

THE INFLUENCE OF THE “SERVICE-BASED LEARNING” METHOD IN ISLAMIC RELIGIOUS EDUCATION TO INCREASE STUDENT EMPATHY AT SDN MAJALENGKA KULON 1

Fadhil Hindah Fauzan¹, Gilang Maulana Jamaludin²

¹ Universitas Majalengka, Indonesia

² Universitas Majalengka, Indonesia

Email : arutalafadhil@gmail.com¹, gmaulana231@gmail.com²

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Abstract :

This study aims to examine the effect of the implementation of the Service Learning method on increasing student empathy in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning at SDN Majalengka Kulon 1. The background of the study departs from the fact that PAI learning in elementary schools is still dominant in the cognitive aspect so that it is less than optimal in developing the affective domain, especially empathy. The research method uses a quantitative approach with a quasi-experimental design of the Non-Equivalent Control Group Design type, which involved 25 students in the experimental group and 25 students in the control group. The instruments used included an empathy questionnaire, an empathic behavior observation sheet, and student reflection notes, which had gone through a validity and reliability testing process. Data analysis was carried out through normality tests, homogeneity tests, t-tests, and gain score calculations. The experimental group recorded an average increase of 20.8 points, while the control group only increased by 5.2 points. The results of the post-test t-test gave a significance value of 0.000 (<0.05), which means there was a significant difference between the two groups after the treatment was given. Student observation and reflection data support these findings, demonstrating that student involvement in social activities enables them to better understand, experience, and directly interpret Islamic Religious Education values. Overall, the Service Learning method has proven effective in fostering empathy and social awareness in students through real-life experiences relevant to Islamic principles.

Keywords : Service Learning, empathy, Islamic Religious Education, quasi experiment

INTRODUCTION

Islamic Religious Education (PAI) plays a strategic role in the character development of students, fostering noble morals, strong spiritual awareness, and positive social interactions. One of the key character values that needs to be developed through Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning is empathy, the ability to understand the circumstances of others and be motivated to help others. Empathy is the moral foundation for the development of prosocial behaviors such as helping others, caring for the environment, and social responsibility (Andrianie et al., 2017).

However, in reality, the Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning process in schools is still dominated by cognitive activities such as lectures, memorization, and theoretical explanations. Learning models that lack direct



experience result in empathy being limited to conceptual understanding rather than concrete action. Research in Indonesia shows that conventional Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning tends to emphasize the cognitive domain over the affective domain, resulting in less than optimal development of students' moral values (Nurliana Hasibuan, 2025).

Due to the limitations of this conventional approach, values such as social awareness, environmental awareness, helping others, and sympathy have not been deeply internalized by students. In fact, these values are a core part of Islamic moral education (Asykur et al., 2025).

One alternative method that can bridge the theory and practice of Islamic Religious Education values is Service Learning, a learning model that combines academic material with community service activities. This learning approach allows students to directly experience prosocial activities that align with Islamic values. International and national research shows that Service Learning can increase students' empathy, cooperation, and social awareness (Ciesielkiewicz et al., 2024). Through Service Learning, students not only learn intellectually but also directly experience acts of kindness, helping others, and reflecting on religious values. Thus, this method has great potential to make Islamic Religious Education learning more contextual and meaningful to students' lives (Rose, 2020).

This research focuses on the application of service learning in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teaching at SDN Majalengka Kulon 1 to enhance empathy. The differences between this study and previous studies are evident in the focus on implementing structured service activities based on Islamic values and the integration of religious reflection to strengthen the internalization of empathy as part of noble character (Hanafi et al., 2025).

This research is expected to provide a tangible contribution to Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers in developing learning. This research emphasizes not only cognitive mastery but also the development of students' social and spiritual character (Alimin et al., 2024). The impact of implementing the Service Learning method in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teaching on improving student empathy at SDN Majalengka Kulon 1 is discussed.

It is hoped that the results of this study can serve as a reference for Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers in developing more meaningful, contextual learning that is oriented toward building students' social character

RESEARCH METHOD

This study used a quantitative approach with a quasi-experimental method. The purpose of this study was to determine the extent of the effect of the implementation of the Service Learning method on improving student empathy in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning at SDN Majalengka Kulon 1 (García-García et al., 2025).

This study employed a Non-Equivalent Control Group Design, involving two groups of students: an experimental group receiving Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning using the Service Learning method, and a control

group receiving conventional learning. This study focused on all fifth-grade students at SDN Majalengka Kulon 1 (Sabiq et al., 2024). The sample was determined using a purposive sampling technique, with 25 students in each experimental class and 25 students in the control class.

The research instruments consisted of a student empathy questionnaire, observation sheets for learning activities, and reflection notes on the Service Learning activities. The student empathy questionnaire was compiled based on empathy indicators from theory, including perspective-taking, emotional concern, and social responsibility. Before use, the instrument was tested for validity and reliability using Product Moment and Cronbach Alpha analysis (Paulus, 2024).

This study emphasizes control over external variables to ensure more accurate results. The nonequivalent control-group pretest-posttest design in a quasi-experiment allows researchers to measure the initial abilities (pre-test) of both groups to ensure baseline equality before treatment, and then re-measure them (post-test) after treatment. This approach helps mitigate internal validity threats such as selection bias, history, and maturation, which can arise as other external factors (Handley et al., 2018).

The student empathy instrument uses a Likert scale based on indicators from Paulus's (2024) theory, including perspective taking, emotional concern, and social responsibility. The instrument's validity was tested using Product Moment correlation and Cronbach's Alpha reliability to ensure accurate and consistent data (Paulus, 2024).

In addition to questionnaires, observation sheets were also used to supplement quantitative data. Observations were conducted during service learning activities, such as school community service, sharing meals, or simple social visits. The observation sheets included aspects such as caring attitudes, ability to work together, and willingness to help others. This observation data provided a direct picture of students' empathetic behavior, thus corroborating the results of the questionnaire measurements (Mardliyah et al., 2020). To ensure that the servicelearning activities ran according to procedure, researchers also recorded student reflections after participating in the activities. Student reflections served as supporting qualitative data to assess the extent to which they experienced the values of empathy in the activities. Thematic analysis was used to identify patterns in students' attitudes and understanding of empathy after participating in the activities. The presence of this reflection data enriched the research results because it demonstrated affective changes that are not always visible through numbers (Uin et al., n.d.).

Before analyzing the data using a t-test, this study began with prerequisite tests for normality and homogeneity. The normality test was conducted to ensure that the data were normally distributed, while the homogeneity test ensured equality of variance between groups. If both prerequisites were met, the t-test could be used to more confidently test differences in empathy scores. All analysis processes were conducted using SPSS to reduce calculation errors and produce a more objective analysis

(Fiandini et al., 2024).

The results of this statistical analysis and observations were ultimately integrated to provide a comprehensive picture of the effectiveness of the Service Learning method on improving student empathy (Aliyah Nur Azizah et al., 2025). Thus, this study not only assessed quantitative aspects but also considered changes in students' behavior and emotional experiences throughout the activity. This aligns with the characteristics of the Service Learning method, which is experiential learning and emphasizes meaningful learning through direct experience (Utari, 2023).

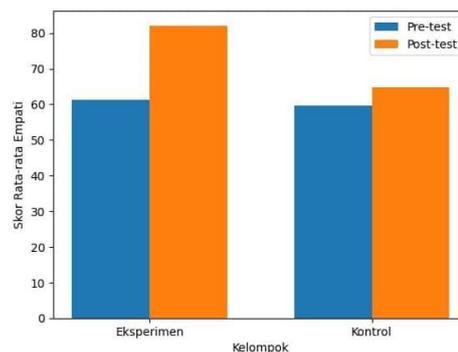
FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning is intended to foster noble morals, such as caring, patience, generosity, honesty, and empathy. However, PAI often places too much emphasis on memorizing verses, theories, and lectures, resulting in suboptimal outcomes (Salmin¹, Rustam², Humaidin³, Nasaruddin⁴, 2025). In this study, Service Learning helps fill this gap through real-life experiences, social interactions, collaborative problem-solving, and reflection on religious values (Zulkarnain, 2025).

In addition to experience, the reflection component, a core component of Service Learning, also encourages the internalization of values. Reflection helps students process social experiences into a more mature moral understanding (Lubis et al., 2023). In this study, students' reflection notes demonstrated an increased awareness of the importance of helping others and understanding others' circumstances. This is consistent with research by Luthfiyah et al. (2022), which confirmed that structured reflection in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning significantly increases the understanding of religious values and prosocial behavior (Luthfiyah et al., 2022).

From the perspective of experiential learning theory, the results of this study indicate that experiential learning contributes to student character development. The stages described in Kolb's theory concrete experience, reflection, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation are clearly facilitated in the implementation of service learning activities. The findings of this study also support international studies such as those conducted by Ciesielkiewicz & Molina (2024), which state that service learning can enhance empathy through meaningful social experiences.

Table : 1 Pre-Test and Post-Test Comparison Diagram



The diagram represents a comparison of the average empathy scores of students before and after treatment in the two research groups. In the experimental group, there was a very striking increase, namely from a pre-test score of 61.3 to 82.1 in the post-test after the implementation of the Service Learning approach. In contrast, the control group showed only a limited increase, from an initial score of 59.6 to 64.8 in the final measurement. The difference between the pre-test and post-test scores in the experimental group appeared much larger than in the control group. This finding indicates that the implementation of the Service Learning method has a more significant effect in increasing students' empathy levels compared to learning without such treatment.

Table : 2 Normality Test (Shapiro-Wilk)

Group	Sig. Pre-test	Sig. Pre-test	Description
Experimental	0,198	0,134	Normal Data
Control	0,198	0,156	Normal Data

All Sig. values > 0.05 → data is normally distributed.

Homogeneity Test (Levene's Test)

The homogeneity test results on the pre-test data showed a significance value of 0.284, which is greater than 0.05, so it can be concluded that the data variance is homogeneous. The homogeneity test results on the post-test data showed a significance value of 0.317, which is greater than 0.05, so it can be concluded that the data variance is homogeneous.

Table : 3 Pre-test t-test (Independent Sample t-test)

Group	Mean	t	Sig. (2-tailed)
Experimental	61,3	1,242	0,221
Control	59,6		

$p = 0.221 > 0.05$ → No significant difference before treatment. → Both groups had equivalent initial empathy abilities.

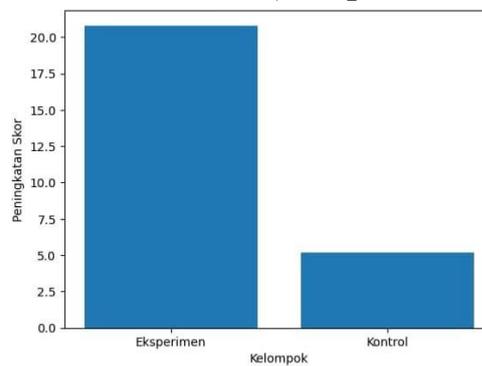
Table : 4 Post-test t-test (Independent Sample t-test)

Group	Mean	t	Sig. (2-
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			tailed)
Experimental	82,1	12,842	0,000
Control	64,8		

$p = 0.000 < 0.05 \rightarrow$ There is a significant difference between the experimental and control groups after treatment. The Service Learning method has a strong influence on increasing empathy.

Table : 5 Post-test t-test (Independent Sample t-test)



Experiment

- Mean gain = 20.8
- $t = 18.452$
- Sig. = 0.000

Controls

- Mean gain = 5.2
- $t = 4.213$
- Sig. = 0.000

The results of the study showed that the application of the Service Learning method in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning significantly increased empathy. This was evident in the difference in average post-test scores between the experimental and control groups, with the experimental group showing an increase of 20.8 points, significantly higher than the control group's 5.2 point increase. This difference was further confirmed by the results of the post-test t-test, which showed a significance value of 0.000 (<0.05), indicating that the increase in empathy in the experimental group was indeed influenced by the application of the Service Learning method (Hoyo-Guillot et al., 2025).

The equality in initial abilities between the two groups, as seen in the pre-test results, further strengthens the validity of the results, as it indicates that the increase in empathy was truly due to the treatment and not due to other factors. Pedagogically, the Service Learning method has proven to be more effective because it combines direct experience with structured reflection activities.

This model allows students to experience real-life situations, such as social activities, community service, and sharing activities. This allows them to not only cognitively understand Islamic Religious Education values but also

deeply experience them through emotional experiences and social interactions (Hébert & Hauf, 2015). Recent research also confirms that direct involvement in social activities can enhance perspective-taking, social sensitivity, and concern for the surrounding environment.

This mechanism aligns with Kolb's Experiential Learning theory, which emphasizes the importance of concrete experiences as a foundation for character development and empathy. The findings of this study also align with various international studies showing that Service Learning programs can create a prosocial climate in schools, increase social motivation, and strengthen students' empathetic behavior (Gordon et al., 2022).

Furthermore, reflection after Service Learning activities significantly contributes to helping students connect their experiences with Islamic values such as empathy, mutual assistance (ta'awun), compassion (rahmah), and trust amanah (Silke et al., 2024). Reflection deepens the learning process because students not only engage in activities but also understand the spiritual meaning behind those actions. This factor is a key difference between conventional Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning, which tends to be lecture-based and cognitive-focused, and Service Learning, which allows for the real internalization of values. Therefore, the results of this study confirm that Service Learning is an effective and relevant learning model for strengthening empathy and the socio-religious character of elementary school students.

Thus, it can be concluded that the service learning method is a highly effective learning model for developing student empathy in the context of Islamic Religious Education (PAI). Learning focuses not only on the cognitive domain but also on the affective dimension, which is the core of religious education. Strengthening character through direct experiences like this is highly relevant and in line with the demands of 21st-century learning, which emphasizes the importance of social and emotional skills.

CONCLUSION

The application of the Service Learning method in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning has been proven to have a significant influence on increasing empathy in elementary school students. The research findings show that although the initial empathy abilities between the experimental and control groups were at a relatively comparable level, students who participated in Service Learning-based learning experienced a significantly higher increase in empathy compared to students who participated in conventional learning. The results of the statistical analysis confirmed that this increase was a direct consequence of the implementation of the Service Learning method.

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