ISSN: 3116-3475
International Journal
of Education, Research, and Innovation Perspectives
Volume 2 Issue 11 (November 2026)

Improving Academic Performance in Introduction to World Religion and Belief System Through Project-Based Learning (PBL) Among Grade 11 Students of Lunas National High School

Jesi Ray A. Zamora
Graduate School, Cebu Technological University–Main Campus, Cebu City, Philippines
zamorajesiray@gmail.com

Date Submitted:
September 30, 2026

Date Accepted:
October 22, 2026

Date Published:
November 10, 2026

DOI:
10.5281/zenodo.24128691

ABSTRACT

This study determined the effectiveness of Project-Based Learning (PBL) in improving the academic performance of Grade 11 Humanities and Social Sciences (HUMSS) students in Introduction to World Religions and Belief Systems at Lunas National High School, Maasin City Division, Southern Leyte, during School Year 2025–2026, and used the results as the basis for a PBL-based instructional guide. A mixed-methods design was employed, combining a one-group pretest–posttest pre-experimental design with a focus group discussion (FGD). The participants were the 20 Grade 11 HUMSS students of the school, who also took part in the FGD. Performance in three learning competencies was measured using a validated 30-item researcher-made achievement test aligned with the assessment guidelines of DepEd Order No. 8, s. 2015. Quantitative data were analyzed using frequency, percentage, mean, standard deviation, and the paired-samples t-test, while FGD data were analyzed through thematic analysis. Students' overall performance rose from Fairly Satisfactory in the pretest ($M = 3.55$, $SD = 1.35$) to Very Satisfactory in the posttest ($M = 7.51$, $SD = 0.85$), with significant pretest–posttest differences in all three competencies ($p < .05$). Three themes emerged from the FGD: transformative learning and critical awareness, empowered and collaborative learning, and authentic application and personal growth. The findings indicate that PBL was associated with higher posttest scores, improved competency mastery, and more engaging and collaborative learning experiences. Because a one-group pretest–posttest design was used, the improvement cannot be attributed solely to the intervention; nevertheless, the results provide preliminary evidence that PBL is a promising instructional approach for teaching world religions in senior high school.

Keywords: *project-based learning, world religions and belief systems, academic performance, senior high school, HUMSS, mixed methods*

INTRODUCTION

Teaching Introduction to World Religions and Belief Systems to Senior High School students in the Humanities and Social Sciences (HUMSS) strand requires approaches that foster critical thinking, cultural awareness, and respect for diversity. Rather than memorizing facts, students should be encouraged to analyze religious beliefs and practices in light of their historical, cultural, and social contexts. When the subject is delivered through varied, engaging, and inclusive strategies, learners develop a deeper understanding of other religious

ISSN: 3116-3475
International Journal
of Education, Research, and Innovation Perspectives
Volume 2 Issue 11 (November 2026)

traditions, empathy for those who hold them, and the capacity to interact critically and respectfully in a multicultural society.

Project-Based Learning (PBL) is one approach well suited to these aims. PBL engages students in sustained, collaborative investigation of meaningful questions that culminates in authentic products or presentations (Krajcik & Blumenfeld, 2006; Thomas, 2000). Applied to the study of world religions, it enables students to explore particular religious traditions, practices, or historical events; connect theoretical knowledge with real-world and community issues; and appreciate the complexity and diversity of human belief systems (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005). By working with classmates, students also come to value diverse viewpoints, question stereotypes, and reflect on their own beliefs and biases (Bell, 2010).

In District IV of the Maasin City Division, Southern Leyte, teachers have found it difficult to identify appropriate strategies for delivering lessons in world religions and belief systems. Many continue to rely on lectures and conventional group activities, and after years of implementing the senior high school program, learners' performance in the subject has been observed to be deteriorating. At the same time, DepEd Order No. 10, s. 2024 calls for a flexible, contextualized, learner-centered curriculum that promotes critical thinking, creativity, and life skills (Department of Education [DepEd], 2024). Although PBL has been widely studied, evidence on its use in teaching world religions to Filipino senior high school students in rural public schools remains limited, and few studies combine performance data with learners' own accounts of the PBL experience.

This study therefore assessed the effectiveness of PBL in Grade 11 Introduction to World Religions and Belief Systems at Lunas National High School during School Year 2025–2026 as the basis for a proposed instructional guide. Specifically, it sought to determine (1) students' performance before exposure to PBL in three learning competencies: analyzing the culture of the region that gave rise to specific religions; gathering print or web-based articles, photos, and editorials showing the positive or negative effects of religion; and identifying the positive and negative effects of religions; (2) students' performance after exposure to PBL in these competencies; (3) whether there was a significant difference between students' performance before and after exposure to PBL; (4) students' experiences of PBL integration; and (5) the intervention that may be proposed based on the results. The null hypothesis tested was that there is no significant difference in students' performance before and after exposure to PBL.

The findings are expected to benefit students through more meaningful learning experiences; teachers through an organized scheme and learning guide for integrating PBL in HUMSS classes; parents through a clearer understanding of how PBL supports their children's learning; school heads and policymakers through evidence to inform curriculum, resource, and pedagogical decisions; and future researchers through a basis for studying PBL in other subjects and grade levels.

Literature Review

Teaching World Religions and Belief Systems in Senior High School

Introduction to World Religions and Belief Systems is a specialized HUMSS subject in the K to 12 Senior High School curriculum whose competencies require learners to examine the cultural origins of religions and their positive and negative effects on individuals and society (DepEd, 2016). Achieving these competencies requires more than recall of doctrines and dates: students must analyze how geography, social structures, history, and traditions shaped specific religions and must evaluate religious influences fairly and respectfully. Instruction designed around enduring understandings and essential questions, rather than coverage of content, is better suited to such goals (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005).

The MATATAG Curriculum reinforces this direction. DepEd Order No. 10, s. 2024 emphasizes a comprehensive, learner-centered approach that promotes the values of being *Maka-Diyos*, *Makatao*, *Makakalikasan*, and *Makabansa*, together with a flexible and contextualized curriculum that develops critical thinking, creativity, and life skills while ensuring inclusion and accessibility (DepEd, 2024). For a subject dealing

ISSN: 3116-3475
International Journal
of Education, Research, and Innovation Perspectives
Volume 2 Issue 11 (November 2026)

with diverse and sometimes sensitive belief systems, these principles call for teaching strategies that combine inquiry, collaboration, and reflection with respect for diversity.

Project-Based Learning: Nature and Principles

Project-Based Learning is a student-centered approach in which learners acquire knowledge and skills by working over an extended period to investigate and respond to complex, authentic questions. Thomas (2000), in a review of research on PBL, described projects as central rather than peripheral to the curriculum, focused on driving questions, and involving constructive investigation, learner autonomy, and realistic tasks. Krajcik and Blumenfeld (2006) similarly identified driving questions, situated inquiry, collaboration, technology use, and tangible artifacts as defining features of PBL, while Larmer et al. (2015) proposed standards for rigorous PBL emphasizing challenging problems, sustained inquiry, authenticity, student voice and choice, reflection, critique and revision, and a public product.

PBL also changes the roles of teachers and students. Bell (2010) explained that in PBL teachers become facilitators while students assume responsibility for planning, researching, and presenting their work, thereby developing communication, cooperation, and decision-making skills. Grant (2011) found that students' beliefs about learning and the products they create are closely linked, and that PBL naturally integrates collaboration and reflection as students co-construct knowledge. Helle et al. (2006) further noted that PBL connects theoretical understanding with practical application, encouraging learners to develop a reflective mindset when they engage with authentic problems.

Project-Based Learning and Academic Achievement

A substantial body of research associates PBL with improved academic achievement. Thomas (2000) concluded that PBL enables learners to acquire deeper content knowledge while improving critical thinking, communication, collaboration, and problem-solving skills, and Bell (2010) reported that students engaged in PBL become more motivated, independent, and capable of applying concepts to real-life situations than those taught through traditional methods. In a meta-analysis, Chen and Yang (2019) found that PBL had a significant positive effect on students' academic achievement, particularly when learning activities emphasized inquiry, collaboration, and authentic tasks.

These outcomes are consistent with broader research on how people learn. Bransford et al. (2000) emphasized that meaningful learning occurs when students actively construct knowledge by connecting new concepts with prior experience rather than simply recalling information, and Hmelo-Silver (2004) argued that inquiry-oriented and problem-based environments promote deeper conceptual understanding through authentic tasks requiring higher-order thinking. Hattie (2009) likewise found that approaches promoting active engagement, feedback, and higher-order thinking produce greater learning gains than approaches focused on memorization, and Prince and Felder (2006) reported that inductive, active methods improve understanding, retention, and application compared with lecture-based instruction.

PBL has also been linked to higher-order reasoning and conceptual depth. Barak and Dori (2005) found that students in project-based instruction demonstrated improved understanding and were better able to explain abstract concepts using real-life examples, while Kokotsaki et al. (2016), reviewing the PBL literature, concluded that PBL enhances deep learning by encouraging students to investigate and analyze real-world issues rather than memorize information.

Project-Based Learning, Collaboration, and Learner Engagement

Collaboration is central to PBL. Han et al. (2015) observed that PBL affects high, middle, and low achievers differently and benefits students across achievement levels by requiring teamwork, shared accountability, and active participation. Tseng et al. (2013) found that collaboration within PBL environments strengthened students' attitudes, teamwork abilities, and confidence, while Holmes and Hwang (2016) reported

that students in PBL settings showed gains in achievement as well as in motivation, self-directed learning, and a sense of community.

PBL has further been associated with affective and personal outcomes. Wurdinger and Rudolph (2009) found that project-based approaches help students develop important life skills, including self-direction, responsibility, and collaboration, as they plan, research, and evaluate their own work. Boaler (2019) highlighted that learning approaches that embrace challenge and treat mistakes as opportunities for growth foster a growth mindset, which in the humanities may help learners become more open-minded toward diverse worldviews.

Information Literacy and Inquiry in Social Studies

One of the target competencies in this study requires students to gather and evaluate print and web-based materials. The American Association of School Librarians (2018) describes information literacy as an essential competency enabling learners to locate, evaluate, and use information effectively for inquiry and informed decision-making. Wineburg and McGrew (2017) showed that even skilled readers struggle to judge the credibility of online sources and benefit from explicit instruction in evaluating digital information.

PBL offers a natural context for developing these skills because projects require learners to investigate meaningful questions, analyze evidence, and communicate findings (Krajcik & Blumenfeld, 2006). In a subject dealing with religion, where online sources may be partial or misleading, combining inquiry projects with guided source evaluation supports both content mastery and responsible, respectful analysis of religious issues.

Theoretical Framework

The study was anchored on three developmental and learning theories. Piaget's (1952) cognitive development theory holds that learners construct knowledge by actively engaging with their environment, organizing experience into schemas that expand through assimilation and accommodation. In PBL, learners participate in experiential learning by addressing real-life problems, consistent with Piaget's view that knowledge is built rather than simply received. Perry's (1970) theory of intellectual development describes students' movement from dualistic thinking, in which ideas are simply right or wrong, toward a relativistic and contextual understanding; PBL supports this transition by engaging learners with multiple viewpoints and complex issues, which is essential in the study of religion.

Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory emphasizes that learning is fundamentally social and culturally embedded, occurring through guided interaction with teachers and peers within the zone of proximal development and mediated by language (Manglik, 2024). PBL reflects this perspective by supporting teamwork, dialogue, and the use of knowledge in culturally meaningful situations.

The study was likewise anchored on DepEd Order No. 10, s. 2024, which provides the policy guidelines for implementing the MATATAG Curriculum and directs educators to design developmentally appropriate, socially and culturally relevant learning experiences (DepEd, 2024). Together, the three theories and this policy framework support instruction that is developmentally appropriate, cognitively challenging, and socially interactive, which the study operationalized through PBL.

Conceptual Framework

The flow of the study followed an Input–Process–Output (IPO) model, as presented in Figure 1. The input consisted of the basic information of the respondents and the variables examined: the performance level of the Grade 11 HUMSS learners before and after the intervention and the test of significant difference between these performances. The process covered the transmittal letter, informed consent, test materials, table of specifications, and lesson plans used to implement PBL, followed by the management and analysis of data using appropriate statistical methods.

The output of the study was a learning guide, the PBL-Based Instructional Guide in Introduction to World Religions and Belief Systems, intended as a practical resource that provides teachers with step-by-step instructions, approaches, and activities for implementing PBL to improve student engagement and performance.

ISSN: 3116-3475
International Journal
of Education, Research, and Innovation Perspectives
Volume 2 Issue 11 (November 2026)

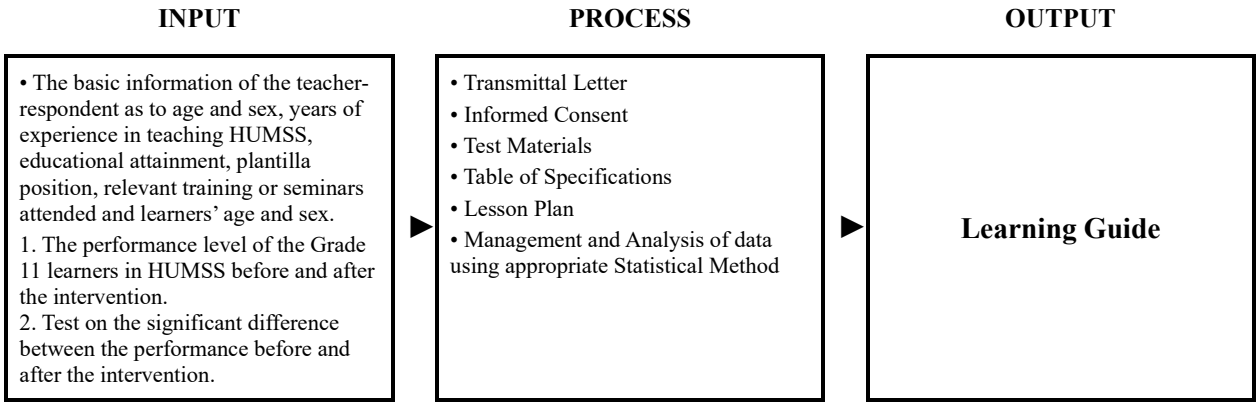


Figure 1. *Flow of the Study (Input–Process–Output Model)*

METHODS

Research Design

The study employed a mixed-methods design integrating quantitative and qualitative approaches. The quantitative component used a one-group pretest–posttest pre-experimental design (O1 – X – O2), in which an intact class was given a pretest (O1), exposed to PBL as the intervention (X), and then given a posttest (O2). The independent variable was the PBL intervention, and the dependent variable was students' academic performance as measured by their test scores. The qualitative component, a focus group discussion (FGD), gathered students' experiences and insights to enrich the interpretation of the quantitative findings.

Several measures were taken to reduce threats to validity. A parallel posttest with a table of specifications was used to control instrumentation effects; attendance was monitored closely to avoid participant attrition; participants were of similar age and were oriented on procedures that could affect the results; and the researcher alone handled the class throughout the experiment, which was held at a fixed morning schedule (8:45–9:45 a.m.) under controlled classroom conditions.

Research Locale

The study was conducted at Lunas National High School in District IV, Maasin City Division, Southern Leyte, Philippines, a medium-sized public school located approximately 18 kilometers from Maasin City proper. The school serves about 178 learners across its Junior and Senior High School departments with 13 teachers; its senior high school offers only the HUMSS strand, serving 65 Grade 11 and 12 learners handled by five teachers.

Participants and Sampling Technique

The participants were the Grade 11 HUMSS students enrolled in School Year 2025–2026. Because the school had only one Grade 11 section, which was handled by the researcher, the entire intact class of 20 students, composed of 10 males and 10 females, served as the participants (Table 1). The same students took part in the FGD.

Table 1. *Distribution of Participants by Sex*

Sex	Frequency	Percentage
Male	10	50.00
Female	10	50.00
Total	20	100.00

Note. The participants constituted the only Grade 11 HUMSS section of the school.

ISSN: 3116-3475
International Journal
of Education, Research, and Innovation Perspectives
Volume 2 Issue 11 (November 2026)

Research Instrument

A researcher-made achievement test was used as both pretest and posttest. The test consisted of 30 multiple-choice items, 10 for each of the three competencies, developed from the DepEd Senior High School curriculum guide for Introduction to World Religions and Belief Systems (DepEd, 2016) and aligned with the classroom assessment guidelines of DepEd Order No. 8, s. 2015 (DepEd, 2015). Each correct answer was given one point, so the maximum score was 10 per competency and 30 for the whole test. The pretest and posttest were parallel in content, structure, and level of difficulty, and a table of specifications was prepared for both. The instrument was critiqued by master teachers with at least five years of experience and validated by experts in social science and research for alignment with the target competencies. For the qualitative phase, a semi-structured FGD guide with two warm-up questions and eight main questions asked students about their understanding of the lessons, enjoyable aspects and challenges of the projects, collaboration and motivation, skills and attitudes developed, and the relevance of the experience to other subjects and real life.

Data Gathering Procedure

Following approval of the research title by the Dean of the Graduate School of Cebu Technological University, permission was sought from the Office of the Schools Division Superintendent, the school head, teachers, and parents of the participants, and students were informed of the purpose of the study. The pretest was administered on November 17, 2025. PBL was then implemented in daily one-hour sessions from November 18 to December 4, 2025, covering the three competencies in sequence, as summarized in Table 2. The posttest was administered on December 5, 2025. The FGD was subsequently conducted, and the discussion was transcribed for analysis.

Table 2. *Schedule of the Implementation of Project-Based Learning*

Date (8:45–9:45 a.m.)	Activity and Competency
November 17, 2025	Administration of the pretest
November 18–24, 2025	Competency 1: Analyze the culture of the region that gave rise to specific religions (HUMSS_WRB12-I/IIIb-2.2)
November 25–28, 2025	Competency 2: Gather print or web-based articles, photos, editorials, etc. showing the positive or negative effects of religion (HUMSS_WRB12-I/IIIc-3.4)
December 1–4, 2025	Competency 3: Identify the positive and negative effects of religions (HUMSS_WRB12-I/IIIc-3.1)
December 5, 2025	Administration of the posttest

Note. Each competency was taught through project-based activities with specific learning objectives.

Data Analysis

Frequency and percentage distributions were used to describe students' pretest and posttest performance, and the mean and standard deviation were used to determine their performance level per competency. Mean scores were interpreted using the following scale: 8.21–10.00, Outstanding; 6.41–8.20, Very Satisfactory; 4.61–6.40, Satisfactory; 2.81–4.60, Fairly Satisfactory; and 1.00–2.80, Did Not Meet Expectations. The paired-samples t-test was used to determine whether the differences between pretest and posttest scores were significant at the .05 level (Field, 2018). FGD transcripts were analyzed through thematic analysis: initial codes were drawn from participants' responses, reviewed, compared, and refined iteratively into categories and patterns, and the confirmed themes were named to capture students shared experiences.

Ethical Considerations

Participation was voluntary, and participants were informed that they were not compelled to participate and that the data would be used solely for academic purposes. Confidentiality was ensured by replacing participants' names with codes, destroying the sheet containing names when no longer needed, restricting access to the code master list to the researcher, and storing research files in password-protected and encrypted form.

ISSN: 3116-3475
International Journal
of Education, Research, and Innovation Perspectives
Volume 2 Issue 11 (November 2026)

Participants' personal information was protected in accordance with Republic Act No. 10173, the Data Privacy Act of 2012.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Students' Performance Before the Integration of Project-Based Learning

Table 3 presents the distribution of students' pretest scores in the three competencies.

Table 3. *Pretest Performance of Students by Competency (N = 20)*

Score Range	Category	Competency 1 f (%)	Competency 2 f (%)	Competency 3 f (%)
9–10	Outstanding	0 (0.00)	0 (0.00)	0 (0.00)
7–8	Very Satisfactory	0 (0.00)	0 (0.00)	2 (10.00)
5–6	Satisfactory	4 (20.00)	3 (15.00)	4 (20.00)
3–4	Fairly Satisfactory	10 (50.00)	14 (70.00)	12 (60.00)
1–2	Did Not Meet Expectations	6 (30.00)	3 (15.00)	2 (10.00)
	Mean	3.25	3.27	4.13
	Standard deviation	1.01	1.63	1.11
	Interpretation	Fairly Satisfactory	Fairly Satisfactory	Fairly Satisfactory

Note. Competency 1 = Analyze the culture of the region that gave rise to specific religions; Competency 2 = Gather print or web-based articles, photos, editorials, etc. showing the positive or negative effects of religion; Competency 3 = Identify the positive and negative effects of religions. Maximum score per competency = 10.

Before PBL, students' performance in all three competencies was Fairly Satisfactory. In Competency 1, analyzing the culture of the region that gave rise to specific religions, half of the students (50.00%) scored in the Fairly Satisfactory range and 30.00% did not meet expectations (M = 3.25, SD = 1.01). In Competency 2, gathering print or web-based materials showing the positive or negative effects of religion, 70.00% were Fairly Satisfactory (M = 3.27, SD = 1.63). In Competency 3, identifying the positive and negative effects of religions, 60.00% were Fairly Satisfactory and only two students reached the Very Satisfactory level (M = 4.13, SD = 1.11). No student reached the Outstanding level in any competency.

These results indicate that students possessed only a basic grasp of the concepts and had difficulty analyzing cultural influences, evaluating information sources, and applying ideas about religion to real-life and societal contexts. The generally low performance may reflect conventional instruction that emphasizes memorization rather than analysis, whereas meaningful learning requires students to construct knowledge actively and connect it with prior experience (Bransford et al., 2000; Hattie, 2009). The relatively weak performance in gathering and evaluating sources also points to the need for explicit development of information literacy (American Association of School Librarians, 2018; Wineburg & McGrew, 2017). The pretest results thus supported the integration of PBL, which engages learners in inquiry, collaboration, and authentic tasks (Hmelo-Silver, 2004; Thomas, 2000).

ISSN: 3116-3475
International Journal
of Education, Research, and Innovation Perspectives
Volume 2 Issue 11 (November 2026)

Students' Performance After the Integration of Project-Based Learning

Table 4 presents the distribution of students' posttest scores after the integration of PBL.

Table 4. *Posttest Performance of Students by Competency (N = 20)*

Score Range	Category	Competency 1 f (%)	Competency 2 f (%)	Competency 3 f (%)
9–10	Outstanding	1 (5.00)	1 (5.00)	2 (10.00)
7–8	Very Satisfactory	16 (80.00)	16 (80.00)	15 (75.00)
5–6	Satisfactory	3 (15.00)	3 (15.00)	3 (15.00)
3–4	Fairly Satisfactory	0 (0.00)	0 (0.00)	0 (0.00)
1–2	Did Not Meet Expectations	0 (0.00)	0 (0.00)	0 (0.00)
	Mean	7.30	7.59	7.63
	Standard deviation	0.73	0.96	0.88
	Interpretation	Very Satisfactory	Very Satisfactory	Very Satisfactory

Note. Scale for the mean: 8.21–10.00, Outstanding; 6.41–8.20, Very Satisfactory; 4.61–6.40, Satisfactory; 2.81–4.60, Fairly Satisfactory; 1.00–2.80, Did Not Meet Expectations.

After PBL, students' performance in all three competencies rose to the Very Satisfactory level. In Competencies 1 and 2, 80.00% of students scored in the Very Satisfactory range and one student reached the Outstanding level, with means of 7.30 (SD = 0.73) and 7.59 (SD = 0.96), respectively. In Competency 3, 75.00% were Very Satisfactory and two students were Outstanding (M = 7.63, SD = 0.88). No student scored in the Fairly Satisfactory or Did Not Meet Expectations categories in any competency.

The lower standard deviations suggest that students performed more consistently after the intervention, implying that PBL benefited not only high-achieving students but also those who initially struggled. This pattern is consistent with Hmelo-Silver (2004) and Prince and Felder (2006), who reported that inquiry-based and active learning approaches improve understanding, retention, and application, and with Krajcik and Blumenfeld (2006), who noted that PBL strengthens research and inquiry skills by requiring students to investigate meaningful questions, analyze evidence, and communicate findings.

Comparison of Pretest and Posttest Performance

Table 5 summarizes students' pretest and posttest performance, and Table 6 presents the results of the paired-samples t-test.

Table 5. *Summary of Students' Pretest and Posttest Performance*

Competency	Pretest M	SD	Category	Posttest M	SD	Category
1. Analyze the culture of the region that gave rise to specific religions	3.25	1.01	Fairly Satisfactory	7.30	0.73	Very Satisfactory
2. Gather print or web-based articles, photos, editorials, etc. showing the positive or negative effects of religion	3.27	1.63	Fairly Satisfactory	7.59	0.96	Very Satisfactory
3. Identify the positive and negative effects of religions	4.13	1.11	Fairly Satisfactory	7.63	0.88	Very Satisfactory
Overall	3.55	1.35	Fairly Satisfactory	7.51	0.85	Very Satisfactory

Note. M = mean; SD = standard deviation. Maximum score per competency = 10.

Students' overall mean increased from 3.55 (SD = 1.35, Fairly Satisfactory) in the pretest to 7.51 (SD = 0.85, Very Satisfactory) in the posttest, and the overall standard deviation decreased, indicating more uniform achievement after the intervention.

ISSN: 3116-3475
International Journal
of Education, Research, and Innovation Perspectives
Volume 2 Issue 11 (November 2026)

Table 6. *Significant Difference Between the Pretest and Posttest Scores of Students*

Competency	Pretest M	Posttest M	Mean Difference	t	p	Decision
1. Analyze the culture of the region that gave rise to specific religions	3.25	7.30	4.05	[t]	< .05	Reject H_0; significant
2. Gather print or web-based articles, photos, editorials, etc. showing the positive or negative effects of religion	3.27	7.59	4.32	7.83	< .05	Reject H_0; significant
3. Identify the positive and negative effects of religions	4.13	7.63	3.50	9.25	< .05	Reject H_0; significant

Note. Paired-samples t-test, df = 19, α = .05.

The paired-samples t-test showed significant differences between pretest and posttest scores in all three competencies ($p < .05$): Competency 1, with a mean difference of 4.05; Competency 2, with a mean difference of 4.32, $t = 7.83$; and Competency 3, with a mean difference of 3.50, $t = 9.25$. The null hypothesis was therefore rejected for each competency. The largest gain was observed in gathering print or web-based materials on the effects of religion, while the highest *t*-value was observed in identifying the positive and negative effects of religions.

These results are consistent with Thomas (2000) and Bell (2010), who concluded that PBL enhances achievement, motivation, and critical thinking by engaging students in authentic investigations, and with the meta-analysis of Chen and Yang (2019), which found a significant positive effect of PBL on academic achievement. The improvement across all competencies also supports the constructivist view that learners develop deeper understanding when they actively construct knowledge through authentic experiences, collaboration, and reflection (Hmelo-Silver, 2004; Vygotsky, 1978). However, because the study used a single group without a comparison group, the gains may also reflect other factors, such as maturation or familiarity with the test, and should be interpreted as improvements associated with PBL rather than effects attributable solely to it.

Students' Experiences of Project-Based Learning

Thematic analysis of the FGD yielded three themes describing students' experiences of PBL.

Transformative learning and critical awareness

Students described PBL as helping them move beyond memorization toward critical understanding and reflection on why people hold certain beliefs and how religion influences behavior and social norms. Student A reflected, "Before, I just memorized the topics and forgot them after the test. But when we did projects, I had to think about what the religion really meant to the people who follow it." Student B added, "I learned that not all religions should be compared in terms of which one is right or wrong," while Student C shared that a project on Buddhism "opened my eyes to different ways of understanding peace and morality." These accounts are consistent with Kokotsaki et al. (2016), who found that PBL promotes deep learning through investigation of real-world issues; with Helle et al. (2006) and Barak and Dori (2005), who linked project work to reflective thinking and the ability to explain abstract concepts; and with Boaler (2019), whose emphasis on growth-oriented learning parallels students' growing openness to diverse worldviews.

Empowered and collaborative learning

Students emphasized that PBL turned the classroom into a community of shared learning in which they could express opinions, make decisions, and take responsibility for their learning. Student D shared, "Everyone in the group had something to do… It made me feel that my ideas were important," and Student E explained, "I'm usually shy, but PBL pushed me to speak up. When my groupmates supported my ideas, I gained confidence to present in front of others." Student G added, "Because we worked in teams, I was more excited to attend class."

ISSN: 3116-3475
International Journal
of Education, Research, and Innovation Perspectives
Volume 2 Issue 11 (November 2026)

These experiences support Han et al. (2015) and Bell (2010) on shared accountability and student leadership in PBL, Tseng et al. (2013) and Holmes and Hwang (2016) on improved confidence, teamwork, and sense of community, and Grant (2011) on the co-construction of knowledge with peers.

Authentic application and personal growth

Students connected classroom knowledge to life outside school, developing empathy, respect for diversity, and responsibility. Student H reflected, "Studying religion is not just about beliefs—it's about understanding people. I learned to respect other faiths more," while Student J shared, "PBL made me more responsible. We had deadlines and real tasks, so I learned to manage time and work better with others," and Student K added that applying lessons to real issues "made me proud that what we did had a purpose." These findings align with Thomas (2000) on the relevance of applying concepts to real problems, Wurdinger and Rudolph (2009) on the life skills developed through project work, Krajcik and Blumenfeld (2006) on learning embedded in meaningful contexts, and Larmer et al. (2015) on authentic projects that cultivate reflection and lifelong learning.

Together, the three themes show that PBL enriched both the intellectual and personal dimensions of learning: students became more analytical, reflective, and engaged while developing teamwork, communication, and respect for diversity. The qualitative findings thus complement the quantitative gains, suggesting that PBL supported not only achievement but also the affective goals of religious and cultural education.

Proposed PBL-Based Instructional Guide

Based on the findings, a PBL-Based Instructional Guide in Introduction to World Religions and Belief Systems was developed for the three competencies. Each of its three project guides contains a rationale, project overview with a driving question, learning competencies and objectives, phased activities, assessment tools such as rubrics and teacher observation checklists, reflection prompts, a culminating activity, and implementation tips. The projects are "Tracing Faith Through Culture: Understanding the Origins of World Religions," in which learners examine how culture influenced the development of specific religions; "Religion in Society: Examining Its Positive and Negative Effects," in which learners gather and evaluate print and web-based evidence, culminating in a media evidence exhibit; and "Religion and Society: Understanding Its Positive and Negative Effects," in which learners investigate real-life examples and present their findings through formats such as infographics, poster exhibits, multimedia presentations, or community awareness campaigns. The guide is intended to help teachers deliver the subject through inquiry, collaboration, and reflection while promoting respect and tolerance toward diverse religious beliefs.

CONCLUSION

Grade 11 HUMSS students initially demonstrated only Fairly Satisfactory performance in the three competencies of Introduction to World Religions and Belief Systems, indicating a basic grasp of the concepts but difficulty in analyzing and applying religious and cultural ideas. After the integration of Project-Based Learning, their performance rose to the Very Satisfactory level in all competencies, and the differences between pretest and posttest scores were statistically significant, leading to the rejection of the null hypothesis. Students also described PBL as a transformative, empowering, and authentic learning experience that deepened their critical awareness, strengthened collaboration and confidence, and connected lessons to real-world values.

The study provides preliminary evidence that PBL is a promising learner-centered approach for improving academic performance and promoting meaningful learning in world religions education. Because a one-group pretest–posttest design with a single intact class was used, the observed improvement cannot be attributed solely to the intervention. Nonetheless, the study contributes context-specific evidence from a rural Philippine public senior high school and a ready-to-use PBL-based instructional guide aligned with the subject's competencies.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusions, the following recommendations are offered:

1. Teachers may regularly integrate Project-Based Learning into their instructional planning, designing projects that promote critical thinking, collaboration, and reflection on real-world issues related to religion and culture, and may share best practices with colleagues and update their strategies through seminars and workshops on learner-centered and inquiry-based approaches.
2. Students may actively participate in project-based activities and take ownership of their learning through research, teamwork, and creative presentations, using the PBL-based instructional guide for independent exploration and reflection.
3. School administrators may support PBL integration by providing training and professional development, and by allocating time and resources for collaborative planning, cross-curricular projects, and community-based learning initiatives.
4. Future researchers may examine the long-term effects of PBL on student motivation, critical thinking, and academic performance; use quasi-experimental designs with comparison groups and larger samples; explore PBL in other subject areas; compare it with other active learning strategies; and examine its effects on values formation, empathy, and intercultural understanding.

References

American Association of School Librarians. (2018). *National school library standards for learners, school librarians, and school libraries*. ALA Editions.

Barak, M., & Dori, Y. J. (2005). Enhancing undergraduate students' chemistry understanding through project-based learning in an IT environment. *Science Education, 89*(1), 117–139. https://doi.org/10.1002/sce.20027

Bell, S. (2010). Project-based learning for the 21st century: Skills for the future. *The Clearing House: A Journal of Educational Strategies, Issues and Ideas, 83*(2), 39–43. https://doi.org/10.1080/00098650903505415

Boaler, J. (2019). *Limitless mind: Learn, lead, and live without barriers*. HarperOne.

Bransford, J. D., Brown, A. L., & Cocking, R. R. (Eds.). (2000). *How people learn: Brain, mind, experience, and school* (Expanded ed.). National Academy Press. https://doi.org/10.17226/9853

Chen, C.-H., & Yang, Y.-C. (2019). Revisiting the effects of project-based learning on students' academic achievement: A meta-analysis investigating moderators. *Educational Research Review, 26*, 71–81. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.edurev.2018.11.001

Department of Education. (2015). *Policy guidelines on classroom assessment for the K to 12 Basic Education Program* (DepEd Order No. 8, s. 2015).

Department of Education. (2016). *K to 12 curriculum guide: Senior High School – Humanities and Social Sciences (HUMSS)*. https://www.deped.gov.ph/k-to-12/curriculum-guides/

Department of Education. (2024). *Policy guidelines on the implementation of the MATATAG curriculum* (DepEd Order No. 10, s. 2024).

Field, A. (2018). *Discovering statistics using IBM SPSS Statistics* (5th ed.). SAGE Publications.

Grant, M. M. (2011). Learning, beliefs, and products: Students' perspectives with project-based learning. *Interdisciplinary Journal of Problem-Based Learning, 5*(2), 37–69. https://doi.org/10.7771/1541-5015.1254

Han, S., Capraro, R., & Capraro, M. M. (2015). How science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) project-based learning (PBL) affects high, middle, and low achievers differently: The impact of student factors on achievement. *International Journal of Science and Mathematics Education, 13*(5), 1089–1113. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10763-014-9526-0

Hattie, J. (2009). *Visible learning: A synthesis of over 800 meta-analyses relating to achievement*. Routledge.

Helle, L., Tynjälä, P., & Olkinuora, E. (2006). Project-based learning in post-secondary education: Theory, practice and rubber sling shots. *Higher Education, 51*(2), 287–314. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-004-6386-5

Hmelo-Silver, C. E. (2004). Problem-based learning: What and how do students learn? *Educational Psychology Review, 16*(3), 235–266. https://doi.org/10.1023/B:EDPR.0000034022.16470.f3

Holmes, V.-L., & Hwang, Y. (2016). Exploring the effects of project-based learning in secondary mathematics education. *The Journal of Educational Research, 109*(5), 449–463. https://doi.org/10.1080/00220671.2014.979911

Kokotsaki, D., Menzies, V., & Wiggins, A. (2016). Project-based learning: A review of the literature. *Improving Schools, 19*(3), 267–277. https://doi.org/10.1177/1365480216659733

Krajcik, J. S., & Blumenfeld, P. C. (2006). Project-based learning. In R. K. Sawyer (Ed.), *The Cambridge handbook of the learning sciences* (pp. 317–334). Cambridge University Press.

Larmer, J., Mergendoller, J., & Boss, S. (2015). *Setting the standard for project-based learning: A proven approach to rigorous classroom instruction*. ASCD.

Manglik, R. (2024). *Human development*. EduGorilla Publication.

Perry, W. G., Jr. (1970). *Forms of intellectual and ethical development in the college years: A scheme*. Holt, Rinehart and Winston.

Piaget, J. (1952). *The origins of intelligence in children*. International Universities Press.

Prince, M. J., & Felder, R. M. (2006). Inductive teaching and learning methods: Definitions, comparisons, and research bases. *Journal of Engineering Education, 95*(2), 123–138. https://doi.org/10.1002/j.2168-9830.2006.tb00884.x

Republic Act No. 10173. (2012). *Data Privacy Act of 2012*. Official Gazette of the Republic of the Philippines. https://www.officialgazette.gov.ph/2012/08/15/republic-act-no-10173/

Thomas, J. W. (2000). *A review of research on project-based learning*. The Autodesk Foundation.

Tseng, K.-H., Chang, C.-C., Lou, S.-J., & Chen, W.-P. (2013). Attitudes towards science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) in a project-based learning (PjBL) environment. *International Journal of Technology and Design Education, 23*(1), 87–102. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10798-011-9160-x

Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes*. Harvard University Press.

Wiggins, G., & McTighe, J. (2005). *Understanding by design* (Expanded 2nd ed.). ASCD.

Wineburg, S., & McGrew, S. (2017). *Lateral reading: Reading less and learning more when evaluating digital information* (Stanford History Education Group Working Paper No. 2017-A1). https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3048994

Wurdinger, S., & Rudolph, J. (2009). A different type of success: Teaching important life skills through project-based learning. *Improving Schools, 12*(2), 115–129. https://doi.org/10.1177/1365480209105576