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## A Collaborative Islamic Education Learning Model Based on Local Culture to Strengthen Students' Social Character in Madrasah

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### ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze the collaborative Islamic education learning model based on local culture in strengthening the social character of students in Madrasah Aliyah Negeri 2 Gorontalo Regency. This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach with data collection techniques in the form of observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation. The data were analyzed using the Miles and Huberman interactive model through the stages of data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawn. The results of the study show that collaborative learning based on local culture is applied through group discussions, social projects, and reflection on Islamic values that are integrated with the local culture of Gorontalo, especially the value of huyula which emphasizes cooperation, empathy, and responsibility. This model contributes to increasing student learning participation while strengthening social character, such as tolerance, solidarity, and social concern. The strengthening is supported by the culture of mutual cooperation and madrasah leadership in creating a conducive learning environment. This study confirms that the collaborative Islamic Education learning model based on local culture is effective in integrating cognitive, affective, social, and spiritual aspects to shape the social character of students in madrasah.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Islamic Religious Education occupies a strategic position within the national education system because it serves not only as a medium for transmitting religious knowledge but also as an educational process that shapes students' faith, morality, social responsibility, and ethical awareness. In the context of Islamic education, learning should not be limited to the mastery of normative doctrines, ritual practices, or textual understanding of religious teachings. Rather, it should be directed toward the holistic formation of students' personalities by integrating spiritual, intellectual, moral, emotional, and social dimensions. Islamic Religious Education is therefore expected to produce students who are not only cognitively knowledgeable about Islam, but also capable of internalizing Islamic values and translating them into concrete actions in their daily lives. In a plural and multicultural Indonesian society, Islamic Religious Education plays an important role in developing Muslim generations who are individually pious and socially responsible. This means that Islamic education should nurture students who can participate constructively in social life, respect diversity, demonstrate empathy, and contribute to the common good. As Azra (2019) argues, Islamic education has a strategic role in connecting religious values with the broader social realities faced by Muslim communities in Indonesia (Azra, 2019).

However, rapid social transformation has created new challenges for the world of education, including madrasahs as Islamic educational institutions. Globalization, the advancement of digital technology, the acceleration of information flows, and the changing patterns of intergenerational social relations have significantly influenced the ways students interact, learn, communicate, and develop social sensitivity. Contemporary students grow up in a digital environment that is highly dynamic, instant, and increasingly individualized. They are accustomed to virtual communication and digital interaction, yet at the same time often experience a weakening of direct social engagement, empathy, cooperation, and communal responsibility. This condition has contributed to the emergence of educational concerns such as increasing individualism, declining social solidarity, weakening mutual assistance, and reduced sensitivity toward the problems of others. These phenomena indicate that education has not fully succeeded in deeply internalizing social and human values in students' character. Zubaedi (2015) emphasizes that character education cannot merely rely on the transmission of moral knowledge but must be strengthened through experience, habituation, exemplary practices, and students' active involvement in social life. Therefore, Islamic Religious Education should no longer be understood simply as the transfer of religious knowledge, but as a transformative educational process that enables students to embody Islamic values in real-world social practices (Zubaedi, 2015).

Madrasahs, as educational institutions with Islamic characteristics, actually have great potential to respond to these challenges. On the one hand, madrasahs possess a strong religious foundation because Islamic values serve as the spirit of their educational process. On the other hand, madrasahs are also rooted in specific social and cultural contexts that can serve as meaningful learning resources for students. Nevertheless, the reality of classroom learning still shows a gap between the ideal objectives of Islamic Religious Education and the pedagogical practices implemented in schools. In several madrasahs, including MAN 2 Gorontalo Regency, Islamic Religious Education learning still tends to be dominated by teacher-centered approaches.

Learning activities are frequently conducted through lectures, one-way explanations, memorization, note-taking, and individual assignments. Meanwhile, opportunities for students to engage in dialogue, discussion, collaboration, collective problem-solving, and reflection on socio-cultural realities remain relatively limited. As a result, Islamic learning materials often remain at the conceptual level and are not sufficiently connected to the concrete social experiences of students. In fact, Islamic values such as *ukhuwah*, *ta'āwun*, trustworthiness, empathy, tolerance, and social responsibility should not only be understood as abstract concepts, but also experienced, practiced, and strengthened through the learning process. Nata (2018) asserts that Islamic education should be oriented toward forming human beings who are able to actualize religious values in real life, rather than merely understanding religion as normative knowledge (Nata, 2018).

The limitations of teacher-centered learning indicate the need for a learning model that positions students as active subjects in constructing their understanding and learning experiences. Students need to be given adequate space to build knowledge through social interaction, dialogue, cooperation, shared reflection, and engagement with problems that are close to their everyday lives. One relevant approach to address this need is a collaborative Islamic Religious Education learning model based on local culture. This model is grounded in the view that knowledge is not formed solely through the transfer of information from teachers to students, but also through social interaction, exchange of experiences, group cooperation, and students' closeness to the cultural values of their community. In collaborative learning, students are not treated as passive recipients of knowledge, but as active learners who support one another, share responsibilities, and contribute to the success of collective learning. Johnson and Johnson (2018) explain that collaborative learning can improve academic understanding while also developing social skills, communication, responsibility, and the ability to work effectively in groups. In the context of Islamic Religious Education, collaborative learning is highly relevant because the values embedded in this approach are closely aligned with Islamic principles of togetherness, mutual assistance, brotherhood, and social care (Johnson & Johnson, 2018).

From an Islamic perspective, collaborative learning has a strong normative and spiritual foundation. The principle of *ta'āwun 'alā al-birr wa al-taqwā* in QS. al-Mā'idah [5]: 2 emphasizes the importance of cooperation in goodness and piety. This verse shows that Islam not only encourages individual righteousness but also promotes collective efforts in building virtue and social welfare. In addition, the Prophet Muhammad's hadith describing the relationship among believers as a building whose parts strengthen one another highlights the importance of solidarity, mutual support, and shared responsibility within the Muslim community. Thus, collaborative learning in Islamic Religious Education is not merely a methodological choice to make classroom learning more active, but also an educational actualization of Islamic values. Habib Maulana (2022) states that learning processes that cultivate cooperation, care, and social responsibility are part of the effort to bring the value of *ukhuwah* into the educational space. Therefore, when students are involved in group discussions, collaborative problem-solving, collective reflection, and social activities based on Islamic values, they are not only learning about religion but also learning to live religion in a concrete and meaningful way.

The implementation of a collaborative Islamic Religious Education learning model based on local culture is highly relevant to the need to strengthen students' social character in madrasahs. Social character cannot be developed merely through advice, moral instruction, or

theoretical explanation about the importance of helping others. It must be cultivated through learning experiences that allow students to listen to others' opinions, respect differences, build mutual understanding, solve conflicts politely, cooperate in groups, and take responsibility for shared tasks. Through collaborative learning, students have the opportunity to directly experience the values taught in Islamic Religious Education. They learn that *ukhuwah* is not only a normative concept of brotherhood, but also a practical ability to care, cooperate, support others, and contribute to collective well-being. They also learn that tolerance is not only about accepting differences but also about managing them fairly, respectfully, and through communication. In this sense, the Islamic Religious Education classroom can function as a concrete, dialogical, and contextual space for developing *ukhuwah insāniyyah*, or human brotherhood, among students.

In the context of Gorontalo, the urgency of developing a collaborative Islamic Religious Education learning model grounded in local culture is even stronger, as the region has a cultural value, *huyula*, that is highly compatible with Islamic social ethics. *Huyula* refers to the local wisdom of the Gorontalo community, reflecting the spirit of mutual cooperation, collective work, mutual assistance, and togetherness for the common good. This value aligns with Islamic teachings on *ta'āwun*, *ukhuwah*, and *maslahah*. Integrating *Huyula* into the design of Islamic Religious Education can make the learning process more contextual, closer to students' lived experiences, and more relevant to the cultural character of the local community. Through this integration, students not only learn Islamic teachings textually, but also understand that Islamic values can be found and practiced within the noble traditions of their own society. In this way, Islamic Religious Education serves not only as a means of transmitting religious teachings but also as a vehicle for strengthening socio-religious identity rooted in local culture. The integration of Islamic values and local wisdom also helps students understand that being a good Muslim does not require them to detach from their cultural roots, as long as the culture contains values of goodness consistent with Islamic teachings.

In addition to its socio-cultural relevance, the development of a collaborative Islamic Religious Education learning model based on local culture is also aligned with the direction of national education policy. The Independent Curriculum emphasizes student-centered learning, differentiated instruction, meaningful learning experiences, and character-strengthening through active, contextual learning processes. Within this framework, collaborative learning is of potential strategy for realizing the profile of Pancasila students, especially in the dimensions of faith and devotion to God Almighty, noble character, mutual cooperation, global diversity, critical reasoning, and independence. Kemdikbud (2022) affirms that learning should be designed not only to help students master subject matter, but also to develop character and life competencies needed in the future. Therefore, the collaborative Islamic Religious Education learning model based on local culture has pedagogical, normative, and policy legitimacy. It responds not only to the need for more active and meaningful Islamic Religious Education learning, but also to the national agenda of strengthening students' character through contextual and experience-based education.

Previous studies have shown that collaborative learning contributes positively to the formation of students' social character, particularly when learning activities are connected to social realities and local cultural values. Learning that links academic activities with students' real-life experiences has been shown to foster responsibility, solidarity, care for others, and active participation in social life. Suharto (2020) explains that contextual and experience-based learning

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can strengthen value internalization because students do not merely receive information, but also experience the process of value formation directly. However, the implementation of collaborative learning in schools still faces several obstacles. Many teachers have understood the importance of active learning and group work at the theoretical level, but they do not yet have an adequate operational design to implement it effectively in local culture-based Islamic Religious Education. Consequently, collaborative activities are often reduced to ordinary group assignments without clear interaction structures, without conscious integration of local cultural values, and without measurable orientation toward the formation of students' social character. This condition shows the urgent need to develop a learning model that is not only conceptual, but also practical, systematic, and suitable for the needs of madrasahs.

Based on the above discussion, the development of a collaborative Islamic Religious Education learning model based on local culture is important because it can bridge the gap between the normative goals of Islamic Religious Education, the cultural character of society, and classroom learning practices. This model is needed to present a learning process that is more participatory, dialogical, contextual, and transformative. Through this model, students are expected not only to understand Islamic teachings at the cognitive level, but also to internalize and practice Islamic social values in shared life. Madrasahs as Islamic educational institutions can therefore perform their role more optimally as institutions that form religious, intelligent, moral, and socially responsible individuals. In the context of MAN 2 Gorontalo Regency, the development of this model is particularly relevant because the madrasah exists within a community that has the local cultural wealth of *huyula*, which is in harmony with Islamic values. Therefore, collaborative Islamic Religious Education learning based on local culture can become an important strategy for strengthening students' social character while preserving the noble values of the Gorontalo community.

Conceptually, collaborative Islamic Religious Education learning based on local culture is not merely an innovation in teaching strategy, but also a pedagogical movement to revive the essence of Islamic education as a process of *ta'dib*, namely the formation of civilized human beings. Islamic education should not stop at the mastery of learning materials, but should lead to the formation of manners, moral sensitivity, social responsibility, and the ability to live together with dignity. Through dialogical, egalitarian, cooperative learning processes that are closely connected to the cultural values of society, students can experience a more meaningful educational process. Values such as *ukhuwah*, empathy, tolerance, responsibility, mutual cooperation, and social care can grow more concretely because students do not only listen to the teacher's explanation, but also participate in learning experiences that reflect those values. Thus, research on the development of a collaborative Islamic Religious Education learning model based on local culture to strengthen students' social character in madrasahs has both theoretical and practical significance. Theoretically, this study can enrich the discourse on Islamic Religious Education learning innovation based on local wisdom. In practice, it can provide an alternative learning model for Islamic Religious Education teachers to design more active, contextual, and student-oriented learning processes focused on students' social character formation.

Therefore, this study aims to develop a collaborative Islamic Religious Education learning model grounded in local culture to strengthen students' social character in madrasahs, particularly at MAN 2 Gorontalo Regency. This objective is important because strengthening students' social character cannot rely solely on instructional or verbal approaches. It requires a learning design

that connects Islamic values, students' social experiences, and the local wisdom of the community. By integrating the principles of collaboration, Islamic Religious Education values, and the local culture of Huyula, this study is expected to produce a learning model that is academically relevant, practically applicable for teachers, and meaningful for students. The model is expected to strengthen the function of Islamic Religious Education as a medium for forming students who are faithful, morally upright, caring, tolerant, responsible, and capable of living together in the spirit of mutual cooperation and social solidarity.

## 2. METHODS

This research was conducted at Madrasah Aliyah Negeri (MAN) 2 Gorontalo Regency, a madrasah selected because of its relevance to the focus of the study's focus: the implementation of a collaborative Islamic Religious Education learning model based on local culture to strengthen students' social character. MAN 2 Gorontalo Regency is considered an appropriate research site because it is an Islamic educational institution operating within the socio-cultural context of Gorontalo society. This context is important because the study not only examines Islamic Religious Education as a classroom subject, but also explores how local cultural values, particularly the value of huyula as a form of mutual cooperation and collective responsibility, can be integrated into the learning process. Therefore, the selection of this research location was based on the consideration that the madrasah provides a relevant setting for understanding the relationship between Islamic education, collaborative learning practices, local wisdom, and the formation of students' social character (Moleong, 2021).

This study employed a descriptive qualitative approach. This approach was chosen because the research aimed to understand, describe, and interpret the implementation of the collaborative Islamic Religious Education learning model, grounded in local culture, in a natural educational setting. A qualitative approach is appropriate for this study because the main focus of the research is not to measure variables statistically, but to explore learning processes, teacher strategies, student experiences, classroom interactions, and the meanings constructed by participants during the learning activities. Through this approach, the researcher sought to gain an in-depth understanding of how collaborative learning was planned, implemented, and experienced by teachers and students, particularly regarding the integration of local Gorontalo cultural values into Islamic Religious Education. As Moleong (2016) explains, qualitative research seeks to understand phenomena experienced by research subjects holistically by using descriptions in the form of words and language within a natural context. In line with this, Sugiyono (2023) emphasizes that qualitative research enables researchers to explore social realities, meanings, and experiences from the perspective of the participants involved in the research setting.

The descriptive nature of this study means that the research findings are presented in the form of systematic, factual, and contextual descriptions of the learning process. The study focuses on describing how teachers implement collaborative learning strategies, how students participate in group-based learning activities, how local cultural values are introduced and connected to Islamic teachings, and how these processes contribute to the strengthening of students' social character. The social character referred to in this study includes students' ability to cooperate, respect others, show empathy, take responsibility, demonstrate tolerance, and develop social awareness in the classroom and school environment. Thus, the descriptive qualitative approach

allows the researcher to capture the complexity of the learning process more comprehensively, including verbal interactions, classroom dynamics, teacher-student relationships, and the cultural meanings embedded in learning activities (Miles et al., 2020).

Data in this study were collected through observation, interviews, and documentation. These three techniques were used to obtain comprehensive and complementary data on the implementation of the collaborative Islamic Religious Education learning model grounded in local culture. An observation was conducted to directly examine the learning process in the classroom, particularly how collaborative activities were organized, how students interacted with one another, how teachers facilitated group learning, and how local Gorontalo cultural values were integrated into Islamic Religious Education materials. Through observation, the researcher captured real classroom situations, including students' participation, communication patterns, cooperation, responses to learning tasks, and expressions of social character during the learning process. This technique was important because some aspects of students' social character, such as mutual assistance, responsibility, empathy, and respect for others, can be more accurately understood through direct observation of their behavior in learning activities.

Interviews were conducted with Islamic Religious Education teachers and students to explore their perceptions, experiences, and reflections on the implementation of the collaborative learning model. Interviews with teachers were intended to obtain information about the planning of learning activities, the reasons for using collaborative strategies, the integration of local cultural values, the challenges encountered during implementation, and the perceived impact of the model on students' social character. Meanwhile, interviews with students were conducted to understand their learning experiences, their responses to collaborative activities, their understanding of local cultural values, and the ways in which the learning process influenced their attitudes toward cooperation, tolerance, responsibility, and social care. Through interviews, the researcher was able to obtain deeper insights that could not be fully captured through observation alone. The interview data also helped reveal the subjective meanings and interpretations given by teachers and students to the learning process.

Documentation was used to strengthen and complement the data obtained from observation and interviews. The documents analyzed in this study included lesson plans, teaching materials, student assignments, photographs of learning activities, school documents, and other relevant physical or online records related to the implementation of Islamic Religious Education learning. Documentation was important because it provided supporting evidence regarding the design and implementation of learning activities. It also helped the researcher verify whether the values and strategies described by teachers during interviews were reflected in the actual learning documents and classroom practices. By using documentation, the researcher was able to obtain a more complete picture of how collaborative learning based on local culture was designed, implemented, and evaluated in the context of Islamic Religious Education at MAN 2 Gorontalo Regency.

The use of observation, interviews, and documentation also served as a form of data triangulation. Triangulation was applied to increase the credibility of the research findings by comparing and confirming data obtained from different sources and techniques. For example, the researcher compared the results of classroom observations with teacher interviews and learning documents to determine whether the implementation of collaborative learning was consistent with the planned instructional design. Similarly, students' interview responses were compared with their observed behavior during learning activities to understand the relationship between their

stated experiences and actual participation in the classroom. Through this process, the researcher attempted to ensure that the findings were not based on a single source of data, but were supported by various forms of evidence.

The data analysis technique in this study was carried out through three stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. Data reduction was conducted by selecting, focusing, simplifying, and organizing data obtained from observations, interviews, and documentation. At this stage, the researcher identified data that were relevant to the research focus, particularly data related to collaborative learning practices, integration of local cultural values, teacher facilitation, student participation, and the strengthening of social character. Irrelevant or repetitive data were reduced, while important data were categorized according to emerging themes. Data display was then carried out by presenting the reduced data in the form of narrative descriptions, thematic categories, and systematic explanations. This stage helped the researcher understand patterns, relationships, and meanings within the data. Finally, conclusion drawing was conducted by interpreting the displayed data and formulating findings related to the implementation of the collaborative Islamic Religious Education learning model based on local culture. This analytical process follows the stages of qualitative data analysis as described by Sugiyono (2023), namely data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions.

Through this methodological design, the study seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of how collaborative Islamic Religious Education learning based on local culture is implemented in the classroom and how it contributes to strengthening students' social character. The combination of qualitative approach, natural research setting, multiple data collection techniques, and systematic data analysis enables the researcher to explore not only what happens in the learning process, but also how and why the learning model becomes meaningful for teachers and students. Therefore, this method is considered appropriate for achieving the purpose of the study, namely to describe and understand the implementation of a collaborative Islamic Religious Education learning model based on Gorontalo local culture in strengthening the social character of students at MAN 2 Gorontalo Regency.

### **3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

#### **3.1. Results**

This study was conducted to examine the implementation of a collaborative Islamic Religious Education learning model based on local culture at Madrasah Aliyah Negeri 2 Gorontalo Regency and to understand the extent to which this model contributes to strengthening students' social character. Based on the results of classroom observations, interviews with the head of the madrasah, Islamic Religious Education teachers, and students, as well as the analysis of learning documents and school activity records, it was found that collaborative Islamic Religious Education learning based on local culture has been implemented as a pedagogical effort to connect Islamic values with students' social experiences. The findings show that the learning model functions not only as a classroom strategy but also as a medium for internalizing religious values, strengthening social awareness, and cultivating student character through interaction, cooperation, reflection, and contextual engagement with local cultural values.

In general, MAN 2 Gorontalo Regency demonstrates a strong institutional commitment to the development of religious, moral, and social values. The school culture is shaped by Islamic

norms, local wisdom, mutual cooperation, tolerance, and the habituation of positive social interaction among students. This institutional environment is conducive to the implementation of collaborative learning because students are already familiar with values such as togetherness, respect, mutual assistance, and social responsibility. The head of the madrasah explained that the school encourages teachers, especially Islamic Religious Education teachers, to design learning activities that do not stop at the transmission of religious knowledge, but also lead students to practice Islamic values in real life. This institutional direction is important because the success of collaborative learning is determined not only by classroom techniques but also by the extent to which the school environment supports the formation of social character.

In an interview, Yon Gani, the head of the madrasah, stated:

“We strive so that learning in madrasahs does not stop at theory. Students must learn how to be religious and social persons. Collaborative learning is one of the approaches that we consider to be in line with Islamic values and Gorontalo culture.”

This statement indicates that the madrasah views Islamic Religious Education as a transformative learning process. Religious education is not only understood as a subject that teaches doctrinal knowledge, but also as a means of forming students who are able to live religious values in their relationships with others. The emphasis on being both “religious and social” shows that the madrasah seeks to integrate individual piety and social piety. In this context, collaborative learning is considered relevant because it provides students with opportunities to interact, cooperate, communicate, and solve problems together. These processes are closely related to Islamic values such as *ukhuwah*, *ta’āwun*, empathy, tolerance, and responsibility.

The findings also show that Islamic Religious Education teachers at MAN 2 Gorontalo Regency implement collaborative learning through various learning activities, including group discussions, case studies, collective reflection, social projects, and presentations. In classroom practice, learning usually begins with the teacher introducing the main theme of the lesson, such as *ukhuwah* in Islam, mutual assistance in goodness, social responsibility from the perspective of hadith, tolerance, or moral responsibility toward others. After explaining the basic concept, the teacher connects Islamic teachings to the social realities experienced by students and to the local cultural values of Gorontalo, particularly the values of togetherness and mutual cooperation. This process helps students understand that Islamic teachings are not separate from their social and cultural environment but can be practiced through local values already familiar in their daily lives.

The classroom observations revealed that teachers divided students into small heterogeneous groups. The heterogeneity of the groups was intended to allow students with different abilities, personalities, and levels of confidence to learn from one another. In each group, students were asked to read relevant verses of the Qur’an or hadith, discuss their meanings, relate them to social phenomena around them, and formulate collective reflections. The results of the discussions were then presented in front of the class. This learning pattern encouraged students to move from passive reception of material to active participation in constructing meaning. Students were asked not only to understand religious texts but also to interpret their relevance to everyday social life. Through this process, Islamic Religious Education became more contextual and meaningful for students.

During the collaborative learning process, the teacher’s role shifted from being the dominant source of knowledge to becoming a facilitator, guide, and moderator of learning.

Teachers did not dominate the discussion, but directed students to remain focused on Islamic values, respect differences of opinion, and build arguments responsibly. This facilitative role was important because collaborative learning requires students to develop autonomy while still being guided by clear moral and religious frameworks. Based on the observations, the classroom atmosphere became more active and dialogical. Students who previously tended to be quiet began to participate in discussions, express their opinions, respond to their peers' ideas, and present group findings. This indicates that collaborative learning can foster a safer, more participatory learning environment, especially for students who need social encouragement to build confidence.

One Islamic Religious Education teacher, Herman, explained:

“The collaborative approach makes the classroom more lively. Students are no longer just listening, but exchanging ideas. They learn about how Islam teaches cooperation, not just reading verses, but living them.”

This statement highlights an important finding of the study: collaborative learning helps transform Islamic values from textual knowledge into lived experience. Students do not only read or memorize verses and hadith related to cooperation, brotherhood, and social responsibility; they also practice these values directly through group interaction. In other words, the learning process becomes a form of value internalization. Islamic teachings about cooperation are not treated merely as learning content, but are embodied in the way students communicate, share tasks, help one another, and complete collective assignments.

Another teacher, Karlina, added:

*“In group work, children learn that everyone has different roles and abilities. They begin to help each other and not stand out. From this comes a sense of empathy and togetherness.”*

This statement shows that collaborative learning also helps students recognize the diversity of abilities among their peers. In group work, students learn that not everyone has the same strengths. Some students may be good at speaking, others at writing, organizing ideas, reading religious texts, or providing examples from everyday life. The division of roles within the group allows students to appreciate differences and understand that collective success depends on the contribution of each member. This process strengthens empathy because students are trained to understand the condition of their peers, provide assistance when needed, and avoid selfish attitudes in learning.

The observation results support these interview findings. In several learning sessions, each group showed diverse patterns of participation. Some students acted as discussion moderators, others became note-takers, presenters, timekeepers, or respondents to questions from other groups. This distribution of roles encouraged students to take responsibility according to their assigned tasks. It also reduced the domination of certain students because each member had a specific responsibility in the group. Students who were initially reluctant to speak gradually became more confident because they were given structured roles and support from their peers. This finding indicates that collaborative learning can strengthen students' confidence, communication skills, responsibility, and willingness to participate in collective learning activities.

In one oral reflection recorded after the learning activity, a student stated:

*“Group study makes me understand better because I can hear the opinions of my friends. It turns out that there are many ways to understand Islam. I have also become more patient in listening.”*

This student’s reflection illustrates that collaborative learning contributes not only to cognitive understanding, but also to the development of social and emotional qualities. The student’s statement indicates the emergence of patience, openness, and respect for different perspectives. By listening to the opinions of peers, students learn that understanding Islamic teachings can be enriched through dialogue and shared reflection. This is important because social character is formed not only through moral instruction, but also through repeated experiences of listening, negotiating meaning, respecting differences, and building common understanding.

The integration of Gorontalo local cultural values, particularly the value of huyula, also emerged as an important element in the implementation of the learning model. Huyula, which reflects the spirit of mutual cooperation, collective work, and shared responsibility, served as a cultural bridge for teachers to explain Islamic values such as ta’āwun and ukhuwah. Teachers connected the concept of helping one another in Islam with the local practice of working together for the common good. This integration made learning more contextual because students could understand Islamic values through cultural examples that were close to their lives. The findings show that when Islamic teachings are connected with local cultural values, students find it easier to understand, internalize, and practice them in social interaction.

In addition to classroom learning, the spirit of collaboration was also reflected in activities outside formal learning. Based on documentation and field observations, several student groups initiated social activities after participating in collaborative Islamic Religious Education learning. These activities included collecting donations for orphans, cleaning mosques around the school, helping peers who had learning difficulties, and organizing light religious discussions among students. These activities were not merely school assignments, but emerged from students’ awareness after discussing themes such as ukhuwah insāniyyah, amar ma’rūf nahi munkar, social care, and the value of togetherness in local culture. This finding shows that the values learned in the classroom began to influence students’ behavior beyond the formal learning setting.

The head of the madrasah also observed a positive change in students’ social behavior. In an interview, Yon Gani stated:

*“I see a significant change in student behavior. They are now more united, more concerned about social activities, and more tolerant of differences. I think this is a real result of the collaborative approach applied by Islamic Education teachers.”*

This statement strengthens the finding that collaborative Islamic Religious Education learning based on local culture contributes to the formation of students’ social character. The changes mentioned by the head of the madrasah, such as unity, concern for social activities, and tolerance, are directly related to the main objective of the learning model. These character qualities show that students are not only acquiring knowledge about Islamic teachings, but are also developing attitudes and behaviors that reflect Islamic social values. The madrasah head further viewed this learning approach as consistent with the vision of the madrasah to produce graduates who possess faith, knowledge, and social character.

The findings also reveal several dynamics and challenges in the implementation process. At the early stage, teachers faced difficulties because some students were not accustomed to

learning activities that required active participation. Some students were shy, hesitant to express opinions, or tended to rely on more dominant group members. This condition shows that collaborative learning requires habituation and structured facilitation. To overcome this challenge, teachers provided clear instructions, assigned specific roles to each group member, and rotated these roles in different learning sessions. Through role rotation, students had equal opportunities to become group leaders, presenters, note-takers, or respondents. This strategy proved effective in encouraging participation and reducing passivity among students.

The process of role distribution also contributed to the strengthening of responsibility and mutual respect. Students became aware that the success of group work depended on the contribution of each member. They learned that neglecting their role could affect the performance of the whole group. At the same time, they also learned to appreciate the roles of others. This finding is in line with the principle of positive interdependence in collaborative learning, where students realize that they need one another to achieve shared goals. Johnson and Johnson (2018) explain that collaboration creates positive interdependence, individual accountability, promotive interaction, and social skills, all of which are essential in developing effective group learning. In the context of this study, these elements were reflected in students' increasing willingness to cooperate, share tasks, listen to others, and support their peers.

The values of empathy and tolerance were also observed during the learning process. In one observation session, when a student was late in completing an assigned task, the other group members helped the student without blaming or excluding them from the group. Instead of criticizing, they divided the remaining task and encouraged the student to contribute according to their ability. In an interview, the student admitted that they felt appreciated and became more motivated to learn. This situation shows that collaborative learning creates a supportive social ecosystem in the classroom. Students learn to respond to their peers' weaknesses with assistance rather than judgment. Such experiences are important in strengthening empathy because students are trained to see others not as competitors, but as partners in learning.

The findings further indicate that collaborative learning based on local culture strengthens students' tolerance in dealing with differences. During group discussions, students sometimes had different interpretations, examples, or opinions regarding the application of Islamic values in daily life. Teachers guided students to respond to these differences politely and to base their arguments on Islamic values and mutual respect. Over time, students became more accustomed to listening to different opinions without immediately rejecting them. This habit is important in the context of character education because tolerance is not formed instantly, but through continuous practice in social interaction. The classroom thus became a space where students could learn to manage differences constructively.

Overall, the implementation of the collaborative Islamic Religious Education learning model based on local culture at MAN 2 Gorontalo Regency shows three main findings. First, the model makes Islamic Religious Education learning more active, participatory, and contextual. Students are no longer positioned merely as listeners, but as active participants who discuss, reflect, cooperate, and connect Islamic teachings with their social and cultural realities. Second, the integration of Gorontalo local cultural values, especially huyula, strengthens the relevance of Islamic learning because students can understand Islamic social values through familiar cultural practices. Third, the model contributes to the strengthening of students' social character,

especially in the aspects of cooperation, empathy, responsibility, tolerance, confidence, and social concern.

Thus, collaborative Islamic Religious Education learning based on local culture can be understood as an effective pedagogical model for realizing the holistic goals of Islamic education. The model integrates knowledge, attitudes, and social action into a single learning process rooted in Islamic values and local wisdom. Through this model, students do not only learn about Islam as a body of knowledge, but also experience Islam as a value system that guides social relations. The findings of this study affirm that when Islamic Religious Education is designed collaboratively and contextually, it can become a meaningful space for strengthening students' social character. In the context of MAN 2 Gorontalo Regency, the integration of collaborative learning and Gorontalo local culture enables students to develop not only religious understanding, but also social sensitivity, mutual responsibility, and the ability to live together in the spirit of cooperation and brotherhood.

### **3.2. Discussion**

The findings of this study indicate that the implementation of a collaborative Islamic Religious Education learning model based on local culture at MAN 2 Gorontalo Regency has contributed positively to the strengthening of students' social character. The model encourages students to learn Islamic values not only through textual explanation, but also through social interaction, group work, reflection, and direct engagement with local cultural values. The discussion of these findings can be organized into several important points.

#### **3.2.1. Collaborative Learning as a Space for Living Islamic Values**

One of the most important findings of this study is that collaborative learning transforms Islamic Religious Education from a merely cognitive process into a lived educational experience. In conventional learning, Islamic values are often presented as concepts to be memorized, explained, or reproduced in examinations. However, through collaborative learning, students are given the opportunity to practice these values directly in classroom interaction (Afandi, 2018).

When students discuss religious themes in groups, share opinions, listen to their friends, divide responsibilities, and solve learning tasks together, they are not only learning about cooperation; they are actually practicing cooperation. In this sense, collaborative learning becomes a pedagogical bridge between Islamic teachings and students' social behavior. Values such as *ta'āwun*, *ukhuwah*, empathy, responsibility, and tolerance are no longer abstract moral messages, but become part of the learning experience itself (Hadi et al., 2025; Usman et al., 2025).

This finding confirms that Islamic Religious Education should not stop at the transfer of knowledge. It must become a process of value internalization. Learning about the Qur'anic command to help one another in goodness and piety, as stated in QS. *al-Mā'idah* [5]: 2, becomes more meaningful when students experience mutual assistance in the learning process. Thus, collaborative learning is not merely a technical strategy, but also an embodiment of Islamic social ethics in the classroom.

#### **3.2.2. Local Culture as a Contextual Bridge for Islamic Education**

The integration of Gorontalo local culture, especially the value of huyula, strengthens the contextual relevance of Islamic Religious Education. Huyula, which represents mutual cooperation, collective responsibility, and shared work for the common good, has a strong value connection with the Islamic concept of ta'āwun. This connection makes the learning process more grounded because students can understand Islamic teachings through cultural values that are close to their daily lives (Afandi, 2018).

The findings show that when teachers connect Islamic values with local wisdom, students are more easily able to understand the practical meaning of religion. They do not see Islam as something distant from their social environment. Instead, they begin to recognize that the noble values embedded in their local culture can serve as a medium for practicing Islamic teachings (Halstead, 2007; Sidik et al., 2025; Rahman, 2022).

This point is important because Islamic Religious Education in Indonesia cannot be separated from the socio-cultural context of society. In a multicultural country, local wisdom can serve as an educational resource that helps students understand religion in a more contextual, humane, and socially relevant way. Therefore, the integration of huyula into Islamic Religious Education learning shows that local culture is not merely an additional element, but a meaningful pedagogical foundation for strengthening students' social character.

### 3.2.3. Social Constructivism and the Formation of Shared Meaning

Theoretically, the findings of this study are in line with the perspective of social constructivism, which views learning as a process constructed through social interaction within a particular cultural context. Students do not build understanding in isolation, but through dialogue, negotiation of meaning, cooperation, and interaction with others. In the collaborative Islamic Religious Education classroom, students construct religious understanding together by discussing verses, hadiths, social cases, and local cultural values.

This process shows that knowledge in Islamic Religious Education is not only transmitted from teacher to student, but also constructed through shared learning experiences. The teacher functions as a facilitator who guides the discussion, while students become active participants who contribute ideas, ask questions, respond to different opinions, and relate religious teachings to their own social realities.

This finding is consistent with Nurdin and Jamila (2025), who state that collaborative learning in Islamic Religious Education creates a more innovative, participatory, and meaningful learning environment. In this study, collaborative learning encouraged students to become more active and reflective. They were not merely listeners, but also contributors to the learning process. As a result, students' understanding of Islamic values became more dialogical and contextual (Yang, 2023).

### 3.2.4. Strengthening Cooperation, Empathy, Responsibility, and Tolerance

The findings demonstrate that the collaborative learning model based on local culture contributes to the development of several dimensions of students' social character. The most visible dimensions are cooperation, empathy, responsibility, and tolerance.

First, cooperation grows because students are required to work together to complete group tasks. They learn that group success depends on the contribution of each member. Second, empathy develops when students begin to understand the strengths, weaknesses,

and perspectives of their peers. They learn to help friends who face difficulties and to appreciate different abilities within the group. Third, responsibility is strengthened through the division of roles, such as moderator, note-taker, presenter, and discussion member. Each student is encouraged to carry out their role seriously because their contribution affects the whole group. Fourth, tolerance develops when students are trained to listen to different opinions, respond politely, and accept diversity in understanding and expression.

These findings support the view of Zubaedi (2015) that cooperative learning in Islamic Education can increase students' interest in learning while strengthening solidarity and mutual understanding. In this study, collaborative interaction became an important medium for character formation because students experienced social values directly, not merely heard them from the teacher (Purnama Sari et al., 2024).

### 3.2.5. Collaborative Learning as a Moral Laboratory

Another important interpretation of the findings is that the classroom becomes a kind of moral laboratory. In collaborative Islamic Religious Education learning, students are not only taught what is good, but are also placed in situations where they must practice goodness. They are trained to listen, respect, help, lead, follow, negotiate, and take responsibility.

This is closely related to the concept of ta'dib in Islamic education. From the perspective of Islamic educational philosophy, education is not only the process of transferring knowledge, but also the process of forming civilized human beings. The goal of education is not merely to produce knowledgeable individuals, but also people who possess adab, moral awareness, and social responsibility.

In this sense, collaborative learning based on local culture reflects the spirit of ta'dib because it integrates knowledge, attitude, and action. Students learn religious concepts, practice social values, and reflect on their experiences. This finding is in line with Kibtiyah et al. (2025), who emphasize that character education involving schools, families, and communities can consistently strengthen Islamic social values. At MAN 2 Gorontalo Regency, the classroom becomes the starting point for cultivating social character, while local culture provides the ethical and social context that strengthens the process (Kibtiyah et al., 2025).

### 3.2.6. From Classroom Learning to Social Action

The findings also show that the impact of collaborative learning is not limited to classroom activities. Several students initiated social activities, such as collecting donations for orphans, cleaning mosques, and organizing peer religious discussions. These activities indicate that the learning process has moved from conceptual understanding to social action.

This is an important indication of successful Islamic Religious Education. Students do not only understand the meaning of *ukhuwah*, *amar ma'rūf nahi munkar*, and social responsibility, but also attempt to practice these values in real life. In this context, collaborative learning functions as a bridge between religious knowledge and social praxis.

This finding is in line with Adjie et al. (2026), who argue that ideal Islamic character education must integrate the values of family, school, and society so that students can practice Islamic teachings in their daily social context. At MAN 2 Gorontalo Regency, the

emergence of student-initiated social activities shows that collaborative learning can encourage students to transform religious understanding into concrete social concern (Yusuf et al., 2024).

### 3.2.7. Teacher Facilitation as the Key to Effective Collaboration

Although collaborative learning gives greater space to students, the role of the teacher remains very important. The teacher is not absent from the learning process, but changes role from a dominant knowledge transmitter to a facilitator, guide, and value director.

The findings show that teachers guide students to remain connected to Islamic values, respect differences of opinion, and participate responsibly in group activities. Teachers also assign clear roles within groups so that each student has an opportunity to contribute. This role distribution is important because collaborative learning can fail when only certain students dominate while others remain passive.

Therefore, teacher facilitation becomes a determining factor in the success of collaborative learning. Teachers must be able to design meaningful group activities, formulate relevant discussion themes, connect Islamic teachings with local culture, manage classroom dynamics, and assess students' social development. Without strong teacher facilitation, collaborative learning may be reduced to ordinary group work without clear character-building outcomes.

### 3.2.8. Challenges in Implementation

Although the collaborative Islamic Religious Education learning model based on local culture has positive impacts, the study also found several challenges. One of the main challenges is limited learning time. Collaborative learning requires discussion, reflection, presentation, and feedback. These processes often need more time than conventional lecture-based learning.

Another challenge is the difficulty of assessing affective and social aspects. Teachers may find it easier to assess students' cognitive understanding through written assignments or tests, but more difficult to assess empathy, responsibility, cooperation, and tolerance objectively. This challenge shows the need for clearer assessment instruments, such as observation rubrics, peer assessment, reflective journals, and teacher notes.

This finding is consistent with Hadi et al. (2025), who explain that although problem-based and cooperative learning are effective in Islamic Education, curriculum limitations and teacher readiness can become obstacles to implementation. Therefore, institutional support, teacher training, and assessment development are needed to ensure that collaborative learning can be implemented consistently and effectively (Hadi et al., 2025; Rahmawati et al., 2023).

### 3.2.9. Positive Impact on Madrasah Learning Culture

An interesting finding of this study is that collaborative learning based on local culture does not only influence students, but also affects the broader learning culture of the madrasah. The study found that teachers from other subjects began to adopt similar approaches in their learning activities. This indicates that the collaborative model has a positive influence on the educational ecosystem of the madrasah.

When one learning model proves effective in creating active, meaningful, and value-oriented learning, it can inspire other teachers to develop similar approaches. This shows that innovation in Islamic Religious Education can contribute to broader pedagogical transformation in the school environment. In this sense, the collaborative Islamic Education learning model based on local culture is not only relevant for Islamic Religious Education subjects, but can also become a model for strengthening character education across subjects.

#### 3.2.10. Toward a Humanistic and Transformative Islamic Education

Overall, the findings of this study affirm that collaborative Islamic Religious Education learning based on local culture represents a humanistic and transformative paradigm of Islamic education. It is humanistic because it places students as active, social, and moral beings who learn through interaction and experience. It is transformative because it seeks to change students not only at the level of knowledge, but also at the level of attitude, awareness, and behavior.

This model makes Islamic Religious Education more meaningful because students experience religion as a living value system. They learn that Islam is not only about individual worship, but also about building good relationships with others, helping those in need, respecting differences, and contributing to the common good. Through collaboration and local cultural integration, Islamic Religious Education becomes more grounded, dialogical, and socially relevant.

Thus, the collaborative Islamic Religious Education learning model based on local culture is not merely a methodological alternative. It is an integral strategy for realizing the mission of Islamic education, namely, forming students who are knowledgeable, faithful, civilized, and socially responsible. In the context of MAN 2 Gorontalo Regency, the integration of Islamic values, collaborative learning, and local Gorontalo culture provides a strong foundation for strengthening students' social character and for developing a madrasah learning environment that is religious, participatory, and culturally rooted.

Based on the discussion above, it is evident that the strength of the collaborative Islamic Religious Education learning model grounded in local culture lies in its ability to integrate three important dimensions: Islamic values, students' social interaction, and local wisdom. The integration of these dimensions makes learning more contextual, meaningful, and transformative. Students do not only learn Islamic teachings as normative knowledge, but also experience them through cooperation, empathy, responsibility, tolerance, and social action. Therefore, this model can be understood as a strategic approach for strengthening students' social character and for revitalizing Islamic Religious Education as a process of forming faithful, knowledgeable, and socially responsible human beings.

## CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the application of a collaborative Islamic education learning model based on local culture in MAN 2 Gorontalo Regency has proven to be effective in shaping and strengthening the social character of students. Learning through group discussion activities, reflection on Islamic values, and social projects fostered the values of cooperation, empathy, responsibility, and tolerance among students. Through group interaction based on the principle of

ta'āwun 'alā al-birr wa al-taqwā (helping one another in righteousness and piety), students not only understand the teachings of Islam cognitively, but also internalize them as everyday social attitudes and behaviors. The role of Islamic Education teachers as value facilitators and motivators is a key factor in the success of this model, and is complemented by the support of madrasah heads, who consistently encourage character-based learning innovations. Local cultural values, namely mutual cooperation, also strengthen the implementation of learning, creating synergy between Islamic values and local wisdom in the context of madrasah education. Thus, the collaborative Islamic Education learning model based on local culture can be seen as a transformative pedagogical approach because it integrates the cognitive, affective, social, and spiritual dimensions as a whole. This model is relevant to be applied more widely in Islamic Education as a strategy for forming a generation of madrasah students who are religious, humanist, and socially civilized.

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