

From Passive Bystander to Active Defender: Effectiveness of Project-Based Learning In Transforming Students' Prosocial Behavior In Civic Education

Dhimas Wahyu Pradana^{1*} and Isnarmi Moeis², Junaidi Indrawadi³, and Hasrul Piliang⁴

^{1,2} Faculty of Social Sciences, University State of Padang, Indonesia

Abstract

This study examined the implementation of Project-Based Learning (PjBL) as an instructional strategy to transform students' prosocial behavior from passive bystanders into active defenders in Civic Education learning. The study was grounded in the problem of limited prosocial intervention among Grade IX-J students at SMP Negeri 5 Cilacap, Indonesia, where preliminary observations showed no observable defender action before the intervention. A Classroom Action Research design based on the Kemmis and McTaggart model was conducted in two cycles involving 32 students. Data were collected through structured observation rubrics covering five indicators of prosocial behavior, field notes, semi-structured interviews, and cognitive learning tests. The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and triangulation to strengthen the credibility of the findings. The results showed a consistent improvement in students' prosocial behavior, with the mean score increasing from 77% in Cycle I to 89.74% in Cycle II. The highest improvement was found in cooperation (+24.62%), followed by initiative and leadership (+16.63%), empathy (+9.44%), responsibility (+9.44%), and defender action (+3.69%). Students' cognitive learning outcomes also increased from a mean score of 76.25 to 88.75. The findings indicate that PjBL can create participatory civic learning spaces that strengthen accountability, empathy, role-taking, and collective responsibility. Theoretically, this study extends the application of Social Cognitive Theory and the Participant Role Approach in Civic Education by showing how project-based civic tasks can foster self-efficacy, reduce passive moral disengagement, and encourage defender-oriented behavior. The study contributes a classroom-based intervention model for promoting justice-oriented citizenship and prosocial civic dispositions among junior secondary students.

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CORRESPONDING AUTHOR

* Dhimas Wahyu Pradana, Faculty of Social Sciences, University State of Padang, Indonesia. Email: dhimaswp@student.unp.ac.id

Introduction

Bullying in educational settings is a systemic social problem that demands a structured, multi-level response. UNESCO (2019) reported that 32% of students globally have experienced bullying, while the Sejiwa (2022) found that 45.5% of junior secondary students identified as bullying victims. The Annual report KPAI (2023) documented a rising trend in verbal and relational violence in schools over recent years. These figures suggest that conventional, reactive approaches punishing perpetrators after events are insufficient to achieve the deeper ecological change required within classroom social norms.

A central psychological mechanism that sustains bullying ecosystems is passive bystander behavior. Latane (1970) demonstrated through their landmark experiments that the more witnesses are present in an emergency, the less likely each individual is to intervene because responsibility

diffuses across the group. In bullying contexts, Salmivalli C. (2010) extended this insight through the Participant Role Approach: witnesses are never truly neutral; each occupies a functional role (reinforcer, assistant, outsider, or defender) that either perpetuates or disrupts the bullying dynamic. The pre-intervention observations in this study confirmed this pattern starkly: not a single defender action (0%) was recorded in Class IX J, SMP Negeri 5 Cilacap, despite open verbal bullying occurring in front of the entire class.

The core challenge is not students' ignorance of anti-bullying values, but the gap between moral knowing understanding that bullying is wrong and moral action actually intervening (Lickona, 1991). Two mechanisms underpin this gap: moral disengagement, through which individuals rationalize passivity without guilt (Bandura A., 2002), and low social self-efficacy, the belief that one's intervention would be ineffective or socially costly (Bandura, 1997). Conventional instruction, which targets only cognitive knowledge, fails to address these affective and structural barriers.

Project-Based Learning (PjBL) offers a more promising pedagogical alternative. Thomas (2000) defined PjBL as a model in which students engage in authentic inquiry into real-world problems through structured cycles that produce meaningful products. Its critical features driving question, constructive investigation, student autonomy, and public product presentation Krajcik (2014) create a learning ecosystem where students not only learn about prosocial values but rehearse them through socially consequential simulation. Recent meta-analytic evidence confirms PjBL's superiority over conventional instruction for both academic achievement and higher-order thinking (Kokotsaki, 2016).

From the perspective of Citizenship Education (Pendidikan Pancasila dan Kewarganegaraan/PPKn), the formation of active defenders corresponds directly to what Westheimer (2004) describe as the justice-oriented citizen a citizen who not only complies with norms but actively intervenes when injustice occurs. Branson (1998) reinforced this by arguing that civic dispositions cannot be instilled through verbal instruction alone; they require authentic civic practice experiences. PjBL contextualized around real bullying dynamics provides precisely such an experience, positioning this study not merely as a pedagogical inquiry but as a contribution to the empirical grounding of PPKn's character-forming mission.

Prior studies have demonstrated connections between PjBL and prosocial behavior (Wardani, 2023) and between defender interventions and classroom norms (Salmivalli C. V., 2011). However, research that operationalizes active defender behavior as a measurable prosocial indicator within a PPKn CAR framework grounded in Salmivalli's Participant Role Approach and Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory remains limited in Indonesian educational research. This gap constitutes the primary contribution of the present article.

This study therefore aims to analyze the effectiveness of implementing the PjBL model in promoting the transformation of students' prosocial behavior from passive bystander to active defender in Class IX J, SMP Negeri 5 Cilacap.

Method

Research Design

This study employed a Classroom Action Research (CAR) design following the (Kemmis, 2014) model, implemented across two cycles: planning → action → observation → reflection. CAR was selected because it enables systematic identification of classroom problems, iterative intervention, and

reflective improvement within authentic educational contexts. Epistemologically, PTK does not claim to demonstrate single-variable causality as in controlled experiments; instead, it constructs a plausibility argument the most credible explanation for observed changes (Kemmis, 2014). To strengthen this argument, the study explicitly identifies five internal validity threats and provides four corresponding causality evidences (discussed in Results).

Participants and Setting

Subjects were 32 students of Class IX J, SMP Negeri 5 Cilacap (14 male, 18 female), identified through baseline observation as exhibiting dominant passive bystander behavior and zero active defender action. Research was conducted in two sessions: Cycle I on 7 January 2026 and Cycle II on 14 January 2026. The researcher served as both teacher and primary observer, with Ibu Khiyarush Adriyani Sholihah, S.Pd., the class homeroom teacher, serving as the collaborative second observer within the triangulation framework.

Instruments and Data Collection

Data were gathered through four specialized instruments. (1) Observation Rubric: This instrument utilized a 4-point Likert scale (1 = Never; 2 = Rarely; 3 = Often; 4 = Consistently) to measure five indicators. For example, the Initiative aspect focused on the student's promptness in disrupting bullying without teacher prompting, while Cooperation measured the equitable distribution of tasks within the project group. (2) Field Notes: These documented qualitative classroom dynamics and spontaneous verbalizations. (3) Semi-structured Interviews: Conducted with the collaborative observer using a guide focusing on perceived barriers and shifts in peer norms. (4) Cognitive Test: A 20-item multiple-choice test based on a specification matrix covering comprehension (C2) and analysis (C4) of prosocial values.

To ensure high reproducibility, the validity of these instruments was established through expert judgment from two faculty members in Civic Education, ensuring alignment with Salmivalli's (2010) framework. Reliability was addressed through inter-rater consistency between the researcher and the collaborative observer. A calibration session was held prior to data collection to synchronize scoring perceptions, ensuring procedural consistency across cycles.

Intervention Procedure

Cycle I implemented six PjBL syntaxes: fundamental questioning → project planning → scheduling → monitoring → product testing (presentation) → reflection. The driving question was grounded in a real bullying scenario drawn from school life, and the project product an Active Defender Decision Flow Map was presented before the whole class. Cycle I reflection identified three critical findings: (1) an Empathy–Initiative gap (79.69% vs. 73.18%) indicating self-efficacy barriers; (2) digital bullying anomaly; and (3) 78.1% of students acknowledged fear of social exclusion as the primary barrier to action. Cycle II applied three revised strategies: (a) individual accountability each group member received a non-transferable specific role to dismantle diffusion of responsibility; (b) role simulation using Cycle I flow maps as mental rehearsal; (c) integrated digital literacy education.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics including mean, percentage, and per-aspect increase (Δ). Qualitative data followed the three-stage (Miles, 2018) model: condensation → display → conclusion drawing. Success indicators were set at $\geq 80\%$ mean prosocial behavior and ≥ 80 mean cognitive score. The CAR cycle framework is illustrated in Figure 1.

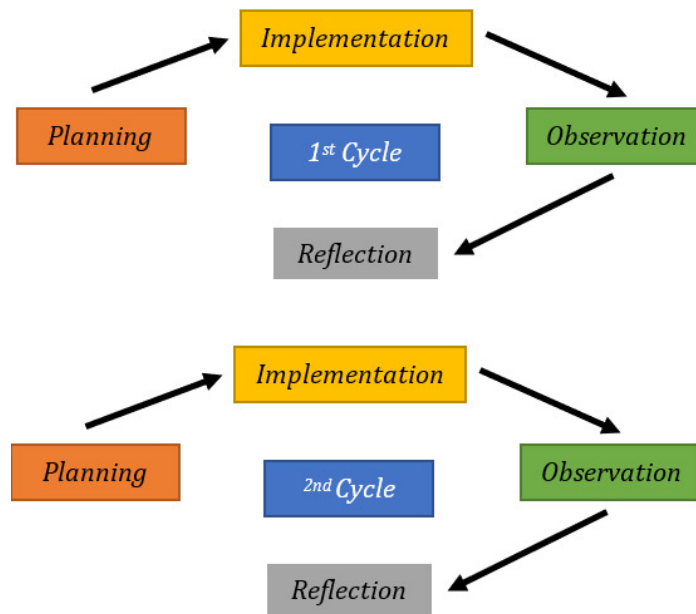


Figure 1. CAR Implementation Flow (Kemmis et al., 2014)

Result and Discussion

Pre-Cycle: Dominance of Passive Bystander Behavior

Pre-cycle observations confirmed a high prevalence of passive bystander behavior in Class IX J. The most significant finding was the absence of active defender behavior (0%): when Afga was subjected to intimidating jeers while performing classroom duties, no student intervened; similarly, when Narendro was mocked by peers, the class responded with either laughter or silence.

These dynamics illustrate the diffusion of responsibility mechanism described by (Latane, 1970). With 32 witnesses present, individuals appeared to assume that others would take responsibility, as reflected in the male students' verbalization "it's already being done by the girls." Through the lens of Bandura A. (2002) moral disengagement, this passivity seemed to be sustained by internal justifications such as "it is not my business." Furthermore, the public jeering toward Afga may have functioned as vicarious punishment Bandura (1986) which potentially suppressed social self-efficacy across the class. Salmivalli C. (2010) Participant Role Approach suggests that the predominant roles were reinforcer and outsider, contributing to a permissive group climate where bullying received implicit peer endorsement.

Cycle I Results: Emerging Awareness and Affective Barriers

PjBL implementation in Cycle I produced a 77% mean prosocial behavior score (below the 80% threshold), with 76.25 mean cognitive score. Table 1 presents per-aspect results.

Table 1. Comparison of mean prosocial behavior scores per aspect: Cycle I vs. Cycle II

Aspect	Theoretical Basis	Cycle I (%)	Cycle II (%)	Increase (Δ)
Cooperation	Carlo & Randall (2002)	65.63	90.62	+24.62
Empathy	Hoffman (2000)	79.69	89.44	+9.44
Responsibility	Latané & Darley (1970)	80.70	89.44	+9.44
Initiative & Leadership	Bandura (1997)	73.18	89.63	+16.63
Defender Action	Salmivalli (2010)	86.20	89.69	+3.69
Overall Mean		77.08	89.74	+12.74

Aspect	Theoretical Basis	Cycle I (%)	Cycle II (%)	Increase (Δ)
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Note. *p* values are reported descriptively based on observer-rated rubric data across 32 students per cycle

Based on the data in Table 1, the implementation of PjBL in Cycle I resulted in an overall prosocial behavior mean of 77.08%, which was still below the 80% success threshold. A significant finding is the discrepancy between Empathy (79.69%) and Initiative & Leadership (73.18%). This gap suggests that while students at SMP Negeri 5 Cilacap possessed the affective capacity to feel for the victims, they lacked the social self-efficacy to transform that empathy into tangible defender action. This outcome confirmed the initial hypothesis that cognitive understanding alone is insufficient to overcome the structural barriers of classroom social norms. This gap confirmed Hoffman’s (2000) empathy inhibition mechanism: students experienced empathic distress upon witnessing bullying, but its conversion into sympathetic distress the motivational force behind prosocial action was blocked by group norm pressure. The most compelling qualitative evidence emerged spontaneously during group monitoring: Arum stated, “If we stay silent, that means we are allowing bullying. What if we report it quietly to the teacher?” This dialogue represents the first instance of sympathetic distress overcoming group norm pressure precisely the transitional moment Hoffman described as most critical for moral development.

A significant anomaly occurred mid-Cycle I: a group of students used mobile devices to create and distribute WhatsApp stickers mocking a peer. The fact that the perpetrators had achieved high cognitive scores (90) yet still engaged in digital bullying empirically verified (Lickona, 1991) argument that moral knowing does not automatically produce moral action, and signaled that Cycle I’s intervention needed reinforcement at the affective and structural not merely cognitive level.

Cycle II Results: Systemic Transformation and Reciprocal Determinism

The Cycle II revisions produced a transformative outcome. Mean prosocial behavior increased to 89.74% (+12.74 points), surpassing the 80% success criterion. Cognitive mean scores rose to 88.75 (+12.50 points).

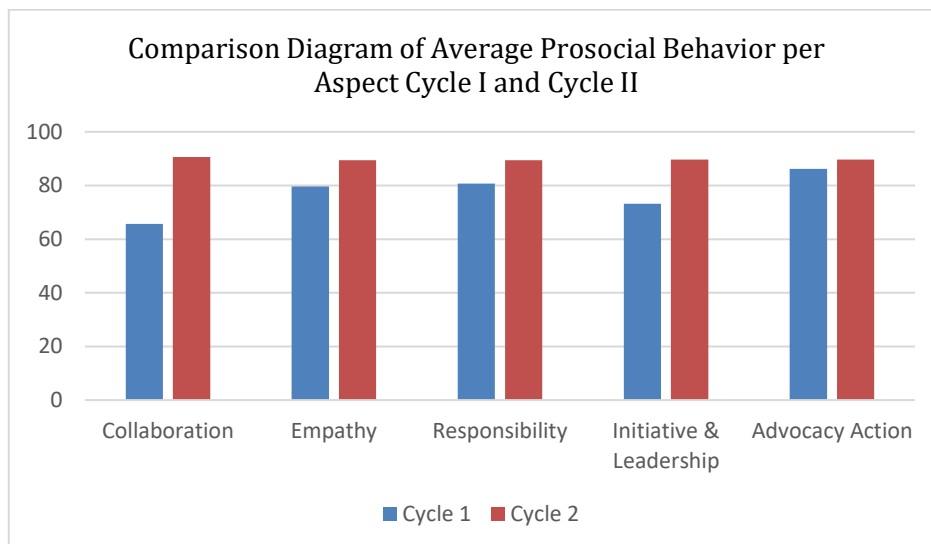


Figure 2. Visualizes the per-aspect comparison across cycles.

Based on Figure 2, it shows a non-uniform pattern of gains across all measured aspects from Cycle I to Cycle II. The most substantial increase occurred in Cooperation (+24.62%), jumping from 65.63 to 90.62. This suggests that the structural modification specifically the introduction of

individual accountability within the PjBL groups was highly effective in dismantling the “diffusion of responsibility.” Meanwhile, Defender Action showed the smallest increase (+3.69%), likely due to a ceiling effect since students were already active in project-based tasks. This data indicates that the transformation from passive bystander to active defender was primarily driven by increased social responsibility and group cohesion.

Table 2. Analysis of Prosocial Behavior Improvement per Aspect

Prosocial Behavior Aspect	Cycle I (%)	Cycle II (%)	Increase (Δ)	Increase Analysis
Cooperation	65.63	90.62	+24.99%*	Highest absolute increase. The individual accountability system disrupted patterns of individual dominance and activated equitable collaboration.
Empathy	79.69	89.44	+9.75%*	Moderate increase. Empathy was already relatively high since Cycle I, but PjBL strengthened its conversion into tangible actions (<i>sympathetic distress</i>).
Responsibility	80.7	89.44	+8.74%*	Moderate increase. Diffusion of responsibility was successfully dismantled through the assignment of specific, non-transferable roles.
Initiative & Leadership	73.18	89.63	+16.45%*	Significant increase. Social self-efficacy was formed through gradual <i>mastery experiences</i> within PjBL role simulations.
Defender Action	86.2	89.69	+3.49%*	Smallest increase. Actions were already high since Cycle I as they measured task participation. The increase reflects the maturation of action quality rather than a rise in basic participation.
Classical Average	77.08	89.74	+12.66%*	

Bandura A., (1986) reciprocal determinism the dynamic triadic interaction between person, behavior, and environment manifested clearly in Cycle II data. The environmental change introduced by individual accountability altered student behavior; behavioral change recalibrated self-efficacy perceptions; elevated self-efficacy then shifted classroom norms further. The most dramatic individual-level evidence: Prasetyo Narendro’s score jumped from 40 (Cycle I) to 100 (Cycle II) inexplicable by mere “better understanding of material,” but coherent as an expression of Krajcik (2014) sense of ownership: when students perceived the project as genuinely theirs and responsibility as non-transferable, intrinsic motivation increased dramatically.

At the classroom ecology level, Salmivalli C. V. (2011) demonstrated that even a small number of consistent active defenders can shift the normative climate of an entire class, because perpetrators lose the implicit endorsement of bystanders. This dynamic manifested in Class IX J: the emergence of Arum and Zulafa as early defenders in Cycle I created a normative precedent sufficient to catalyze the collective surge in Cycle II. The most powerful qualitative marker of this normative shift was the spontaneous, critical question Naura and Olinda brought directly to the researcher: “Sir, if we defend a bullying victim, and then we get bullied back, what should we do?” This question is not mere academic curiosity; it signals that these students now identify themselves as serious prospective defenders reasoning about practical strategy precisely the shift that Pozzoli (2010) identified as the hallmark indicator of successful bystander intervention: students no longer ask “is this wrong?” but “how can I help safely?”

Cognitive Learning Outcomes

Table 3 summarizes cognitive learning outcomes, presenting a cross-cycle comparison including the highest individual gains.

Table 3. Cognitive learning outcomes: Cycle I vs. Cycle II (N = 32)

Metric	Cycle I	Cycle II	Increase (Δ)
Class Mean Score	76.25	88.75	+12.50
% Students Achieving ≥ 80	53.1%	90.6%	+37.5%
Highest Individual Gain	40 (Prasetyo)	100 (Prasetyo)	+60
Score Distribution Range	40 – 100	70 – 100	Narrowed

Note. Score distribution narrowing indicates more equitable learning outcomes across all students, not just high achievers.

The narrowing of score distribution from a 60-point spread (40–100 in Cycle I) to a 30-point spread (70–100 in Cycle II) is particularly significant. This convergence reflects (Kokotsaki, 2016) meta-analytic finding that PjBL’s strongest effects occur for low-achieving students confirmed here by Prasetyo (+60), Raihan (+40: 50→90), and Pedroza (+40: 60→100). When individual accountability is in effect and the project is perceived as personally owned, collaborative peer support naturally extends to weaker members, realizing the equity principle central to PPKn’s educational mission.

Critical Validity Discussion

Following the trustworthiness principles of CAR (Kemmis, 2014), this study explicitly addresses five internal validity threats: (1) testing/carryover effect students who completed Cycle I were familiar with the instrument format; (2) Hawthorne effect awareness of being observed may inflate behavior scores; (3) researcher confirmation bias the teacher-researcher dual role risks unconsciously inflating Cycle II scores; (4) regression to the mean statistically, very low Cycle I scorers are expected to score higher in subsequent measurements; (5) history effect external events between January 7 and 14 could influence attitude changes.

Four evidences support the causal attribution to the PjBL intervention: (a) Specificity of gain pattern if improvements were due to testing effect or Hawthorne effect, all aspects should have improved uniformly; the uneven pattern (Cooperation +24.62% vs. Defender Action +3.69%) precisely matches theoretical predictions made before Cycle II was conducted; (b) Pradeep’s score decrease (90→70) the only student with a negative trajectory demonstrates that the researcher did not inflate all Cycle II scores, ruling out confirmation bias; (c) Spontaneous critical questioning by Naura and Olinda an authentic expression of cognitive struggle with defender identity that cannot be attributed to social desirability; (d) Cross-source triangulation consistency improvements in observation rubric, field notes, and cognitive test converge across three independent instruments with different bias structures. Table 4 summarizes this validity framework.

Table 4. Internal validity threats and corresponding causality evidences

Validity Threat	Causality Evidence	Assessment
Testing / carryover effect	Gain pattern is non-uniform; uniform inflation expected if testing effect dominated	Mitigated
Hawthorne effect	Naura & Olinda’s spontaneous, critical, unsolicited questioning reflects authentic cognitive engagement	Mitigated
Researcher confirmation bias	Pradeep’s score decreased 90→70; researcher did not inflate all Cycle II scores	Mitigated

Regression to the mean	High-scorers (Shalom, Fayyaz) also improved, not only low-scorers; pattern not exclusive to regression	Partially mitigated
History effect	Cannot be fully controlled; acknowledged as irreducible limitation of two-week CAR window	Acknowledged

Note. Assessment scale: Mitigated = evidence significantly reduces the threat; Partially mitigated = evidence is present but incomplete; Acknowledged = threat remains unresolved.

Implications for Civic Education Theory and Practice

The findings of this study offer three primary implications for the development of Civic Education (PPKn) pedagogy. First, this research provides empirical evidence for the formation of “justice-oriented citizens.” While the concept of a citizen who actively intervenes against injustice is a central goal in PPKn literature Westheimer (2004), it has often remained a theoretical aspiration. By documenting the transformation of students into active defenders, this study demonstrates that prosocial dispositions can be systematically cultivated through classroom-level interventions that target cognitive, affective, and structural barriers simultaneously.

Second, the study highlights the importance of “authentic civic practice” in character building. As Bandura (1997) argued, civic dispositions cannot be instilled through verbal instruction alone. The PjBL model used here, which involved real-world bullying scenarios and the creation of an Active Defender Decision Flow Map, allowed students to move beyond the declarative knowledge that “bullying is wrong” toward the dispositional commitment of “here is how I will act.” This suggests that PPKn instruction should prioritize learning environments where students can safely rehearse moral actions in the face of social risks.

Third, the “diagnostic-prescriptive logic” emerging from this data suggests a shift in how PPKn practitioners should approach character education. The finding that different PjBL elements such as individual accountability specifically targeted different psychological barriers like “diffusion of responsibility” allows teachers to be more precise in their interventions. Instead of applying general methods, educators can diagnose whether students lack empathy, self-efficacy, or are hindered by structural norms, and then select the specific pedagogical lever most likely to catalyze change.

Discussion

The results of this study provide compelling evidence that Project-Based Learning (PjBL) can effectively transform students’ prosocial behavior, specifically from passive bystanders to active defenders in the context of bullying in Indonesian secondary schools. The study revealed a significant improvement in students’ prosocial behaviors, with the mean score increasing from 77.08% in Cycle I to 89.74% in Cycle II. This 12.66% increase was not uniform across all aspects; the most prominent gains were observed in cooperation (+24.62%) and initiative & leadership (+16.63%), which highlights the effectiveness of PjBL in fostering collaboration and self-efficacy among students. The smallest gain was observed in defender action (+3.69%), indicating that while the intervention was effective in promoting active defense, there are challenges that remain in fully transforming passive bystanders into active defenders.

In terms of cognitive learning, students’ mean score increased from 76.25 to 88.75, further reflecting the positive influence of PjBL on both prosocial behavior and academic performance. This was particularly evident in the narrowing of the cognitive score distribution, which indicates that the intervention helped achieve more equitable learning outcomes across all students. These findings underscore the potential of PjBL as a comprehensive pedagogical strategy that not only improves students’ academic knowledge but also enhances their moral development and social responsibility.

Globally, numerous studies have explored the effectiveness of Project-Based Learning (PjBL) in enhancing various aspects of student behavior, including prosocial behaviors such as empathy, cooperation, and responsibility. Several studies have confirmed the utility of PjBL in improving prosocial behavior by fostering a child-friendly social environment that reduces conduct problems and encourages positive social interactions among students (Ng et al., 2024; Yang et al., 2025; Ye et al., 2025). This aligns with the findings of the current study, where the PjBL model successfully improved students' cooperation, empathy, and responsibility.

However, while there are similarities in the findings, this study diverges from other research, particularly in its focus on defender behavior. A study by Salmivalli (2010) highlighted that the majority of bystanders remain passive, even when they have the cognitive knowledge of bullying being wrong. Our study expands on this by showing that, through PjBL, students' moral knowing can be translated into moral action, demonstrating that a structured learning environment can help overcome barriers such as moral disengagement and low social self-efficacy (Bandura, 1986, 1997).

Additionally, research by Mansoor et al. (2025), Pozzoli (2010), and Rahmania (2024) emphasized the role of personal characteristics and perceived peer pressure in shaping active defending behavior. In contrast, this study found that the introduction of individual accountability within the PjBL model effectively dismantled the diffusion of responsibility and created an environment where students felt more empowered to take action. This suggests that the unique structure of PjBL, which emphasizes task ownership and collective responsibility, may be particularly effective in fostering defender behavior in bullying situations.

In the context of Indonesia, the findings of this study align closely with local research on the role of character education in fostering prosocial behaviors. A study by Wardani (2023) demonstrated the effectiveness of PjBL in enhancing students' social responsibility and cooperative behaviors. Similarly, the current study found significant improvements in cooperation and initiative, indicating that PjBL is an effective strategy for cultivating these values within Indonesian schools. Moreover, the improvement in empathy and responsibility in Cycle II echoes the results of research by Salmivalli (2010), which emphasized the importance of classroom norms and peer influence in shaping prosocial behavior.

However, this study also contributes new insights to the existing body of Indonesian research by focusing specifically on the transformation of passive bystanders into active defenders. While previous studies have examined the role of PjBL in enhancing general prosocial behavior (Blaisdell et al., 2024; Jayanti et al., 2025; Wardani, 2023), few have explicitly targeted bullying intervention through structured educational interventions. This research, therefore, provides a unique contribution to Indonesian education by offering a concrete model for fostering defender behavior in bullying situations.

This study extends the application of Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) and the Participant Role Approach Salmivalli (2010) in the context of bullying prevention in educational settings. Bandura's (1986) concept of reciprocal determinism was particularly evident in the transformation of students' behavior, where changes in the classroom environment led to alterations in students' actions and, in turn, reshaped their self-efficacy beliefs. These findings suggest that SCT can be a powerful lens through which to understand and address the barriers to intervention in bullying situations, particularly the role of moral disengagement and social self-efficacy.

Furthermore, this study supports the Participant Role Approach by demonstrating how students can transition from passive bystanders to active defenders when provided with opportunities to rehearse moral action in a safe, supportive environment (Campbell et al., 2023; Wu et al., 2023). The introduction of role simulations and individual accountability within the PjBL framework created a learning space where students could practice defending victims of bullying, reinforcing the idea that active defense can be cultivated through structured educational experiences.

This study provides valuable insights into how Project-Based Learning (PjBL) can enhance students' prosocial behavior (Ramadhan & Agustiar, 2026; Shvets et al., 2024). By integrating real-world problems, such as bullying scenarios, PjBL helps students move from understanding bullying to actively intervening in such situations. The findings emphasize the importance of addressing both cognitive and affective barriers to prosocial behavior. While students may know bullying is wrong, they often lack the confidence to intervene. PjBL addresses these issues by promoting empathy, providing opportunities for students to practice moral action, and empowering them to become active defenders in bullying situations.

Policy implications of this study suggest that schools should implement PjBL as a strategy for character education, fostering social self-efficacy and empathy in students. Policies should also create environments where students are individually accountable, reducing the diffusion of responsibility in bullying contexts. Educators should receive training on promoting empathy and guiding students in safe intervention strategies. A multi-level, comprehensive approach to bullying prevention that incorporates both cognitive and affective elements will be key to addressing the underlying issues of bullying behavior.

The novelty of this research lies in applying PjBL to the specific challenge of transforming passive bystanders into active defenders in bullying situations. This study offers a new intervention model that not only addresses academic achievement but also moral and prosocial development. Integrating Social Cognitive Theory and the Participant Role Approach, the study provides a theoretical framework for understanding bystander behavior and suggests ways to design effective interventions. Despite the promising results, limitations such as the short duration of the study and the focus on verbal bullying point to the need for further research across diverse contexts and long-term studies. Future research should also explore other variables like peer relationships and teacher-student interactions that might influence the effectiveness of PjBL.

Conclusion

This study confirms that a Project-Based Learning (PjBL) model, specifically designed to address psychological and structural barriers through individual accountability and role simulation, effectively facilitates the transformation of students from passive bystanders to active defenders. The results show a significant improvement in prosocial behavior, with the mean score rising from 77.08% to 89.74%, and a notable narrowing of the achievement gap among students. Beyond the numerical gains, the most profound outcome is the shift in student disposition moving from mere "moral knowing" to "moral action" as evidenced by their spontaneous strategic reasoning on how to intervene safely in bullying situations.

From a Civic Education perspective, these findings empirically ground the aspiration of forming justice-oriented citizens within the Indonesian PPKn curriculum. It demonstrates that when pedagogical interventions are mechanism-specific, targeting the "diffusion of responsibility" and

enhancing “social self-efficacy” simultaneously, the classroom can evolve into a proactive prosocial ecosystem. However, due to the two-week timeframe of this Classroom Action Research, the long-term persistence of these behaviors remains to be tested. Future research should utilize longitudinal designs across more diverse school contexts and develop psychometrically validated instruments to further refine the measurement of active defender behavior.

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