

Reframing Literacy in Islamic Education: Embedding Numeracy and Socio-Cultural Literacy through Project-Based Learning Model

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the transformation of learning practices in Islamic elementary schools, particularly the development of integrated literacy encompassing numeracy literacy and sociocultural literacy. The study offers both theoretical and practical contributions to the development of integrated literacy within a curriculum grounded in Islamic values, while simultaneously presenting a pedagogical innovation. A qualitative case study approach was employed, involving interviews with several key informants, observations, and document analysis. The data were analyzed using the interactive model proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, which includes data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. The findings reveal that, in the planning stage, teachers: (a) analyze the Learning Outcomes, (b) formulate learning objectives, (c) assess student characteristics, (d) analyze and internalize literacy competencies, and (e) prepare instructional materials. In the implementation stage, teachers apply differentiated instruction by following the steps of the project-based learning model: (a) starting with an essential question, (b) designing the project plan, (c) creating an activity schedule, (d) supervising the project implementation process, (e) assessing the final products, and (f) conducting evaluation. The study demonstrates that numeracy and sociocultural literacies can be developed simultaneously, thereby enhancing students' engagement and motivation to learn. It also provides empirical evidence that religious education subjects can serve as an effective space for literacy development, while offering a conceptual foundation for strengthening curriculum policy in Islamic elementary education.

ABSTRAK

Tulisan ini mengeksplorasi transformasi pembelajaran di sekolah dasar Islam khususnya untuk mengembangkan literasi terintegrasi yaitu literasi numerasi dan literasi sosial budaya. Penelitian ini memberikan kontribusi teoritis dan praktis pada pembelajaran literasi terintegrasi dalam kurikulum berbasis nilai-nilai Islam sekaligus menawarkan sebuah inovasi pedagogis. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan studi kasus kualitatif dengan melibatkan beberapa informan kunci untuk wawancara, observasi, dan studi dokumentasi. Peneliti menggunakan analisis data interaktif menurut Miles, Huberman, dan Saldana yang meliputi kondensasi data, penyajian data, dan penarikan kesimpulan/verifikasi. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa dalam perencanaan pembelajaran, guru melakukan (a) analisis Capaian Pembelajaran, (b) menyusun tujuan pembelajaran, (c) menganalisis karakteristik siswa, (d) menganalisis dan menginternalisasi kompetensi literasi, dan (e) menyusun perangkat pembelajaran. Sementara itu dalam pelaksanaan pembelajaran, guru menggunakan pembelajaran berdiferensiasi dengan mengikuti langkah-langkah model pembelajaran berbasis proyek (a) memulai dengan pertanyaan penting, (b) merancang rencana proyek, (c) membuat jadwal kegiatan, (d) mengawasi proses pengerjaan proyek, (e) menilai produk yang dihasilkan, dan (f) melakukan

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evaluasi. Penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa literasi numerasi dan sosial budaya dapat dikembangkan secara simultan sehingga dapat meningkatkan keterlibatan dan motivasi belajar siswa. Penelitian ini memberikan bukti empiris bahwa mata pelajaran keagamaan dapat menjadi ruang pengembangan literasi yang sekaligus memberikan landasan dalam memperkuat kebijakan pengembangan kurikulum pendidikan dasar Islam.

Introducing

Literacy is a crucial dimension of education, encompassing the ability to read, write, comprehend, and analyze information both critically and creatively. At the elementary school level, literacy serves as a fundamental cornerstone for developing students' academic and cognitive skills (Iswara et al., 2022). However, data indicate that Indonesia's literacy performance remains at an alarming level. Results from the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) place Indonesia among the lowest in literacy achievement (OECD, 2018). According to the report, Indonesian students, on average, are only able to comprehend simple texts, lagging far behind peers in other countries who demonstrate mastery of more complex literacy skills. This presents a significant challenge for the education sector, particularly for elementary-level students, to strengthen and reorient literacy learning approaches (Rahmah et al., 2023). The condition underscores the urgent need to prioritize literacy development in elementary education. Literacy should not be reduced to basic reading and writing abilities; rather, it constitutes the gateway to fostering critical thinking and problem-solving capacities essential for students' preparedness in facing global challenges (Chalkiadaki, 2018).

In response, innovative learning strategies are required to enhance literacy outcomes, including the design of engaging teaching materials, the adoption of relevant pedagogical methods, and the integration of technology. Equally critical is the involvement of teachers, parents, and the wider school environment in cultivating a literacy-supportive ecosystem (Dewantara et al., 2023). With targeted and sustained interventions, elementary madrasas can play a pivotal role in advancing literacy quality, thereby contributing to the broader competitiveness of Indonesian education at the global level (Munthahana et al., 2023). As a strategic component of basic education, elementary madrasas serve as a formative stage in building and strengthening students' literacy skills. At this level, children are at a crucial stage of cognitive and linguistic development, where they begin to master reading, writing, and the deeper comprehension of information (Iswara et al., 2022).

As the foundation of formal education, elementary madrasas hold a central responsibility in nurturing essential literacy skills that extend beyond technical abilities, such as decoding letters and words, to include interpreting meaning, analyzing texts, and synthesizing information from diverse sources. This process provides not only the basis for continued academic learning but also essential life skills for the future (Khasanah & Purnamasari, 2023; Rahmah et al., 2023). Furthermore, the madrasa curriculum—rooted in religious values offers a unique opportunity to integrate literacy development with character and moral education. Learning anchored in the Qur'an, hadith, and Islamic values can simultaneously advance literacy competencies and instill virtuous dispositions in students. (Widodo et al., 2025; Robbaniyah & Baharumi, 2025).

Through innovative and student-centered approaches, elementary madrasas can become an ideal arena for cultivating a culture of literacy from an early age

(Fathinnaufal & Hidayati, 2020). Literacy should not be confined to specific subjects but can be embedded across the curriculum, including in Aqidah Akhlak. Such integration broadens the scope of student literacy, encompassing reading and writing skills as well as higher-order abilities such as comprehension, analysis, and application of values in daily life (Chalkiadaki, 2018; Iswara et al., 2022; OECD, 2018). Aqidah Akhlak, in particular, provides students with opportunities to deepen their understanding of the Qur'an and translate its teachings into practical action. By aligning literacy development with learning outcomes, instruction not only strengthens academic proficiency but also cultivates students' character and moral integrity in accordance with Islamic values.

The integration of literacy into Aqidah Akhlak can be facilitated through engaging methods such as discussions, text analysis, and interactive activities. When applied effectively, this approach renders learning more meaningful by enhancing literacy competencies while simultaneously shaping students' personalities on the basis of religious values. (Mukhibat et al., 2024; Purwanto et al., 2024). Integrated literacy, in this sense, refers to a pedagogical approach that unites multiple literacies, including scientific, numerical, reading, and socio-cultural, designed to equip learners with competencies relevant to the demands of the modern world. Such an approach not only strengthens technical proficiency within each literacy domain but also fosters students' capacity to connect and synthesize knowledge and skills in authentic contexts (Almazroui, 2023; Sasson et al., 2018).

In general, literacy emphasizes the ability to research, explain, evaluate, and use scientific information as a basis for responsible decision-making and action. Numeracy literacy focuses on the ability to represent objects or data mathematically, apply problem-solving strategies, and reason and provide logical reasons (Iswara et al., 2022; Munthahana et al., 2023). Meanwhile, sociocultural literacy teaches students to understand and appreciate sociocultural diversity, emphasizing the ability to demonstrate and explain cultural values, apply them in everyday life, and respond to, analyze, evaluate, and create works relevant to sociocultural issues (Nicol et al., 2003). This contrasts with previous research that generally places literacy integration only in general subjects such as mathematics, science, or language (Haryanto et al., 2024). Furthermore, research on Project-Based Learning in Islamic religious education has never been linked to improvements in numeracy and sociocultural literacy. For example, research by Aditya Firdaus et al. (2023) found that Project-Based Learning (PBL) is only used to improve student learning outcomes in schools, so its application in developing literacy based on religious values remains underexplored. This gap highlights the need for more in-depth research to uncover strategies for developing student literacy while strengthening religious values. In this study, researchers present an innovation by applying an integrated literacy approach through the Project-Based Learning (PBL) model to the teaching of Aqidah Akhlak. This introduces a new dimension to encourage students to think critically and reason logically, while instilling spiritual values in real-life contexts.

Aqidah Akhlak is one of the subjects in elementary madrasas that aims to form and develop faith and noble morals in students based on Islamic teachings. Through this subject, students are taught to understand the basic concepts of faith in Allah SWT, angels, books, apostles, the last day, and destiny, and to apply them in everyday life (Nisak, 2018). More specifically, this course focuses on the formation of students' character so that they become individuals who are faithful, pious, and have noble morals according to the guidance of the Qur'an and Hadith (Rahmawati, 2020). However, the

reality in the field shows that learning practices that integrate literacy are still not widely implemented, especially in the Aqidah Akhlak course in elementary madrasahs. The Aqidah Akhlak subject has great potential to develop various types of literacy, but most Aqidah Akhlak learning still focuses on the traditional theoretical approach, so it has not fully utilized the integrated literacy approach (Firdaus et al., 2022). This study aims to explore Aqidah Akhlak learning based on integrated literacy through a project-based learning model. The novelty of this research lies in the application of integrated literacy, namely numeracy and socio-cultural literacy, in Aqidah Akhlak learning, which has not been discussed in previous Islamic education research.

Based on a preliminary study at MIS Nurul Iman Sekincau, the implementation of integrated literacy-based learning has been carried out by class teachers with the aim of developing the literacy competencies of grade VI students. The integrated literacy that is strengthened includes numeracy literacy and socio-cultural literacy. In addition, the increase in learning motivation shown by students during the learning process shows the effectiveness of the approach used by teachers in creating student learning experiences. The project-based learning model used by teachers can contribute to strengthening student literacy simultaneously, while creating opportunities for students to link learning materials to real-world contexts. This is interesting to study further in order to understand how integrated literacy-based learning practices can be implemented effectively through the project-based learning model in grade VI of MIS Nurul Iman Sekincau.

Method

This study employed a qualitative approach using a case study design as outlined by Yin (2018), selected for its capacity to investigate contemporary phenomena within authentic, real-life contexts and to provide an in-depth understanding of ongoing learning practices. The research focused on integrated literacy-based learning implemented through a project-based learning model in Grade VI at MIS Nurul Iman Sekincau. This design was considered the most appropriate for capturing the complexity, dynamics, and contextual factors shaping the literacy learning process. Consistent with Creswell (2018) and Denzin and Lincoln (2018), the study sought to construct meaning, explore participants' perspectives, and present a holistic description of the phenomenon under investigation.

Participants were selected through purposive sampling to ensure the inclusion of individuals directly involved in integrated project-based literacy learning. The sample comprised the principal, the vice principal for curriculum, the classroom teacher coordinator, the Islamic religious education teacher, and five sixth-grade students actively engaged in project-based learning activities. Participant selection was based on their relevance to the research focus, their roles in implementing the learning model, and their potential to contribute diverse insights. Prior to data collection, all participants received an explanation of the study's objectives and provided informed consent, ensuring adherence to research ethics. Demographic details of the participants are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Demography of participants

Participants	Gender	Age (year)	Position	Special Role
P1	Male	43	Principal	Policy initiator in school
P2	Female	39	Curriculum coordinator	Curriculum developer
P3	Female	34	Sixth-grade teacher	Teacher coordinator
P4	Female	39	Islamic religious teacher	Classroom teacher
P5	Male	12	Sixth-grade student	Learning subject
P6	Male	12	Sixth-grade student	Learning subject
P7	Female	11	Sixth-grade student	Learning subject
P8	Female	12	Sixth-grade student	Learning subject
P9	Female	12	Sixth-grade student	Learning subject

The primary instrument of this research was the researcher herself (Creswell, 2018), supported by additional instruments in the form of an interview guide, observation guide, and a document analysis checklist. The interview guide was semi-structured, allowing the researcher to flexibly explore participants' perspectives while remaining focused on key themes such as planning, implementation, and challenges in integrated literacy learning. The observation guide was used to record classroom interactions, teacher teaching strategies, student engagement in project activities, and overall classroom dynamics. Meanwhile, the document analysis checklist included categories for reviewing lesson plans, student project reports, assessment rubrics, and documentation in the form of activity photos. This combination of instruments is expected to provide systematic, comprehensive data that aligns with the objectives of this research.

Data collection took place over eight months using three primary techniques. In-depth interviews were conducted with school leaders, teachers, and students to explore their perceptions, experiences, and strategies related to project-based literacy learning. Classroom observations were carried out to capture daily learning activities, particularly the integration of literacy skills into project tasks, teacher-student interactions, and the learning environment. Document analysis was performed on curriculum materials, learning tools, assessment instruments, and student project outputs. Triangulation of techniques, sources, and time strengthened the credibility of the findings by enabling the researcher to capture both subjective participant experiences and observable classroom practices, thereby producing a comprehensive portrayal of literacy integration in learning.

Data analysis followed the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2014), consisting of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing or verification, all conducted simultaneously throughout the research process to deepen understanding of emerging patterns. To enhance validity and credibility, the study incorporated member checking, prolonged engagement in the field, and peer debriefing, as recommended by Baxter and Jack (2008). These procedures ensured the reliability of

the findings and contributed meaningfully to the understanding of integrated literacy learning practices within the context of Islamic basic education.

Results

Integrated Literacy-Based Learning Planning in the Subject of Akidah Akhlak

In every learning process, there is a process of preparing a design or learning plan. In integrated literacy-based learning in class VI MIS Nurul Iman Sekincau, planning is the initial stage carried out to develop learning activities in the classroom. Teachers prepare learning plans so that learning activities truly achieve the expected goals while integrating two types of literacy, namely numeracy and socio-cultural literacy, in learning through the project-based learning model. Several steps are taken in the process of preparing the Akidah Akhlak learning plan in class VI. Teachers begin learning planning by conducting an in-depth analysis of the learning achievement documents that have been set by the government. This analysis is an important initial step in understanding the competencies that students must achieve in the Akidah Akhlak subject. Competencies that cover various dimensions are detailed into more specific indicators for each theme or learning material.

Teachers examine each learning achievement to ensure that the learning objectives designed are relevant to the context of students' needs, especially in developing student literacy. In learning practices, teachers not only focus on academic achievement but also identify how each learning achievement can be linked to literacy strengthening. The teacher connects the material with numeracy and socio-cultural literacy and then formulates learning indicators that reflect the dimensions of both literacies. Each indicator formulated not only covers the scientific aspects of Akidah Akhlak but also equips students with contextual and applicable literacy skills. The teacher conducts an in-depth analysis of student characteristics as an initial step in learning planning. This analysis covers various aspects, including the level of cognitive development, learning interests, and learning styles, all of which can contribute to successful learning. In analyzing cognitive development, the teacher utilizes the results of diagnostic assessments and observations to determine the extent of students' thinking abilities, from the ability to understand abstract concepts to problem-solving skills. This information is the basis for teachers to determine the level of difficulty of the material and the appropriate delivery method. As conveyed by the following teacher.

"...For example, if students are at a low level, I usually simplify the concept by giving real examples that are close to the students' world or using concrete tools or media. In addition, I usually also analyze students' learning interests to ensure that the learning carried out is relevant and interesting (Intv. 01-Sept2024).

In this context, teachers use simple surveys to find out what topics or activities students like. Teachers also design varied activities and consider students' socio-cultural backgrounds as part of a differentiated learning approach. By understanding the socio-cultural environment in which students live, teachers hope to be able to relate learning materials to the context of their lives. In teaching, teachers often use examples from local traditions as part of local culture. Teachers also integrate socio-cultural literacy by encouraging students to discuss and analyze how Islamic values can be applied in community life. The learning objectives designed by teachers are seen not

only to include mastery of the main concepts in Akidah Akhlak but also to develop students' literacy skills comprehensively.

In formulating these objectives, teachers ensure that there is a balance between understanding religious material and developing literacy skills, both numeracy and socio-cultural literacy. This makes the learning steps more focused and relevant to student development. In addition, in formulating the steps, teachers also consider student characteristics and the relevance of the material to the challenges of life around students so that learning becomes more contextual and meaningful. The balance between understanding religious material and strengthening literacy skills is an aspect of consideration in formulating learning objectives. In the process of identifying literacy in learning, teachers refer to the analysis of predetermined learning outcomes that are adjusted to the relevance of the subject matter to students' daily lives. Socio-cultural literacy is integrated through discussions that link the material to social challenges in the students' environment, such as the importance of honesty in social interactions.

This process is carried out by taking into account both the characteristics of the subject matter and the students' potential in literacy-based learning. Once the literacy dimensions are internalized, teachers identify the relevant literacy competencies and formulate appropriate learning strategies. These strategies involve the development of learning activities that explicitly foster numeracy skills as well as socio-cultural literacy. To achieve this, teachers design project-based activities that engage students in analyzing Islamic values within specific social phenomena. A project-based learning approach is employed to provide students with varied and meaningful learning experiences that strengthen literacy. Learning activities are intentionally structured so that each stage of instruction implicitly or explicitly contributes to literacy development. In parallel, teachers cultivate a learning environment that naturally facilitates the application of literacy, such as through group tasks requiring collaboration, interpretation, and critical analysis. Overall, teachers offer direct and systematic guidance, beginning with reading critical texts, continuing with data analysis, and culminating in the evaluation and synthesis of information. This integrated approach not only enhances students' literacy competencies but also embeds literacy as an essential component of the learning process.

Teachers prepare learning tools as guidelines for implementing learning, where the learning tools are designed in detail to ensure that each learning element is well structured and supports the achievement of learning for integrated literacy. These learning tools include clear learning steps and a sequence of activities to be carried out by students and teachers. One important component in learning tools is teaching materials, reading texts that are relevant to the Akidah Akhlak material, and fun and meaningful scenarios. These learning tools also include activities to develop numeracy and socio-cultural literacy. In the activities, teachers invite students to identify the social challenges they face and explore solutions based on religious principles. In addition, presentation activities are also designed to provide opportunities for students to communicate their understanding of the concepts they have learned and how these values can be applied in their social context. As conveyed by the following teacher.

"...In this way, it is hoped that students will gain knowledge about the material but also develop in-depth socio-cultural skills which are very important in forming their character and attitudes towards society (Intv. 02-Oct2024).

In addition, this learning tool also includes various assessments that support

integrated literacy strengthening. Formative and summative assessments are designed to evaluate students' understanding of the material while measuring their literacy skills, as the following teacher's statement.

"...Formative assessment, I use various methods, such as short quizzes, class discussions, assignments, student development during the learning process, and providing constructive feedback on their friends' work. For summative assessment, I use tests and through final project products produced by students. The product is designed to see the final achievement of students, both in terms of understanding the Akidah Akhlak material and the literacy skills they have developed (Intv.03-Sept2024).

Implementation of Integrated Literacy-based Learning in the Akidah Akhlak Subject

The implementation of integrated literacy-based learning at MIS Nurul Iman Sekincau refers to the differentiated learning of the Merdeka curriculum, which includes differentiation of content, process, and product. The emphasis of this literacy is focused on the learning experiences that students go through related to numeracy and socio-cultural literacy. Numeracy literacy focuses on the ability to represent objects or data mathematically, apply problem-solving strategies, and reason and provide reasons based on logic. Socio-cultural literacy teaches students to understand and appreciate social and cultural diversity, with a focus on the ability to demonstrate and explain cultural values, apply them in everyday life, and respond, analyze, evaluate, and create works that are relevant to socio-cultural issues. In the implementation of the project-based learning model in class VI of MIS Nurul Iman Sekincau, teachers develop systematic learning steps to improve students' numeracy and socio-cultural literacy. Learning begins with a trigger stage designed to stimulate critical thinking through basic questions that are relevant to students' daily lives. This question is not only intended to explore students' curiosity, but also to build their awareness of the importance of problem-solving in real contexts. As conveyed by the following teacher.





"...With this process, I hope that students will understand that learning is not only limited to memorizing concepts, but also involves applying knowledge in broader situations. I only act as a facilitator who guides students in exploring the problems to be studied and encourages them to find creative, applicable solutions (Intv.04-Nov2024).

The next stage, the teacher guides students in designing a project that includes identifying roles in the group, preparing a work plan, and determining the resources needed. Dividing tasks into groups allows students to develop collaborative skills and build responsibility in completing the project effectively. In order for the project to run according to plan, the teacher helps students create a schedule of activities that includes work stages and completion deadlines. Setting this deadline aims to train students' discipline and time management skills in working on assignments systematically. During the project implementation process, students are directed to document each stage in a reflective journal containing notes on project development, obstacles faced, and completion strategies used. This documentation is part of metacognitive learning that helps students reflect on their own thinking processes and improve conceptual understanding of the material being studied.

After the project is completed, the teacher assesses the resulting product by

considering aspects of relevance, creativity, and depth of analysis, which are stated in the final report. Evaluation of project results not only focuses on cognitive aspects but also includes affective and psychomotor aspects such as cooperation, independence, and communication skills. At this stage, students are given the opportunity to present their project results in front of the class, which allows them to practice their public speaking skills and receive constructive feedback from teachers and peers. This presentation activity is also a means for students to develop analytical and argumentative thinking skills in explaining the concepts they have learned and the products they have produced. By implementing this project-based learning model, it shows that numeracy and socio-cultural literacy can be developed well, and students look very active and enthusiastic in participating in learning. The overall learning scenario applied by the teacher is shown in Table 2 below.

Table 2. Numeracy and Socio-Cultural Literacy-based Learning Scenarios

Learning Steps	Student Activities	Documentation
Start with an important question.	Asking basic questions about what to do or solutions to solve a problem related to the learning material to be studied. These questions are designed to be relevant to the context of students' daily lives and in accordance with the expected learning outcomes.	
Design a plan for the project.	Discuss and create a project plan (dividing roles into groups and noting things that need to be prepared for student projects). This aims to ensure that students understand the goals, responsibilities, and share roles according to the abilities of group members.	
Create a schedule of activities.	Agree on a schedule for the project. Setting a deadline can help students learn to manage their time effectively and stay focused on achieving the project goals. Teachers provide periodic reminders to ensure students adhere to the schedule.	
Supervise the project work process.	Create projects and ensure that they are implemented according to schedule. Students can write down the stages and record progress that will later be included in the report. Teachers monitor this process periodically, provide guidance, and help if obstacles	

arise.

Provide an assessment of the products produced. Discussing the feasibility of the project being run and the final report to the teacher. At this stage, students are asked to reflect on the results of the project, identify advantages and disadvantages, and provide arguments regarding the relevance of the product.

Conducting an evaluation Presenting project results and receiving feedback and direction from the teacher. Students are given the opportunity to present their work in front of the class, explaining the process, the purpose of the project, and the results they have achieved.



Discussion

Lesson planning constitutes a crucial stage that determines the direction, quality, and relevance of students' learning experiences, particularly in the context of integrated literacy-based learning. In line with McTighe and Wiggins (2005), effective planning must begin with the formulation of clear, measurable, and meaningful objectives. The findings of this study indicate that teachers of grade VI at MIS Nurul Iman Sekincau prepared lesson plans that not only fulfilled administrative requirements but went further by integrating numeracy and socio-cultural literacy into the Akidah Akhlak subject. Religious education is no longer confined to rote memorization of dogmatic content; rather, it has evolved into an arena of integrated literacy that is contextual and closely tied to students' everyday realities. OECD's (2018) perspective, which emphasizes literacy as a multidimensional competence encompassing numeracy, digital skills, and socio-cultural awareness, provides the theoretical foundation for arguing that religious education must transcend purely cognitive paradigms. This research reveals a paradigm shift whereby religious education is repositioned not merely as a normative domain, but as a site of critical and contextual literacy development.

The integration of religious content with numeracy and socio-cultural literacy demonstrates that the subject of Akidah Akhlak can function as a strategic locus for developing 21st-century competencies. This finding is consistent with studies by Dangol et al. (2024) and Kim and Lee (2024), which confirm that integrated literacy has the potential to strengthen students' critical reflection on both knowledge and lived experiences. However, this study contributes a novel dimension by incorporating the religious and spiritual aspects of literacy, an area largely overlooked in previous scholarship. While prior studies tend to emphasize literacy primarily as an academic tool for sharpening cognitive abilities, the present study shows that literacy can also serve as a medium for nurturing students' moral and spiritual development (Skerrett, 2015; Wai-Yip, 2008). This extends the conceptual horizon of literacy by positioning it within a dialectical space where religious texts, numeracy, and socio-cultural experiences intersect. Such a framework resonates with Kivi et al. (2021), who argued that context-based literacy enhances learning motivation, yet this study adds a

distinctive layer: the internalization of religious values that enable students to be intellectually critical while also morally discerning. Religious learning thus becomes a dialogical space in which sacred texts, logical reasoning, and social realities converge to cultivate students capable of interpreting reality through both critical and religious lenses (Kumar, 2017).

Furthermore, this integration affirms the arguments of Muhammad et al. (2023) and Yugo et al. (2024), who emphasized that meaningful learning must always be connected to students' lived experiences. Teachers at MIS Nurul Iman Sekincau explicitly linked Akidah Akhlak content with social phenomena in daily life, enabling students to grasp Islamic values while simultaneously interpreting social realities from a moral-religious standpoint. The study demonstrates that religious education can be positioned as a medium of multidimensional literacy, shaping learners who are not only academically competent but also ethically grounded, socially responsible, and spiritually mature. The incorporation of numeracy into religious education constitutes a significant innovation that challenges long-standing paradigms. Traditionally, religious education has tended to be confined to normative-doctrinal approaches that prioritize rote memorization, leaving little space for logical reasoning. (Mukhibat et al., 2024; Purwanto et al., 2024). The findings, however, show that teachers incorporated simple cases requiring mathematical reasoning, yet framed these within an ethical-religious context. Such practice highlights that numeracy extends beyond mechanistic computation; it becomes a means for rational, value-based decision-making (Dewantara et al., 2023).

Compared to earlier research, such as Kivi et al. (2021), which emphasized contextual literacy as a means to enhance student motivation, the present findings add an ethical dimension by positioning literacy as a moral-spiritual instrument. Consequently, numeracy attains renewed meaning when fused with religiosity, creating an epistemological bridge between logic and ethics. Another critical aspect is the formulation of learning objectives guided by the SMART framework (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-bound). As stressed by McTighe and Wiggins (2005), SMART goals ensure that learning objectives function as a compass to maintain pedagogical coherence. The findings show that teachers targeted not only cognitive outcomes but also affective and socio-cultural literacy aspects. This aligns with Cahyanto et al. (2024), who argue that modern religious education requires a balance between knowledge acquisition and character formation. Yet, the significant distinction in this study lies in its demonstration of how learning objectives are interwoven with multidimensional literacy, an approach rarely highlighted in prior research, which largely situates religious education objectives within normative frameworks. (Ali et al., 2021; Chanifah et al., 2021).

The central message derived from these findings is that religious education can be designed in a modern and systematic way without losing its spiritual essence, thereby maintaining its relevance for 21st-century learners. Furthermore, the integration of literacy into learning objectives aligns with OECD's (2018) concept of functional literacy, which emphasizes the need to connect learning directly to real-life contexts. In this study, teachers encouraged students to relate faith-based content to their social environments, ensuring that learning was imbued with authentic meaning. Such practice reflects epistemic justice, as articulated by Komariah and Nihayah (2023), who argue that contextualized learning enables students from diverse backgrounds to access meaning in ways that resonate with their lived realities. The findings also correspond

with those of Asrori et al. (2025) and Asrori (2023), who emphasize that value transmission becomes more impactful when embodied in social praxis. Beyond these contributions, however, this study advances the discourse by demonstrating that Akidah Akhlak learning outcomes extend beyond conceptual understanding toward tangible practice. Nevertheless, a critical question remains as to how such integration can be institutionalized within the curriculum on a sustained basis, rather than relying solely on the initiatives of individual teachers, an issue that warrants further research and exploration.

Overall, the study addresses a long-standing issue in religious education, the dichotomy between cognition and affect (Askar et al., 2025; Falaqi et al., 2025). It offers a model of integration that links cognitive skills (numeracy), socio-cultural awareness, and religious values within a clearly structured set of objectives. The practical contribution lies in providing teachers with a contextual and flexible planning strategy. Theoretically, it extends the horizon of religious education as a strategic domain for multidimensional literacy development, rather than merely transmitting doctrine. Nonetheless, several gaps remain for future research, including questions on how the sustainability of such practices can be measured, how students from diverse socio-economic backgrounds engage with these approaches, and what school policies are required to institutionalize literacy integration so that it does not remain at the experimental level.

The integration of literacy also reveals strong connections with the paradigm of differentiated learning in the Merdeka Curriculum. This finding supports Gheysens et al.'s (2022) argument that differentiation in content, process, and product is essential to ensure that students from diverse backgrounds can reach their full potential. Teachers in this school not only presented numeracy and socio-cultural literacy as pedagogical supplements but positioned them as core instruments to accommodate learning needs. (Bahri et al., 2025; Kurniawan et al., 2025). This is consistent with Nguyen et al. (2023), who stressed that understanding students' socio-cultural contexts is pivotal to successful contextualized learning. The novel contribution here is that, in religious education, differentiation is not solely directed toward academic needs but also toward the transformative internalization of religious values. Thus, differentiation in religious education encompasses moral-spiritual dimensions that have rarely been addressed in prior research.

Moreover, this practice illustrates the relevance of constructivist approaches such as *Project-based Learning* (PjBL), as discussed by Krajcik et al. (2023) and Zhang and Ma (2023). Both argue that PjBL promotes knowledge construction through deep exploration, while Maros et al. (2023) add that project learning fosters social responsibility. The findings support these claims but extend them by showing that PjBL in religious education not only strengthens cognition and collaboration but also cultivates religious consciousness and reflective capacity to interpret social realities. In this sense, integrated literacy becomes a transformative medium that unites cognition, collaboration, social responsibility, and spirituality. This distinction demonstrates how the present study broadens the theoretical scope of PjBL by foregrounding religiosity as an essential dimension of 21st-century learning, an area rarely emphasized in earlier works.

Another unique aspect is the emphasis on assessment. Teachers combined written tests with reflective discussions, project presentations, and collaborative activities. This strengthens Orsmond et al.'s (2004) findings that authentic assessment enables

students to express their understanding in real-world contexts. Yet this study goes further by showing that assessment in religious education can also function as a tool for character formation. These results contradict earlier studies that framed religious assessment mainly as verification of rote memorization, thus addressing the gap between academic assessment and contextual learning needs. However, questions remain regarding the replicability of such authentic assessment models in schools with limited resources or conservative learning cultures (Hidayati et al., 2023; Dean et al., 2023).

Taken together, the implications of these findings are both practical and theoretical. At the practical level, they affirm that teachers should view lesson planning not as a rigid administrative task but as a creative endeavor to design integrated and relevant learning experiences (Bytyqi, 2022). At the policy level, the findings highlight the urgency of developing curricula that move beyond cognitive knowledge transfer and open spaces for the integration of cross-disciplinary literacies, numeracy, socio-cultural, and religiosity as the foundation for holistic student competence. At the academic level, this study repositions religious education not as a static normative field but as a dynamic, multidimensional arena capable of cultivating critical, adaptive, and ethically grounded learners. Ultimately, this research answers part of the question of how literacy integration can enrich religious education in Islamic elementary schools, while also opening further exploration into its limitations, challenges, and potential replication in other contexts. Religious education, therefore, emerges as a creative dialectical space that integrates cognition, affect, morality, and social praxis into a coherent whole—a significant contribution to literacy-based educational development in the global era (Chen et al., 2022; Sasson et al., 2018; Tsybulsky & Muchnik-Rozanov, 2019).

Conclusion

The study demonstrates that the integration of numeracy and socio-cultural literacy in Grade VI learning at MIS Nurul Iman Sekincau is effectively achieved through context-based planning and differentiated project-based learning. The findings directly answer the research question by showing that systematic alignment between Learning Outcomes, teaching devices, and students' characteristics enables literacy to function as an embedded learning driver rather than a supplementary skill. Religious education subjects, when designed through integrated project-based approaches, become strategic spaces for cultivating 21st-century competencies, particularly collaboration, adaptability, religiosity, and character development, thus contributing to national literacy goals.

This study, however, is limited by its single-site case design, relatively small participant pool, and reliance on qualitative self-reported data, which may constrain the generalizability of the findings. Future research should expand to multi-site comparisons across different madrasah contexts, incorporate mixed-methods designs to strengthen measurement of literacy gains, and explore longitudinal impacts of integrated literacy practices on students' academic and socio-emotional development.

Building on these findings, future studies could examine how integrated literacy models operate across various religious education subjects, how teacher professional development influences implementation quality, and how school ecosystems support sustained literacy innovation. Practically, the results offer guidance for teachers in designing contextualized learning, for curriculum developers in embedding

multidimensional literacy within project-based frameworks, and for policymakers in strengthening regulatory support for integrated literacy in madrasah curricula. Theoretically, this study reinforces the positioning of religious education as a fertile domain for literacy integration, contributing to broader discourse on holistic and competency-based learning in Islamic basic education.

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