

Implementation of the Project Based Learning Model in Catholic Religious Education

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ABSTRACT

This study describes the implementation of the Project Based Learning (PjBL) model in Catholic Religious Education at Santo Paulus Catholic Junior High School, Palangka Raya. A qualitative descriptive design was used to understand the phenomenon in its natural setting. Data were collected from three informants, two Catholic Religious Education teachers and one principal, through interviews and documentation, supplemented by a questionnaire distributed to forty-four students, then analysed through data reduction, display, and conclusion drawing. The findings show that PjBL was implemented through six systematic steps, with Catholic faith values integrated at every stage. Project forms included videos, posters, Scripture drama, wall magazines, and social and environmental action, of which the latter were most meaningful. Student involvement was generally high, with active participation and good collaboration, although roughly thirty percent remained passive. Supporting factors included adequate facilities and parental support, whereas inhibiting factors involved limited time and uneven participation

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INTRODUCTION

Education is a conscious and planned effort to help students develop their potential through active and meaningful learning. Educational developments in the twenty-first century demand a fundamental change in the learning process, so that students not only master knowledge but also acquire essential skills such as critical thinking, creativity, communication, and collaboration. The Merdeka Curriculum responds to these needs by emphasising student-centred, contextual, and project-based learning as one of its distinctive features (Hasnawati, 2025). Passive, teacher-centred approaches are no longer adequate, so pedagogical strategies that encourage active student involvement and connect learning to everyday life are required (Retnasari, 2022).

Within Indonesian education, religious instruction plays a strategic role in shaping students' faith, morality, and social concern. Catholic Religious Education (CRE) is one subject that is central to character formation, through which students are expected to know, understand, and internalise the Catholic faith. Learning in CRE should integrate belief into the students' learning experience, so that they develop a deeper understanding of faith and how to apply it in daily life (Ekatni et al., 2023). CRE therefore carries not only a cognitive dimension but also affective and psychomotor dimensions that invite students to live out their faith concretely.

The importance of faith education at school is affirmed by the Catholic Church in the apostolic exhortation *Catechesi Tradendae*, which states that catechesis at school has the right and responsibility to lead students toward a deeper knowledge and internalisation of the Catholic faith (John Paul II, 1979). Catechesis does not merely convey doctrine but also guides children and adolescents toward dialogue, self-giving, faith, trust, and love. Accordingly, CRE learning must emphasise not only the transmission of material but also the living out of faith and the application of Christian values, which requires teachers to design engaging, creative, and contextual learning (Ekatni et al., 2023).

One innovative model considered relevant and effective for this purpose is Project Based Learning (PjBL). PjBL is a learning model that uses projects to activate students physically and psychologically, both individually and in groups, stimulating their thinking to discover and solve problems in learning (Kahar & Ili, 2022). It gives students the opportunity to learn more actively and independently by designing projects, gathering information, discussing in groups, and presenting their work. Prior studies confirm that PjBL contributes positively to students' creativity, engagement, and learning outcomes across educational levels (Salsabila et al., 2025; Rombe, 2024). In the CRE context, PjBL holds strong potential, since projects can invite students to apply Catholic faith values in real life, for example through social service or care for the environment, and can produce learning outputs such as posters, presentations, and videos (Maquita & Tobeli, 2022).

Santo Paulus Catholic Junior High School in Palangka Raya is a Catholic institution that has begun applying PjBL in CRE learning. However, no in-depth academic study has yet examined how this implementation actually unfolds in the classroom, what steps the teachers apply, how students are involved, and what supporting and inhibiting factors arise. Since every school has different conditions, student characteristics, and resources, a close study of PjBL implementation in this CRE context is needed (Gultom & Sirait, 2022). Accordingly, this study aims to describe three matters: the implementation of the PjBL model in CRE; the involvement of students in the CRE learning process through PjBL; and the supporting and inhibiting factors in its implementation. The contribution of this study lies in providing a contextual account of PjBL in a Catholic junior high school that can serve as a basis for developing more innovative, meaningful, and contextual religious learning.

METHOD

This study used a qualitative approach with a qualitative descriptive design, chosen to understand in depth the phenomenon of PjBL implementation in CRE learning at Santo Paulus Catholic Junior High School, Palangka Raya, within its natural setting (Sugiyono, 2023). The research was conducted at the school in May 2026, selected because the institution delivers CRE using the PjBL model and because the researcher had ready access to the site.

The subjects were determined through purposive sampling, namely the selection of informants based on their knowledge of and direct involvement in the implementation of PjBL. The informants comprised two Catholic Religious Education teachers, chosen for their direct experience in applying PjBL, and one principal, chosen for the role in policy, support, and supervision of learning. In addition, student representatives from grades VII, VIII, and IX participated as respondents, since they had directly followed CRE learning using the PjBL model.

Data were collected through three techniques. Semi-structured interviews with the teachers and principal used an interview guide of open questions, recorded and noted for

accuracy. A mixed questionnaire, combining closed and open items, was distributed to forty-four student representatives across the three grades to capture their learning experience, involvement, and responses, strengthening the interview data. Documentation gathered syllabi, teaching modules, lesson plans, teaching materials, and photographs of learning activities as supporting data.

Data were analysed following the interactive model of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. In data reduction, raw interview and questionnaire results were selected and focused on the three research questions; in data display, the reduced data were presented in narrative and tabular form together with questionnaire percentages; and in the final stage, conclusions were drawn and verified against the collected evidence. The validity of the data was strengthened through the triangulation of sources and techniques.

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

RESEARCH RESULT

The findings are presented according to the three research questions, drawing on interviews with three informants (two CRE teachers and the principal) and a questionnaire completed by forty-four students. For the first research question, on the implementation of PjBL, the teacher informants reported that projects were planned in line with learning outcomes and the teaching module, with themes drawn from students' lives so that Christian values could be more readily internalised. Implementation followed six systematic steps: formulating an essential question or problem, designing the project, arranging a schedule and task division, carrying out the project under teacher monitoring, presenting the results, and evaluating the process. Catholic faith values such as love, care, responsibility, honesty, and cooperation were integrated from planning through evaluation. Project forms included videos, posters, Scripture drama, wall magazines, presentations, and social and environmental action, of which social and environmental projects were regarded as the most meaningful because they moved students to live out their faith through concrete action. The principal confirmed that the school actively supports PjBL across suitable subjects through facilities, administration, motivation, a conducive environment, and learning resources.

Table 1. Interview Results on the Implementation of PjBL (RQ1)

Informant	Data Reduction (Interview)	Gist
Teacher A (Yohana Egie A.)	Plans PjBL by matching projects to learning outcomes and material; chooses themes from students' lives; applies six PjBL steps; integrates faith values (love, care, responsibility, honesty, cooperation) from planning to evaluation; project forms include video, poster, Scripture drama, social action, and environmental care.	PjBL is implemented systematically through six steps with faith values integrated at every stage; social and environmental projects are most meaningful as they move students to live out their faith.
Teacher B (Maria Emanuella D.)	Applies PjBL selectively on suitable themes, especially society and environment; plans from the teaching module; guides students to understand material through real-life problem	PjBL is applied to appropriate themes with faith values embedded through Christian habituation and modelling, realised in concrete

	solving; integrates values via prayer, respect for human dignity, and the example of Christ; projects include wall magazines, PowerPoint presentations, and educational videos on waste and the environment shared on social media.	environmental and media projects.
Principal (Yohanes Darmaji)	States the school has a policy supporting PjBL across most subjects, including CRE, adjusted to relevant themes; provides moral, administrative, and facility support, a conducive environment, and library resources.	The school supports PjBL institutionally through policy, facilities, administration, motivation, and learning resources so implementation runs well.

Source: Processed interview data, 2026

Table 2. Student Responses to the PjBL Questionnaire (n = 44)

No	Questionnaire Item	Positive Response
1	Teacher uses the project based learning model	75.0%
2	Ever produced a project output (poster, video, presentation)	86.4%
3	Actively involved in every stage of the project	59.1%
4	Able to collaborate well within the group	79.1%
5	Time provided by the teacher was sufficient	88.6%
6	School facilities and learning resources were adequate	61.4%

Source: Processed questionnaire data, 2026

For the second research question, on student involvement, the teachers observed that students were generally active throughout the project, from planning and group discussion to execution and presentation, and became more enthusiastic, more willing to ask questions and express opinions, and more cooperative. One teacher estimated that about seventy percent of students participated actively while around thirty percent remained passive, prompting the teacher to form balanced groups so that active students could encourage the others. The teachers also noted a positive effect on students' living out of faith, visible in growing care for others, a stronger sense of responsibility, and a reduction in harsh language toward peers. As shown in Table 2, the questionnaire corroborated these observations: 86.4% of students had produced a project output, 79.1% reported good collaboration, and 59.1% reported active involvement at every stage, indicating broad but not yet fully even participation.

The students' own accounts, gathered through the open-ended questionnaire items, enrich this picture. Describing the process, most students reported that learning began with the teacher explaining the material and assigning a project linked to the theme, after which they formed groups, divided tasks, gathered information from various sources, worked on the project, and finally presented or submitted the results under the teacher's guidance and assessment. When asked about their roles, students described a range of contributions matched to their abilities, such as gathering information, arranging content, designing posters, writing the project text, searching for Scripture verses, preparing presentations, leading the group, and handling technical tasks like cutting, pasting, and bringing materials. This spread of roles indicates that the project structure gave students concrete and differentiated ways to participate rather than a single uniform task.

On the connection between projects and faith, the students most frequently named poster-making on themes such as Easter, the Sacred Triduum, Good Friday, Holy Thursday, Ash Wednesday, and love and care for others, alongside presentations, social action, and reflection reports. Most students linked these projects to Catholic values such as love, sacrifice, service, care for others, humility, hope, responsibility, and cooperation, and reported that the work helped them grasp the meaning of the Church's feast days and apply Jesus' teaching in daily life. Concrete examples they gave included helping friends who struggled with their studies, respecting others' opinions during group work, taking part in social service, helping parents at home, and building the habit of prayer and Scripture reading. This suggests that, for many students, the project was experienced not only as a product to be completed but as a lived encounter with faith values.

At the same time, the student responses revealed that internalisation was uneven. Some students gave only brief answers such as "making groups, discussion, presentation" without describing the full process, some named a project type such as "making a poster" or "Good Friday" without being able to explain its connection to Catholic values, and a few stated that they did not remember the projects they had done. This indicates that a portion of students recalled the output they produced more readily than the faith values the project was meant to instil, and that their understanding of the PjBL stages was not yet uniform. The uneven contribution within groups, where some students engaged only in technical tasks, reinforces the finding that active involvement still needs to be distributed more evenly so that every member gains a comparable learning experience.

Table 3. Interview Results on Student Involvement (RQ2)

Informant	Data Reduction (Interview)	Gist
Teacher A (Yohana Egie A.)	Students are active from planning to presentation, more enthusiastic and cooperative, and more willing to ask and give opinions; a few remain passive but this is managed; PjBL positively affects faith, seen in growing care, responsibility, and application of Christian values.	PjBL raises activeness, collaboration, and faith internalisation, though some students still need encouragement to participate fully.
Teacher B (Maria Emanuella D.)	Involvement is uneven, about 70% active and 30% passive; forms balanced groups so active students help others; collaboration generally good but some are distracted or use phones; after learning, students show behavioural change such as reducing harsh words and respecting human dignity.	PjBL drives activeness, cooperation, and character growth despite uneven participation; teacher mediation and balanced grouping are decisive.
Principal (Yohanes Darmaji)	Reports good involvement and enthusiasm in each project activity; notes that implementation still needs improvement in teacher competence and full student participation, and that continuous evaluation is required; observes positive change in students' character and faith.	Involvement and enthusiasm are good; sustained success needs ongoing evaluation, teacher capacity building, and wider student participation.

Source: Processed interview data, 2026

For the third research question, on supporting and inhibiting factors, the teachers identified adequate facilities such as interactive screens, projectors, and comfortable classrooms, a conducive and tolerant multi-religious environment, optimal teacher mentoring, parental support, and students' ability to use technology as supporting factors. Inhibiting factors related less to the model itself than to the conditions of its implementation: limited time so that presentations sometimes could not finish in one meeting, differing levels of ability and activeness, and reduced concentration in the final teaching hours when both students and teachers were tired. These obstacles were addressed by dividing projects into simpler stages, giving special guidance to less active students, arranging a clear schedule, completing most work within class hours, and making creative use of available facilities and resources. The questionnaire echoed this, with 88.6% of students judging the time sufficient and 61.4% considering the facilities adequate. Table 5 summarises these factors by aspect.

Table 4. Interview Results on Supporting and Inhibiting Factors (RQ3)

Informant	Data Reduction (Interview)	Gist
Teacher A (Yohana Egie A.)	Supported by adequate facilities (interactive screen, projector, comfortable rooms) and parental help with out-of-class projects; hindered by limited time so presentations overrun and by differing ability and activeness; addressed through staged projects, special guidance for passive students, and clear scheduling.	Facilities and parental support enable PjBL; limited time and uneven ability are the main obstacles, managed through staging, mentoring, and scheduling.
Teacher B (Maria Emanuella D.)	Supported by adequate facilities, a conducive and tolerant multi-religious environment, optimal mentoring, and students' use of technology; obstacles lie in implementation conditions, low activeness of some students and reduced focus in the final tired hours; managed by adjusting time to project needs and completing work mostly in class.	The obstacle is not the model but its conditions; a supportive, tolerant environment and time adjustment keep implementation effective.

Source: Processed interview data, 2026

Table 5. Supporting and Inhibiting Factors of PjBL Implementation

Aspect	Supporting Factors	Inhibiting Factors
School	Adequate facilities (interactive screen, projector, comfortable classrooms); institutional and foundation support; conducive, tolerant multi-religious environment	Certain facility limitations; occasional resource gaps for out-of-class project work
Teacher	Optimal mentoring and guidance; balanced grouping of students; clear scheduling of project stages	Need to strengthen competence in managing project-based learning; limited class time so presentations sometimes overrun

Student	Enthusiasm of most students; ability to use technology for projects; good collaboration	Uneven activeness (about 30% passive); fatigue and reduced concentration in final teaching hours; distraction by gadget use
Parents / Home	Parental support in completing projects done outside school hours	Uneven parental involvement for some students

Source: Processed interview and questionnaire data, 2026

DISCUSSION

The finding that PjBL was implemented through six systematic steps with faith values integrated at every stage indicates that the model in this school functions not merely as a procedure but as a vehicle for value formation. This is consistent with the view that PjBL activates students physically and psychologically and stimulates problem-solving thinking (Kahar & Ili, 2022), and it extends that view into the religious domain by showing that the essential question, project design, and evaluation can each carry an explicit Catholic value. The prominence of social and environmental projects as the most meaningful forms confirms that authentic faith learning is realised when students move from understanding to concrete action, echoing findings that PjBL enables students to apply Catholic values in daily life (Maquita & Tobeli, 2022).

The pattern of student involvement, high overall yet uneven, aligns closely with the literature. The questionnaire evidence of strong collaboration and broad participation supports prior findings that PjBL raises engagement, creativity, and learning outcomes (Salsabila et al., 2025; Rombe, 2024; Gultom & Sirait, 2022). At the same time, the roughly thirty percent of passive students, and the distraction caused by fatigue and gadget use, show that the model's success is conditional on classroom management and grouping rather than automatic. The teachers' strategy of forming balanced groups so that active students draw in the passive ones reflects the social-constructivist premise that learning is mediated through peer interaction, in which more capable peers scaffold others (Vygotsky, 1978), while the emphasis on concrete, real-life projects resonates with the developmental principle that adolescents learn through active construction of meaning (Piaget, 1972).

The finding that inhibiting factors lie in implementation conditions rather than in the model itself, chiefly limited time and uneven activeness, is consistent with studies that identify time management and participation as recurring challenges in project-based learning (Zein, 2024). The observed growth in students' character, including greater care, responsibility, and respect for others, supports the argument that value and character education is effectively cultivated through habituation and practice rather than through cognitive transmission alone (Lickona, 1991). This suggests that the affective gains reported here are not incidental but are structurally enabled by the project cycle, in which students repeatedly enact Christian values in collaborative tasks.

This study has several limitations. The interview data derive from three informants, and the direct student voice was captured through a questionnaire rather than in-depth interviews, so the depth of individual student experience is limited. The research was conducted at a single school over a short period, so the findings describe a specific context and are not intended for broad generalisation. Future research is encouraged to widen the scope by involving more schools and subjects, to combine questionnaires with student

interviews, and to examine the effect of PjBL on other outcomes such as learning achievement, critical thinking, and character development (Sugiyono, 2023).

The practical implication is that PjBL can serve as an effective alternative model in CRE when teachers plan projects around students' real lives, integrate faith values deliberately at each step, and provide intensive mentoring for less active students. Schools can strengthen implementation by supplying adequate facilities and internet access and by developing teachers' competence in managing project-based learning, while parental involvement in out-of-class project work further supports its success.

CONCLUSION

Based on the research findings, the implementation of the Project Based Learning model in Catholic Religious Education at Santo Paulus Catholic Junior High School, Palangka Raya, has been carried out well. Learning proceeded through the stages of formulating an essential question, designing the project, scheduling activities, executing the project, monitoring progress, and presenting results, with the teacher acting as facilitator. Various project forms, including videos, posters, Scripture drama, social action, environmental care, presentations, and wall magazines, helped students learn actively and connect the material to daily life.

PjBL had a positive effect on students' living out of Catholic faith values. Through project activities, students not only understood the material theoretically but also internalised and applied values such as love, care, responsibility, cooperation, honesty, discipline, and respect for others, and they became more active, creative, and willing to express opinions. Supporting factors included adequate facilities, support from the school, foundation, and parents, a conducive learning environment, and the enthusiasm of most students, whereas inhibiting factors included limited time, the uneven activeness of some students, difficulty in reconciling group opinions, certain facility limitations, and low motivation among a few students. These obstacles were overcome through teacher mentoring, clear task division, good communication, and cooperation among the school, teachers, parents, and students. Overall, PjBL proved able to increase student involvement, strengthen the formation of Christian character, and help students live out Catholic faith values in everyday life.

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