

# Implementation of the Project-Based Experiential Learning Model in Religious Education at Elementary Schools


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**Abstract:** This article explores the application of the project-based experiential learning cycle (ELC) model in religious education subjects at MI Nurul Mun'im, Karanganyar, Paiton, Probolinggo, Indonesia. The ELC model, emphasizing experiential processes, facilitates education and fosters a deeper understanding of Islamic religious studies. The implementation involves six stages: the preliminary (opening stage), experiencing (experience), reflection, discussion, exploration, and concluding (closing stage). This study employs a qualitative descriptive approach with action research as the research type, where the researcher serves as both a key instrument and an active participant. Data collection methods include interviews, documentation, and observations. The research was conducted at Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Nurul Mun'im, Paiton, Probolinggo, using a random sampling technique to select students from grades V and VI. The study also highlights the dynamic and innovative development processes, curriculum advancements, and the transformation of scientific approaches at Elementary Schools.

**Abstrak:** Artikel ini membahas penerapan model siklus pembelajaran berbasis pengalaman (*Experiential Learning Cycle/ELC*) berbasis proyek pada mata pelajaran pendidikan agama di MI Nurul Mun'im, Karanganyar, Paiton, Probolinggo, Indonesia. Model ELC yang menekankan pada proses pengalaman ini memfasilitasi pendidikan dan memperdalam pemahaman terhadap studi pendidikan agama Islam. Implementasinya melibatkan enam tahap: tahap pendahuluan (pembukaan), pelaksanaan (experience), refleksi, diskusi, eksplorasi, dan tahap penutup. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan deskriptif kualitatif dengan jenis penelitian tindakan (*action research*), di mana peneliti bertindak sebagai instrumen utama sekaligus peserta aktif. Metode pengumpulan data meliputi wawancara, dokumentasi, dan observasi. Penelitian dilakukan di Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Nurul Mun'im, Paiton, Probolinggo, dengan teknik random sampling untuk memilih siswa kelas V dan VI. Penelitian ini juga mengungkap proses pengembangan yang dinamis dan inovatif, kemajuan kurikulum, serta transformasi pendekatan ilmiah di tingkat sekolah dasar.

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## INTRODUCTION

Religious education often faces the challenge of bridging the gap between theoretical understanding and practical application of religious values (Sa'adah et al., 2023). Students frequently struggle to internalize spiritual and ethical principles into concrete actions. Traditional teaching methods that heavily emphasize theoretical explanations risk reducing students' interest and involvement in religious learning (Maknunah & Muis, 2023). The limited connection between religious teachings and students' daily lives highlights the need for innovative educational approaches to make learning more meaningful and applicable. Despite the recognized importance of contextualizing religious education, there remains a lack of consensus on how to effectively integrate these values into dynamic learning environments.

Existing research has explored various learning models aimed at enhancing student engagement, with the Experiential Learning Cycle (ELC) emerging as a promising approach (Badriyah & Hikmah, 2023). This model emphasizes learning through direct experience, making it particularly relevant for religious education, which requires students to connect theoretical knowledge with real-world applications (Irmawati, 2019). However, most studies on experiential learning have focused on general subjects, leaving a gap in understanding its specific impact on Islamic Religious Education (IRE) (Habib & Basri, 2023). Recent studies suggest the potential of a project-based ELC model to address the unique challenges of religious education, yet its application remains underexplored in the context of Islamic values (Fazli et al., 2024).

Furthermore, research has highlighted the importance of integrating experiential learning theory into Islamic Religious Education, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, where learning methods had to adapt to maintain their effectiveness in challenging situations (Apriliana et al., 2022). This study underscores the flexibility and relevance of the ELC model in the evolving context of religious education. Additionally, studies by Widiyanto (2023) and Suryani (2022) explored the application of experience-based learning models in Islamic Religious Education, emphasizing both the benefits and challenges associated with this approach.

Despite these insights, there is a need for more in-depth research on the effectiveness of project-based ELC models in enhancing students' understanding and application of Islamic values. This study aims to bridge this gap by investigating the implementation of this model in religious education settings and its role in supporting students' ability to internalize and apply Islamic principles.

The purpose of this article is to examine the concept, implementation, and benefits of a project-based Experiential Learning Cycle (ELC) model in the context of Islamic Religious Education. This research aims to highlight how the model can bridge the gap between religious theory and practice, allowing students to internalize and apply Islamic values in meaningful ways. By exploring the interplay between experiential learning and Islamic education, this study seeks to provide actionable insights for educators on designing innovative learning experiences that align with students' social and cultural realities.

Religious education plays a crucial role in shaping students' spiritual and moral values (Basri, 2024). However, ensuring its relevance in an ever-evolving social and cultural landscape is a persistent challenge (Komalasari & Yakubu, 2023). This research is important because it addresses the need for a dynamic approach to teaching Islamic values, ensuring these teachings remain relatable and applicable in students' daily lives. By emphasizing the integration of Islamic principles with practical experiences, this study contributes to the broader discourse on creating meaningful and engaging religious education that inspires long-term student engagement.

Teachers play a pivotal role in contextualizing religious teachings to align with students' social and cultural realities. They are not only transmitters of knowledge but also facilitators who guide students in translating religious values into everyday actions. Effective Islamic education requires innovative pedagogical approaches that enable students to explore and apply Islamic teachings in concrete situations (Fazli et al., 2024). A curriculum that supports the integration of religious values with scientific disciplines and daily activities is essential to help students internalize these teachings profoundly and practically.

Despite its potential, the traditional approach to religious education often remains overly focused on theoretical mastery and memorization (Mahrus, 2024). This limits opportunities for students to engage in meaningful, experiential learning that connects abstract concepts with real-world applications. Teachers must adopt creative strategies to make the learning environment engaging, reflective, and relevant to students' lived experiences. By designing learning experiences that consider students' rights, needs, and development, educators can transform the learning process into a dynamic and enjoyable journey.

The project-based ELC model offers a promising alternative for addressing these challenges. This approach emphasizes active participation, allowing students to engage in real-life projects that align with Islamic teachings, such as social service or study trips to places of worship (Setiawati, 2023). Through reflection and experimentation, students can connect their experiences with religious theories, fostering a deeper understanding and application of Islamic values. This model supports the holistic development of students, enabling them to internalize religious teachings in a way that is both meaningful and transformative.

Although the project-based ELC model holds significant potential for enhancing Islamic Religious Education, there is limited research specifically examining its effectiveness in this context. Future studies should explore how this model can be tailored to different educational settings and measure its impact on student's ability to apply religious values in daily life. Additionally, further research could investigate the interaction between the project-based ELC model and students' social and cultural backgrounds to better understand its role in increasing student engagement and interest in religious education.

## **METHOD**

The research method used in this study is a qualitative descriptive approach with action research as the type of research. The purpose of this research is to analyze and investigate the application of the project-based Experiential Learning

Cycle (ELC) model in enhancing students' understanding and application of religious values, contributing to the development of innovative learning practices. The descriptive approach with action research is used to thoroughly and in-depth describe the phenomenon of religious learning through the project-based ELC model. A qualitative approach was chosen to allow the researcher to gain a deeper understanding of student's experiences and perceptions related to this learning process.

Action research was chosen because it focuses on practical improvements in the learning context. This research involves a cycle of action consisting of planning, implementation, observation, and reflection to develop and evaluate faith-based projects integrated with the ELC model. The research was conducted over two months at MI Nurul Mun'im. Data collection techniques included interviews, documentation, and observation. The research was carried out at Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Nurul Mun'im in Paiton, Probolinggo, using random sampling for students in grades V and VI. The funding source for this research was provided by allocation funds from the lecturer's home university.

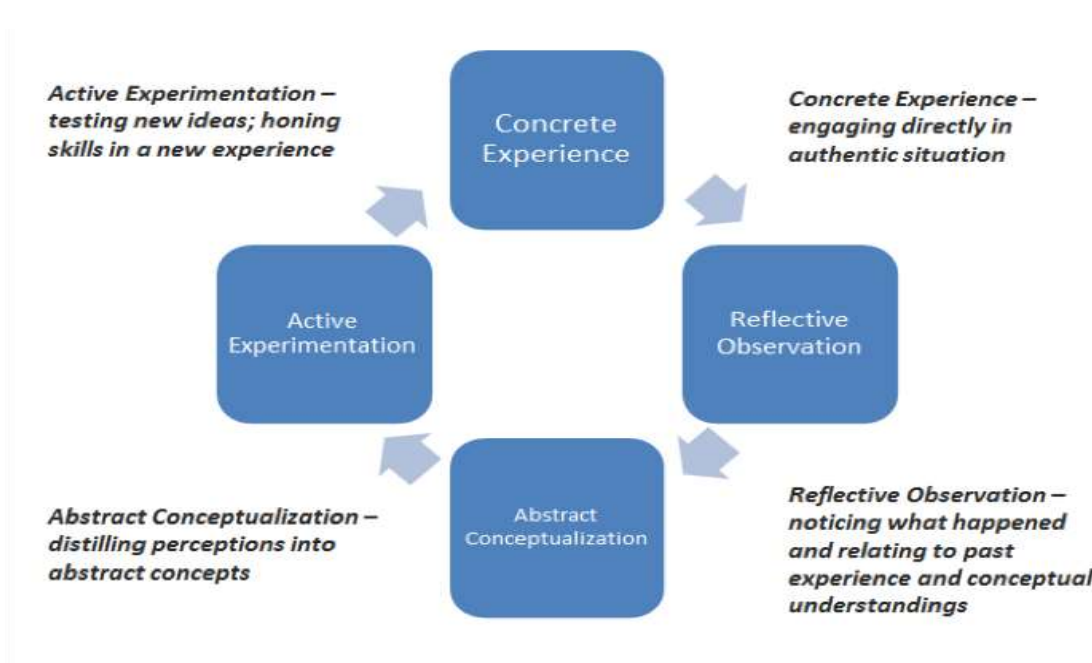
## **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

### **Implementation of the Experiential Learning Cycle (ELC) Model**

Religious education at Madrasah Ibtidaiyah, or primary-level Islamic schools, plays a crucial role in shaping students' character and morals (Musa et al., 2024). However, teaching religious subjects poses challenges, particularly in making learning relevant, meaningful, and applicable to students' daily lives. The project-based Experiential Learning Cycle (ELC) model provides an innovative approach that emphasizes direct experience as the core of learning. This article discusses the concept, implementation, findings, and implications of applying the project-based ELC model in religious education at Madrasah Ibtidaiyah.

The Experiential Learning Cycle (ELC) model, developed by David Kolb, serves as a framework for understanding how individuals learn through experience. This model consists of four main stages (Irmawati, 2019): Concrete Experience, Reflection, Conceptualization, and Active Experimentation. It highlights the importance of a comprehensive and continuous learning cycle.

Experiential learning is an approach that employs active teaching and learning processes to develop knowledge and skills through experience (Kalsum, 2022). Students' experiences serve as their best teacher. This model fosters skills through direct experiences and encourages active participation. It also motivates students to explore their thoughts, improve their behavior, develop a wide range of skills, and enhance learning outcomes (Cahyani et al., 2017). Moreover, learning media plays a critical role in supporting the process, and making activities more innovative (Widayati, 2018).



**Figure 1. Kolb's Cycle of Experiential Learning**

Experiential learning emphasizes the relationship between learning, work, daily activities, and the creation of knowledge. For this model to succeed, teachers must create a pleasant learning environment, help students overcome anxiety, and guide them in recognizing situational differences to facilitate generalization (Modran et al., 2024). By engaging in this constructivist approach, students experience dynamic assimilation or accommodation of knowledge, allowing them to adapt and refine their understanding with new input (Yusof et al., 2020).

Experiential learning is a learning model that applies an active teaching and learning process to develop knowledge and skills from experience (Kalsum, 2022). The experience gained by students becomes the best teachers. The main role of the experiential learning model in learning includes building skills through direct experience and actively involving students directly. In line with the experiential learning model, it fosters and encourages students to explore their thinking, improve their behavior to be more active, develop broad skills and improve learning outcomes (Cahyani et al., 2017). Besides that, learning media is very important in supporting the learning process to make activities more innovative (Widayati, 2018).

The ELC model involves four stages, namely: (1) Concrete Experiences: This stage involves direct experiences that students have had, such as visits to places of worship, participation in social or charitable activities, or research into religious values in their daily lives in the community; (2) Reflection: After a concrete experience, students are expected to reflect on the experience in depth. This reflection helps them recognize and understand the religious values involved in the experience; (3) Conceptualization: This stage involves the process of linking concrete experiences with religious concepts studied in the classroom. Students are asked to understand the theories and religious concepts that underlie their experiences; and (4) Active Experimentation: The final step in this cycle is to reapply the concepts learned in everyday life or new situations. Through this active

experiment, students can test their understanding of religious values in a real context (Morris, 2020).

The successful implementation of the project-based ELC model involves the following stages: *First*, Project Planning, namely: (1) *goal identification*, teachers define specific learning objectives, such as enhancing students' understanding of particular religious concepts or developing social and emotional skills; and (2) *topic selection*: Topics are chosen to align with the religious curriculum while capturing students' interest. Examples include visiting places of worship, engaging in charity activities, or studying religious practices in the community. *Second*, project implementation, namely: (1) *field trips*: Students visit places of worship to gain deeper insights into religious practices and associated values; (2) *Charity Activities*: Students participate in acts of charity, such as food drives or community assistance programs. *Third*, research and presentation, namely students research a religious topic and present their findings to the class. This promotes discussion and collaborative reflection. *Fourth*, reflection, namely: (1) *group discussions*: students share their experiences and learnings in a group setting; (2) *personal journals*: Writing reflective journals allows students to think deeply about their experiences; and (3) *teacher feedback*: teachers provide constructive feedback on students' reflections and progress.

The implementation of the project-based ELC model in religious education at Madrasah Ibtidaiyah has yielded several key benefits: (1) *Curriculum Development*: Enriches the religious curriculum with engaging and relevant strategies; (2) *Teacher Professional Development*: Provides training for teachers to design and execute effective ELC-based projects; (3) *Enhanced Learning Experience*: Offers students a holistic, in-depth understanding of religious values while building critical social, emotional, and ethical skills; and (4) The study demonstrated that the project-based ELC model significantly improved students' understanding of religious concepts. For instance, fifth and sixth-grade students reported positive experiences in learning fiqh (Islamic jurisprudence) topics, such as the principles of buying and selling, through practical activities. One student shared: "We enjoyed learning about fiqh by visiting Basmalah Tanjung to practice the *ijab qabul* process. It made understanding Islamic law so much easier through practical, hands-on experience."

Additionally, during a session on moral principles, students proactively organized prayer spaces without being instructed, reflecting their internalization of religious values. This research highlights the potential of the project-based Experiential Learning Cycle (ELC) model in enhancing religious education. By emphasizing direct experience, reflection, and application, this approach not only strengthens students' conceptual understanding but also fosters essential life skills. The findings underscore the importance of this model in shaping ethical, responsible individuals capable of applying religious values in their daily lives. The project-based ELC model offers a meaningful, innovative alternative for developing an effective religious curriculum. Its adoption can inspire teachers and education stakeholders to create more engaging and impactful learning strategies, contributing to the holistic growth of students in religious education contexts.

## Stages of Implementation of the Project-Based Experiential Learning Cycle (ELC) Model

This section outlines the scenario and stages of research data collection and processing in this study. It includes the analysis methods used to interpret and approach the research findings, leading to meaningful conclusions. The study is designed to follow the five stages of the Experiential Learning Cycle (ELC) model. The research focuses on addressing specific challenges, analyzing the pillars of faith (*Iman*), the pillars of Islam (*Islam*), and the concept of excellence (*Ihsan*), while encouraging introspection to avoid major sins in daily life.

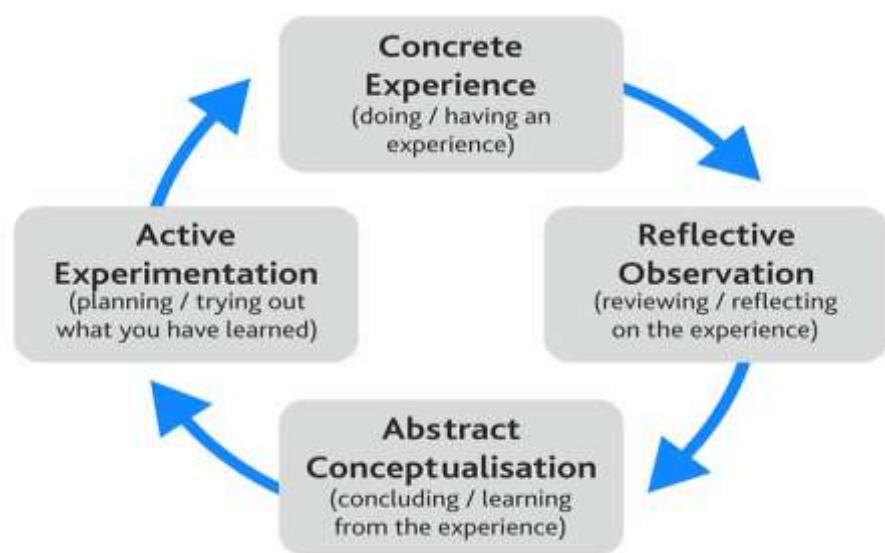


Figure 2. The Experiential Learning Cycle

The research was conducted over two months and involved the following stages:

Table 1. Stages of the Project-Based Experiential Learning Cycle (ELC) Model

No.	ELC Stages	Method Description	Time Allocation
1	Introduction/ Opening	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ The teacher leads a group prayer before the session begins.</li> <li>✓ The teacher introduces themselves.</li> </ul>	5 minutes
2	Experiencing	The teacher prepares and presents video materials relevant to the subject matter.	5 minutes
3	Reflection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ The teacher asks participants about the video and connects it to the material being studied.</li> <li>✓ Participants share their opinions about the material and its connection to the videos.</li> </ul>	10 minutes
4	Learning earning/conceptua lization)	The teacher reinforces participants' understanding of the material, covering topics such as:	15 minutes

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ The Pillars of Faith (Iman).</li> <li>✓ The Pillars of Islam (Shari'ah/fiqh).</li> <li>✓ Morality (Akhlaq).</li> </ul>	
5	Application (Implementing/ experimentation)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Students are divided into groups, with each group tasked with creating a reflective "spiritual journey" report.</li> <li>✓ Each group presents its findings.</li> <li>✓ The teacher facilitates a reflection on group work.</li> </ul>	10 minutes
6	Closing/Conclusion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Participants reflect on their creations and learning experiences to consolidate understanding.</li> <li>✓ The teacher closes the session with a prayer.</li> </ul>	5 minutes

The experiential learning model is a framework that emphasizes learning through direct experiences. It focuses on the harmonious relationship between learning, working, life activities, and the creation of knowledge. To facilitate this, teachers are responsible for creating a pleasant classroom environment, helping students overcome anxiety, and guiding them to recognize differences in situations so they can make generalizations (Modran et al., 2024).

Among the many alternatives available, the experiential learning model stands out as a constructivist approach, allowing students to learn through real-life contexts. In this model, students engage in a cycle of real experiences. Their prior knowledge undergoes dynamic assimilation or accommodation to adapt or build upon new inputs. Knowledge is not created in isolation; instead, it evolves continuously through an ongoing developmental process (Yusof et al., 2020).

Experiential learning prioritizes direct experiences as the central focus of education. Students learn by engaging in concrete experiences, reflecting on these experiences, and conceptualizing their outcomes (Rakhmawati, 2019). This approach extends beyond classroom theory by integrating real-world experiences, enabling students to build a deep and relevant understanding of the material.

The experiential learning model has several defining characteristics (Puspitowati, 2019): (1) Holistic: This learning process engages the individual as a whole, addressing cognitive, emotional, and social dimensions of learning—not just intellectual aspects; (2) Continuous: Learning takes place as a continuous cycle of experience, reflection, and conceptualization, allowing students to develop and grow over time; (3) Process-Oriented: The focus is on the learning process rather than solely on outcomes, giving students the freedom to explore and construct their own understanding; (4) Human-Environment Interaction: Students engage with real environments, fostering a deeper understanding by relating theory to practice; (5) Knowledge Creation: Learning involves the integration of personal and social knowledge to create new understandings (Devira, 2020). Students do not merely receive information; they actively construct knowledge through their experiences; and (6) Conflict Resolution: The learning process includes adapting to the world by resolving conflicts between differing understandings. Students learn to address contrasting perspectives and find effective solutions (Ssekamatte et al., 2022).



One of the primary strengths of this method is its effectiveness in achieving learning objectives. By actively involving students in the process, it fosters deeper, more relevant understanding. Moreover, experiential learning supports the development of essential skills, such as problem-solving, social interaction, and critical thinking.

Despite its advantages, the experiential learning model has some limitations. The broad scope of its theory may be challenging for some individuals to grasp. Additionally, implementing this method requires significant time, resources, and teacher expertise to ensure effective facilitation (Christian et al., 2021).

Experiential learning can be applied in various educational contexts, ranging from schools to professional training environments. Some examples of its implementation include: (1) *Formal Education*: In schools, teachers can adopt an experiential learning approach to teach diverse subjects, from natural sciences to foreign languages. For instance, in science lessons, teachers can organize hands-on experiments or field trips to relevant sites, enabling students to grasp scientific concepts through direct interaction with the material; (2) *Professional Training*: In the workplace, experiential learning can be used to help employees develop job-relevant skills. Companies can facilitate simulations or role-playing activities to prepare employees for realistic work scenarios, fostering practical problem-solving and collaboration; and (3) *Non-Formal Education*: Outside formal education settings, experiential learning is commonly implemented in non-formal programs, such as outdoor activity courses or personal development workshops. For example, an organization might organize a youth camping program featuring experiential activities designed to encourage active participation, teamwork, and collaborative learning.

## CONCLUSION

The project-based Experiential Learning Cycle (ELC) learning model offers an innovative and effective approach to improving religious education at Madrasah Ibtidaiyah. By placing direct experience at the core of learning, this model not only enhances students' understanding of religious values but also motivates them to apply these values in their daily lives. In the context of religious education, the implementation of the project-based ELC model represents a progressive step toward increasing the relevance and impact of religious learning for students in madrasas. This research proposes that the project-based ELC model is an effective solution for enhancing religious education in schools. With a focus on direct experience, deep reflection, and the practical application of religious values, this model not only enriches students' conceptual understanding but also fosters the development of social, emotional, and ethical skills essential for leading an ethical and responsible life.

The action research conducted concluded that implementing the project-based ELC model in religious subjects at Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Nurul Mun'im was highly effective in improving students' understanding and application of religious values. Through hands-on experiences, in-depth reflection, and the practical application of religious teachings, students enhanced not only their conceptual knowledge but also

their social, emotional, and ethical competencies. This approach has the potential to serve as a meaningful and relevant learning method within the context of religious education in madrasas. Experiential learning can be applied in various contexts: (1) Formal Education, where teachers use practical activities like experiments or field trips to make subjects more engaging; (2) Professional Training, where companies utilize simulations or role-playing to enhance job-specific skills; and (3) Non-Formal Education, including outdoor programs or workshops, such as youth camps, to foster active learning, teamwork, and collaboration.

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