Jurnal Profesi Pendidikan (JPP)
Volume 4, Number 2, December 2025
P-ISSN: 2829-0828 E-ISSN: 2828-8831
Open Access: https://journal.ikipsiliwangi.ac.id/index.php/jpp

Application of Problem-Based Learning Model Based on Humanistic Theory in Developing Students' Learning Motivation in Grade III MI Al-Azkiya Pengalihan

Harsiah[1*]
[1]Pendidikan Dasar, Universitas Terbuka, Indonesia

Article Info

Article history:

Received May 19, 2025
Accepted December 15, 2025
Available online December 20, 2025

Keywords:

Problem Based Learning Model, Learning Motivation, Grade III MI Students, Humanistic Theory

DOI: https://doi.org/10.22460/jpp.v4i2.27430

Abstract

Learning motivation plays a crucial role in determining students' learning success at the elementary level, as this stage shapes attitudes, interests, and learning character for future development. However, learning in many Madrasah Ibtidaiyah is still dominated by teacher-centered approaches that limit students' active participation. This study aims to describe the planning, implementation, and outcomes of applying a problem-based learning model grounded in humanistic theory to enhance the learning motivation of Grade III students at MI Al-Azkiya Pengalihan. The study employed a qualitative approach using a fixed case study design, involving 20 Grade III students as research subjects. Data were collected through observation, documentation, and assessment of learning activities and motivation indicators. Data analysis followed the stages of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The findings indicate that learning planning was conducted effectively in accordance with the principles of problem-based learning and humanistic theory. The implementation of learning successfully encouraged active student participation. Students' learning motivation increased, as reflected in high levels of curiosity (90%), activeness in asking questions (75%), enthusiasm for reading and learning (80%), courage to express opinions (85%), and initiative in discussion (70%). These results demonstrate that a humanistic theory-based problem-based learning model is effective in fostering students' learning motivation.

Corresponding Author:

Harsiah
Pendidikan Dasar, Universitas Terbuka, Indonesia
Author Email: harsiah1511@gmail.com

INTRODUCTION

Learning motivation plays a central role as the primary internal driving force that determines students' engagement and success in learning activities. Motivation influences not only students' willingness to participate in learning, but also their persistence, curiosity, and ability to overcome academic challenges (Uni, 2016). When

learning motivation is weak, students tend to experience difficulties in achieving optimal learning outcomes, even when their cognitive abilities are adequate. This condition is particularly critical in basic education, as students at this stage are forming attitudes, interests, and learning characters that will shape their long-term academic trajectories. Empirical findings consistently show that low learning motivation is associated with decreased academic achievement, minimal classroom participation, and the emergence of negative attitudes toward school.

The findings of this study are closely aligned with field realities observed in several Madrasah Ibtidaiyah (MI), particularly in Pengalihan Village. Learning practices in these schools are still largely dominated by conventional, teacher-centered approaches. At MI Al-Azkiya, approximately 75% of learning activities rely on lecture-based instruction, limiting opportunities for students to engage in discussion or express their ideas. Questioning behavior is also relatively low, with only about 25% of students actively asking questions. Similar patterns were identified at MI Nurul Falah and MI Nurul Yaqin, where classroom interactions remain minimal and student participation in group discussions does not exceed 30%. These data indicate that conventional instructional practices contribute significantly to students' passive learning behaviors and limited engagement.

Such conditions pose serious challenges in efforts to enhance students' learning motivation and develop essential 21st-century skills, including critical thinking, problem-solving, collaboration, and communication, which are central to the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum. When students are positioned merely as passive recipients of information, they are deprived of opportunities to explore ideas, engage in meaningful dialogue, and construct knowledge independently. As a result, learning becomes procedural rather than reflective, and motivation remains extrinsic rather than intrinsically driven.

In response to these challenges, innovative instructional models such as Problem-Based Learning (PBL) have been increasingly promoted. PBL is widely recognized as an instructional model that fosters critical thinking, problem-solving skills, and conceptual understanding through student engagement with real-life problems (Trianto, 2010). Through the stages of identifying problems, analyzing information, and formulating solutions, students are actively involved in the learning process. This active engagement makes learning more contextual, meaningful, and intellectually stimulating, which in turn has the potential to enhance students' learning motivation.

However, findings from previous studies suggest that the implementation of PBL alone is not always sufficient to meet the diverse needs of students. Some learners experience difficulties adapting to the cognitive demands of PBL, particularly when they are not accustomed to independent inquiry or collaborative problem-solving. Research by Sulaiman and Fitriani (2025), for instance, reported that although PBL increased student activity, some students felt overwhelmed by the complexity of the problems and

the limited direct guidance from teachers. This condition may lead to academic stress, which can negatively affect students' motivation and emotional well-being.

These limitations highlight the importance of integrating PBL with an approach that addresses students' psychological and emotional needs, namely the humanistic learning approach. Humanistic learning theory, as developed by Maslow and Rogers, emphasizes the fulfillment of basic psychological needs such as safety, appreciation, belonging, and self-actualization as prerequisites for effective learning. Within this framework, teachers are positioned as facilitators who support students' personal growth rather than merely transmitting knowledge. A learning environment that is safe, open, and appreciative enables students to feel valued, confident, and motivated to participate actively (Sanjaya, 2019; Sudrajat, 2021). The fulfillment of these needs is crucial for fostering intrinsic motivation, self-confidence, and learner autonomy (Hidayat & Anggraeni, 2023).

Furthermore, the humanistic approach recognizes students as unique individuals with diverse characteristics, interests, and learning needs. Teachers are therefore required to understand student differences and adopt instructional strategies that allow learners to express themselves without fear of judgment. Positive emotional relationships between teachers and students become a foundational element for effective learning, as they encourage openness, risk-taking, and sustained engagement (Prayitno & Sari, 2021). In this context, integrating PBL with humanistic principles creates a learning model that not only challenges students cognitively but also supports them emotionally.

The relevance of this combined approach is particularly evident in the context of MI Al-Azkiya Pengalihan. Initial observations revealed that the dominance of lecture-based instruction has limited students' opportunities for exploration and interaction, resulting in low enthusiasm, minimal questioning, and weak problem-solving abilities. By contrast, the integration of PBL with a humanistic approach offers a more balanced learning environment, where students are encouraged to think critically while feeling psychologically safe and supported. Such learning conditions are essential for developing students' confidence and motivation, especially in elementary education settings.

Empirical evidence from previous studies further supports the effectiveness of this integrated approach. Setiawan et al. (2024) found that PBL significantly improved students' motivation and learning outcomes in elementary science classes by increasing student involvement and responsibility for learning tasks. Similarly, Sari and Husein (2024) demonstrated that a humanistic approach within differentiated learning contexts effectively enhanced learning motivation by aligning instructional strategies with students' individual learning styles. Karwadi and Indrawan (2023) also emphasized that humanistic learning environments positively influence students' motivation in Madrasah Ibtidaiyah, particularly in fostering comfort, engagement, and active participation.

Despite the growing body of research on PBL and humanistic learning, most studies have examined these approaches separately or within general educational contexts. The novelty of the present study lies in its integration of PBL and humanistic theory within the specific local context of MI Al-Azkiya Pengalihan. This combined approach addresses the persistent issue of low student motivation caused by conventional teaching practices and demonstrates how cognitively challenging yet emotionally supportive learning environments can be created in Madrasah Ibtidaiyah settings.

Moreover, this study aligns closely with national education policy directions, particularly the Merdeka Curriculum, which emphasizes student-centered learning, differentiated instruction, project-based learning, and the strengthening of the Pancasila Student Profile. The integration of PBL and humanistic principles supports these policy goals by promoting active participation, respecting individual differences, and connecting learning to real-life contexts. Consequently, this study not only contributes to classroom-level instructional improvement but also offers broader implications for the development of innovative learning models in Islamic elementary education.

Overall, the findings of this study suggest that the application of a problem-based learning model grounded in humanistic theory is a promising strategy for enhancing learning motivation among third-grade students at MI Al-Azkiya Pengalihan. This integrated approach encourages active and critical engagement while simultaneously addressing students' emotional and psychological needs. Therefore, further research is essential to explore its long-term impact and potential adaptation across different Madrasah Ibtidaiyah contexts.

METHOD

This study uses a qualitative approach with an embedded case study design. The case study was chosen because this study aims to deeply understand the process of implementing the problem-based learning (PBL) model combined with a humanistic approach in developing learning motivation of grade III students at MI Al-Azkiya Pengalihan. MI Al-Azkiya Pengalihan was chosen as the research location purposively because this madrasah is considered to represent the general conditions of madrasahs in Pengalihan Village, learning is still dominated by lecture methods, low student activity, and learning motivation tends to be weak. In addition, MI Al-Azkiya is also in the early stages of developing innovative learning in accordance with the Merdeka Curriculum, so it is a relevant place to study the application of the PBL model with a humanistic approach. The subjects of the study were 20 students of class III of MI Al-Azkiya Pengalihan.

This research instrument was developed based on the learning motivation theory proposed by Schunk et al. (2014) and Keller (2010), which emphasizes that learning motivation is reflected through several main indicators, namely curiosity, activeness in asking questions, enthusiasm for reading and learning activities, courage in expressing opinions, and initiative to engage in discussions. Based on these indicators, the research

instruments used included student activity observation sheets to involve students during the learning process, documentation to support field data, and a student activity assessment format used to systematically assess the level of learning motivation. Before being used in the research, all instruments were first validated by two experts, namely a lecturer of elementary education and a practitioner of innovative learning at Madrasah Ibtidaiyah. The validation process was carried out to ensure the suitability of the instruments with the theoretical basis of learning motivation, ease of implementation in the classroom, and its relevance to the learning context at the madrasah.

Data triangulation was conducted to ensure the accuracy and validity of research findings through several strategies. Source triangulation was conducted by comparing data obtained from observations, documentation of learning activities, and assessments of student activities to ensure consistency of findings. Furthermore, method triangulation was applied by matching data obtained through various data collection techniques, namely observation, documentation, and assessment of student activities. Theoretical triangulation was also conducted by linking research findings to theories of learning motivation and humanistic learning as a basis for strengthening the validity of conclusions. To strengthen data validity, data confirmation (member checking) was conducted through discussions of preliminary results with classroom teachers to ensure the data aligns with actual conditions in the field.

Research data were collected through observations of student learning activities during the implementation of the problem-based learning model with a humanistic approach, documentation in the form of photographs of learning activities, student learning record results, teacher planning documents, and student activity assessments compiled based on learning motivation indicators. The collected data were then analyzed using the interactive analysis model of Miles and Huberman (2014), which includes data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. In the data reduction stage, data from observations, documentation, and assessments of student activities were selected and focused on information relevant to the research problem formulation and objectives. The data presentation stage was carried out by organizing the data in narrative form, tables, and direct quotations from field notes to facilitate researchers in identifying data patterns and meanings. The final stage, drawing and verifying conclusions, was carried out repeatedly through a process of triangulation of sources and methods. This research was conducted in three meetings or three cycles of application of the learning model, so that the development of student learning motivation could be observed gradually and comprehensively.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

RESULT

Based on the results of observations, documentation, and assessments of the learning activities of 20 Grade III students of MI Al-Azkiya Pengalihan, the application of

a problem-based learning model grounded in humanistic theory demonstrated a clear improvement in students' learning motivation across five key indicators. As presented in Table 1 , the majority of students showed positive motivational behaviors during the learning process.

Table 1: Results of Learning Motivation Development
Students of Class III of MI Al-Azkiya Diversion

No	Learning Motivation Indicators	Number of Students (n = 20)	Percentage
1	Curiosity	18	90%
2	Asking Activity	15	75%
3	The Spirit of Reading and Learning	16	80%
4	Courage to Express Opinions	17	85%
5	Discussion Initiative	14	70%

The curiosity indicator reached the highest percentage, with 18 students (90%) actively demonstrating interest in the learning activities. This was reflected in students' attentiveness, careful observation of learning materials, and eagerness to explore the content being discussed. This finding indicates that problem-based learning, when combined with a humanistic approach, successfully stimulates students' intrinsic motivation by presenting learning as a meaningful and engaging experience. From a humanistic perspective, this condition suggests that students' basic psychological needs for curiosity and self-exploration were well facilitated, allowing them to feel safe and encouraged to learn.

Active questioning was observed in 15 students (75%), showing that a substantial number of learners were willing to ask both clarification and exploratory questions to teachers and peers. This increase in questioning behavior reflects a shift from passive learning habits toward more active cognitive engagement. The learning environment created through PBL allowed students to view questioning not as a risk, but as a natural part of learning, which aligns with humanistic principles emphasizing openness, acceptance, and respect for individual expression.

The indicator of enthusiasm for reading and learning was shown by 16 students (80%), particularly during activities involving reading Surah Al-Fil and completing learning worksheets. Students not only read the material seriously but were also able to understand and discuss its content collaboratively. This suggests that learning tasks embedded in meaningful problems encourage students to engage more deeply with learning resources, as they perceive reading as a tool to solve problems rather than as an isolated academic obligation.

Furthermore, 17 students (85%) demonstrated courage in expressing opinions during class discussions and teacher-led questioning. This high percentage indicates that students felt confident and emotionally secure in expressing their ideas. From a humanistic learning perspective, this reflects the presence of a supportive classroom

climate where students feel valued and respected, which is essential for developing self-confidence and intrinsic motivation.

The lowest, yet still significant, indicator was discussion initiative, achieved by 14 students (70%). These students were able to initiate group discussions independently, organize roles within their groups, and manage turn-taking without constant teacher guidance. Although this percentage is lower than other indicators, it still demonstrates a meaningful improvement, considering that students were previously accustomed to teacher-dominated instruction. This finding suggests that discussion initiative develops progressively and requires continuous exposure to student-centered learning environments.

In addition to quantitative indicators, documentation of learning activities revealed more varied and creative student work, indicating deeper conceptual understanding. Students appeared more confident, willing to experiment, and showed positive attitudes toward learning. Affective responses were also evident through students' cheerful expressions and spontaneous verbal feedback, such as "It's fun to learn like this," "I understand because there are pictures," and "It's fun to discuss with friends." These responses confirm that the learning atmosphere became more lively, interactive, and collaborative compared to prior conventional learning practices.

Overall, these findings indicate that the implementation of a humanistic-based problem-based learning model not only enhances observable motivational indicators but also fosters a positive emotional learning climate. This combination supports both cognitive engagement and students' psychological well-being, making learning more meaningful and motivating for elementary-level learners.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study indicate that the implementation of a problem-based learning model grounded in humanistic theory contributes positively to the development of students' learning motivation, as reflected in the five observed indicators: curiosity, active questioning, enthusiasm for reading and learning, courage to express opinions, and discussion initiative. The high percentage of curiosity (90%) suggests that students were genuinely interested and cognitively engaged in the learning process. This condition can be interpreted as the result of a learning environment that is psychologically safe and supportive, allowing students to explore learning materials without fear of making mistakes. From a humanistic perspective, this reflects the application of the principle of *unconditional positive regard*, where teachers appreciate students' efforts and ideas without judgment, thereby fostering intrinsic motivation.

The indicator of active questioning, which was shown by 75% of students, further demonstrates a shift from passive learning habits toward active cognitive engagement. In conventional learning settings previously observed at MI Al-Azkiya Pengalihan, students tended to hesitate in asking questions. However, within the PBL–humanistic

learning environment, questioning became a natural and accepted part of the learning process. This finding aligns with Carl Rogers' view that meaningful learning occurs when students experience a collaborative and non-threatening relationship with the teacher, enabling them to express curiosity and uncertainty openly.

Similarly, the high level of enthusiasm for reading and learning (80%) indicates that students perceived reading activities as meaningful rather than merely obligatory tasks. The integration of problem-based activities encouraged students to read Surah Al-Fil and learning worksheets with purpose, as reading became a tool for understanding and solving problems. This supports the constructivist principle that knowledge is actively constructed through meaningful engagement with learning resources and experiences (Trianto, 2010).

The courage to express opinions, demonstrated by 85% of students, highlights the effectiveness of the humanistic approach in building students' self-confidence. Students felt respected and valued when expressing their ideas during discussions, which fulfilled their psychological needs for acceptance and recognition. According to humanistic theory, the fulfillment of these needs is essential for self-actualization and the development of intrinsic motivation. This condition confirms that students were not merely responding to external demands but were internally motivated to participate.

The discussion initiative indicator, achieved by 70% of students, shows that while most students were able to independently engage in group discussions, this aspect developed more gradually compared to other indicators. This finding suggests that discussion initiative requires sustained exposure to student-centered learning environments, especially for students who were previously accustomed to teacher-dominated instruction. Nevertheless, the observed ability of students to organize discussions, assign roles, and manage turn-taking reflects a meaningful shift toward learning autonomy and collaboration.

Students' affective responses further reinforce these findings. Expressions of enjoyment, pride, and enthusiasm, such as feeling happy when their ideas were used or excited to collaborate with peers, indicate that learning motivation was supported not only cognitively but also emotionally and socially. These responses are consistent with Sardiman's (2018) assertion that learning motivation grows when students feel appreciated, safe, and actively involved in learning. Moreover, individual differences in learning styles, such as visual and kinesthetic preferences, suggest that while the PBL–humanistic approach is generally effective, teachers still need to adapt learning strategies to accommodate student diversity.

Overall, the discussion of these results confirms that a problem-based learning model grounded in humanistic theory effectively supports the development of students' learning motivation across cognitive, emotional, and social dimensions. This approach aligns with previous studies demonstrating the positive impact of PBL on student motivation (Lestari, 2020) and is consistent with the principles of the Independent Curriculum, which emphasizes student-centered learning and the development of

critical, creative, independent, and collaborative competencies. By fostering a supportive and meaningful learning environment, the PBL–humanistic approach contributes to a more interactive, engaging, and motivating classroom climate.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of this study, it can be concluded that the implementation of a problem-based learning model grounded in humanistic theory is effective in enhancing the learning motivation of Grade III students at MI Al-Azkiya Pengalihan. This learning model fosters active student involvement, provides opportunities for self-expression and self-actualization, and fulfills students' basic psychological needs such as curiosity, appreciation, and a sense of security, which are central to humanistic learning principles. The results also indicate that the success of this model is influenced by individual student factors, including learning styles and affective responses, highlighting the importance of understanding student characteristics in the learning process. Therefore, meaningful learning should not only focus on academic achievement but also address students' emotional and psychological development. In this regard, teachers are encouraged to consistently apply and further develop humanistic-based problem-based learning in classroom practice by considering students' diverse needs and characteristics, supported by the use of interactive and contextually relevant learning media. At the institutional level, schools are expected to support such learning innovations through teacher training, adequate facilities, and continuous professional development to create a learning environment that holistically supports the development of students' learning motivation.

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