discussions	Active collaboration
3	Investigation	Analysis of main ideas and text structure	Text-based argumentation
4	Presentation	Presentation of analysis results	Dialogic interaction between groups
5	Reflection	Evaluation of process and content	Clarification and reinforcement of concepts

Referring to Table 2, observation results indicate an increase in student engagement during the learning process. Students actively participated in group discussions, expressed their opinions, and collaboratively constructed meaning from the texts. One student stated, "I feel more confident to express my ideas because we discuss the text together and help each other understand it." (Student 3). This indicates that PBL encourages a more participatory and dialogic learning environment.

Table 3 Student Engagement Data During PBL

Engagement Aspects	Intensity	Finding's Description
Discussion Participation	High	Most students actively expressed their opinions.
Courage to Speak Your Mind	Increasing	Students were more confident than in previous learning.
Inferential Analysis	Developing	Students were able to deduce the implicit meaning of the text.
Learning Reflection	Positive	Students were able to evaluate the learning process.

Furthermore, the engagement that emerged was not only behavioral but also reflected cognitive and emotional involvement. Cognitively, students demonstrated the ability to ask critical questions, offer alternative interpretations, and defend arguments with explicit textual references. Emotionally, the classroom atmosphere became more dynamic and interactive, marked by enthusiasm and confidence in presenting analytical results.

The data in Table 3 show that implementing PBL encouraged high levels of cognitive and social engagement. Thus, these findings indicate that implementing PBL significantly contributed to creating a participatory, dialogic learning environment focused on developing a deep understanding of reading skills.

Evaluation Stage

The evaluation phase of this research was implemented in two ways: process evaluation and learning outcome evaluation. Process evaluation was conducted through reflective observation of discussion dynamics, student interaction patterns, and the quality of argumentation that emerged during problem-based learning. Meanwhile, outcome evaluation was conducted through reading comprehension tests administered before and after PBL implementation.

Pre- and post-learning scores showed a trend toward improvement in primary idea identification, text structure analysis, and inference drawing. However, this improvement was not simply interpreted as a numerical change but rather as an indicator of development in how students understand, process, and interpret reading texts.

The validity of the findings in the evaluation phase was strengthened through data triangulation. Triangulation was conducted by comparing test results, classroom observation data, and interviews with teachers and students. Observational data showed improvements in the quality of participation, the accuracy of textual evidence use, and students' ability to construct arguments. Interview results revealed that students found it easier to understand the reading content through group discussions and collaborative clarification. These findings align with the test results, which showed improvements in reading comprehension.

The consistency across the various data sources indicates that the improvements reflected changes in students' thinking processes. Thus, evaluation not only serves as a measure of learning achievement but also as a means to observe a transformation in reading comprehension toward greater analytical, reflective, and contextual depth.

Student Response and Engagement During PBL Implementation

Observation and interview results indicate that students' responses to PBL implementation were generally positive. Students demonstrated changes in attitudes and participation patterns compared to previous, teacher-centered learning. Student

engagement was evident not only in their physical presence during learning activities but also in the quality of their interactions and the depth of their understanding demonstrated throughout the learning process. Student engagement was evident across three main dimensions: behavioral, emotional, and cognitive engagement, as shown in Table 4.

Table 4 Dimensions of Student Engagement

Dimensions	Indicators	Findings
Behavioral	Active discussion	High
Emotional	Enthusiasm for learning	Positive
Cognitive	Analysis and inference	Significantly increased

Referring to Table 4, in the behavioral dimension, students demonstrated active participation in group discussions, involvement in assignments, and presentation of analytical results. Observations showed that most students contributed by expressing their opinions and responding to their peers' arguments. This indicates a shift from passive learning to more active, collaborative participation.

In the emotional dimension, students demonstrated greater enthusiasm during the learning process. They appeared more confident in expressing their opinions, did not hesitate to ask questions when experiencing difficulties, and demonstrated interest in the topics discussed. Interviews also revealed that students found the learning more engaging and challenging because they were directly involved in the problem-solving process.

Meanwhile, in the cognitive dimension, there was development in analytical and inference-drawing skills. Students not only understood texts at a literal level but also began to identify relationships between ideas, interpret implied meanings, and provide arguments supported by textual evidence. This development indicates that the engagement was deep and involved higher-order thinking.

Overall, student responses and engagement during PBL implementation indicate that this model can create a more participatory, dialogic, and meaningful learning environment. The involvement that emerges reflects the integration of behavioral, emotional, and cognitive aspects that support one another in the development of reading skills.

Supporting and Inhibiting Factors

The implementation of PBL in reading skills learning is inseparable from various factors that influence its success. Identifying these factors for improvement can foster a sense of purpose and engagement among educators, researchers, and students interested in PBL. Based on observations and interviews, several factors were identified that support smooth implementation, as well as several obstacles that require attention for further development. Identifying these factors is crucial for a more comprehensive understanding of the learning implementation context. Table 5 presents the supporting and inhibiting factors identified during the PBL implementation process.

Table 5 Supporting Factors

No	Factors	Description
1	Teacher Competence	Able to design authentic problems
2	School Environment	Supportive academic culture
3	Student Collaboration	Effective collaboration

The identification of supporting factors in Table 5 shows that teachers' competence greatly influences the success of PBL implementation in designing authentic problems and facilitating group discussions. Teachers who can prepare relevant and challenging problem scenarios can encourage students to think critically, collaboratively, and creatively. Furthermore, a conducive school environment with an academic culture that supports active learning also strengthens the effectiveness of PBL implementation. The availability of adequate learning resources, supporting facilities, and a classroom atmosphere open to discussion is essential for the smooth running of problem-based learning. The final supporting factor is effective student collaboration, in which students' ability to collaborate and support one another in groups enhances the quality of collective analysis and problem-solving.

Table 6 Inhibiting Factors

No	Factors	Description
1	Time constraints	Discussion is not optimal
2	Heterogeneity of abilities	Instructional differentiation is needed

On the other hand, several inhibiting factors require attention (Table 6). Recognizing that time constraints hinder discussions and reflections can empower educators to find solutions, fostering a sense of agency and confidence in their ability to improve PBL implementation. This awareness is essential for creating an environment where all students can fully develop their analyses.

Overall, managing, supporting, and inhibiting factors effectively can inspire policymakers and researchers to see their role in enhancing PBL outcomes. Proper management is key to ensuring PBL consistently improves reading, student engagement, and critical thinking, aligning with pedagogical principles emphasizing context, facilitation, and social interaction.

DISCUSSION

The research results show that the implementation of PBL in teaching reading skills at Islamic Senior High Schools (Madrasah Aliyah) is carried out through systematic stages, including authentic problem orientation, organizing students into small groups, independent and collaborative investigation, developing and presenting solutions, and evaluative reflection. The problems presented take the form of contextual reading texts on socio-religious issues and current phenomena relevant to students' lives, thereby encouraging the activation of initial schemata and deeper cognitive engagement.

This finding not only confirms previous studies on PBL and student engagement but also extends them by demonstrating how engagement is constructed through dialogic interaction and text-based problematization in Arabic reading contexts. Unlike prior research that primarily focuses on measurable outcomes, this study reveals the underlying processes through which students negotiate meaning collaboratively.

In the problem orientation stage, the teacher facilitates initial exploration of the text by asking analytical and inferential prompting questions. This process aligns with the characteristics of PBL, which positions problems as learning triggers and as a means of knowledge construction (Ertmer & Glazewski, 2024). This implementation is also consistent with Williamson (2023) findings, which confirm that PBL is effective in developing higher-order thinking skills through open-ended problem exploration.

During the investigation process, students identify main ideas, analyze text structure, draw inferences about meaning, and collaboratively evaluate the reading content. This activity demonstrates that PBL functions not only as a pedagogical strategy but also as an epistemological framework that encourages meaning-based learning. This finding reinforces the meta-analysis by [Belland et al. \(2017\)](#), which showed that PBL significantly improves conceptual understanding and problem-solving skills.

Thus, the application of PBL in the context of reading skills at MAN is not only focused on achieving literal competency but also on developing critical, analytical, and reflective thinking skills. Pedagogically, this model shifts the learning paradigm from teacher-centered to student-centered, a more dialogic and participatory approach ([Aglibot et al., 2025](#)).

The findings of the second study indicate that student responses to the application of PBL in reading lessons were generally positive. Students demonstrated increased active participation in group discussions, greater courage to express opinions, and a greater sense of responsibility for completing assignments. This engagement reflects the dimensions of behavioral, emotional, and cognitive engagement as proposed by [Reschly et al. \(2008\)](#).

Cognitively, students were more active in asking critical questions, clarifying vocabulary meanings, and connecting text content to real-life contexts. This indicates deep learning engagement, which, according to [Skinner & Pitzer \(2012\)](#), is an important indicator of meaningful learning. Furthermore, the increase in students' intrinsic motivation during PBL implementation aligns with [Ryan & Deci's \(2000\)](#) Self-Determination Theory, which emphasizes the importance of autonomy, competence, and social connectedness in fostering intrinsic motivation. In this context, PBL provides students with autonomous space to explore solutions, thereby strengthening their sense of ownership of the learning process. Thus, implementing PBL in reading instruction at MAN not only increases cognitive engagement but also strengthens students' affective and social skills. This indicates that the PBL model is relevant for improving the quality of pedagogical interactions in Arabic language learning at the Madrasah Aliyah level.

Other findings investigating supporting and inhibiting factors reported that, first, teachers' readiness to design authentic problems and facilitate collaborative discussions. Teacher pedagogical competence is a crucial determinant of PBL success, as emphasized by [Sims & Fletcher-Wood \(2021\)](#), who noted that learning quality is strongly influenced by teachers' professional capacity to manage innovative learning strategies. Furthermore, [Gul et al. \(2021\)](#) reported that teacher expertise in instructional strategies significantly influences student learning outcomes. In the context of PBL, teachers act as cognitive facilitators, guiding the inquiry process rather than simply conveying information. Furthermore, a supportive school environment, including the availability of learning resources and a collaborative academic culture, also strengthens the effectiveness of PBL implementation. A supportive learning environment enables dialogic interactions, shared reflection, and the social construction of meaning, all key characteristics of PBL. According to [Wekner & Nückles \(2015\)](#), effective learning develops within a community of practice that encourages active participation and negotiation of meaning. Furthermore, [Fraser \(2015\)](#) and [Cambay & Paglinawan \(2024\)](#) emphasized that classroom climate and the learning environment significantly contribute to student engagement and the effectiveness of innovative learning strategies. These findings are reinforced by a study by [Lijun & Te \(2024\)](#), which emphasized that a positive school culture and high academic expectations contribute to the successful implementation of learning innovations. Thus, the effectiveness of PBL depends not

only on the design of the learning model but also on the pedagogical ecosystem, including teachers' professional competence and the structural support provided by the school environment.

However, this study also identified several inhibiting factors. One of these is limited learning time, which leads to suboptimal discussion and reflection. Furthermore, there is considerable heterogeneity in students' reading abilities, necessitating more structured instructional differentiation. This challenge aligns with the findings of [Kirschner, Sweller, & Clark \(2006\)](#), who emphasized that a problem-based approach requires appropriate scaffolding design to avoid overloading students' cognitive capacities.

Nevertheless, overall, the application of PBL in teaching reading skills at MAN (Islamic State Islamic Senior High School) demonstrates significant pedagogical potential, particularly in developing critical literacy based on Islamic and social contexts.

This study takes a different epistemological stance, positioning PBL implementation as a socio-pedagogical practice constructed through interactions among teachers, students, texts, and institutional contexts. Through an in-depth qualitative approach, this study uncovers the process of negotiating meaning, patterns of students' cognitive and affective engagement, and the scaffolding strategies teachers develop to mediate text comprehension. Thus, this study not only answers the question "is PBL effective", but also "how and why PBL works" in the context of learning Arabic reading in madrasas.

Substantively, this research broadens the horizons of Arabic language pedagogy by offering a PBL implementation model that adapts to the characteristics of madrasah students, who have their own religious backgrounds and academic cultures. The integration of text problematization, Islamic values, and collaborative discussion forms a learning framework that not only develops cognitive reading skills but also fosters reflective awareness and values-based critical literacy.

Theoretically, this research contributes to strengthening the discourse of constructivist reading pedagogy in the context of Islamic education. This study demonstrates that constructivism in reading instruction should not be separated from its normative and religious dimensions but can instead be enriched through the integration of values as sources for text problematization. Thus, this research presents a synthesis between constructivist learning theory and contemporary Islamic educational practices.

In practice, the findings of this study provide an implementable framework that Arabic language teachers can replicate to design more problematic, contextual, and transformative reading lessons. This model enables teachers to move from textual-reproductive learning patterns to dialogic learning that encourages analysis, reflection, and argumentation. Therefore, the contribution of this research is not only conceptual, but also applicable in improving the quality of Arabic language learning in Madrasah Aliyah.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that implementing Problem-Based Learning (PBL) in Arabic reading instruction within Madrasah Aliyah shifts learning from a transmissive model to a dialogic, constructivist process. Students are not only engaged in decoding texts, but also actively construct meaning through collaborative inquiry, discussion, and reflection. This transformation is evident in the development of inferential reading skills, increased cognitive, emotional, and social engagement, and the ability to interpret texts beyond literal comprehension.

Beyond confirming previous findings on the effectiveness of PBL, this study provides a more nuanced understanding of how PBL operates within linguistically complex and socio-religious learning contexts. The findings suggest that meaning-making in Arabic reading is shaped not only by cognitive processes but also by interactional and contextual dynamics, where students negotiate interpretations through dialogue and culturally embedded perspectives. This highlights the role of PBL as a pedagogical mechanism that facilitates critical literacy through socially constructed understanding.

Theoretically, this study contributes to the development of constructivist reading pedagogy by extending it into the domain of Arabic literacy in Islamic education. It shows that reading should be understood as a dialogic, interpretative, and value-laden process, rather than merely a technical decoding activity. In practice, the study offers a framework for designing problem-oriented, contextually grounded reading instruction that fosters deeper engagement and critical thinking.

Future research should further explore the application of PBL across different linguistic and cultural contexts, particularly through comparative or longitudinal designs to examine its sustainability. In addition, studies integrating mixed-method approaches or focusing on specific aspects such as scaffolding strategies, teacher facilitation, or digital-supported PBL environments would provide deeper insights into optimizing its implementation in diverse educational settings.

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During the preparation of this manuscript, the authors used Google Translate to assist in translation. All outputs were thoroughly reviewed and revised by the authors to ensure accuracy, clarity, and compliance with academic standards. The authors assume full responsibility for the content of this manuscript.

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The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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