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Integrating religious values into project-based learning to improve students' politeness in Pancasila education: action research

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the implementation of religiously integrated Project-Based Learning (PjBL) to improve students' politeness in Pancasila Education. Classroom Action Research was conducted with 18 vocational high school students across two cycles involving planning, action, observation, and reflection. Data were collected through observations, interviews, field notes, and documentation and analyzed using qualitative and quantitative descriptive approaches. Students' mean politeness scores increased from 1.70 at baseline to 2.06 in Cycle I and 3.11 in Cycle II. Improvements were observed across nine behavioral indicators, particularly respectful communication, interpersonal courtesy, and appreciation of differences. Instructional refinements strengthened students' engagement and behavioral consistency. Religiously integrated PjBL supported improvements in students' politeness by connecting moral principles with authentic collaborative experiences. This approach offers a contextual strategy for strengthening character education and civic responsibility in vocational secondary schools through reflective and participatory learning practices.

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Introduction

Character education plays a crucial role in developing students' moral responsibility, ethical communication, and interpersonal behavior. Politeness is an essential character dimension reflected in respectful language, empathy, and appreciation of differences. In vocational education, these competencies are particularly important for preparing students to meet professional and social expectations. However, maintaining respectful interactions remains challenging amid changing communication patterns and increasingly diverse social environments. Pancasila Education provides a curricular foundation for cultivating mutual respect, human dignity, and social responsibility (Chotimah et al., 2026; Nuryadi et al., 2026). Nevertheless, character development requires instructional practices that extend beyond moral knowledge toward consistent and observable ethical behavior (Afandi et al., 2026; Warlim et al., 2026).

Project-Based Learning (PjBL) provides opportunities to develop students' interpersonal competencies through authentic projects, collaboration, and reflective learning. Its participatory nature encourages communication, shared responsibility, and constructive responses to differing perspectives. Previous studies have demonstrated the potential of character-oriented learning to strengthen engagement and social

competencies (Subiyantoro et al., 2023; Sukisno et al., 2025). However, collaborative participation does not necessarily produce consistent politeness without explicit behavioral guidance and reinforcement. Existing research has also paid limited attention to measuring specific behavioral changes during project implementation. Therefore, examining how PjBL translates moral understanding into observable politeness remains necessary, particularly within civic education contexts (Prakoso et al., 2024; Wibisono et al., 2026; Yani et al., 2025).

Integrating religious values into PjBL may strengthen character development by connecting ethical principles with authentic social experiences. Islamic values such as adab (proper conduct), amanah (responsibility), and ta'awun (mutual assistance) provide moral guidance for respectful communication and cooperation. These principles align with Pancasila values emphasizing human dignity, mutual respect, and appreciation of diversity. Their integration into collaborative projects allows students to practice ethical conduct through interpersonal interactions rather than merely understanding moral concepts. Previous research has highlighted the relevance of religious and civic values in character education (Benawa et al., 2022; Firmansyah et al., 2024; Rahmat et al., 2026). Nevertheless, empirical explanations of how these values contribute to measurable politeness behaviors within PjBL remain insufficient.

Despite growing research on PjBL and character education, limited attention has been directed toward integrating religious values into projects to improve observable politeness in vocational schools. Previous studies have predominantly examined broader character outcomes without systematically monitoring behavioral changes across instructional cycles. Preliminary observations at SMKN 1 Sutera identified inappropriate language, frequent interruptions, and limited appreciation of others' opinions among Grade XII Electrical Engineering students. These concerns indicate a need for structured interventions emphasizing ethical communication and behavioral self-regulation. However, the extent of these behaviors requires systematic assessment rather than relying solely on preliminary observations. This study therefore addresses the gap between value-oriented instructional practices and measurable behavioral development through iterative classroom interventions (Astawa et al., 2026; Komalasari et al., 2025; Ruyadi et al., 2026; Sudarmin et al., 2024).

This study investigates the implementation of religiously integrated PjBL to improve students' politeness in Pancasila Education at SMKN 1 Sutera, Indonesia. Its contextual novelty lies in connecting Islamic ethical principles with collaborative projects and assessing politeness through nine observable indicators covering verbal communication, behavioral courtesy, and interpersonal respect. Using Classroom Action Research, the study examines behavioral changes through successive cycles of planning, action, observation, and reflection. Unlike approaches emphasizing moral knowledge or self-reported attitudes, this research focuses on directly observed classroom behavior. Specifically, it aims to examine the implementation process, changes in students' politeness, and instructional challenges requiring refinement. The findings are expected to contribute practical evidence for developing character-oriented PjBL in vocational civic education (Benawa et al., 2024; Nabila & Yanthi, 2026; Tabrani et al., 2024).

Method

This study employed a Classroom Action Research (CAR) design comprising four interconnected stages: planning, action, observation, and reflection. The research was conducted from July 16 to August 31, 2026, at SMKN 1 Sutera, Indonesia, involving 18 Grade XII Electrical Engineering students. The intervention was implemented in two cycles, each consisting of three instructional meetings, following a preliminary assessment of students' politeness. Baseline observations identified behavioral concerns related to inappropriate language, interruptions during discussions, and insufficient respect for others' opinions. These findings informed the development of religiously integrated Project-Based Learning (PjBL) activities within Pancasila Education. Each cycle involved implementing instructional activities, observing students' behavioral responses, and reflecting on the findings to determine necessary improvements. This iterative process enabled the intervention to be refined according to the behavioral challenges identified during classroom implementation.

The intervention incorporated Islamic ethical principles, including adab (proper conduct), amanah (responsibility), and ta'awun (mutual assistance), into collaborative learning activities. During Cycle I, students developed educational posters emphasizing respectful communication, cooperation, and appropriate interpersonal behavior. Reflection on the first cycle identified persistent difficulties in maintaining communication etiquette and independently demonstrating polite conduct. Consequently, Cycle II introduced more explicit behavioral expectations, teacher modeling, positive reinforcement, and structured reflection through the development of politeness campaign boards. Data were collected using structured observations, interviews, field notes, and documentation. Students' politeness was assessed through nine behavioral indicators representing three dimensions: verbal politeness, behavioral courtesy, and respect for others. Each indicator was

rated on a four-point scale, ranging from 1 (lowest) to 4 (highest), to monitor behavioral changes across the pre-cycle assessment and both intervention cycles.

Data were analyzed using quantitative and qualitative descriptive approaches. Quantitative analysis involved calculating the mean scores of nine politeness indicators and comparing the results across the pre-cycle assessment, Cycle I, and Cycle II. Scores were classified into four categories: poor (1.00–1.75), moderate (1.76–2.50), good (2.51–3.25), and very good (3.26–4.00). A mean score of at least 2.51 was established as the minimum criterion for achieving the expected behavioral outcome. Qualitative data from observations, interviews, field notes, and documentation were examined through data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing and verification. Evidence from these sources was compared to identify recurring behavioral patterns, implementation challenges, and instructional improvements. The integration of quantitative trends and qualitative findings supported a contextual interpretation of students' politeness development throughout the intervention.

Results and Discussions

Baseline Assessment of Students' Politeness

The preliminary observations revealed that students' politeness during Pancasila Education lessons was generally below the expected level. The assessment involved 18 Grade XII Electrical Engineering students at SMKN 1 Sutera and examined nine behavioral indicators encompassing verbal politeness, behavioral courtesy, and respect for others. These indicators included using polite expressions, avoiding interruptions, maintaining a respectful tone, requesting permission, respecting teachers, helping peers, listening to others' opinions, refraining from mockery, and appreciating differences. The baseline assessment provided an empirical foundation for implementing religiously integrated Project-Based Learning (PjBL) through two cycles of classroom action research.

As presented in Table 1, the overall mean politeness score during the pre-cycle assessment was 1.70, classified as poor. Requesting permission obtained the highest mean score (1.89), followed by respecting teachers (1.83). Conversely, avoiding interruptions and listening to others' opinions recorded the lowest mean scores (1.56 each). These findings indicated that students experienced particular difficulties in maintaining respectful communication and acknowledging others' contributions during classroom interactions. Observational records further identified inappropriate language, interruptions during discussions, and inconsistent respect for peers as recurring behavioral concerns. These baseline findings informed the design of collaborative projects intended to provide opportunities for students to practice politeness through meaningful classroom activities.

Implementation and Outcomes of Cycle I

The first intervention cycle consisted of three instructional meetings incorporating religious values into PjBL activities. Students collaboratively developed educational posters promoting polite communication and respectful interpersonal behavior. Religious values were introduced through classroom routines and project-related interactions, including respectful speech, mutual assistance (ta'awun), responsibility (amanah), and appreciation of others. Throughout the learning process, the teacher facilitated group discussions, monitored students' behavioral responses, and provided guidance to reinforce appropriate social interactions.

The observational findings demonstrated a gradual improvement in students' politeness across the three meetings. The overall mean score increased from 1.72 in the first meeting to 2.07 in the second meeting and 2.38 in the third meeting, producing a cycle mean of 2.06. Compared with the pre-cycle mean of 1.70, this represented an increase of 0.36 points. All nine behavioral indicators reached the moderate category during Cycle I. Requesting permission and respecting teachers achieved the highest cycle means (2.22 each), whereas avoiding interruptions and listening to others' opinions remained the lowest-scoring indicators (1.93 each).

Classroom observations indicated that collaborative project activities encouraged students to communicate more respectfully, assist their peers, and participate more constructively in group discussions. Nevertheless, the observed improvements were not consistently demonstrated without teacher reminders. Several students continued to interrupt others or required guidance when expressing disagreement. Reflection on Cycle I therefore identified the need for more systematic integration of religious values throughout project activities, additional opportunities for guided reflection, and reinforcement of independently demonstrated polite behavior. These findings provided the basis for instructional modifications in Cycle II.

Implementation and Outcomes of Cycle II

Cycle II incorporated instructional refinements based on the reflection findings from Cycle I. The intervention emphasized the contextual application of religious values throughout project planning, collaborative activities, classroom discussions, presentations, and reflection. Students developed politeness campaign boards addressing

nine specific behavioral indicators. Each project was linked to relevant moral principles, including respectful communication, mutual assistance, responsibility, consideration for others' feelings, and appreciation of differences. The teacher also strengthened behavioral modeling, established clearer expectations for turn-taking, and encouraged students to evaluate their interpersonal conduct during collaborative activities.

The results demonstrated a substantial improvement in students' observed politeness. The overall mean score increased progressively from 2.79 in the first meeting to 3.12 in the second meeting and 3.42 in the third meeting, resulting in a Cycle II mean of 3.11. This represented an increase of 1.05 points compared with Cycle I. All nine behavioral indicators reached the good category, indicating that improvement extended across the assessed dimensions rather than being restricted to particular behaviors.

Respecting teachers obtained the highest mean score (3.20), followed by maintaining a respectful tone (3.18). Requesting permission and appreciating differences each reached 3.13, while listening to others' opinions obtained the lowest mean score (3.02), although it remained within the good category. Classroom observations suggested that students increasingly demonstrated appropriate communication, cooperation, and respect during group activities. Behaviors that previously required repeated reminders became more consistently observable during project completion and classroom interactions. These findings indicate that the refined instructional practices in Cycle II were accompanied by more favorable and consistent politeness outcomes.

Comparative Improvements in Students' Politeness Across Research Cycles

A comparative analysis of the pre-cycle assessment, Cycle I, and Cycle II revealed a consistent upward trend in students' politeness following the implementation and refinement of religiously integrated PjBL. As shown in Table 1, the overall mean score increased from 1.70 at baseline to 2.06 in Cycle I and 3.11 in Cycle II. The cumulative improvement was 1.41 points, with the observed behavioral classification progressing from poor to moderate and subsequently to good. The larger improvement between Cycle I and Cycle II suggests that the instructional refinements introduced after the first reflection stage were accompanied by more substantial behavioral changes.

Table 1. Changes in Students' Politeness Scores Across Classroom Action Research Cycles

Assessment stage	Mean score	Behavioral category	Change from previous stage
Pre-cycle	1.70	Poor	—
Cycle I	2.06	Moderate	+0.36
Cycle II	3.11	Good	+1.05
Overall improvement	—	—	+1.41

A more detailed examination of individual indicators demonstrated improvements across all nine assessed behaviors (Table 2). The largest gains between Cycle I and Cycle II were observed in avoiding interruptions and appreciating differences, each increasing by 1.11 points. Helping peers, listening to others' opinions, and refraining from mockery also demonstrated substantial improvements of 1.09 points each. Requesting permission exhibited the smallest increase (0.91 points), although its final score reached the good category. These results indicate that improvements occurred across verbal communication, behavioral courtesy, and interpersonal respect.

Table 2. Comparison of Students' Politeness Indicators Across Assessment Stages

Politeness indicators	Pre-cycle	Cycle I	Cycle II	Overall change
Using polite expressions	1.72	2.04	3.11	+1.39
Avoiding interruptions	1.56	1.93	3.04	+1.48
Maintaining a respectful tone	1.72	2.13	3.18	+1.46
Requesting permission	1.89	2.22	3.13	+1.24
Respecting teachers	1.83	2.22	3.20	+1.37
Helping peers	1.67	2.00	3.08	+1.41
Listening to others' opinions	1.56	1.93	3.02	+1.46
Refraining from mockery	1.72	2.02	3.11	+1.39
Appreciating differences	1.67	2.02	3.13	+1.46

Note. Overall changes were calculated from the reported pre-cycle and Cycle II scores. The original thesis contains minor arithmetic discrepancies in some reported improvement values; the differences above are calculated directly from the displayed means.

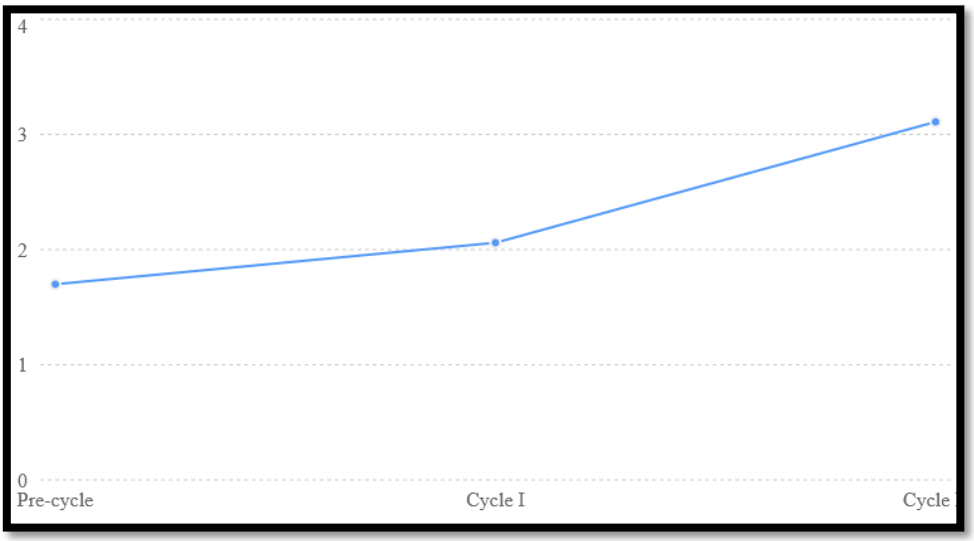


Figure 1. Changes in Mean Politeness Scores Across Research Stages

The sequential improvement observed across the research stages was consistent with the reflective nature of classroom action research. While Cycle I introduced students to collaborative projects and religiously grounded behavioral expectations, Cycle II provided more structured opportunities for applying and reinforcing these values. The findings therefore demonstrate a positive descriptive association between the progressive implementation of the intervention and improvements in students' observed politeness within the participating classroom.

Implementation Challenges and Instructional Refinements

Qualitative evidence from classroom observations, field notes, interviews, and reflective activities identified several challenges during the implementation of religiously integrated PjBL. The primary difficulty in Cycle I concerned students' inconsistent application of polite behavior despite their growing familiarity with the expected social norms. Some students continued to require teacher reminders to use respectful language, wait for their turn to speak, listen attentively, and acknowledge differing opinions. These observations suggested that initial exposure to moral values and collaborative activities had not yet resulted in consistently observable behavioral practices.

To address these challenges, Cycle II incorporated more explicit behavioral guidance, teacher modeling, positive reinforcement, and structured reflection. The project activities were also modified from producing educational posters to developing campaign boards focused on specific politeness indicators. Students were encouraged to identify interpersonal problems, formulate appropriate behavioral responses, and communicate commitments to respectful interaction. Religious principles were embedded throughout these activities, particularly through the practices of amanah (responsibility), ta'awun (mutual assistance), respectful speech, and consideration for others.

The subsequent classroom observations documented more consistent demonstrations of polite behavior, accompanied by an increase in the overall mean score from 2.06 in Cycle I to 3.11 in Cycle II. Students increasingly participated in discussions without interrupting others, communicated more respectfully, and demonstrated greater willingness to assist peers and acknowledge different perspectives. Collectively, the quantitative observations and qualitative classroom evidence indicate that the iterative refinement of religiously integrated PjBL was accompanied by improvements in students' politeness during Pancasila Education lessons.

The findings revealed progressive improvements in students' politeness following the implementation of religiously integrated Project-Based Learning (PjBL), with mean scores increasing from 1.70 at baseline to 2.06 in Cycle I and 3.11 in Cycle II. The modest improvement during Cycle I suggests that collaborative activities alone were insufficient to establish consistent behavioral practices. In contrast, Cycle II incorporated explicit behavioral guidance, teacher modeling, and structured reflection, providing more systematic opportunities to practice respectful interactions. From a constructivist perspective, these activities may facilitate behavioral development through active participation, social negotiation, and reflective learning. However, repeated exposure and increased teacher guidance may also have contributed to the observed improvements. These findings align with previous studies emphasizing the importance of structured collaborative learning and

instructional support in character development (Lusia et al., 2023; Sarkadi et al., 2022; Wedhatami et al., 2024; Yulianti, 2024).

Improvements in verbal politeness were reflected in avoiding interruptions, which increased from 1.56 to 3.04, and listening to others' opinions, which improved from 1.56 to 3.02. Maintaining a respectful tone also increased from 1.72 to 3.18, indicating more favorable communication during classroom interactions. These changes may reflect opportunities for behavioral practice through collaborative discussions, shared responsibilities, and project presentations. Nevertheless, listening to others remained the lowest-scoring indicator in Cycle II, suggesting that attentive communication requires more sustained behavioral reinforcement. Although classroom observations indicated more respectful interactions, the absence of detailed individual behavioral records limits explanations of students' self-regulation development. Thus, the findings support the potential relevance of authentic collaborative experiences while emphasizing the importance of explicit behavioral guidance in character-oriented learning (Juanta et al., 2025; Puspitasari et al., 2025; Ruyadi & Dahliyana, 2022; Suwandi et al., 2025).

The integration of religious values provided an ethical framework for connecting moral principles with students' interpersonal behavior. Respecting teachers achieved the highest final score of 3.20, while requesting permission, helping peers, and appreciating differences increased to 3.13, 3.08, and 3.13, respectively. These improvements are consistent with the educational relevance of adab in respectful conduct, amanah in responsible participation, and ta'awun in cooperative relationships. However, the study did not separately measure the contribution of each religious principle, limiting conclusions regarding their individual effects. Within Pancasila Education, religious value integration should also promote inclusive interactions and respect for diverse perspectives rather than emphasizing behavioral conformity alone. Accordingly, the findings suggest conceptual compatibility between religious ethics and civic values, although their specific mechanisms require further empirical examination (Benawa, Lusia, et al., 2023; Fernandes et al., 2025; Maisyaroh et al., 2023; Patras et al., 2025).

The improvement between intervention cycles highlights the practical importance of reflective instructional refinement in classroom action research. The mean politeness score increased from 2.06 in Cycle I to 3.11 in Cycle II, representing a 1.05-point improvement following modifications to instructional practices. Avoiding interruptions and appreciating differences each improved by 1.11 points, suggesting favorable changes in communication and interpersonal respect. These developments coincided with clearer behavioral expectations, teacher modeling, positive reinforcement, and structured reflection. Nevertheless, because these strategies were implemented simultaneously, their individual contributions cannot be distinguished. Repeated observations, increased familiarity with classroom expectations, and continued teacher assistance may also explain part of the improvement. Therefore, the findings emphasize the potential importance of systematic instructional refinement without establishing a direct causal relationship between specific strategies and behavioral outcomes (Abdulkarim et al., 2026; Benawa, Lake, et al., 2023; Chalistha et al., 2026; Pujiastuti et al., 2025).

This study contributes context-specific evidence concerning the integration of religious ethics, collaborative projects, and behavioral assessment in vocational Pancasila Education. Unlike approaches primarily emphasizing moral knowledge, the intervention monitored nine observable politeness indicators across successive instructional cycles. The findings suggest that structured opportunities for ethical practice and reflection may support improvements in classroom interactions. However, the study involved only 18 students, lacked a comparison group, and relied on observational ratings that may be influenced by assessor subjectivity. Furthermore, the absence of follow-up assessments prevents conclusions regarding the sustainability of behavioral improvements beyond the intervention. Future studies should incorporate validated instruments, independent observers, comparison groups, and longitudinal assessments to strengthen the evidence. These considerations position the present findings as preliminary support for contextually integrated character education rather than definitive evidence of intervention effectiveness (Benawa & Sihombing, 2023; Hidayat et al., 2023; Widiyanto et al., 2026; Yusaini et al., 2026).

Conclusions

This study concludes that integrating religious values into Project-Based Learning (PjBL) within Pancasila Education contributed to improving students' politeness through collaborative, contextual, and reflective learning experiences. The implementation of two classroom action research cycles demonstrated progressive improvements in students' respectful communication, behavioral courtesy, and appreciation of others, with the overall mean politeness score increasing from 1.70 at baseline to 2.06 in Cycle I and 3.11 in Cycle II. The integration of Islamic ethical principles into authentic project activities provided opportunities for students to translate moral understanding into observable interpersonal behavior. Furthermore, the instructional challenges

identified during Cycle I, particularly inconsistent communication etiquette and limited behavioral self-regulation, were addressed through structured guidance, teacher modeling, behavioral reinforcement, and reflective activities in Cycle II. These findings highlight the potential of religiously integrated PjBL as a contextually relevant approach to strengthening character education and civic responsibility in vocational secondary schools. However, further research involving broader educational contexts and longitudinal assessments is necessary to establish the sustainability and generalizability of the observed behavioral improvements.

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