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The Use of Problem-Based Learning to Increase Fifth-Grade Students' Interest in Learning Economics as Part of the IPAS Curriculum

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Abstract: *This study aimed to examine the use of Problem-Based Learning (PBL) to improve fifth-grade students' interest in learning economics-related content within Integrated Natural and Social Sciences (IPAS). The study employed classroom action research involving 23 students in Class 5B at a public elementary school in Bandung during the 2025/2026 academic year. The research consisted of three cycles, each comprising planning, action and observation, and reflection. Data were collected through a student learning-interest questionnaire and classroom observations and analyzed descriptively by comparing percentage scores across cycles. The four indicators assessed were enjoyment, interest, attention, and engagement. Across the three cycles, students' reported learning interest increased from 35% in Cycle I to 50% in Cycle II and 88% in Cycle III. The four indicators also showed a consistent upward trend during the intervention. These findings suggest that PBL was associated with improved learning interest in economics-related IPAS content. The study offers a practical reference for teachers seeking to design more engaging, problem-oriented learning activities in primary schools.*

Keywords: *Interest in Learning, Problem-Based Learning (PBL), Economics Curriculum*

Abstrak: *Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji penerapan model Problem-Based Learning (PBL) dalam meningkatkan minat belajar siswa kelas V pada materi ekonomi dalam mata pelajaran Ilmu Pengetahuan Alam dan Sosial (IPAS). Penelitian ini menggunakan metode Penelitian Tindakan Kelas (PTK) yang melibatkan 23 siswa kelas VB di salah satu sekolah dasar negeri di Kota Bandung pada tahun ajaran 2025/2026. Penelitian dilaksanakan dalam tiga siklus, yang masing-masing meliputi tahap perencanaan, pelaksanaan tindakan dan observasi, serta refleksi. Data dikumpulkan melalui angket minat belajar siswa dan observasi pembelajaran, kemudian dianalisis secara deskriptif dengan membandingkan persentase hasil antarsiklus. Minat belajar diukur berdasarkan empat indikator, yaitu perasaan senang, ketertarikan, perhatian, dan keterlibatan siswa. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa persentase minat belajar siswa meningkat dari 35% pada Siklus I menjadi 50% pada Siklus II dan mencapai 88% pada Siklus III. Keempat indikator juga menunjukkan kecenderungan peningkatan secara konsisten selama pelaksanaan tindakan. Temuan ini mengindikasikan bahwa penerapan PBL berkaitan dengan peningkatan minat belajar siswa pada materi ekonomi dalam pembelajaran IPAS. Penelitian ini memberikan acuan praktis bagi guru dalam merancang pembelajaran berbasis masalah yang lebih menarik dan mendorong keterlibatan aktif siswa di sekolah dasar.*

Kata kunci: *Minat Belajar, Problem Based Learning (PBL), Materi Ekonomi*

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Introduction

Globalization is the process of entering the global sphere; nations that shut themselves off from globalization are nations that close themselves off from progress and will become left behind. This is stated in (Pratama & Najicha, 2022) . This is further reinforced in (Harefa, 2022), which states that globalization does not simply happen on its own but also affects many other aspects, including education.

Changes in the world of education are certainly taking place in several areas, particularly in the curriculum as well as in learning models and strategies. This is a consequence of globalization, which has subsequently become a particular focus for all stakeholders and the academic community—prompting them to continually assess what may still be lacking, what can be added, and what can be reduced as new and diverse learning approaches continue to emerge. This presents a

challenge: when students are exposed to learning models they are already accustomed to, they may become bored and lose interest in learning. Furthermore, the appropriateness of current learning methods for students must be reevaluated, as educational advancements must align with students' developmental stages. Nevertheless, these challenges should be viewed as opportunities to learn and continue innovating by adapting to the strategies that are needed (Septia, 2025).

Based on observations conducted together with the homeroom teacher of Class 5B at a public elementary school in Bandung, the following was found: (1) Class 5B is predominantly composed of male students, making the class more active than other classes. (2) In conducting lessons, the teacher has begun to use a variety of teaching tools and media; however, this practice has not yet been consistent. (3) The classroom is located close to the lower-grade classrooms (Grade 3), so it is easy for students to become distracted when students in those lower-grade classes are engaged in activities outside the classroom. It was also found that, based on observations of the students in Class 5B: (1) during IPAS lessons, the students appeared inactive and passive; (2) the students appeared bored and uninterested in participating in the lessons, indicating a lack of interest in IPAS; and (3) the students moved around actively, making the classroom quite noisy.

Students' interest in learning is one of the factors that influence their success in achieving learning outcomes; therefore, this interest is a very important aspect of learning. A study cited in (Mawaddah, 2025) states that there are four functions of interest in learning, namely: a) facilitating the development of concentration; b) eliminating external distractions; c) enhancing memory of what is being learned; d) Eliminating boredom during learning. As stated by (Slameto, 2013) in (Dukalang & Sudirman, 2024), interest has a significant influence on learning activities; if the subject matter does not align with a student's interests, the student will not be fully engaged in learning because the material lacks appeal or is uninteresting to them. Furthermore, in the IPAS curriculum, this economics material is one of the more complex and relatively unfamiliar topics for students. It covers various economic activities taking place in Indonesia and its surrounding regions, as well as how to empower economic actors—whether small, medium, or large-scale. Additionally, this material addresses real-world issues occurring in the community that contribute to economic conditions and circumstances. This material presents a variety of basic concepts regarding economic activities, the factors that influence them, as well as the problems that arise—along with the relevant theories and solutions.

This subject is considered quite difficult to learn. Moreover, economics in elementary school is often seen as hard for students to understand, because they view it as a serious and rigid subject—not to mention that the way the material is presented sometimes still fails to capture students' attention. In fact, some statements indicate that all or most of this economics material is difficult to learn due to the volume of reading material, boredom stemming from being given only problems at times, dissatisfaction with the teaching methods used, and several other factors that contribute to the stigma surrounding economics education in various elementary school classrooms. As cited in (Azhar et al., 2022a), which mentions similar issues regarding the stigma surrounding IPAS learning in elementary schools. This makes learning less meaningful, and students struggle to develop critical thinking skills and to effectively solve problems in today's educational environment (Arynata et al., 2025) . Furthermore, it is also noted that students find IPAS instruction—particularly in economics—boring due to the volume of reading material and the lack of engaging content, which ultimately leads to a lack of confidence when expressing their opinions during the learning process (Azhar et al., 2022b) . Given these findings, this may serve as a profound reflection for educators and educational professionals in designing learning experiences that, while focusing on content, must also prioritize the strategies and content elements used to address the specific needs and circumstances of the target audience. Consequently, educators must develop a deeper understanding of how to adapt content and strategies for effective implementation.

Given the sheer number of learning difficulties and challenges faced and documented in various literature reviews, this should be sufficient to demonstrate that improvements and enhancements to instructional materials are indeed necessary so that existing challenges can gradually be addressed effectively. If these issues are left unaddressed, it does not mean that other problems or challenges will not arise. On the contrary, the accumulation of challenges that cannot be properly addressed will lead to new and increasingly serious problems. This situation should also serve as a wake-up call for teachers, who must carefully observe and analyze the actual problems at hand, and—as educators—strive to provide a much more creative and innovative learning experience for students, particularly in the IPAS subject's economics module.

This was also noted by (Anita et al., 2025), who pointed out that it is not uncommon for students to still struggle with learning economics material, because the instruction has not been concretely linked to their daily lives—and, moreover, because economics material is inherently abstract. Consequently, fostering students' interest in learning will greatly assist them in the learning process. Therefore, an approach or teaching model [learning approach or method that meets these needs. (Nurjanah, 2026) notes that one model capable of fostering student engagement, making learning enjoyable, and ensuring meaningful, conscious learning is PBL, or Problem-Based Learning. To stimulate students' interest in learning and overcome the challenges they face in the classroom when understanding economic concepts, a learning approach is needed that involves both students and teachers in roles consistent with their respective responsibilities and aligned with the realities students experience or are familiar with in their daily lives. One learning model that can serve as a solution to this situation is Problem-Based Learning (PBL).

PBL is a creative learning model because it encourages students to engage in active, in-depth, and collaborative learning experiences. Furthermore, this model positions the teacher as a facilitator, as it encourages students to be active and innovative. A study (Harwati, 2021) indicates that PBL has successfully increased students' interest in learning while also having a positive impact on the school. Furthermore, a study (Lestari, 2023.) also indicates that the implementation of the PBL learning model can increase students' interest in learning from Cycle 1 to Cycle 2. Therefore, based on this, the purpose of this study is to determine whether the implementation of the Problem-Based Learning (PBL) model can increase the interest in learning among 5th Grade Class B students in the IPAS subject, specifically in the economics module. This is based on classroom observations, which revealed that students often feel bored, unengaged, passive, and unenthusiastic when studying the IPAS subject—particularly the economics module—in class. This study was conducted at SDN 066 Halimun, a public elementary school in Bandung, with a total of 23 research subjects, consisting of 9 female students and 14 male students.

Method

His study employed a Classroom Action Research (PTK) design, utilizing the research procedures developed by Kemmis and McTaggart, which consist of three research stages: planning, implementation, and reflection (Rahayu & Saskia, 2025) . Classroom Action Research (PTK) is a type of research that describes both the process and the results to improve the quality of learning (Arikunto, 2021). This study was conducted iteratively through three cycles: Cycle I, Cycle II, and Cycle III. The study was conducted at a public elementary school in the city of Bandung. The sample for this study consisted of 24 students from Class VB during the mid-semester evaluation for the 2025/2026 academic year.

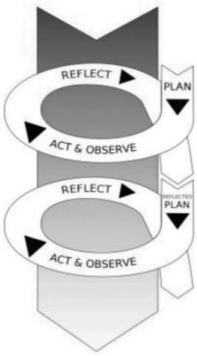

Figure 1. The Kemmis and M.G. Taggart Model

The data collection technique employed a descriptive method. The data obtained were then compared between Cycle 1 and Cycle 2, and between Cycle 2 and Cycle 3. Data were collected through questionnaires, observations, tests, and documentation.

The data analysis technique used involved two types of data: data from the student learning interest questionnaire and observational data collected during instruction using the PBL model. Data analysis was conducted by assigning scores to the responses on the questionnaires completed by students or respondents. To determine the percentage score for student learning interest, the following formula was used:

$$\textbf{Interest} = \frac{\textbf{Total student interest scores}}{\textbf{Maximum Score}} \textbf{ x 100\%}$$

The percentage results were then categorized according to the criteria for learning interest scores proposed by Riduwan (2015) as cited in (Khotimah, 2022) as follows:

Table 1. Criteria for scoring the learning interest questionnaire

Percentage Range	Criteria
0%–20%	Very Low
21%–40%	Weak
41%–60%	Fair
61%–80%	Strong
81%–100%	Very Strong

The indicators used in developing the student learning interest questionnaire are based on the learning interest indicators proposed by Slameto (2015) as cited in (Lestari, 2023) , which are similar to those proposed by Safari (2003) as cited in (Dukalang & Sudirman, 2024), including the following:

1) Feeling of joy: Students feel comfortable and happy when studying the material
2) Student interest: the appeal that makes students want to learn more
3) Student attention: the focus of mental energy on the subject matter
4) Student engagement: students' active participation in completing assignments and participating in discussions

Classroom Action Research (PTK) is a research activity conducted within the classroom to solve learning problems faced by educators. PTK is also conducted to improve the quality of learning so that, ultimately, the results meet expectations or are outstanding and optimal. The PTK method also offers various benefits, such as providing teachers with a framework for improving the quality of learning. Furthermore, this research generates numerous journal articles that serve as references and contribute to innovations in contemporary educational science. Furthermore, this research activity fosters students' curiosity, interest, engagement, enjoyment, and comfort in the learning process, thereby improving learning outcomes in the classroom. Most importantly, using the PTK method helps teachers be creative and innovative in designing learning experiences that meet students' needs (Rizal Pahleviannur et al., 2023).

This research method is also widely used for similar research needs in classroom settings. For example, in (Panjaitan et al., 2020), the PTK model was used to investigate learning outcomes through the application of the discovery learning model in elementary schools. The PTK method also offers advantages in its implementation. Among these are that it fosters something far more meaningful, given that the instruction provided is the result of the teacher's own creativity, the conclusions reached—though not in all PTK studies—are typically the result of consensus among all parties, thereby enhancing the validity of the research findings; and finally, because PTK begins with problems faced by the teachers themselves, results can be obtained directly (Rizal Pahleviannur et al., 2023).

Nevertheless, research using the Classroom Action Research (PTK) method still has limitations, including the fact that some of the conclusions drawn are not universally applicable, since this research began with practical problems faced by the teachers themselves. Furthermore, this research requires a relatively long time to complete, due to the procedures and timeframe inherent to Classroom Action Research, which necessitates a specific duration. Therefore, educators must pay closer attention to classroom management and time allocation, ensuring they are tailored to students' needs (Rizal Pahleviannur et al., 2023).

Therefore, the use of the Classroom Action Research (PTK) method is not mandatory in all research. However, as with all research conducted by researchers, its application is tailored to the specific needs and strategies to be employed. In this study, the Classroom Action Research (PTK) method was employed because the researcher had already designed the study and was actively seeking solutions to problems encountered within a classroom setting. The use of this PTK method undoubtedly serves as the most appropriate approach and solution for this researcher—and indeed for other researchers conducting studies with similar needs, conditions, and strategies. The use of the PTK method also reflects just how remarkably effective practice can be in transforming classroom conditions for the better, supported by necessary elements such as teaching methods, instructional models, the use of instructional media, strategies, and even instructional approaches that can serve as solutions to address challenges experienced in the classroom. Using the PTK method also helps educators realize that the practices implemented, together with the solutions employed, can serve as a pathway to significant improvements in student learning.

Results and Discussion

Results

As previously noted, this study employed classroom action research (CAR), which was conducted through three cycles. Changes in students' learning interest were observed across the cycles following the implementation of the Problem-Based Learning (PBL) model in Class 5B at a public elementary school in Bandung.

Cycle 1

During Cycle 1, students' learning interest was assessed based on four indicators: enjoyment, interest, attention, and engagement. The results of the initial cycle provide an overview of students' learning interest during the early implementation of the PBL model. The findings are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Students' Initial Interest

No.	Indicator	Percentage
1	Feeling of Joy	43%
2	Feeling of Interest	33%
3	Student Attention	37%
4	Student Engagement	26%

The percentages for each indicator related to student interest in learning during Cycle 1—which was the first cycle in which the Problem-Based Learning model was implemented—are shown in the graph below:

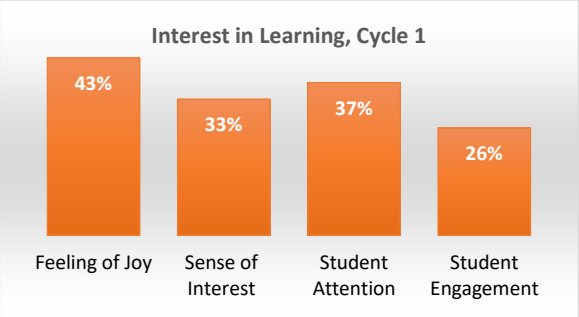

Figure 2. Initial Learning Interest Graph

Cycle 2

In Cycle 2, using the Problem-Based Learning model, several improvements were observed after two learning sessions using this approach. The results of student learning interest obtained in Cycle 2 are presented in the following table:

Table 3. Learning Interest in Cycle 2

No.	Indicator	Percentage
1	Sense of Joy	51%
2	Feeling of Interest	51%
3	Student Attention	57%
4	Student Engagement	50%

The following graph shows the percentage of students' interest in learning during Cycle 2:

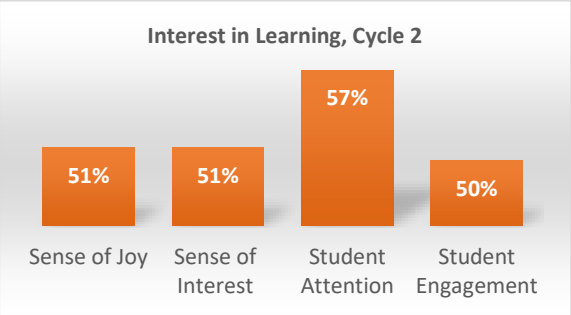

Figure 3. Graph of Learning Interest in Cycle 2

As shown in the figure and graph, there was an increase in all indicators of student learning interest when using the Problem-Based Learning (PBL) model.

Cycle 3

Student learning interest in Cycle 3 also increased as the PBL model was implemented more frequently in the classroom. This increase was observed across all learning interest indicators, as shown in the following table:

Table 4. Learning Interest in Cycle 3

No.	Indicator	Percentage
1	Sense of Joy	95%
2	Feeling of Interest	86%
3	Student Attention	84%
4	Student Engagement	89%

The following percentages represent the results of students' learning interest in Cycle 3, presented in the graph below:

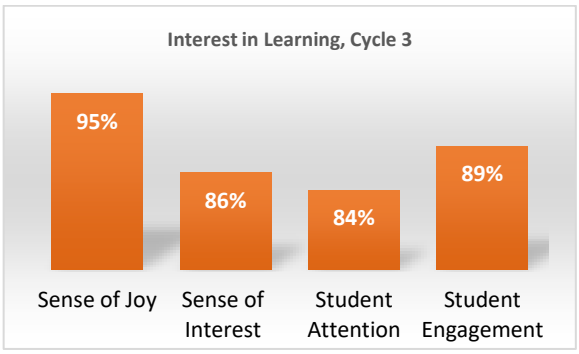

Figure 4. Graph of Learning Interest in Cycle 3

An overview of the comparison of increases in learning interest among 5B students across the three cycles using the Problem-Based Learning model is also presented in the graph below, which includes the learning interest results for Cycle 1, Cycle 2, and Cycle 3:

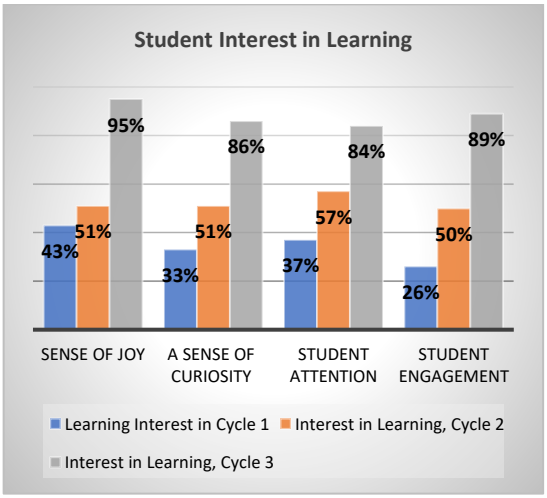

Figure 5. Graph of Learning Interest in Cycle 1, Cycle 2, and Cycle 3

The use of the PBL model on students' learning interest in economics material in Class 5B.

To determine students' interest in learning at each cycle using the PBL learning model in Grade 5B for the economics course, a student learning interest questionnaire was administered. This questionnaire was administered at the end of each lesson or after classroom activities using the PBL model. Learning interest was measured using four indicators based on Slameto's (2015) theory as cited in (Lestari, 2023), namely enjoyment, interest, attention, and engagement.

An increase in students' interest in learning occurred in Cycle 2 across all indicators; this increase is clearly evident in each individual indicator of interest in learning, with results falling into the "strong" or "high" and "very high" categories.

The increase can also be seen in the graphs of student learning interest from the initial cycle, Cycle 2, and Cycle 3, which are presented as follows:

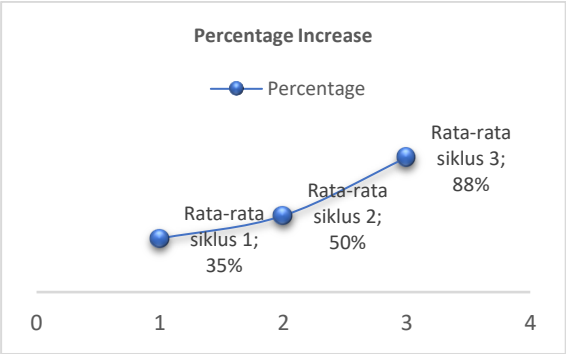

Figure 6. Students' Interest in Learning

The graph above shows that students' interest in learning from Cycle 1 through Cycle 3, when taught using the PBL model, underwent a change. This change manifested as an increase in the learning interest of the students in Class 5B, with the percentage in the initial cycle (Cycle 1) at 35%, then 50% in Cycle 2, and 88% in Cycle 3.

Discussion

During the implementation of PBL-based learning, it was also observed that students appeared to enjoy and take an active interest in the lessons, assignments, and activities. Students analyzed problems, sought solutions, and researched and developed information to complete their assignments. Students are also able to follow the learning process through the stages of planning, monitoring, problem-solving, and providing solutions to the problems presented. Thus, when students participate and take an active role in learning activities, it fosters awareness and a sense of meaning, making the understanding they gain far more effective than that achieved through non-problem-based or traditional learning models. This is consistent with research (Viratama et al., 2025) demonstrating that the implementation of the PBL model successfully enhances students' learning motivation and critical thinking skills, while also encouraging teachers to provide engaging and joyful learning experiences.

The application of the Problem-Based Learning model in research certainly has its own advantages and disadvantages. One of its weaknesses is that its implementation requires more time compared to other traditional learning models. This is noted in (Lulu et al., 2024), where students need time to process problems, gather information, and seek or even develop solutions. This situation poses a unique challenge in adhering to a predetermined learning schedule, whether in terms of time or within the framework of a semester or annual program. Nevertheless, research on the PBL learning model also highlights its advantages, as cited in (V. ratna I. Sari et al., 2024), which states that PBL successfully addresses student inactivity in abstract subjects (such as magnetism and electricity) by encouraging independent exploration, thereby significantly increasing students' average interest and understanding. PBL can also serve as a solution and remedy for improving learning outcomes, critical thinking, memory retention, and learning motivation (Shofa & Nurulaeni, 2026).

The use of the Problem-Based Learning (PBL) model can increase students' interest in learning, which is consistent with research (Prayoga et al., 2024) indicating that PBL successfully increases students' interest in learning while simultaneously encouraging them to be fully engaged in seeking information and building upon their prior knowledge. Furthermore, a study (Triani et al., 2019) found that the implementation of PBL influences environmental awareness as well as learning outcomes. This is consistent with research (Rustan & Meyliani, 2023) indicating that the PBL model influences students' interest in learning, as evidenced by a pretest score of 55 that increased to 65 on the posttest.

Furthermore, the use of PBL to enhance students' interest in learning can be combined or integrated with various other creative learning media capable of capturing students' attention during instruction. This is also supported by (Juliana & Yuisman, 2025), who found that the use of Wordwall within the PBL framework proved effective not only in learning but also in encouraging students to be active, increasing their curiosity, and fostering enthusiasm in the learning process. Furthermore, a study by (Anjliana et al., 2026) also revealed just how

effective PBL is in improving science learning outcomes in fifth grade. Additionally, consistent with the research by (Dewi et al., 2024), which uncovered a new finding—namely, that the PBL model can influence the interest and science learning outcomes of fifth-grade elementary school students when implemented using or based on the TPACK framework. This is further clarified in (Yukhanit et al., 2025), which states that learning using the PBL model—which encourages students to actively engage, apply contextual knowledge, and seek solutions—unwittingly leads students to develop a deeper understanding. Therefore, the use of the PBL model in instruction can and should be considered a viable alternative in science education to achieve optimal learning outcomes. In fact, a study by (Inggriyani, 2024) shows that PBL helps students develop higher-order thinking skills, boosts their enthusiasm for learning, and fosters motivation in the learning process.

The use of the Problem-Based Learning (PBL) model in Grade 5B's IPAS class has proven effective in increasing students' interest in learning; this is consistent with the final scores obtained, which showed an increase from Cycle 1 to Cycle 2 to Cycle 3. Furthermore, this finding is consistent with a study (Lulu et al., 2024) stating that the use of the PBL model is effective in increasing students' interest in learning the IPAS subject in 5th grade. Furthermore, a study (K. P. Sari et al., 2022) also found that during the implementation of the intervention, although students' interest increased at the beginning of the cycle, it often did not yet reach the target. Therefore, 2 to 3 cycles are needed to demonstrate that as students become accustomed to using the PBL model, their interest in learning will increase and effectively reach the target.

Conclusion

This study demonstrated a consistent increase in fifth-grade students' interest in learning economics-related content within Integrated Natural and Social Sciences (IPAS) following the implementation of Problem-Based Learning (PBL) across three classroom action research cycles. Students' learning interest increased from 35% in Cycle I to 50% in Cycle II and 88% in Cycle III. Improvements were observed across all four indicators of learning interest: enjoyment, interest, attention, and engagement, with student engagement showing the greatest increase. These findings suggest that PBL can support more engaging and participatory learning experiences by encouraging students to explore and solve problems related to their everyday lives.

The findings highlight the potential of PBL as an instructional approach for fostering students' learning interest in primary education. However, given the classroom-specific nature of the research, the results should be interpreted within the context of the participating students. Future studies are encouraged to examine the implementation of PBL across different classroom settings and explore its contribution to other aspects of student learning.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.