Creative-interactive PAI strategies for generation z and society 5.0 vision

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Abstract

This study examines the use of creative–interactive Islamic Education (PAI) strategies through social projects in a junior high school context. The approach aims to internalize religious values, increase student engagement, and align learning with the human-centered principles of Society 5.0. An exploratory qualitative single-case study was conducted at SMP Muhammadiyah Panggang involving 11 participants (two teachers and nine students) selected through purposive maximum variation sampling. Data were obtained from interviews, observations, and learning artifacts, and were analyzed thematically with credibility ensured through member checking and an audit trail. The findings show that social projects shifted PAI learning from passive knowledge delivery to an action–reflection–meaning cycle. Students displayed strong participation, collaboration, creativity, and improved digital skills through poster production, slogan creation, and video documentation. The value "cleanliness is part of faith" was internalized and sustained in daily behavior. Teachers considered this strategy highly suitable for Generation Z and consistent with Society 5.0, although successful implementation requires coordination, adequate time, and standardized authentic assessment.

Keywords: Creative-Interactive Strategy, PAI, Generation Z Society 5.0

INTRODUCTION

Generation Z, born in the digital era and exposed to technology from an early age, exhibits unique characteristics in the ways they learn, interact, and comprehend religious values. This generation is more receptive to interactive, visual, and technology-based learning but tends to show less interest in traditional one-way approaches (Aprilianto et al., 2025; Barus et al., 2024; Bhatnagr & Rajesh, 2024; Miftakhuddin, 2020; Sharma et al., 2020) . This shift in learning preferences raises a critical question: how can Islamic Religious Education (PAI) remain relevant and meaningful for a generation that is increasingly dynamic and context-driven (Saksono Prasetyo & Halida, 2020)? In the era of Society 5.0, which emphasizes synergy between humans and technology, there is a pressing need for new, innovative approaches in religious education to avoid being left behind (Hoang et al., 2025). Without answering this challenge through concrete innovation, PAI risks becoming outdated and losing its relevance to Generation Z, who are constantly immersed in digital environments (Rashed et al., 2025) . This research exists to explore how PAI can adapt to these challenges, particularly by focusing on the concept of phenomenology in schools, which emphasizes understanding the lived experiences of students. By examining how students experience and engage with religious education in their digital and social contexts, this study aims to provide insights into how PAI can be innovatively integrated into the modern educational landscape, making it more applicable and meaningful for the next generation.

Recent studies show that creative and interactive learning strategies such as the use of digital media, gamification, augmented reality (AR), and virtual reality (VR) can increase students' interest and understanding of religious concepts (Jaleel et al., 2024; Amalia et al., 2024a; Wedi et al., 2025). Other studies affirm that project-based learning, especially with a social orientation, is effective in instilling character values while developing 21st-century skills such as creativity, collaboration, communication, and critical thinking (Razali et al., 2024; Taufiqurrochman, 2025b). On the other hand, the PAI curriculum in the Society 5.0 era is undergoing a transformation toward technological integration, yet still faces gaps between the ideal vision and the reality of implementation in schools, particularly in secondary institutions such as SMP Muhammadiyah Panggang (Azman et al., 2025; Shaleh et al., 2024).

Although many studies emphasize the role of digital technology in Islamic education, few have explored the integration of creative-interactive approaches with social project models as a means of contextualizing religious values in society. Most research focuses on digital

Media such as learning applications or online content, but has not thoroughly demonstrated experiential learning in students' social environments. In fact, Generation Z prefers authentic, collaborative experiences and learning outcomes that can be directly applied to daily life (Kistoro et al., 2022; Nahar et al., 2022) . Therefore, this research seeks to extend existing studies by exploring how creative-interactive PAI learning based on social projects can address the unique needs of the digital generation.

The conceptual framework of this research is grounded in Project-Based Learning (PjBL), which emphasizes contextual learning through the completion of real-world tasks based on social projects. PjBL has been proven effective in developing higher-order thinking skills (HOTS), 21st-century competencies, and Islamic character values, which are at the core of PAI learning (Hussien et al., 2021) . Additionally, social constructivist theory, which highlights social interaction as an essential part of the learning process, is also relevant as it supports collaborative approaches in social projects. The integration of Society 5.0 values is equally important, where technology is not merely a tool but a means of empowering humans to create innovative social solutions.

Unfortunately, most previous studies only highlight the technological aspect of creative-interactive learning, such as the use of digital media, without emphasizing the direct connection between PAI learning and students' social engagement (Asrori et al., 2025; Nordin et al., 2025) . This connection is crucial, as Generation Z tends to seek learning that is meaningful, contextual, and capable of addressing real societal issues. As a result, there remains a gap in research on how social project models can serve as the main strategy in creative-interactive PAI learning that bridges theory with students' social realities.

The absence of research emphasizing social project integration in PAI has led to a knowledge gap regarding how students can learn religion meaningfully while actively engaging in society. This is critical because PAI does not merely aim to equip students with cognitive knowledge but also to shape character, social attitudes, and spirituality relevant to modern life contexts (Aydinli, 2025). If this gap is not addressed, PAI risks being perceived as non-functional and unable to respond to contemporary challenges, thereby losing its appeal in the eyes of Generation Z who crave meaningful and applicable learning.

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Addressing this gap is essential for teachers, schools, and Islamic educational institutions, as relevant learning strategies will help improve students' interest, understanding, and internalization of religious values among digital-native learners. Moreover, this research offers a strategic contribution to strengthening the vision of Society 5.0, which combines technology with social solutions, enabling students to actively participate in global society without losing their Islamic identity (Asri & Kaplan, 2023) . In other words, developing a creative-interactive PAI learning model based on social projects can serve as a bridge between the demands of globalization and the need to internalize religious values among Generation Z.

Generation Z, as digital natives, has a learning style greatly influenced by technology from an early age, as explained in the Digital Natives Theory (Prensky, 2001), which shows that they are more responsive to interactive and technology-based learning. This is supported by the Cognitive Load Theory (Sweller, 1988), which reveals that using technology in learning can reduce cognitive load and improve understanding. Creative and interactive learning approaches, such as digital media, gamification, and AR/VR, have proven effective in increasing students' interest in Islamic concepts (Abdul Jaleel et al., 2024) (Wedi et al., 2025).

Additionally, Project-Based Learning (PjBL) (Thomas, 2000) supports the use of social projects in education, which not only develops higher-order thinking skills but also 21st-century skills such as creativity and collaboration, relevant for shaping students' character in Islamic education. Social Constructivist Theory (Vygotsky, 1978) emphasizes the importance of social interaction in learning, which supports the collaborative approach in social projects. This concept aligns with Society 5.0 (Japan Cabinet Office, 2016), which integrates technology with social solutions to create a more sustainable society. Therefore, this study aims to develop a creative and interactive PAI learning model based on social projects, addressing the challenge of making Islamic education more relevant and applicable in the digital era and Society 5.0, while bridging the gap between theory and students' social realities.

The main objective of this study is to analyze creative-interactive PAI learning strategies through a social project model at SMP Muhammadiyah Panggang and assess their relevance to the needs of Generation Z and the vision of Society 5.0. This research is based on the hypothesis that the implementation of creative-interactive strategies based on social projects can enhance student engagement, increase the relevance of learning to their life context, and strengthen Islamic values in accordance with contemporary challenges. This study is expected to make a practical contribution to PAI teachers in developing adaptive, innovative, and transformative learning models, as well as a theoretical contribution to enriching the literature on Islamic learning strategies in the digital era and the Society 5.0 era.

METHOD

This study was conducted to gain an in-depth understanding of how creative and interactive Islamic Education (PAI) learning strategies are implemented through social project activities at SMP Muhammadiyah Panggang. A case study approach was used to explore the real process of applying these strategies within a single school context (Hadi, 2021). The design is a single case with embedded units, limiting the case to a full project cycle (planning, implementation, reflection), with embedded units including teachers' pedagogical practices and students.

The research participants consisted of two Islamic Education (PAI) teachers and nine students who were purposively selected by considering variations in levels of activity, roles in the project, and digital readiness. Before the study was conducted, the researcher obtained permission from the school, written consent from parents and teachers, and assent from the students. The identities of all participants were protected through anonymization to ensure data confidentiality. Data were collected using several techniques, including semi-structured interviews, direct observation, and analysis of instructional documents (Sugiyono, 2018). The interviews were conducted face-to-face for approximately 30–60 minutes per session. For teachers, the interviews focused on the process of designing instructional strategies, integrating Islamic values with social issues, the use of technology, as well as the challenges and supports encountered. For students, the interviews explored their experiences in collaboration, creativity, technology use, and their understanding of Islamic Education through social projects. All interviews were audio-recorded with permission, transcribed verbatim, and verified by participants through member checking In addition, the researcher

kept field notes, reviewed lesson plans and teaching modules, examined project outputs, and analyzed digital documentation to strengthen the findings through source and method triangulation (Creswell W. J. and Creswell J. D., 2018).

Data analysis was conducted thematically following several steps: reading all transcripts for familiarization, performing open coding, grouping codes into categories and themes across participants (teachers and students), and interpreting the meanings emerging from these themes. The results of the analysis were then used to map how social project activities addressed the learning needs of Generation Z and supported the reinforcement of Islamic Education values in the digital era. To ensure the validity of the data, the researcher carried out triangulation of sources, methods, and time; conducted member checking; analyzed negative cases; maintained an audit trail of analytical decisions; wrote reflective memos; and engaged in peer debriefing. The researcher also provided thick contextual descriptions so that the findings could be understood and responsibly applied to similar contexts (Gall et al., 2013).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Teachers' Perspectives and Implementation of Social Project-Based PAI Learning

This study aimed to explore the effectiveness and relevance of social project-based learning strategies in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) for Generation Z students, aligning with the principles of Society 5.0. The key findings are as follows:

Table 1. Teacher Interview (NR & AUS)

No	Question	NR (Teacher)	AUS (Teacher)
1	Planning of Islamic Education (PAI) strategy based on social projects	Identification of Islamic values (cleanliness, responsibility); organize a community service activity as a practice of moral conduct and cooperation.	Lesson Plan (RPP) with Project-Based Learning; project "My Clean School, My Worship": task distribution, schedule, poster of QS Al-Muddatsir [74]: 4–5, reflection video.
2	Reasons for choosing the	So that students can practice Islamic teachings; cleanliness is part of faith.	Lecturing helps students understand theory but rarely changes attitudes; direct

		social project model		involvement fosters responsibility and gratitude to Allah, and care for the environment.
3	Students' responses	Very positive; enthusiastic because learning takes place outdoors and involves teamwork; closer student–teacher relationship.		Very positive; creative ideas like "halal–haram trash bins," hadith slogans; clean behavior continued even after the project.
4	Strengths and weaknesses	+ Meaningful and contextual. − Requires more time and coordination.		+ Students feel the meaning of worship; builds character. − Requires cross-party coordination and authentic assessment (observation, portfolio, reflection).
5	Support for Islamic character and 21st-century skills	Responsibility, social care, teamwork; trains critical thinking and communication; cleanliness and discipline develop naturally.		A bridge between Islamic values and modern life: cooperation, critical thinking, digital literacy (recording/editing videos), communication (reflection); gratitude to Allah.
6	Relevance to Generation Z and Society 5.0	Highly relevant; applicable, fosters empathy and environmental awareness; balances technology and humanity.		Experience-based learning; creation of educational content; encouraging Muslims to be active, socially aware, and wise in using technology; aligns with Society 5.0.

Interview data from two teachers (NR and AUS) illustrates a consistent orientation toward meaningful, action-based learning, with differences in emphasis during the planning stage and in the evidence of implementation. NR began by mapping Islamic values cleanliness and responsibility which were embodied through "collective work" as a practice of moral conduct and cooperation. Meanwhile, AUS designed a more structured Project-Based Learning (PjBL) lesson plan through the project "My Clean School, My Worship", complete

with task distribution, schedules, posters featuring Qur'an Surah Al-Muddatsir (74): 4–5, and reflective video products.

Both shared similar pedagogical rationales: lectures were deemed less effective in changing attitudes, while direct involvement facilitated the internalization of values (responsibility, gratitude, environmental care) and transformed the idea that "cleanliness is part of faith" into a lived practice rather than a mere concept.

Students' Learning Experiences and Value Internalization

Student responses were considered highly positive. According to NR, enthusiasm was evident through students' enjoyment of learning outside the classroom and the strengthened teacher student relationship. AUS highlighted the emergence of creative ideas ("halal-haram trash bins," hadith-based slogans) and the sustainability of clean behavior after the project.

The main strengths identified were contextual relevance and the formation of character and worship meaningfulness; challenges included time requirements, interdepartmental coordination, and the need for well-organized authentic assessments (observation, portfolio, reflection).

Within the framework of character strengthening and 21st-century skills, NR emphasized responsibility, social awareness, collaboration, critical thinking, and communication where discipline and cleanliness developed naturally. AUS added a bridge between Islamic values and modern life through cooperation, critical thinking, digital literacy (recording/editing videos), and reflective communication.

Both considered this strategy as highly relevant for Generation Z (experiential learning, collaboration, content creation) and aligned with the Society 5.0 vision (human-centered, co-creation, and technological utilization for collective good). They also pointed out prerequisites for success: strong coordination and standardized authentic assessments to ensure that positive attitudes and habits are sustained and replicable.

Table 2. Student Interview Results

No	Name	Opinion on PAI through Social Projects	Most Memorable Experience	Understanding of Islamic Values	Collaboration & Creation	Relevance to the Current Generation
1	Muhammad	Enjoyable; includes hands-on practice.	Togetherness with friends.	Very helpful..	Task sharing: sweeping, watering plants; cleanliness poster.	Relevant; makes learning easier.
2	Akbar Nur Rizki	Good; keeps the environment clean and comfortable for learning/worship.	Togetherness during community service and snack time.	Helpful; applies "cleanliness is part of faith."	Task distribution.	Relevant; requires teamwork and cooperation.
3	Rumman Assasi	Fun; trains teamwork and togetherness.	(Not mentioned).	Helpful.	Task sharing in cleaning the environment.	Relevant.
4	Albar Umar Sa'id	Exciting; cleaning the school together.	Maintaining mosque cleanliness.	Helpful; direct practice.	Task sharing.	Relevant; helps protect the surrounding environment.
5	Ilyas Abdurrohman	Good; improves environmental awareness.	Cleaning the bathroom (the hardest task).	Helpful; applies the lesson.	Discussion for task division; created slogan.	Relevant; trains sensitivity.

6	Adam Ghazi Malmsteen	Good; builds awareness of cleanliness.	The school became very clean.	Yes; increased awareness of Islamic values.	Communicated to share tasks; wrote cleanliness motivation notes.	Relevant; builds environmental sensitivity.
7	Haidar Ar Rohiid	Fun; togetherness and joy when the environment is clean.	Planting trees.	Very helpful..	Discussion and communication.	Very relevant.
8	Farhan Abdus Salam	Very enjoyable; clean, beautiful, and comfortable learning environment.	Togetherness and teamwork.	Very helpful.	Communication..	Very relevant.
9	Aunur Rofiq	Fun; teamwork during community service.	Planting trees.	Very helpful.	Togetherness and teamwork.	Very relevant.

Interview data from nine students revealed a highly positive pattern of appreciation toward social project-based Islamic Education (PAI). All responses used expressions such as "fun," "exciting," or "good," indicating that hands-on activities outside the classroom made learning feel meaningful and relevant. The most memorable experiences were dominated by moments of togetherness during communal work, such as sweeping and watering plants, with variations including cleaning the mosque and planting trees (Haidar, Aunur). The most challenging task cleaning the bathroom (Ilyas) unexpectedly became a medium for value reflection and perseverance. All students stated that the project helped or greatly helped them understand Islamic teachings, particularly the meaning of "cleanliness is part of faith," because the values were not only taught but practiced in real life.

Relevance to Generation Z and Theoretical Implications

From the perspective of generational relevance, students perceive this approach as highly suitable: it was contextual, facilitated understanding, nurtured environmental awareness, and strengthened the habit of cooperation, characteristics aligned with Generation Z traits (high engagement, teamwork, creativity) and the Society 5.0 spirit, which emphasizes human-centered social problem-solving.

The findings align with Kolb's (1984) experiential learning theory, which emphasizes the importance of active engagement and reflection in the learning process (Gonibala, 2022). The project-based approach in PAI allowed students to cycle through concrete experiences, reflection, conceptualization, and experimentation, thus fostering deeper value internalization. Additionally, the principles of Project-Based Learning (PjBL), as outlined by 'Rosanawati et al (2025), were evident in the structured approach to role distribution, task assignments, and authentic evaluation through reflection. This further supports the claim that PjBL can effectively bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application in religious education.

Moreover, the study contributes to the discourse on service learning (Bringle & Hatcher), where academic learning is directly tied to social responsibility "(Alimni et al., 2022; Asri & Kaplan, 2023a; Kamarudin & Hishamudin, 2024). The "My Clean School, My Worship" project is an example of how service learning can be used to instill moral values (akhlaq) while addressing real-world issues. The students' involvement in cleaning the school and creating educational content serves as a concrete experience that triggers reflection on Islamic teachings and personal responsibility.

From the perspective of Generation Z, the project proved highly relevant. The integration of digital tools and content creation allowed students to engage in learning that was both meaningful and aligned with their technological preferences. The project also provided an opportunity to nurture social awareness and responsibility, key characteristics of Society 5.0, which promotes human-centered development alongside technological progress.

CONCLUSION

This study confirms that interactive and creative social project–based PAI effectively transforms learning from mere concept transfer into value internalization through real

Actions, as demonstrated by value mapping (cleanliness and responsibility), structured community service, learning artifacts, and reflective activities. The findings show high student engagement through contextual learning, deeper understanding of Islamic values because they are practiced, development of 4C skills and digital literacy through collaboration and content creation, and the sustainability of clean behavior beyond the project. The strategy is highly relevant to Generation Z characteristics and aligns with the human-centered and co-creative principles of Society 5.0, despite challenges related to coordination, time allocation, and authentic assessment. The study contributes by extending Project-Based Learning into the ethical-religious domain of PAI, linking empirical findings to Generation Z and Society 5.0 frameworks, and proposing an authentic assessment model. Future research is recommended to adopt longitudinal, multi-case, and mixed-method approaches, with broader stakeholder triangulation and standardized assessment rubrics to strengthen generalizability and replication.

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