Madrasah Berbagi Program as Project-Based Learning for Empathy and Social Responsibility

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
	The rapid advancement of digital technology has shaped Generation Alpha into a cohort deeply integrated with virtual interactions, thereby posing challenges to the development of empathy and social responsibility within real-life contexts. This study aims to examine the *Madrasah Berbagi Program* as a Project-Based Learning (PjBL) model in fostering empathy and social concern among *madrasah ibtidaiyah* students. Employing a qualitative approach with a case study design, the research was conducted at an *madrasah ibtidaiyah* and involved 20 fifth- and sixth-grade students, the school principal, and two teachers as key informants. Data were collected through participatory observation, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis, and subsequently analyzed through data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. Triangulation and member checking were applied to ensure the credibility of the findings. The findings indicate that the *Madrasah Berbagi Program* provides authentic social experiences through students' active involvement in identifying beneficiaries, collecting basic necessities, and directly distributing aid within the surrounding community. These activities stimulated emotional engagement, enhanced social sensitivity, and demonstrated indications of students' prosocial behavior in their daily interactions. Although the program reflects several core principles of PjBL—such as authentic context, collaboration, and the production of tangible outputs with social impact—its implementation remains partial, as it has not fully incorporated student-driven formulation of essential questions and structured reflection as integral components of the instructional design. This study concludes that the *Madrasah Berbagi Program* holds strong potential as a contextual PjBL model for character education in *madrasah ibtidaiyah*.

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INTRODUCTION

The rapid advancement of digital technology has given rise to Generation Alpha, a cohort of children born approximately between 2010 and 2024 who have grown up as digital natives from an early age (Gunawan et al., 2024; Mark McCrindle, Ashley Fell, 2021). In the context of this study, Generation Alpha refers to *Madrasah Ibtidaiyah* (MI) students aged 7–12 years who served as the research participants. At this developmental stage, students are undergoing a critical phase of social character formation (Suliantoro et al., 2024). However, simultaneously, they have become accustomed to interacting with digital devices and virtual environments from an early age.

Easy access to information and global connectivity constitute key advantages of Generation Alpha. However, behind these advantages lies a significant challenge in the form of a decline in the quality of direct social interactions, which may adversely affect the development of students' social character (Zendrato, Juwita Febri Cahyani, 2025). Children tend to engage more actively in virtual interactions than in their immediate social environments, resulting in a shift in patterns of social character formation. This condition indicates that the characteristics of Generation Alpha not only influence modes of social interaction but also necessitate the adaptation of educational strategies that are more contextual and responsive to the realities of the digital era (Gunawan et al., 2024).

The shift in communication patterns toward digital media has the potential to diminish the quality of direct social interactions if it is not balanced by systematic and sustained character development (Mea & Syaikhu, 2023; Susanto, 2025). Therefore, character education has become a crucial component in addressing the challenges posed by the digital era (Sitompul et al., 2023). Through character education, students are not only encouraged to achieve academic excellence but are also guided to internalize social and moral values, such as empathy, social concern, and social responsibility (Lickona & Davidson, 2020). Educational approaches that emphasize authentic experiences and social engagement are increasingly relevant in supporting students' balanced development of social skills alongside technological advancement (Guo et al., 2020).

One form of character education implementation in *madrasah* is through social activities that foster empathy and concern for others. *MI Muhammadiyah Macanmati* has implemented the *Madrasah Berbagi Program* since 2015 as an effort to develop students' social character. This program actively involves both students and teachers in collecting and distributing basic necessities to communities in need. Preliminary interviews with the school principal indicate that the program has had a positive impact on the development of students' empathy and social concern.

Although the *Madrasah Berbagi Program* has demonstrated notable benefits, its implementation has tended to remain routine-based and has not been explicitly integrated into the formal curriculum. Moreover, the program has not yet adopted Project-Based Learning (PjBL) as a systematically designed pedagogical approach. Conceptually, PjBL is grounded in social constructivism and experiential learning, emphasizing active engagement, collaboration, and reflection throughout the learning process (Kokotsaki et al., 2021; Morris, 2020). The integration of PjBL has the potential to transform sharing activities into meaningful learning experiences, enabling students not only to participate in social action but also to understand its underlying processes, purposes, and impacts.

Several previous studies have examined the implementation of PjBL in Islamic Religious Education and have demonstrated its contribution to the development of students' character and social attitudes. Wijaya et al. (2024) emphasized that PjBL enhances learning engagement while simultaneously fostering cooperation and responsibility through project-based activities. Zainudin (2025) reported the effectiveness of PjBL in cultivating students' empathy, tolerance, and collaboration through contextualized projects. The findings of Syarif et al. (2023) revealed that project-based models play a significant role in strengthening religious character, while Junita et al. (2023) highlighted the success of collaborative project-based learning in promoting positive social attitudes. Furthermore, a literature review conducted by Najiha and Saputri (2023) reinforced the alignment of PjBL with the social learning objectives of Islamic Religious Education.

These conditions indicate a research gap, as limited studies have examined the integration of PjBL with social programs as a contextual strategy for character education. The *Madrasah Berbagi Program* holds considerable potential to be developed as a project-based learning medium; however, it has not yet been systematically analyzed within a PjBL pedagogical framework. Based on this gap, the present study aims to analyze the alignment of the *Madrasah Berbagi Program* with the principles of PjBL and to identify its contribution to the development of students' social attitudes. This study is expected to provide empirical contributions to the advancement of social project–based learning in Islamic Religious Education that is more structured, contextual, and responsive to the challenges of the digital era.

LITERATURE REVIEW

1. Generation Alpha and Its Characteristics

Generation Alpha refers to a cohort of children born approximately between 2010 and 2024 who have grown up as digital natives from an early age (Gunawan et al., 2024; Höfrová et al., 2024; Mark McCrindle, Ashley Fell, 2021; Megersa et al., 2020). Generation Alpha differs significantly from previous generations. While earlier generations, such as Millennials and Generation Z, primarily used technology as a tool, Generation Alpha perceives technology as an "extension of the self," as they have been entirely raised within environments dominated by digital technology (Mark McCrindle, Ashley Fell, 2021). Continuous exposure to digital devices, widespread internet access, and virtual interactions from an early age have substantially influenced their learning patterns, modes of interaction, as well as cognitive and social development. This influence is more pronounced when compared to previous generations who were not raised within a highly interconnected digital environment (Apandi et al., 2025).

In a recent systematic review, Höfrová et al. (2024) emphasized that Generation Alpha is the first generation whose lives are intrinsically "wired" to digital technology. They are accustomed to exploring, communicating, and learning through digital media, which in turn shapes their thinking patterns, learning styles, and social–emotional skills. These characteristics are particularly significant in educational contexts, as they influence how students build social relationships and respond to their surrounding environments.

Several characteristics are commonly identified in studies on Generation Alpha. Children of this generation grow up in environments saturated with digital devices, internet access, and digital applications from birth, enabling them to adapt rapidly to technology while simultaneously influencing their attention span and the quality of non-digital social interactions. As a result of early and continuous technological exposure, Generation Alpha tends to exhibit visual and interactive learning preferences, characterized by pragmatic thinking and a need for fast-paced, engaging stimulation, which contrasts with more linear and conventional instructional approaches. In addition, research indicates that Generation Alpha demonstrates high levels of creativity, strong curiosity, and an early inclination toward social engagement and leadership roles. However, despite their advanced technical competencies, the intensive use of digital technology has been associated with potential challenges in social–emotional development, particularly a decline in the quality of direct social interactions. This condition may affect children's empathy, interpersonal communication skills, and emotional regulation if it is not balanced by intentional and sustained character education interventions (Danilova, 2023).

These characteristics indicate that the social–emotional development of Generation Alpha children cannot be regarded as a simple issue that can be addressed through conventional instructional approaches alone. Instead, they require educational designs that acknowledge the complexity of both digital and real-world interactions, including the provision of authentic social experiences to enrich empathy, social concern, cooperation, and social responsibility. Overall, the unique characteristics of Generation Alpha as true digital natives demand educational strategies capable of bridging their digital experiences with the development of balanced social competencies. Without appropriate pedagogical intervention, intensive exposure to technology may hinder the development of interactive social skills, underscoring the need for education to create meaningful opportunities for direct social engagement.

2. Character Education: Empathy and Social Responsibility

Character education constitutes one of the fundamental pillars of primary education, particularly in shaping students' personalities to be not only academically competent but also socially and morally mature (Lickona & Davidson, 2020). Within the context of twenty-first-century education, character education is understood as a systematic and continuous process aimed at instilling moral, social, and spiritual values through meaningful learning experiences (Zubaedi, 2021). Education, therefore, is not merely intended to transfer knowledge, but also to cultivate attitudes, values, and behaviours that are reflected in students' social lives (Shodikin et al., n.d.).

Among the core values of character education, empathy and social concern play a particularly strategic role (Truebridge & Brown, 2021). Conceptually, empathy is understood as an individual's ability to comprehend and share the emotional states of others, as well as to respond appropriately through both affective and cognitive processes (Mulyanti & Rahmawati, 2023). Empathy not only involves the capacity to "feel what others feel," but also encompasses perspective taking and moral sensitivity toward social situations (Pang et al., 2022). Consequently, empathy serves as a foundational element for

the emergence of prosocial behaviors, such as helping others, respecting differences, and refraining from actions that may harm others (Xiao et al., 2025).

Meanwhile, social concern refers to an individual's awareness, attitudes, and disposition to pay attention to surrounding social conditions, accompanied by a willingness to make tangible contributions to the well-being of others and the environment (Zubaedi, 2021). Social concern extends beyond mere understanding or emotional response and is manifested through concrete actions, such as sharing, cooperating, and participating in social activities that benefit the community (Setiawati & Achadi, 2024). Within educational contexts, social concern serves as a key indicator of the success of character education, as it reflects the internalization of moral values into observable behaviors (Lickona & Davidson, 2020).

At the primary education level, particularly in *Madrasah Ibtidaiyah*, the development of empathy and social concern is of critical importance (Apandi et al., 2025). At this stage, students are in a social–emotional developmental phase that is strongly shaped by direct experiences, social interactions, and the habituation of behaviors within the learning environment (Gunawan et al., 2024). However, the characteristics of Generation Alpha, who grow up within a digital ecosystem, present distinct challenges for character education (Mark McCrindle, Ashley Fell, 2021). The high intensity of virtual interactions has the potential to reduce the frequency of direct social engagement, thereby limiting children's opportunities to develop social sensitivity, understand others' emotions, and respond empathically to social realities if such experiences are not consciously facilitated through educational processes (Höfrová et al., 2024).

Several studies indicate that character education focusing on the development of empathy and social concern contributes positively to the quality of students' social relationships (Danilova, 2023). Students who demonstrate strong empathy and social concern tend to exhibit higher levels of prosocial behavior, collaborate more effectively, and show greater sensitivity to social issues within their environments (Mulyanti & Rahmawati, 2023). Conversely, insufficient reinforcement of empathy and social concern values may lead to individualistic tendencies, weakened social solidarity, and a decline in the quality of social interactions within school settings (Höfrová et al., 2024).

Within this context, character education cannot be implemented in a partial or merely normative manner through verbal transmission of values alone (Zubaedi, 2021). Effective character education requires learning approaches that are contextual, participatory, and grounded in authentic experiences (Solissa et al., 2023). Through direct involvement in social activities, students are provided with opportunities to experience, reflect upon, and internalize the values of empathy and social concern more deeply (Truebridge & Brown, 2021). This process enables character values to be understood not only at the cognitive level but also to be embedded in students' attitudes and observable behaviors (Lickona & Davidson, 2020).

Islamic Religious Education holds a strategic position in strengthening character education, particularly in fostering empathy and social concern (Apandi et al., 2025). Values such as compassion (*rahmah*), mutual assistance (*ta'awun*), and social responsibility constitute integral components of Islamic teachings that are highly relevant to the development of students' social character (Solissa et al., 2023). However, the internalization of these values requires instructional designs that provide space for

authentic social experiences, enabling students to connect normative religious teachings with the social realities they encounter in their daily lives (Apandi et al., 2025).

Thus, character education focusing on empathy and social concern for Generation Alpha requires pedagogical innovation capable of bridging moral values with authentic social experiences (Gunawan et al., 2024). Schools and *madrasah* need to develop learning strategies that are not only adaptive to technological advancement but also intentionally create spaces for meaningful direct social interaction (McCrindle & Fell, 2021). Experiential learning approaches and social engagement have therefore become increasingly relevant as means of strengthening contextual, sustainable, and socially responsive character education in the digital era (Höfrová et al., 2024).

3. Project-Based Learning (PjBL) and Its Principles

PjBL is a learning approach oriented toward students' active engagement in the learning process through the completion of meaningful and contextual projects (Guo et al., 2020). PjBL positions students as the primary agents of learning, who actively construct knowledge, skills, and attitudes through authentic experiences, problem-solving activities, and social collaboration (Zhang, 2023). Within this approach, learning is no longer centered on one-way content delivery, but rather on processes of exploration, planning, implementation, and reflection on projects that are relevant to real-life contexts.

Theoretically, PjBL is grounded in the paradigms of social constructivism and experiential learning (Hidayati, 2025). Social constructivist perspectives emphasize that knowledge is actively constructed through individuals' interactions with their social environments and authentic contexts. Meanwhile, experiential learning highlights that learning becomes more meaningful when students are directly engaged in authentic experiences that allow for reflection and value internalization. Accordingly, PjBL functions not only as a pedagogical strategy for achieving cognitive objectives but also as a means of fostering students' social skills and character development.

In practice, PjBL is designed to engage students in addressing complex and open-ended real-world problems, thereby requiring the development of critical thinking, collaboration, communication, and responsibility. The projects developed within PjBL are not artificial in nature but are grounded in social contexts that are relevant to students' lived experiences (Runniarsiti, Siti Habibah, 2024). This characteristic positions PjBL as a learning approach with strong potential to foster empathy, social concern, and awareness of the social impact of individual actions.

The core principles of PjBL emphasize the distinctive characteristics of this approach. *First*, PjBL is centered on contextual and meaningful problems or essential questions, commonly referred to as *driving questions*. These questions serve as the primary drivers of learning activities and encourage students to engage in in-depth exploration of the issues being addressed (Al-kamzari & Alias, 2025). *Second*, PjBL highlights students' active engagement and autonomy in designing, implementing, and evaluating projects. Students are provided with opportunities to make decisions, work independently or collaboratively, and take responsibility for both the learning process and its outcomes (Salsadilla & Sugesti, 2020).

Third, PjBL positions collaboration as a key element of the learning process. Project implementation encourages students to work together, share roles, and develop effective communication within groups. Through these social interactions, students learn to respect differences, cultivate empathy, and develop mutual support attitudes (Najiha & Saputri, 2023). *Fourth*, PjBL integrates continuous reflection as an essential component of learning. Reflection enables students to review their learning experiences, comprehend the meaning of the activities undertaken, and connect the learning process with the values acquired throughout the project (Kokotsaki et al., 2021).

Fifth, PjBL emphasizes authentic and meaningful learning outcomes (Al-kamzari & Alias, 2025). Project products or outcomes are not assessed solely in terms of cognitive achievement, but also in relation to learning processes, attitudes, and the social impact generated. Assessment within PjBL is holistic in nature, encompassing knowledge, skills, and attitudes, thereby aligning with the goals of character education. This principle positions PjBL as a relevant learning approach for supporting the development of twenty-first-century competencies while simultaneously fostering students' social character.

Within the context of primary education and the characteristics of Generation Alpha, PjBL demonstrates strong relevance. The learning styles of Generation Alpha, which tend to be visual, interactive, and require active engagement, align closely with the characteristics of PjBL that emphasize experiential learning and hands-on activities. Moreover, PjBL provides opportunities for students to integrate digital experiences with direct social interactions, thereby helping to balance the influence of technology on children's social–emotional development.

Thus, PjBL is not merely regarded as an innovative instructional strategy, but also as a pedagogical approach with strong potential to reinforce character education, particularly empathy and social concern. Through its principles emphasizing active engagement, collaboration, reflection, and authentic experiences, PjBL provides a relevant learning framework for developing students' social character in a contextual and sustainable manner. This approach offers a solid foundation for integrating school-based social programs as part of a structured and meaningful learning process.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative approach with a case study design to gain an in-depth understanding of the implementation of the *Madrasah Berbagi Program* at *MI Muhammadiyah Macanmati* and its integration with the principles of PjBL in shaping students' social attitudes. A case study design was selected as it allows researchers to examine phenomena contextually within the natural school setting, enabling a comprehensive understanding of social interaction dynamics, collaborative processes, and social project–based learning experiences. The focus of this study was directed toward optimizing the application of PjBL principles within sharing activities to ensure a more systematic implementation and a stronger impact on the development of students' social character.

The research participants consisted of 20 students, comprising 10 fifth-grade and 10 sixth-grade students who were directly involved in the *Madrasah Berbagi Program*. Participants were selected using purposive sampling, based on their active involvement in

the program and their ability to verbally articulate their experiences. In addition to the students, the study also involved the school principal and two accompanying teachers as key informants. These informants were selected due to their strategic roles in the planning, implementation, and evaluation of the program, enabling them to provide comprehensive perspectives on the dynamics of program implementation and the development of students' social attitudes.

To address concerns regarding the reliability of reflections provided by elementary school students, this study employed several strategies to ensure data credibility. Semi-structured interviews were conducted using simple, contextual, and open-ended questions that were appropriate to the students' cognitive developmental stages. The questions focused on concrete experiences encountered during the activities, such as forms of collaboration, feelings associated with sharing, and perceived changes in attitudes. The interview process was facilitated in a comfortable and informal setting to minimize psychological pressure. The researcher applied gradual probing techniques to help students elaborate on their responses without directing or influencing their answers. In addition to oral interviews, students' reflections were also collected through brief, simple reflective notes written after the activities. To strengthen reliability, source triangulation was conducted by comparing data from student interviews, participatory observations, and information provided by teachers and the school principal. The researcher also conducted a simplified form of member checking by presenting summarized interview findings to the students using clear and accessible language to confirm the accuracy of the interpretations.

Data collection in this study was conducted through semi-structured interviews, participatory observation, and document analysis. Semi-structured interviews were employed to explore in depth students' experiences, perceptions, and reflections, as well as to capture the perspectives of teachers and the school principal regarding the implementation of the Madrasah Berbagi Program. Participatory observation was carried out across the stages of planning, implementation, and evaluation to systematically document social interactions, patterns of collaboration, expressions of empathy, attitudes of responsibility, and the level of students' active engagement within authentic social learning contexts. Document analysis involved a careful review of activity plans, program documentation, and relevant school evaluation records, serving to complement, validate, and strengthen the data obtained from interviews and observations.

Data were analyzed in a systematic and iterative manner through the stages of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing. During the data condensation phase, the researcher selected, focused, simplified, and organized raw data derived from interviews, observations, and documents through a coding process to identify key themes related to empathy, collaboration, social responsibility, and active participation. Subsequently, the data were presented in the form of descriptive narratives and thematic matrices to facilitate the identification of patterns and relationships across categories. The final stage involved drawing and verifying conclusions through repeated cross-checking among data sources to ensure the consistency and credibility of the findings. Data trustworthiness was maintained through source and technique triangulation, as well as prolonged and persistent observation throughout the research process.

FINDINGS

Description of the Implementation of the Madrasah Berbagi Program

The findings indicate that the *Madrasah Berbagi* Program is a routine social initiative implemented at MI Muhammadiyah Macanmati on a monthly basis. Although the program has not yet been formally integrated into the madrasah's curricular structure, it has been consistently conducted as an extracurricular learning activity since 2015. The sustainability of the program over nearly a decade reflects a strong institutional commitment to fostering values of social care, empathy, and collective responsibility as integral components of students' character development.

The main activity of the program involves the collection of staple food items, particularly rice, with a minimum contribution guideline of one handful of rice per student. This provision is presented as a voluntary minimum rather than a mandatory requirement, thereby allowing flexible participation based on each student's individual capacity and personal awareness. The collection process takes place over a two-week period prior to the distribution day. Information regarding the activity is conveyed by the supervising teachers through parents' WhatsApp groups, while the collected rice is centralized and managed through the madrasah cooperative as the main distribution point.

Observational findings indicate that, in practice, many students contribute beyond the stipulated minimum requirement. These additional contributions take the form of larger quantities of rice, as well as other staple items such as eggs, cooking oil, instant noodles, and cash donations. This finding is corroborated by interview data. A sixth-grade student stated, *"The madrasah requires only one handful of rice, but I usually bring more than that typically around one kilogram, or sometimes more depending on the rice available at home."* Meanwhile, a fifth-grade student explained, *"I usually bring five kilograms of rice, and sometimes I also add other items such as eggs or cash."* A supervising teacher further confirmed, *"The guideline we set is one handful of rice; however, in practice, students often bring more than that, including other forms of contributions such as eggs, cooking oil, instant noodles, and cash."*

After the collection process is completed, the donated staple goods are packaged by teachers based on the predetermined number of beneficiaries. The packaging is carried out in a planned manner, taking into account the proportion and types of items available. During the initial implementation in 2015, beneficiaries were limited to residents of Dusun Macanmati, with data sourced from the local community. As the number of students and the program's capacity increased, the distribution coverage was gradually expanded beyond the area. Beneficiary data are obtained through recommendations from community leaders, as well as information provided by parents and students regarding social conditions in their respective neighbourhoods.

The program is generally implemented on the fourth Friday of each month; however, under certain conditions, activities may be conducted on alternative days. During the month of Ramadan, the implementation pattern is adjusted by inviting beneficiaries to the madrasah to receive assistance in conjunction with religious study sessions and communal iftar. For beneficiaries who are unable to attend due to health conditions or limited mobility, the madrasah ensures direct home delivery of the assistance.

Technically, the activity begins with the assembly of students in the school courtyard, bringing the packaged food aid that has been prepared in advance. The teacher in charge provides an orientation on the objectives and significance of the activity, accompanied by the delivery of religious values emphasizing the virtue of sharing. Subsequently, students are divided into several groups to distribute the assistance to designated beneficiaries. Each group is accompanied by a supervising teacher. For beneficiary locations that are relatively distant, distribution is typically represented by one student accompanied by one teacher, taking into account considerations of effectiveness and safety.

Overall, the implementation of the *Madrasah Berbagi* Program demonstrates an organized, sustainable, and student-participatory pattern of social activity. Although it has not yet been formally designed within an instructional framework, the structure of its implementation reflects authentic social learning practices that position students as active agents in real-world sharing activities.

Student Involvement in the *Madrasah Berbagi* Program

Student involvement in the Madrasah Berbagi Program is not limited to the collection of basic food supplies but also extends to the process of identifying potential beneficiaries. Based on interview findings, students receive guidance from the teacher in charge to observe social conditions within their respective residential environments as a basis for determining eligible recipients of assistance. A total of 20 students who participated as research subjects, 15 reported that they had been asked to propose or provide information about prospective beneficiaries in their communities, while 5 students indicated that they were not directly involved in this process and instead followed recommendations provided by teachers, parents, or community leaders.

One student, when asked about their involvement in determining aid beneficiaries, stated, *"Yes, I once proposed my neighbour."* This statement reflects the existence of participatory space for students to engage in social observation and to provide recommendations grounded in their direct experiences within the surrounding community. It indicates that students are not merely passive recipients of program implementation but are afforded opportunities to exercise social awareness and contribute to decision-making processes. However, another student expressed a different perspective: *"No, usually the data come from the supervising teacher."* This response suggests that the data collection and beneficiary identification process has not yet systematically and actively involved all students. It highlights a procedural limitation in ensuring inclusive participation, where the determination of beneficiaries appears to remain predominantly teacher-centered rather than collaboratively structured.

These findings indicate that the level of student participation in the social observation stage is variable. Some students have demonstrated initiative and reflective engagement in identifying the social conditions within their immediate environment, while others remain in a more passive participatory position, relying primarily on guidance from the madrasah authorities or other adults. This variation suggests that the mechanism for involving students in the beneficiary data collection process has not yet been uniformly structured. Nevertheless, in practice, it has provided opportunities for the development of

social sensitivity through direct engagement with real-life community contexts. Such experiential involvement holds potential as a pedagogical medium for fostering students' social awareness, even though its implementation has not been consistently institutionalized across participants.

Indications of Empathy and Social Care Attitudes in the Madrasah Berbagi Program

The observational findings during the implementation of the Madrasah Berbagi Program revealed the emergence of empathetic attitudes and social concern among the majority of participating students. Emotional expressions were particularly evident when students distributed basic food assistance packages to beneficiaries. Several students displayed facial expressions reflecting sadness and deep emotional engagement during their direct interactions with the recipients. These emotional responses were consistent with the results of the interviews conducted to explore students' motivations for participating in the activity. When asked to explain their reasons, most students articulated motivations such as compassion toward those in need ("feeling pity"), a genuine desire to provide assistance ("wanting to help"), and religious considerations, including the intention to obtain spiritual merit ("seeking reward from God").

One student stated, "When I see people struggling, I cannot bear it. It makes me want to help, even if only in a small way." This statement reflects an affective response emerging from direct exposure to social realities. These findings were further corroborated by the testimony of the supervising teacher. When asked to describe the students' attitudes throughout the activity, the teacher reported that the students demonstrated a high level of enthusiasm and genuine concern. The teacher also recounted an incident in which a group of students became tearful after listening to the daily life story of one of the aid recipients. Such circumstances indicate that direct interaction with social realities can evoke authentic emotional engagement among students. The experience appears to have functioned not merely as a charitable activity, but as a meaningful encounter that stimulated affective awareness and deepened students' sensitivity toward social issues.

However, not all students demonstrated empathy-based motivation. Some students provided normative responses, such as, "Because it is a task assigned by the school." This variation in responses indicates that students' motivation to participate in the activities is not yet fully homogeneous. While some students exhibit strong emotional engagement, others remain at a stage of compliance with institutional rules. This variation suggests that the internalization of social care values occurs gradually and differs among individuals.Teachers also noted that after several months of program implementation, students became more receptive to discussions about social conditions in the community compared to earlier stages. Nonetheless, teachers acknowledged that these changes do not occur uniformly, and not all students demonstrate significant attitude transformations within a short period.

Additional findings supporting the development of social concern were evident in students' responses when asked about how they react to peers experiencing difficulties at school. The majority of students reported having encountered such situations and expressed their willingness to provide assistance according to their capacities, whether in the form of moral support or tangible help. This response reflects a tendency toward

prosocial behavior that extends beyond the specific context of the program and begins to manifest in students' daily interactions within the madrasah environment. Overall, the observational and interview data indicate that the *Madrasah Berbagi* Program has contributed to the emergence of empathetic attitudes and social concern among the majority of students. Nevertheless, the degree of value internalization appears to vary, suggesting that while affective awareness has been stimulated, the consolidation of these values into consistent behavioral patterns may still require sustained reinforcement and continued experiential engagement.

Alignment of the *Madrasah Berbagi* Program with the Project-Based Learning (PjBL) Approach

The findings indicate that the program embodies several characteristics consistent with the principles of PjBL, including collaborative activities, engagement within an authentic social context, and the production of a tangible outcome in the form of social assistance packages. These elements reflect core dimensions of PjBL, particularly experiential engagement and meaningful real-world application.

However, the program has not yet been designed according to the systematic stages typically associated with a comprehensive PjBL framework, such as the formulation of a driving question, structured project planning led by students, clearly defined timelines, and formal reflective evaluation processes. Consequently, the alignment identified in this study can be characterized as partial and emergent, rather than the result of an intentional pedagogical design explicitly grounded in the PjBL model. Therefore, the Madrasah Berbagi Program is more appropriately understood as an experience-based social practice with significant potential to be further developed into a more structured and pedagogically grounded PjBL model.

DISCUSSION

The *Madrasah Berbagi* Program in the Context of Generation Alpha Characteristics

The findings of this study demonstrate that the Madrasah Berbagi Program holds strong relevance to the characteristics of Generation Alpha, widely recognized as the first true digital-native generation. The literature indicates that Generation Alpha grows up in an environment intrinsically integrated with digital technology, shaping their patterns of social interaction and socio-emotional development through the intensity of virtual communication (Mark McCrindle, Ashley Fell, 2021)). Furthermore, Höfrová et al. (2024) emphasize that the dominance of digital interaction may influence the quality of direct social engagement if it is not balanced by structured and meaningful real-world social experiences.

The present study reveals that students' direct involvement in the distribution of social assistance elicited significant emotional responses, including feelings of empathy, compassion, and a genuine desire to help. Direct interaction with beneficiaries enabled students to encounter social realities in a concrete manner, rather than merely understanding them through narratives or digital media representations. This finding aligns with Danilova (2023), who argues that generations raised in digitally saturated

environments require authentic social experiences to optimally develop moral sensitivity and empathy.

In this regard, the Madrasah Berbagi Program can be interpreted as a pedagogical response by the madrasah to bridge students' digital-oriented world with meaningful real-life social experiences. By facilitating structured encounters with social realities, the program contributes to the cultivation of socio-emotional competencies that may not be fully nurtured through digital interaction alone.

The Internalization of Empathy and Social Concern from the Perspective of Character Education

Empathy and social concern constitute core values in character education, serving as the foundation of prosocial behavior. Lickona & Davidson (2020)) asserts that effective character education must encompass the dimensions of *moral knowing*, *moral feeling*, and *moral action*, ensuring that moral values do not remain at the level of cognitive understanding but are translated into concrete behavior. The findings of this study indicate that while some students participated in the sharing activities driven by intrinsic empathy, others appeared to be motivated primarily by normative compliance.This variation suggests that the process of value internalization occurs gradually and unevenly among students. In this context, the continuity of the program implemented on a monthly basis functions as a mechanism for value habituation. Consistent practice enables students to engage repeatedly in meaningful social interactions, allowing empathy to evolve from a momentary emotional response into a more stable behavioral disposition.

The emergence of helping behaviors toward peers outside the formal context of the program further indicates that the value of social concern is beginning to be internalized within students' everyday social interactions. These findings reinforce the argument that effective character education requires sustained and reflective social experiences, rather than relying solely on verbal instruction or moral exhortation.

The Dimensions of Social Constructivism and Student Participation

From the perspective of PjBL, meaningful learning is constructed through learners' active engagement within authentic contexts (Kokotsaki et al., 2021). The findings of this study indicate that several students were involved in the process of identifying and proposing aid recipients based on their observations of the surrounding social environment. This practice reflects elements of social constructivism, as students construct understanding through direct experience and interaction with social realities. Knowledge, in this sense, is not passively received but actively formed through participatory engagement.

Nevertheless, the variation in levels of participation suggests that the mechanism of student involvement has not yet been fully systematic or evenly distributed. Within a comprehensive PjBL framework, the formulation of a driving question, student-led project planning, and structured reflection constitute essential components (Morris, 2020). The absence of these stages indicates that the program remains at the level of experience-based social practice rather than being fully articulated as a project-based instructional design. Therefore, strengthening participatory and reflective structures represents a crucial step in

optimizing the program. A more intentional integration of structured inquiry, collaborative planning, and guided reflection would not only enhance alignment with PjBL principles but also deepen students' cognitive and socio-emotional learning outcomes.

Alignment of the Program with the Principles of Project-Based Learning

The analysis indicates that the Madrasah Berbagi Program incorporates several fundamental principles of PjBL, including engagement within an authentic context, collaborative group work, the production of a tangible outcome in the form of social assistance packages, and the generation of direct social impact. These characteristics are consistent with the findings of Guo et al. (2020), who assert that project-based learning implemented in real-world social contexts can enhance students' sense of responsibility and active engagement.

Nevertheless, the alignment remains partial. The program has not yet articulated an essential problem or driving question to guide the learning process, nor has it fully implemented student-initiated project planning or systematic formal reflection. The absence of these components suggests that, while the program embodies experiential and collaborative elements of PjBL, it has not been comprehensively structured as a project-based instructional design. With the integration of these core components, the Madrasah Berbagi Program holds significant potential to evolve into a more structured and comprehensive model of socially oriented PjBL. Such a transformation would not only strengthen students' cognitive and affective development but also enhance the depth of their moral reflection and social awareness.

Theoretical and Contextual Implications

From a theoretical perspective, this study extends the discourse on the integration of school-based social programs with the PjBL approach within the framework of Islamic character education at the madrasah ibtidaiyah level. The findings demonstrate that routine social initiatives rooted in Islamic values such as sharing *(berbagi)* and mutual assistance *(tolong-menolong)* can be systematically reconstructed into a structured project-based learning model. This reconstruction highlights the conceptual compatibility between faith-based moral education and experiential, inquiry-driven pedagogical approaches. From a contextual standpoint, the results underscore that in the era of Generation Alpha, character education requires an integrative, contextual, and authentically experience-based pedagogical approach. Madrasahs possess strategic potential to develop social learning models that are not only adaptive to technological advancements but also intentionally oriented toward cultivating students' socio-emotional competencies through direct engagement with real-life contexts.

Therefore, the systematic integration of the Madrasah Berbagi Program with PjBL principles may serve as a relevant and sustainable pedagogical innovation. Such integration offers a responsive educational strategy capable of addressing the moral and social challenges of the digital era while reinforcing the foundational values of Islamic character education. From a pedagogical standpoint, this integration also illustrates how character education can move beyond normative instruction toward participatory and reflective learning experiences. Through project-based activities that involve identifying community

needs, organizing collaborative actions, and reflecting on the outcomes of social engagement, students are not only exposed to Islamic moral teachings but are also provided with opportunities to internalize these values through meaningful practice. In this sense, the Madrasah Berbagi Program functions as a contextual learning environment where moral concepts such as empathy, solidarity, and social responsibility are translated into concrete student actions. Moreover, the integration of PjBL within faith-based social programs encourages the development of higher-order competencies, including critical thinking, collaboration, and problem-solving, which are essential skills for learners in the twenty-first century. Consequently, this model demonstrates that Islamic character education in madrasahs can be strengthened through experiential learning designs that bridge moral instruction with authentic social participation.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the Madrasah Berbagi Program represents a form of social educational practice with significant potential to serve as a Project-Based Learning (PjBL) model in strengthening empathy and social concern among madrasah ibtidaiyah students. The program provides authentic experiences that enable students to engage directly with social realities, ensuring that the value of social concern does not remain at the cognitive level but evolves into affective awareness and concrete action. Within the context of Generation Alpha characterized by the dominance of digital interaction direct participation in sharing activities functions as a crucial medium for balancing virtual experiences with tangible social engagement.The findings reveal indications of the development of empathy, social sensitivity, and prosocial behavior among students, although the degree of value internalization varies and appears to be influenced by both intrinsic and normative motivations.

Conceptually, the Madrasah Berbagi Program incorporates several core elements of PjBL, including authentic context, collaboration, and the creation of tangible products with direct social impact. However, its implementation remains partial, as it has not yet fully integrated essential components such as the formulation of a driving question, student-initiated project planning, and structured reflection. Strengthening these pedagogical design elements holds considerable potential to transform the program into a more comprehensive and sustainable project-based social learning model.Ultimately, this study affirms that the integration of character education with the PjBL approach within the madrasah context is not only theoretically relevant but also strategically significant. Such integration contributes to the formation of a generation that is not merely academically competent, but also endowed with profound empathy and a strong sense of social responsibility amidst the dynamic challenges of contemporary digital society.

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