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Supporting Learning Motivation through Crossword-Supported Problem-Based Learning in Islamic Religious Education

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Abstract

This study explores students' learning motivation in Islamic Religious Education, teacher practices in crossword-supported problem-based learning (PBL), and the challenges associated with implementation. It examines how instructional support relates to students' reported classroom experiences without presuming measurable motivational improvement. A qualitative case study involved one teacher and ten Grade IX students selected through purposive sampling to capture varied learning experiences. Data were collected through observations, interviews, and document analysis and examined using data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. Source and method triangulation supported comparisons across participants and evidence types. Findings indicate that students' reported enthusiasm and attention varied with classroom activities. Seven students described boredom, reduced concentration, or sleepiness during extended explanations and note-taking, while students expressed preferences for discussion, questions, quizzes, games, and peer assistance. The teacher described planning, guided group work, crossword-based concept review, and evaluation as efforts to support participation in lessons on aqiqah and qurban. Time allocation, instructional preparation, and differences in students' understanding emerged as implementation concerns. However, students did not explicitly describe crossword experiences, the complete PBL process was insufficiently documented, and reported learning mastery relied on the teacher's account. The study's originality lies in distinguishing intended motivational support, students' general learning preferences, and evidence of motivational change within an integrated instructional approach. Its contribution is a contextual account of teacher facilitation and student experiences that clarifies the limits of attributing engagement to crossword-supported PBL. Practical implications emphasize connecting crossword tasks with contextual problems, providing explanatory feedback, managing lesson time, and monitoring equitable participation. Further research should document implementation and examine whether immediate engagement develops into sustained motivation over extended periods.

Keywords: learning motivation; problem-based learning; crossword puzzles; Islamic Religious Education; teacher facilitation.

Introduction

Supporting students' learning motivation remains an important challenge in Islamic Religious Education, particularly when classroom activities provide limited opportunities for questioning, collaboration, and active participation. Islamic Religious Education aims not only to develop religious knowledge but also to cultivate attitudes and encourage the application of Islamic values in everyday life (Majid, 2012). At the junior secondary level, its content encompasses the Qur'an and Hadith, Islamic beliefs, moral conduct, jurisprudence, and the history of Islamic civilization (Zubaidillah & Nuruddaroini, 2019). This breadth requires teachers to help students understand religious concepts and consider their practical significance. Such responsibilities are consistent with the emphasis on developing learners' potential in Indonesia's Law No. 20 of 2003 on the National Education System and with the broader contribution of education to knowledge, skills, and critical thinking (Fajartani et al., 2024). Teachers therefore play an important role in creating interactive learning environments and selecting instructional strategies that support students' willingness to participate and learn (Putri & Aji Pradana, 2021; Wahyuningsih et al., 2024).

Learning motivation concerns the processes that initiate, direct, and sustain students' learning activities. Uno and Nurudin (2022) describe it in terms of internal and external encouragement toward learning goals, while Sardiman (2016) emphasizes the psychological forces that generate and maintain learning activity. Although motivation is associated with learning outcomes (Fimala et al., 2021), it should not be inferred solely from achievement or visible enthusiasm. Howard et al. (2021) demonstrate that different forms of motivation have different relationships with achievement, persistence, and well-being. Accordingly, students' enjoyment of an activity, participation in a discussion, and sustained commitment to learning should be examined as related but distinguishable aspects of their learning experiences.

Self-determination theory provides a useful perspective for examining how classroom practices may support motivation. From this perspective, students' experiences of competence, autonomy, and relatedness help explain their reasons for engaging in learning. Bureau et al. (2022) identify teacher autonomy support and psychological need satisfaction as important correlates of self-determined motivation. This perspective directs attention to whether classroom activities help students feel capable, provide meaningful opportunities to contribute, and facilitate supportive relationships. Situational interest offers a complementary concept for understanding fluctuations in attention during particular activities. Rotgans and Schmidt (2011) show that interest can change within a problem-based learning session, suggesting that an immediate positive response should not automatically be interpreted as an enduring motivational change. These concepts inform the present study's interpretation of classroom experiences without assuming that all dimensions of motivation are directly captured by the available data.

Preliminary fieldwork at SMPN 5 Bukittinggi brought these concerns into focus. During a teaching practicum observation on July 15, 2025, the

researcher noted students appearing sleepy or paying limited attention during Islamic Religious Education lessons. In a preliminary interview on August 25, 2025, the Grade IX teacher similarly reported that some students showed limited enthusiasm when lessons relied heavily on explanation and memorization, particularly during afternoon classes. The teacher also identified differences among students as a challenge in managing participation. These observations and interview accounts provided an initial rationale for investigating instructional practices and motivation. They did not establish that teaching methods alone caused disengagement or that students' understanding would necessarily improve through more interactive instruction. The preliminary accounts are therefore treated as contextual background rather than evidence of motivational change in the subsequent case study.

Problem-based learning offers one possible approach to supporting students' participation in meaningful learning. It organizes learning around a problem that prompts students to identify what they need to understand, investigate relevant information, and develop a reasoned response through collaborative and self-directed activities, with the teacher acting as a facilitator (Hmelo-Silver, 2004; Savery, 2006). Its defining feature is the role of the problem in directing inquiry; group discussion alone does not establish that PBL has occurred. Research has associated PBL with learning motivation and critical thinking (Lestari et al., 2021). However, motivational benefits should not be assumed from the instructional label. Wijnia et al. (2024) report generally positive but heterogeneous effects of problem-driven approaches on motivation, with differences across motivational constructs, academic domains, and implementation settings. This evidence supports examining how PBL is enacted and experienced in particular classrooms.

Crossword puzzles may serve a complementary instructional function by providing a structured opportunity to revisit terminology and check conceptual understanding. Studies have examined their potential to support motivation and create engaging learning activities (Harahap & Nasution, 2022; Gulo & Muhid, 2024), strengthen subject knowledge (Fransiska et al., 2022), and stimulate discussion (Franklin et al., 2003). Nevertheless, these outcomes should be distinguished: recalling a term correctly does not, by itself, demonstrate stronger motivation or deeper reasoning. In crossword-supported PBL, the problem should remain the organizing focus of learning, while the puzzle functions as a supporting activity for reviewing concepts and identifying misunderstandings. For topics such as *aqiqah* and *qurban*, this distinction is particularly relevant because understanding key terms can support discussion of religious practices and their social significance, but completing a puzzle cannot replace investigation and reasoned consideration of a problem.

Previous studies provide a basis for investigating this combination. Herdiwati (2021) reported increased learning motivation through crossword-supported PBL in sociology, while Erpiyana et al. (2023) reported motivational improvements in senior secondary biology lessons on the sensory system. Trianingsih (2023) examined its influence on motivation in primary science

education, and Parida (2025) reported a moderate normalized gain of 0.53 in a Grade VIII implementation. Within Islamic Religious Education, Saenab (2019) and Rifa'i (2022) investigated the relationship between PBL and learning motivation. Ardiansi et al. (2023) also examined the influence of crossword-based instruction on motivation in civic education. Together, these studies suggest educational potential, but their findings do not establish that the same outcomes will occur in a different subject, age group, or classroom setting.

The studies discussed above primarily establish whether particular instructional approaches are associated with motivational outcomes. They provide a less direct account of how a teacher coordinates problem-based activities and crossword tasks, how students interpret those activities, and what practical constraints shape their implementation in Islamic Religious Education. The present study addresses this process-oriented question through a qualitative examination of Grade IX teaching at SMPN 5 Bukittinggi. Its contribution lies in investigating the relationship between intended instructional support and participants' classroom experiences, rather than in treating a new research location as sufficient novelty. Particular attention is given to the distinction between students' preferences for interactive learning in general and their accounts of the activities specifically investigated.

Accordingly, this study aims to explore Grade IX students' accounts of learning motivation in Islamic Religious Education, examine the teacher's planning, implementation, and evaluation of crossword-supported PBL, and identify the challenges encountered and the responses used to address them. The study approaches the instructional combination as a potential means of supporting motivation, without presuming a measurable increase or attributing students' responses exclusively to either PBL or crossword puzzles. Theoretically, it seeks to clarify how instructional support, collaborative participation, and concept-review activities relate to students' reported learning experiences. Practically, it aims to inform lesson planning, the purposeful use of crossword activities, and classroom facilitation while keeping its implications proportionate to the evidence from a single case.

Method

This study employed a qualitative case study to explore how a teacher supported students' learning motivation through crossword-supported problem-based learning (PBL) in Islamic Religious Education. Qualitative inquiry facilitates contextual understanding of participants' experiences and practices (Moleong, 2021; Sugiyono, 2023), while a case study enables detailed investigation of a bounded educational activity using multiple sources of evidence (Creswell, 2014). The case concerned Grade IX instruction on *aqiqah* and *qurban* at SMPN 5 Bukittinggi, West Sumatra. Fieldwork lasted approximately one month between September and October 2026. Observations and an interview conducted during the researcher's teaching practicum in 2025 provided preliminary background and were distinguished from the main research data.

Participants were selected purposively and comprised one Islamic Religious Education teacher and ten Grade IX students. Student selection sought variation in learning motivation and classroom participation rather than statistical representation. The reported categories of high, moderate, and low motivation were treated as descriptive sampling considerations rather than standardized measurements. Supporting documents included teaching modules, learning objective sequences, lesson schedules, the school profile, and classroom photographs. Student identities were represented by initials, and the teacher was identified as Ms. Z.

The researcher served as the primary research instrument, supported by observation and interview guides. Observations focused on classroom activities, the enactment of PBL, the use of crossword puzzles, teacher facilitation, and students' attention and participation. Teacher interviews addressed planning, implementation, evaluation, and instructional challenges. Student interviews explored learning experiences, interest, preferred activities, and expectations. Documents provided contextual and instructional evidence (Sugiyono, 2023). Accounts of general learning preferences were distinguished from responses explicitly concerning crossword-supported PBL. The researcher's previous practicum experience provided familiarity with the setting but was not treated as evidence of instructional effectiveness.

Analysis followed Miles et al.'s (2014) interactive framework of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. Interview, observation, and documentary data were organized into categories concerning motivation, instructional practices, crossword use, and implementation challenges. Interpretations were checked against supporting excerpts and compared across participants and methods (Sugiyono, 2023). Differences between teacher and student accounts were examined rather than automatically treated as agreement. Consistent with Braun and Clarke's (2025) emphasis on methodological coherence and transparent reporting, conclusions were bounded by the available evidence. Classroom enthusiasm and reported achievement were not treated as direct proof of sustained motivational improvement.

Results and Discussion

Results

Data were collected through classroom observations, interviews with one Islamic Religious Education teacher and ten Grade IX students, and documentation of learning activities at SMPN 5 Bukittinggi. The observation account described more than half of the students in each observed class as appearing sleepy or inattentive during lessons. This description provides contextual evidence of classroom participation, but it does not establish the causes of inattention or students' ability to understand the material. The findings are organized into three areas: students' accounts of learning motivation, the teacher's practices in crossword-supported problem-based learning (PBL), and implementation challenges and responses.

Students' Learning Motivation in Islamic Religious Education

The teacher and students described their experiences in relation to the topic "Expressing Gratitude through Aqiqah and Caring for Others through Qurban." Their accounts revealed variation in enthusiasm and attention, alongside preferences for particular learning activities.

1. The teacher's perspective

Ms. Z distinguished students' ability to understand the material from their enthusiasm for participating in lessons. She explained: "In general, Grade IX students can understand the material presented, but some students are still less enthusiastic. This may be because of their condition or because they have not understood the material."

The teacher associated limited enthusiasm with students' circumstances and understanding. However, she also acknowledged her own role in supporting their participation: "Maximizing students' activity, motivation, and enthusiasm also depends on the teacher."

Her account emphasized individual attention and the selection of appropriate instructional approaches. Motivation was therefore presented as something that could be supported through classroom practices, rather than solely as a characteristic of individual students.

2. Students' experiences and preferences

Several students expressed positive attitudes toward Islamic Religious Education while describing fluctuations in their enthusiasm. ANF considered lessons reasonably enjoyable, particularly when explanations were easy to understand. AS and NFh also reported liking the subject. RHR, however, described feeling enthusiastic only "sometimes" and preferred topics that attracted personal interest.

Seven of the ten students, ANF, AS, NFh, MR, RHR, HK, and AM, reported boredom, reduced attention, or sleepiness when lessons were dominated by explanations and note-taking. ANF stated: "When I spend too much time listening to explanations and taking notes, I sometimes feel bored, lose focus, and become sleepy."

The other accounts showed related but distinct experiences. AS became bored when the teacher continued explaining for long periods. NFh found it difficult to maintain attention during extended explanations, while MR associated boredom with lessons consisting mainly of note-taking. RHR reported losing focus and looking toward classmates. HK became sleepy when only listening to the teacher, and AM quickly became bored with listening and writing.

Students identified three types of activities that encouraged greater interest and attention. First, AS, NF, MR, MH, and AM mentioned discussion and learning with peers. NF found it easier to understand material when able to ask classmates questions, while MH described receiving explanations from friends when something remained unclear.

Second, AS, NFh, MR, FA, HK, and AM mentioned questions, exercises, and quizzes. NFh paid closer attention because of wanting to know the answer. FA valued quizzes because they provided an opportunity to find out whether an answer was correct.

Third, HK and AM expressed a preference for games. HK explained: "It is more exciting when there are games or questions."

AM similarly preferred variation through quizzes, discussions, and games because these activities reduced boredom.

These accounts indicate that students' reported attention and enthusiasm varied with classroom activities. They do not, by themselves, demonstrate sustained motivational improvement. The teacher primarily emphasized students' circumstances and understanding, whereas students more frequently emphasized how lessons were conducted. These different emphases provide distinct perspectives on the classroom experience.

Teacher Practices in Crossword-Supported Problem-Based Learning

The teacher described her practices in terms of planning, implementation, and evaluation. She identified PBL and topic-related questions as ways of encouraging participation: "We use PBL and develop interesting questions that are appropriate to the material."

The findings below distinguish the practices described by the teacher from conclusions about their effects.

1. Planning

Ms. Z reported preparing the instructional approach, learning materials, and crossword activities in relation to the lesson content and intended learning objectives. She explained: "Preparation begins with designing the instructional approach, learning media, and lesson content. Before the discussion, the learning objectives are also communicated, and the material and indicators are explained so that students understand from the outset."

According to her account, crossword activities were aligned with the topic of *aqiqah* and *qurban*. Communicating the objectives and indicators was intended to orient students before group discussion. The available account describes the teacher's planning intentions, but it does not establish how consistently students understood those objectives.

2. Implementation

The teacher described a sequence involving the communication of learning objectives, explanations of the material and indicators, and group discussion under her guidance. Students were expected to develop sufficient understanding to complete the crossword activity. Ms. Z stated: "The instructional approach is adapted to the indicators and the main material that has been presented, until students understand the material and can answer the crossword puzzle easily."

She also described preparing engaging questions, attending to students individually, and guiding discussion. In this account, the crossword puzzle functioned primarily as an activity for reviewing and checking understanding of *aqiqah* and *qurban*.

The evidence identifies teacher-guided group work and crossword use, but does not describe the complete PBL process. In particular, the interview account does not explain the initial problem, students' investigation, or the development and evaluation of proposed solutions in sufficient detail. The findings therefore describe the practices reported under the teacher's

designation of PBL without assuming that all its defining stages were demonstrated.

3. Evaluation and perceived outcomes

Ms. Z considered the approach helpful because she perceived students as participating actively and meeting the expected learning standard: "It is very helpful because, as can be seen in their group discussions, everyone is active. This is also supported by the learning results, which, praise be to God, show that everyone achieved mastery."

This statement represents the teacher's assessment. The claim that all students achieved mastery was not accompanied by assessment records in the reported findings. It therefore remains a teacher-reported outcome rather than an independently verified result. Similarly, active participation provides evidence of engagement but does not directly establish sustained learning motivation.

The reported documentation supported the presence of PBL-related planning and crossword activities. However, the findings did not identify the specific documentary features that confirmed each stage of implementation. Students' preferences for discussion, quizzes, and games were broadly compatible with the teacher's emphasis on interactive activities, but none of the students explicitly referred to crossword puzzles. Consequently, their general preferences cannot be treated as direct evidence of their responses to crossword-supported PBL.

Implementation Challenges and the Teacher's Responses

The interviews highlighted time management, instructional preparation, and differences in students' enthusiasm and understanding. These findings included both challenges perceived by the teacher and conditions she considered necessary for successful implementation.

1. Managing classroom time

Ms. Z emphasized the teacher's responsibility for allocating time and preparing the instructional approach: "The challenges depend on the teacher and the model. If the teacher can manage time and prepare the model properly from the beginning, without taking excessive time and while keeping it appropriate to the material, hopefully it can run smoothly."

Her statement framed time management as a condition for smooth implementation. It did not describe a specific occasion when insufficient time interrupted learning. The finding therefore concerns the teacher's perceived management demands rather than a documented instance of time-related disruption.

2. Preparing instruction

The teacher emphasized that the instructional approach needed to be prepared in advance and adapted to the lesson content. Preparation included selecting the approach, developing crossword materials, organizing the content, and specifying objectives and indicators.

Her account positioned preparation as important to coordinating the lesson. However, the interviews did not provide a detailed example of a planning difficulty or show how a particular revision resolved it.

3. Responding to differences among students

Teacher and student accounts indicated variation in enthusiasm and understanding. Some students were described as less enthusiastic or as not yet understanding the material, while others reported boredom during extended explanations and note-taking.

Although the teacher did not explicitly identify this variation as a separate implementation barrier, it emerged across the interviews as a classroom condition relevant to participation. The accounts suggest a need to attend to different students' experiences, but they do not establish that all students participated equally in group activities.

4. Strategies described by the teacher

Ms. Z described four responses to the demands of implementation: managing time, planning the lesson as a whole, guiding discussion, and providing individual attention.

Regarding planning and time allocation, she stated: "We manage time as effectively as possible and plan the lesson from beginning to end as teachers."

She also emphasized continued guidance during discussion: "The teacher acts as a learning guide, and the students then carry out the discussion. If they are guided until the end of the material or the scheduled lesson, God willing, it will run smoothly."

These statements show that the teacher regarded facilitation as an ongoing responsibility. She also reported attending to students individually and maintaining activities that she believed supported their enthusiasm. However, the available accounts did not specify the form of individual assistance or document its outcomes for particular students.

Overall, the findings describe a teacher's efforts to support learning through preparation, guided interaction, crossword activities, and attention to students' differing needs. Students expressed preferences for interactive activities and peer assistance, while evidence concerning their specific experiences of crossword puzzles and sustained motivational change remained limited.

Discussion

Learning Motivation as a Contextual Classroom Experience

The findings suggest that students' reported enthusiasm and attention varied with their classroom experiences. Seven of the ten students described boredom, reduced concentration, or sleepiness during extended explanations and note-taking, while several preferred discussion, quizzes, questions, and games. These accounts are most closely related to Uno's (2011) indicators concerning interesting learning activities and a supportive learning environment. They provide less information about other dimensions, such as aspirations, the desire to succeed, and sustained effort. Consequently, the findings support an interpretation of motivation as responsive to classroom conditions, but do not establish an overall increase in learning motivation.

Self-determination theory provides a useful framework for interpreting these experiences. Ryan and Deci (2000) emphasize the motivational

importance of competence, autonomy, and relatedness. FA's appreciation of quizzes because they reveal whether an answer is correct suggests that feedback was valued as information about understanding. This experience may be relevant to competence support, but does not independently demonstrate that the student's need for competence was satisfied. Similarly, NF's and MH's accounts of receiving explanations from classmates suggest opportunities for supportive interaction, without establishing the quality of relatedness experienced by all students. Bureau et al. (2022) identify psychological need satisfaction and teacher autonomy support as important correlates of self-determined motivation. Their findings strengthen the rationale for examining classroom support while also indicating that enjoyable activities alone are insufficient evidence of autonomous motivation.

Keller's (1987) ARCS model offers a complementary interpretation of students' responses to questions and quizzes, particularly in relation to attention, confidence, and satisfaction. However, the present interviews primarily reveal preferences and perceived usefulness rather than changes across all ARCS dimensions. Howard et al. (2021) further show that different forms of motivation have distinct relationships with achievement, persistence, and well-being. This distinction cautions against treating attention, enjoyment, participation, and achievement as interchangeable indicators. The teacher's perceived role is consistent with Wahyuningsih et al. (2024), while students' preferences for dialogue and collaboration are compatible with participatory approaches to Islamic Religious Education discussed by Ramayulis (2015) and Hamriah (2017). These connections contextualize the findings without establishing that particular activities produced lasting motivational change.

Interpreting the Integration of PBL and Crossword Activities

The teacher's emphasis on guiding group discussion is compatible with the facilitative role described in PBL literature. Hmelo-Silver (2004) and Savery (2006) explain that PBL involves identifying learning needs, investigating relevant information, and applying knowledge to a problem. Nevertheless, the present evidence documents these processes unevenly. Group work, teacher guidance, and crossword use are identifiable, whereas the initiating problem, students' inquiry, and the development and evaluation of solutions remain insufficiently described. The findings therefore demonstrate selected practices associated with PBL rather than confirming comprehensive implementation of its defining processes.

The crossword activity appears more clearly in the teacher's account as a means of reviewing terminology and checking understanding. This function is consistent with Silberman's (2009) discussion of crossword activities for revisiting previously studied material and with Whisenand's (2010) emphasis on learning subject-specific terms. Ramadhania and Yamin (2022) also provide a relevant comparison concerning vocabulary development, while Gulo and Muhid (2024) discuss the educational potential of crossword-based learning. However, evidence about vocabulary, critical thinking, or enjoyable learning cannot automatically substantiate a claim about motivation. In this

case, these sources support the plausibility of the activity's instructional function rather than verifying its motivational effects.

For *aqiqah* and *qurban*, familiarity with key terms may help students participate in discussions about religious practices and their social significance. The analytical implication is that crossword activities could consolidate concepts needed for problem investigation. Their contribution would depend on how clues, answers, and subsequent explanations connect with the problem being examined. Completing a terminology task alone does not demonstrate problem solving. Accordingly, the integration should be understood as a relationship between problem investigation and concept review, whose actual implementation requires clearer empirical documentation.

Comparison with Previous Research

Previous studies provide encouraging evidence concerning crossword-supported PBL. Herdiwati (2021) reported an increase in motivation scores from 74.78% in the first cycle to 80.76% in the second cycle. Erpiyana et al. (2023) and Trianingsih (2023) likewise reported motivational improvements or effects, while Parida (2025) reported a normalized gain of 0.53 among Grade VIII students. Rifa'i (2022) also investigated PBL and learning motivation in Islamic Religious Education. These studies establish a basis for examining the approach, but their measured outcomes cannot be transferred directly to the present case.

The teacher's positive assessment and students' preference for interactive activities are broadly compatible with the educational rationale underlying those studies. However, none of the students explicitly described their experience of crossword puzzles. Their accounts therefore cannot establish that the instructional combination generated the same changes reported elsewhere. Wijnia et al.'s (2024) meta-analysis reinforces this distinction: problem-driven approaches generally showed positive but heterogeneous motivational effects, with variation across motivational constructs, domains, and implementation settings. Thus, adopting PBL does not guarantee a particular motivational outcome, and evidence from other subjects cannot substitute for direct examination of students' experiences in Islamic Religious Education.

Feedback, Peer Support, and Alternative Explanations

The findings suggest several possible explanations for students' preference for interactive lessons, including access to feedback, assistance from classmates, and variation in classroom activities. These possibilities should be treated as interpretations rather than demonstrated mechanisms of crossword-supported PBL. FA's account, for example, concerns quizzes generally, while NF and MH describe peer assistance without explicitly connecting it to crossword activities.

Feedback is particularly relevant because students may value opportunities to identify misunderstandings. Wisniewski et al. (2020) show that feedback effects vary substantially according to the information conveyed. This suggests that checking whether a crossword answer is correct may have limited instructional value unless students also receive explanations that help

them understand errors. The present data do not establish what feedback accompanied the crossword activity, so immediate corrective feedback should remain a potential instructional benefit rather than a confirmed finding.

Other explanations also remain possible. Increased attention may have reflected novelty, reduced periods of passive listening, greater teacher attention, or opportunities for social interaction. The study cannot isolate the contribution of PBL from that of crossword puzzles or these accompanying conditions. Likewise, the teacher's report that all students achieved mastery concerns perceived learning outcomes. Without assessment records and direct motivational evidence, it does not verify either universal mastery or improved motivation.

Implementation Demands and Teacher Facilitation

The teacher emphasized advance preparation, time allocation, discussion guidance, and individual attention. These concerns are consistent with the facilitation demands described by Hmelo-Silver (2004). Khaerunnisa et al. (2023) provide a further point of comparison concerning PBL and motivation, although the present case additionally highlights the practical work required to organize participation. Prayetno et al. (2025) reported limited group cooperation, low discussion participation, and difficulties associated with teacher readiness in Islamic Religious Education. These findings indicate that opportunities for collaboration do not necessarily produce equitable participation.

An important distinction concerns the status of time management in the present evidence. Ms. Z described effective time allocation as a condition for smooth implementation rather than recounting a specific interruption caused by insufficient time. Her account therefore differs from Prayetno et al.'s (2025) reported concern about the adequacy of weekly instructional hours. Similarly, preparation was presented as necessary, but its effectiveness was not independently demonstrated. Silberman's (2009) emphasis on selecting keywords and developing appropriate clues helps explain the preparation involved in crossword activities. The practical implication is to align problem investigation, discussion, concept review, and feedback within the available lesson time, while monitoring whose participation remains limited.

Contribution, Limitations, and Future Research

The contribution of this study lies in distinguishing the teacher's intended motivational support from the classroom experiences reported by students. The teacher described planning and facilitation, while students emphasized interaction, feedback, and peer assistance. Together, these perspectives identify conditions relevant to supporting participation, but leave the specific motivational contribution of crossword-supported PBL unresolved. This distinction supports a more cautious account of instructional practice than a general claim of effectiveness.

As a single qualitative case, the findings are context-specific and do not provide a basis for statistical generalization (Sugiyono, 2023). Further limitations concern the incomplete documentation of PBL processes, the absence of explicit student accounts of crossword use, and reliance on the teacher's statement about learning mastery. Preliminary observations from

2025 also require clear separation from the main fieldwork in 2026. Future research should document the instructional sequence through repeated observations, collect the crossword materials and students' work, and elicit accounts of specific learning episodes. Longitudinal qualitative research could examine whether initial interest develops into sustained effort. Classroom action research or mixed-methods designs could additionally investigate change using appropriate motivational measures, while keeping learning achievement analytically distinct from motivation.

Conclusion

This study found that Grade IX students' reported enthusiasm and attention in Islamic Religious Education varied with their classroom experiences. Students described boredom and reduced concentration during extended explanations and note-taking, while expressing greater interest in discussion, quizzes, games, and peer learning. The teacher described planning, guided group work, crossword activities, and individual attention as efforts to support participation. These findings draw attention to the importance of classroom interaction and instructional support, questioning the assumption that limited enthusiasm primarily reflects students' characteristics. However, the evidence does not establish that crossword-supported problem-based learning produced sustained motivational improvement or effects greater than anticipated.

The study reinforces previous research emphasizing teacher facilitation, feedback, and peer support, while questioning the inference that enjoyable activities, visible participation, or reported learning mastery necessarily indicate stronger motivation. Its contribution lies in distinguishing intended motivational support, students' reported experiences, and demonstrated motivational change. This distinction provides an analytical perspective for examining crossword-supported PBL without attributing general preferences for interactive learning to a specific instructional combination. Crossword puzzles may support concept review, but their relationship with problem investigation and students' motivation requires clearer empirical evidence.

The study was limited to one teacher and ten students at a single school, restricting the transferability of its findings. Additional limitations include incomplete documentation of PBL processes, limited student accounts specifically addressing crossword activities, and the absence of assessment records supporting the teacher's mastery claim. Further research involving larger and more diverse participant groups, multiple schools, repeated observations, and longitudinal or mixed-methods designs would provide a more comprehensive understanding. Teachers should connect crossword tasks explicitly with contextual problems, provide explanatory feedback, and monitor participation across students. Schools should support instructional planning and teacher development while encouraging evaluation that distinguishes immediate engagement from sustained motivation.

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