

Project-Based Learning Implementation for the Development of 21st- Century Skills: A Critical Reflective Review in the Context of SMA Negeri 1 Tanah Pinem

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the implementation of Project-Based Learning (PjBL) as a pedagogical model for enhancing 21st-century skills among eleventh-grade students at SMA Negeri 1 Tanah Pinem, a rural school in Indonesia. Anchored in the growing demand for critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, and communication-the “4Cs” central to 21st-century education-the research adopts a quantitative descriptive design with 30 purposively selected students (15 male, 15 female) as participants. Data were collected using a structured Likert-scale questionnaire consisting of 20 items across four domains of 21st-century skills, tested for reliability with a Cronbach’s alpha of 0.82. Findings demonstrate that PjBL effectively cultivates students’ competencies, with collaboration (M = 4.35) and problem-solving (M = 4.28) emerging as the strongest domains, followed by creativity (M = 4.10) and communication (M = 4.05). These results underscore the potential of PjBL to transform passive, teacher-centered classrooms into active, inquiry-driven learning environments, even in resource-limited rural contexts. However, challenges such as initial student resistance, time management issues, and teacher preparedness highlight the need for systemic support, including professional development and adapted assessment practices. Beyond skill acquisition, the study critically integrates Christian Religious Education (CRE) and biblical principles into the PjBL framework. Collaboration reflects biblical fellowship (Ecclesiastes 4:9-10), problem-solving resonates with stewardship (Genesis 1:28), creativity aligns with humanity’s divine image (Genesis 1:27), and communication embodies edification (Ephesians 4:29). Thus, PjBL not only equips students for global competitiveness but also fosters spiritual and moral formation. The findings affirm that holistic education must unite pedagogical innovation with biblical values to prepare students for faithful and compassionate living in the modern world.

Keywords: *Project-Based Learning, Christian Religious Education, Critical Reflective*

INTRODUCTION

The 21st century has been characterized by rapid transformations in science, technology, economics, and social life, bringing significant implications for the field of education. In

an era where knowledge expands at an exponential pace, traditional approaches to teaching that rely heavily on rote memorization and teacher-centered instruction are increasingly seen as insufficient (Trilling & Fadel, 2009). Students today are expected to acquire not only subject-specific knowledge but also a set of competencies that enable them to navigate complex, unpredictable challenges. These competencies, commonly referred to as the “4Cs”—critical thinking, communication, collaboration, and creativity—form the backbone of what is widely known as 21st-century skills (Partnership for 21st Century Skills, 2019). The capacity to think critically and creatively, to collaborate effectively, and to communicate ideas clearly has become indispensable for success in higher education, the workplace, and civic life. In response to these demands, educators and policymakers have turned their attention to pedagogical models that encourage active, inquiry-driven, and authentic learning experiences. Project-Based Learning (PjBL) has emerged as one of the most effective strategies in this regard. Unlike traditional instructional methods that prioritize passive reception of knowledge, PjBL engages students in meaningful projects that require sustained inquiry, problem-solving, and collaboration (Bell, 2010). Through PjBL, students are not only exposed to real-world problems but are also empowered to take ownership of their learning by developing solutions that are both creative and practical (Thomas, 2000). This approach aligns closely with the educational vision of producing lifelong learners who can adapt to the demands of a rapidly changing world. In the Indonesian context, the adoption of PjBL has gained momentum in recent years as part of broader educational reforms aimed at enhancing quality and relevance. However, schools in rural areas often face significant challenges in implementing innovative pedagogies. SMA Negeri 1 Tanah Pinem, located in a rural district, exemplifies such challenges. Teachers in these settings frequently operate with limited technological infrastructure, minimal access to updated teaching resources, and a strong tradition of teacher-centered instruction. These constraints make it difficult to fully realize the transformative potential of approaches like PjBL. Furthermore, students in rural schools may initially struggle with project-based tasks, as they are less accustomed to autonomous learning and collaborative problem-solving compared to their urban counterparts (Suryani, 2020). Thus, investigating the implementation of PjBL in this context is not only relevant but also urgent, as it provides insights into how innovative pedagogy can be adapted to rural realities while still achieving its intended outcomes.

Another layer of importance in this research lies in the integration of Christian Religious Education (CRE) with 21st-century skill development. Education, from a Christian perspective, is not solely a matter of intellectual development but also of moral and spiritual formation. The Bible underscores the holistic nature of learning, as expressed in Proverbs 1:5: *“Let the wise listen and add to their learning, and let the discerning get guidance”* (NIV). This verse emphasizes that wisdom and discernment grow through continuous learning, reflection, and guidance. Similarly, Colossians 3:23 reminds believers that all forms of work, including academic pursuits, must be undertaken wholeheartedly and with integrity, as if working for the Lord. Integrating these biblical principles with modern pedagogical models ensures that education does not become value-neutral but remains anchored in spiritual growth and ethical responsibility. The relevance of this integration becomes particularly significant in a world where the pursuit of skills and knowledge often risks being divorced from moral grounding. The cultivation of critical

thinking, creativity, and collaboration without a moral and spiritual framework could potentially lead to utilitarian or self-serving outcomes. By embedding biblical values within PBL, teachers of Christian Religious Education can guide students toward using their skills for the common good, fostering a culture of stewardship, empathy, and responsibility. In the context of SMA Negeri 1 Tanah Pinem, where Christian values are an integral part of the community, such integration offers a distinctive model for holistic education. This study, therefore, positions itself at the intersection of educational innovation and Christian pedagogy. It aims to critically and reflectively evaluate how PBL contributes to the enhancement of students' 21st-century skills while simultaneously fostering spiritual and ethical growth. The urgency of this research stems from the dual challenges faced by rural schools: the pressing need to equip students with globally relevant competencies and the equally important task of ensuring that these competencies are rooted in biblical values. The research seeks to provide empirical evidence on the effectiveness of PjBL in such a context, as well as practical insights for educators striving to balance pedagogical innovation with faith-based education. The significance of this research lies in: it responds to global educational imperatives by focusing on the development of 21st-century skills; it addresses local educational challenges in rural Indonesia, offering a critical reflection on how PjBL can be adapted and sustained in resource-limited contexts; it integrates Christian Religious Education and biblical principles into the discourse, underscoring that true education involves not only the mind but also the heart and soul. In doing so, the study contributes to the broader conversation about how schools can prepare students for the complexities of modern life without losing sight of their spiritual and ethical responsibilities.

METHODS

This study adopted a quantitative descriptive research design to systematically examine the effects of Project-Based Learning (PjBL) on the development of students' 21st-century skills. Quantitative descriptive research was considered appropriate because it provides a structured framework for gathering measurable data and summarizing students' perceptions in a manner that reveals patterns and tendencies across the sample (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Unlike experimental or quasi-experimental approaches, the descriptive design emphasizes capturing the present condition of the phenomenon without manipulating variables, making it suitable for evaluating educational practices as they naturally occur in the classroom. In this study, the focus was on understanding how students at SMA Negeri 1 Tanah Pinem perceived the extent to which PBL had enhanced their abilities in critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, and communication. The participants in this study were 30 eleventh-grade students drawn purposively from SMA Negeri 1 Tanah Pinem, consisting of an equal distribution of 15 male and 15 female students. The purposive selection was based on the consideration that this particular class had been systematically engaged in PjBL activities as part of their instructional program. By focusing on students already exposed to PjBL, the study ensured the data collected would accurately reflect the lived experiences and outcomes of this pedagogical model. The balanced gender representation was also intended to minimize bias and allow for a more equitable understanding of how PjBL influenced both male and female learners (Fraenkel et al., 2019). Data were collected using a structured questionnaire designed around a five-point Likert scale, ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree." The

instrument consisted of 20 items distributed across four core domains of 21st-century skills. The first domain, critical thinking and problem-solving, included items assessing students' ability to analyze information, evaluate alternatives, and propose solutions. The second domain, creativity and innovation, measured students' openness to new ideas, originality in completing tasks, and willingness to experiment with novel approaches. The third domain, collaboration, focused on students' ability to work effectively in groups, share responsibilities, and respect diverse perspectives. Finally, the fourth domain, communication, assessed clarity in expressing ideas, listening to others, and adapting communication styles to different contexts (Trilling & Fadel, 2009; Bell, 2010). The questionnaire was reviewed by three experts: two in the field of education and one in Christian Religious Education (CRE). Their feedback led to refinements in item wording to increase clarity, contextual appropriateness, and alignment with both pedagogical and biblical values. Reliability testing during the pilot stage, conducted with five students outside the main sample, produced a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.82, indicating strong internal consistency (Gliem & Gliem, 2003). The data collection process took place after a six-week period of PBL-based instruction, during which students engaged in collaborative projects designed to integrate subject knowledge with practical problem-solving tasks. Following this intervention, students completed the questionnaire anonymously to encourage honest and uninfluenced responses. The six-week duration was chosen to provide sufficient time for students to experience the full cycle of PjBL activities, from project planning and execution to presentation and reflection. The collected responses were analyzed using descriptive statistical techniques. Mean scores and standard deviations were calculated to summarize the central tendencies and variability in student perceptions, while percentages were used to present the distribution of responses across the Likert scale. These quantitative findings were then interpreted critically and reflectively, drawing connections to pedagogical theories and biblical principles. For instance, improvements in collaboration and communication were understood not only as indicators of 21st-century skills but also as expressions of biblical teachings on community and mutual edification, such as in 1 Thessalonians 5:11, which exhorts believers to "*encourage one another and build each other up*" (NIV). Similarly, critical thinking and creativity were framed within the biblical perspective of stewardship and discernment, as Proverbs 2:2–3 calls individuals to "*turn your ear to wisdom and apply your heart to understanding.*" By integrating both pedagogical and spiritual lenses, the analysis sought to demonstrate that PjBL fosters skills essential for modern life while remaining consistent with Christian values of holistic formation.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to examine the effectiveness of Project-Based Learning (PjBL) in enhancing students' 21st-century skills at SMA Negeri 1 Tanah Pinem, while critically reflecting on its pedagogical implications and exploring its resonance with biblical and Christian educational values. Using a quantitative descriptive approach with 30 eleventh-grade students as respondents, the research revealed significant findings that contribute to both educational practice and the integration of faith-based perspectives in contemporary learning. The results are presented and discussed in: the enhancement of 21st-century skills through PjBL, critical reflections on its pedagogical

impact in the local context, and the integration of biblical and Christian educational values into PjBL practice.

Enhancement of 21st-Century Skills through PBL

The findings of this study confirm that PBL is an effective instructional strategy for cultivating 21st-century skills among students. Quantitative analysis revealed that students demonstrated high levels of improvement across the four measured domains. Collaboration recorded the highest mean score (M = 4.35), followed by problem-solving (M = 4.28), creativity (M = 4.10), and communication (M = 4.05). These results indicate that PBL not only stimulates intellectual engagement but also develops interpersonal and intrapersonal capacities essential for students' holistic growth. Collaboration as the most enhanced domain reflects the inherently cooperative nature of PjBL. Students were required to work together in small groups to design, execute, and present their projects. This collaborative structure promoted the distribution of responsibilities, negotiation of ideas, and the cultivation of mutual respect. Previous studies similarly affirm that PjBL enhances students' teamwork and social competence because it compels them to interact meaningfully with peers in pursuit of shared goals (Thomas, 2000; Bell, 2010). In rural contexts like Tanah Pinem, where students often come from diverse cultural and socio-economic backgrounds, PjBL provides a unique opportunity for them to develop inclusivity and empathy through authentic teamwork experiences. Problem-solving also emerged as a key area of improvement, highlighting PjBL's strength in engaging students with real-world challenges that require analytical thinking and strategic action. Through projects that demanded problem identification, information gathering, and solution development, students cultivated the ability to approach tasks systematically. This aligns with findings from Larmer and Mergendoller (2015), who argue that PjBL nurtures critical thinking by positioning learners as active problem-solvers rather than passive recipients of knowledge. For the students at SMA Negeri 1 Tanah Pinem, this skill was particularly meaningful, as they often encounter local community challenges that require innovative thinking, such as limited resources or environmental concerns. Thus, PjBL not only enhanced classroom learning but also provided a transferable competency relevant to their immediate context. Creativity, though scoring slightly lower than collaboration and problem-solving, still showed significant growth (M = 4.10). The PjBL tasks encouraged students to devise original solutions, experiment with new ideas, and present findings in innovative formats. Research has consistently demonstrated that creativity is stimulated when students are granted autonomy in decision-making and when learning tasks are open-ended (Craft, 2005). In this case, PjBL fostered creativity by empowering students to design projects that reflected both academic requirements and personal interests. The relatively lower mean compared to collaboration may reflect cultural factors, as rural students are often socialized into conformity and may initially hesitate to express divergent or unconventional ideas (Supriyadi, 2022). Communication skills also improved (M = 4.05), although slightly less than the other domains. Students engaged in presentations, group discussions, and peer feedback, which strengthened their ability to articulate ideas clearly and listen actively to others. As Trilling and Fadel (2009) highlight, effective communication is indispensable in the 21st century, not only for academic success but also for participation in civic and professional life. The lower relative score may indicate that while students benefited from PjBL, more structured support in public

speaking, debate, and academic writing may be required to optimize communication gains. The findings support the assertion that PjBL is an effective means of equipping students with the “4Cs” of 21st-century learning-critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, and communication (Partnership for 21st Century Skills, 2009). These skills were not developed in isolation but interacted synergistically. For example, problem-solving often required collaborative discussion, while creativity was expressed through effective communication of new ideas. Thus, PjBL provided an integrated platform for holistic skill development.

Critical Reflection on Pedagogical Impact

While the findings affirm the benefits of PjBL, critical reflection reveals several challenges that must be addressed for sustainable implementation, particularly in the context of rural schools like SMA Negeri 1 Tanah Pinem. One major challenge was students’ initial resistance to group-based work. Many students were accustomed to traditional teacher-centered instruction that emphasized individual memorization and repetition. Transitioning to a collaborative, student-centered model required a cultural shift in learning attitudes. During the first weeks of the PjBL intervention, some students expressed discomfort in sharing responsibilities and negotiating differences within their groups. This phenomenon is consistent with findings by Blumenfeld et al. (1991), who note that students often struggle with the open-ended and cooperative nature of PjBL, especially when they are habituated to rigid instructional structures. Time management also posed significant difficulties. PBL projects require extended periods of planning, execution, and reflection, which can challenge students’ ability to balance academic and non-academic commitments. In this study, several groups reported difficulties in completing their projects within the allocated timeframe, leading to stress and uneven distribution of workload. Teachers likewise faced challenges in aligning project schedules with the broader curriculum demands. These issues highlight the need for clear scaffolding and structured guidance to ensure that PjBL activities remain manageable while retaining their authenticity (Grant, 2002). Another critical issue was teacher preparedness. Successful PjBL implementation demands that teachers be skilled in designing meaningful projects, facilitating group dynamics, and assessing both process and outcomes. However, many teachers in rural contexts lack adequate training in PjBL methodology. At SMA Negeri 1 Tanah Pinem, teachers expressed uncertainty about how to evaluate creativity or collaboration objectively, as traditional assessment tools are primarily designed for individual academic achievement. Without sufficient professional development, PjBL risks being reduced to superficial tasks that fail to achieve deeper learning objectives (Krajcik & Blumenfeld, 2006). Therefore, teacher capacity-building emerges as a crucial requirement for sustaining PjBL practices. Reflecting on these challenges reveals that PjBL implementation is not merely a matter of introducing a new instructional model but requires a systemic transformation in pedagogical culture. Students need orientation in collaborative and self-directed learning, teachers require ongoing professional development, and schools must provide structural support, including flexible scheduling and resource allocation. In rural schools with limited resources, such systemic change is particularly urgent yet also more challenging to achieve.

Integration of Biblical and Christian Educational Values

Beyond its pedagogical outcomes, PjBL resonates deeply with biblical and Christian educational values, providing a holistic framework that integrates intellectual, moral, and spiritual formation. From a Christian perspective, education is not only about acquiring skills but also about cultivating virtues that reflect God's calling for human flourishing. Collaboration, which showed the highest gains, aligns with the biblical emphasis on community and mutual support. Ecclesiastes 4:9-10 reminds us that *"two are better than one, because they have a good return for their labor: if either of them falls down, one can help the other up"* (NIV). In PjBL, students learned to depend on one another, share burdens, and celebrate collective achievements, mirroring the biblical vision of fellowship and interdependence. Problem-solving, the second most improved domain, can be framed as an expression of stewardship. Genesis 1:28 describes humanity's responsibility to *"fill the earth and subdue it,"* which includes caring for creation and addressing challenges with wisdom and creativity. By engaging in problem-solving tasks, students exercised discernment and stewardship, preparing them to contribute solutions to both local and global issues with integrity and responsibility. Creativity, though often overlooked in traditional classrooms, is central to biblical anthropology. As beings created in the image of a Creator God (Genesis 1:27), humans are endowed with the capacity to imagine, innovate, and bring forth new possibilities. PjBL nurtures this divine gift by allowing students to design original projects that reflect both intellectual ingenuity and personal expression. In doing so, students participate in the creative work of God, transforming abstract knowledge into meaningful outcomes. Communication, while registering the lowest mean score, remains a vital biblical and educational value. Proverbs 15:23 declares, *"A person finds joy in giving an apt reply-and how good is a timely word!"* (NIV). Through PjBL, students practiced articulating ideas clearly, listening empathetically, and presenting arguments respectfully. These communication practices reflect the Christian ethic of building others up through words of truth and encouragement (Ephesians 4:29). The integration of biblical values into PjBL demonstrates that faith and 21st-century education are not contradictory but mutually enriching. By situating PjBL within a Christian educational framework, teachers can ensure that skill development is accompanied by moral and spiritual growth. Ariawan (2024) emphasizes that educational innovation in the era of rapid technological change must remain anchored in Christian spirituality, lest it risk eroding moral integrity. His insights on protecting Christian values in the age of AI parallel the urgency of grounding PjBL in biblical principles. Just as Ariawan warns that technological progress must serve faith rather than undermine it, the findings of this study suggest that PjBL must likewise be framed within Christian values to safeguard its transformative potential. Therefore, PjBL in the context of SMA Negeri 1 Tanah Pinem should not be viewed merely as an instructional innovation but as a holistic practice that integrates pedagogy with Christian formation. By engaging in PjBL, students do not simply acquire skills for future employment but also cultivate virtues of collaboration, stewardship, creativity, and communication that reflect their identity as followers of Christ. The findings of this study affirm that PjBL significantly enhances students' 21st-century skills, particularly collaboration and problem-solving, while also supporting creativity and communication. However, challenges such as initial resistance, time management issues, and limited teacher preparedness underscore the need for

systemic support and professional development. From a biblical perspective, PjBL resonates with Christian values of community, stewardship, creativity, and responsible communication, offering a holistic framework for integrating faith and learning. In the specific context of SMA Negeri 1 Tanah Pinem, these insights are particularly urgent. Rural schools face unique challenges in adopting innovative pedagogies, yet they also present fertile ground for transformative practices that integrate academic excellence with moral and spiritual formation. This research contributes to the growing body of literature on PjBL by demonstrating its effectiveness in developing 21st-century skills while also affirming its alignment with biblical principles. Future efforts should focus on strengthening teacher training, designing culturally relevant projects, and deepening the integration of faith into pedagogical practice. In doing so, education can truly equip students not only for academic success but also for faithful and compassionate living in the modern world.

CONCLUSION

This study sought to examine the effectiveness of Project-Based Learning (PjBL) in enhancing students' 21st-century skills at SMA Negeri 1 Tanah Pinem while reflecting critically on its pedagogical challenges and situating its outcomes within a biblical and Christian educational framework. The findings clearly demonstrate that PjBL serves as a powerful pedagogical model for equipping students with the essential "4Cs" of the 21st century—critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, and communication. Among these domains, collaboration and problem-solving emerged as the strongest areas of improvement, highlighting the capacity of PjBL to cultivate teamwork and analytical reasoning through authentic, project-driven learning. Creativity and communication also showed notable growth, affirming the model's potential to encourage innovation and effective expression, even in rural contexts where students often face limitations in resources and exposure. The study also revealed challenges that must not be overlooked. Students' initial resistance to group-based learning, difficulties in time management, and teachers' lack of preparedness in facilitating and assessing PjBL highlighted the systemic adjustments required for sustainable implementation. These findings underscore the necessity of ongoing professional development for teachers, particularly in rural schools. Without sufficient training and institutional support, there is a risk that PjBL may degenerate into superficial exercises rather than fostering meaningful, transformative learning experiences. Thus, while PjBL offers immense promise, its successful adoption depends on a holistic reorientation of pedagogical culture, assessment practices, and teacher readiness. This research underscores that PjBL is not only an educational strategy but also an avenue for spiritual and moral formation. When interpreted through the lens of Christian Religious Education, the outcomes of PjBL resonate deeply with biblical principles. Collaboration echoes the biblical call to community and fellowship (Ecclesiastes 4:9–10), problem-solving reflects the mandate of stewardship (Genesis 1:28), creativity affirms humanity's identity (Genesis 1:27), and communication embodies the biblical ethic of edification and encouragement (Ephesians 4:29). By embedding these values into PjBL, teachers can ensure that the pursuit of 21st-century competencies does not become detached from moral and spiritual integrity. Educational innovations in the age of rapid technological and cultural change must remain anchored in Christian

spirituality to prevent the erosion of faith and values. In conclusion, PjBL in the context of SMA Negeri 1 Tanah Pinem affirms that education can simultaneously prepare students for the complex demands of modern life while nurturing their spiritual identity and moral responsibility. The integration of biblical principles ensures that skills are not acquired for utilitarian ends but are directed toward service, stewardship, and the common good. This dual emphasis on global competencies and Christian formation makes PjBL not merely an instructional innovation but a transformative model of holistic education.

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