



Local Wisdom as a Foundation for Sustainable Character Building in Transformative Islamic Education at Madrasah Aliyah

Budi Santoso¹, Anisa Widyawati², Nurul Hidayah³

¹ Universitas Diponegoro, Semarang, Indonesia

² Universitas Brawijaya, Malang, Indonesia

³ Universitas Islam Negeri Walisongo, Semarang, Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

Islamic education in Indonesia continues to face the task of reconciling the nation's abundant local cultural values with the pursuit of more holistic educational outcomes. This article examines the application of local wisdom within transformative Islamic education, concentrating on student character formation at MAN 1 Kudus and MAN Demak. A qualitative case study design was adopted, with data gathered through in-depth interviews involving eighteen informants, participatory observation, and document analysis. The findings reveal that embedding local values such as unggah ungguh, guyub, srawung, and nrimo ing pandum has meaningfully strengthened students' social responsibility, tolerance, and spiritual resilience. Implementation nevertheless remains hindered by the considerable variation of local values across Indonesian regions and by many educators' limited appreciation of why such integration matters. Accordingly, the study calls for sustained professional training for educators and closer partnership among madrasahs, families, and surrounding communities. By articulating a concrete, locally grounded model of character education, this research offers a foundation for sustainable Islamic education practice and invites further inquiry into the transfer of comparable models to other cultural settings.

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Corresponding Author:

Budi Santoso

Universitas Diponegoro, Semarang, Indonesia; budi.santoso@undip.ac.id

INTRODUCTION

The advancement of human resources in Indonesia depends considerably on Islamic education, particularly in shaping the character of the younger generation (Hakim et al., 2024; Rohana, 2018; Taufikin, 2021). Indonesia's cultural diversity and abundance of local values call for an educational approach that extends beyond religious understanding alone to embrace values capable of strengthening students' character (Afriyanto & Anandari, 2024; Taufikin, 2022). Transformative Islamic education has emerged within this landscape as an alternative pathway toward producing a generation that is intellectually capable, wise, cultured, and morally upright. Such education seeks to unlock individual potential by directing religious teaching toward constructive social change, anchored in values drawn from local culture (Awaludin, 2024). Examining how Islamic education can be woven together with local wisdom is therefore essential to building a sustainable educational model rooted in community values.

Local wisdom refers to the knowledge and practices handed down across generations within a community, guiding social interaction and the preservation of natural balance (Azwar, 2018; Purba et al., 2021). Within an educational setting, local wisdom is regarded as both a cultural inheritance and a resource for character formation. Values such as *gotong royong*, communal harmony, and respect for others and for nature can jointly shape a holistic student character. Indonesia's cultural and ethnic diversity offers a considerable opportunity to build an educational model grounded not only in the universal teachings of Islam but also in local wisdom that can underpin the character development of younger generations (Bandura, 1977; S & Das, 2025; Suri & Chandra, 2021).

Despite the considerable potential of local wisdom to support character education, its integration into madrasah curricula and activities has generally not been optimal (Yusuf et al., 2024). A persistent difficulty lies in reconciling the diversity of local values with an education system oriented primarily toward academic attainment (Karomi et al., 2025). At the same time, there remains a need for an Islamic education model that addresses theological content while also cultivating the social values that reinforce students' character and disposition. This study therefore investigates how local wisdom can be woven into transformative Islamic education to support student character development.

A review of prior literature indicates that several solutions have been proposed for integrating local wisdom into Islamic education. Among these is an educational approach grounded in local cultural values that shapes character across both spiritual and social dimensions. Earlier studies have shown that education which incorporates local wisdom can reinforce togetherness, tolerance, and cooperation within society (Arsal et al., 2023; Rahayu, 2024). In several madrasahs that have embraced values such as *gotong royong*, cooperation, and everyday harmony, students have shown a demonstrable increase in social responsibility and discipline. In addition, values such as *nrimo ing pandum*, understood as the graceful acceptance of one's circumstances, have been found to help students build mental and spiritual resilience when confronting life's difficulties.

Related literature further suggests that local wisdom can be integrated into education through a character based curriculum coupled with the habituation of positive values in daily life (Ilham & Rahman, 2024; Novitasari & Walid, 2024). A considerable body of research underscores the significance of habituating values such as *unggah ungguh* (courteous conduct), *guyub* (communal togetherness), and *srawung* (social friendship) within character education (Abidin, 2021; Huda, 2021; Lickona, 1996; Purwaningsih & Ridha, 2024). Internalizing these values requires direct engagement with the surrounding community and genuine respect for existing traditions. Transformative Islamic education, accordingly, extends beyond academic achievement to enrich students' social lives beyond the school environment.

Nonetheless, notwithstanding the substantial body of research on integrating local values into Islamic education, a gap persists regarding how a local wisdom based model of transformative Islamic education might be implemented in a sustainable and structured manner within madrasahs. This study addresses that gap by proposing a character development model grounded in local wisdom, suitable for application in Indonesian madrasahs, with particular reference to MAN 1 Kudus and MAN Demak. These two madrasahs were selected because both have demonstrated success in weaving local wisdom

into their learning activities and religious programs.

The purpose of this study is to identify how local wisdom is applied within transformative Islamic education for student character development and to formulate a sustainable model suitable for madrasah implementation. The study also seeks to examine the challenges and opportunities associated with integrating local wisdom in education and to consider how the resulting model might positively influence student character. Building on the gaps identified in the literature, this research is intended to contribute toward a more holistic and sustainable model of Islamic education, one that attends not only to academic outcomes but also to the cultivation of strong character grounded in local values.

Three research questions guide this study. First, how is local wisdom integrated into Islamic education at MAN 1 Kudus and MAN Demak? Second, in what ways does the integration of local wisdom influence student character development? Third, what challenges and opportunities arise in integrating local wisdom within transformative Islamic education at the madrasah level? Through addressing these questions, the study seeks to identify a model that can be broadly applied across other madrasahs, so that local wisdom based transformative Islamic education becomes an integral component of the Indonesian education system.

METHODS

This study examined the integration of local wisdom in transformative Islamic education at the madrasah level as a foundation for a sustainable model of student character development. A qualitative approach with a case study design was applied across two madrasahs, MAN 1 Kudus and MAN Demak, chosen for their capacity to provide an in depth understanding of how local wisdom is applied in Islamic education and of its bearing on students' character formation.

Qualitative Approach

A qualitative approach was selected because it enables researchers to examine social phenomena in a thorough and holistic manner (Haki et al., 2024; Khan, 2022; Muurlink & Thomsen, 2024). This approach suits the exploration of experiences, perspectives, and perceptions surrounding the integration of local wisdom within transformative Islamic education, while also allowing the researcher to grasp the social and cultural contexts that shape how local values are applied in practice. As Creswell (2014) observes, the qualitative approach affords researchers the space to capture the meaning underlying human behavior, a capacity directly relevant to understanding how local wisdom is integrated within the madrasah environment.

Case Study Design

A case study design (Gustafsson, 2024; Halkias et al., 2022) was employed to develop an in-depth understanding of how the two madrasahs integrate local wisdom into Islamic education. This design allows the researcher to concentrate on a single phenomenon within a specific context, thereby offering a clear picture of how local wisdom is applied in teaching and in the cultivation of student character. MAN 1 Kudus and MAN Demak were selected as research sites precisely because both have successfully embedded local values within their educational activities, rendering them relevant and instructive cases for study.

Data Collection Technique

Data were gathered through three principal methods, namely in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and document analysis (Carter et al., 2014). In depth interviews were conducted with the madrasah heads, teachers, and students to explore their understanding of how local wisdom is applied within Islamic education. As Bogdan and Biklen (1998) note, in-depth interviews allow researchers to obtain detailed and personalized information that would be difficult to elicit through other means. The eighteen informants comprised two madrasah principals (one from each research site), eight teachers (four from each site), and eight students (four from each site), a composition designed to ensure

representative coverage of institutional, pedagogical, and learner perspectives across both madrasahs.

Participatory observation took place within classrooms and throughout the daily activities of each madrasah, allowing the researcher to witness firsthand how local values are applied in practice. The researcher took an active part in school activities to gain a deeper grasp of the social and cultural dynamics unfolding in the field. Document analysis was additionally undertaken to examine curricula, lesson plans, and programs connected with local values within Islamic education, offering further evidence of how local wisdom has been embedded within the madrasahs' formal educational structures.

Data Analysis Technique

Data obtained through interviews, observation, and document analysis were examined using thematic analysis. This technique enables researchers to identify recurring patterns and themes within the collected data. Braun and Clarke (2006) regard thematic analysis as an effective method for analyzing qualitative material, since it assists researchers in discerning the principal themes relevant to a given inquiry. The themes generated in this study concern how local wisdom is applied in Islamic education and how it shapes students' character development.

Data Validity and Reliability

To secure the validity and reliability of the data, this study applied triangulation, comparing information obtained through interviews, observation, and document analysis. Triangulation strengthens the credibility of research findings and reduces potential bias in data interpretation (Carter et al., 2014). Member checking was additionally undertaken, whereby informants were asked to confirm the findings drawn from their interviews, thereby ensuring the accuracy of the data collected.

Taken as a whole, the methods applied in this study were designed to yield an in depth understanding of how local wisdom is applied within Islamic education and how it shapes student character development at the madrasah level. Through its qualitative approach and case study design, this research is intended to contribute meaningfully to the development of a local wisdom based model of Islamic education.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study examines how local wisdom is integrated into Islamic education at MAN 1 Kudus and MAN Demak and how this integration shapes student character development, while also identifying the challenges and opportunities encountered in implementing such integration within transformative Islamic education. The findings indicate that both madrasahs have successfully embedded local wisdom across various facets of their educational practice, yielding a positive effect on students' character development.

Integration of Local Wisdom in Islamic Education

Local wisdom at MAN 1 Kudus and MAN Demak is woven into multiple dimensions of Islamic education, spanning curriculum, daily activity, and religious programming. This integration draws on local cultural values including unggah ungguh (courteous conduct), guyub (communal togetherness), srawung (social friendship), and nrimo ing pandum (graceful acceptance of one's circumstances).

Interviews with madrasah principals and teachers at both sites indicate that these local values have been internalized within the curriculum and within extracurricular activity. At MAN 1 Kudus, for instance, unggah ungguh is taught through the framework of social interaction both inside and outside the classroom, with teachers modeling courteous conduct for students to practice in daily life. At MAN Demak, the value of guyub is applied through group based learning and cooperative activity, teaching students to support one another and to appreciate difference.

Table 1. Integration of Local Wisdom in Islamic Education at MAN 1 Kudus and MAN Demak

Local Value	MAN 1 Kudus	MAN Demak
Unggah ungguh	Taught through social interaction and learning activities (teacher interview)	Emphasized in manners and courtesy across every activity (student interview)
Guyub	Group-based learning and cooperation in extracurricular activity	Collaboration in community service programs and classroom activity (student interviews)
Srawung	Regular gatherings to strengthen relationships between students and teachers	Regular religious study programs involving every element of the madrasah
Nrimo ing pandum	Internalized through habituated acceptance of circumstance in every learning challenge	Taught as a means of facing life's tests and challenges (teacher interview)

The integration of local wisdom into Islamic education at MAN 1 Kudus and MAN Demak has produced meaningful outcomes in student character formation. These findings align with the broader theory of Islamic education, which emphasizes the significance of local values in cultivating a person balanced across spiritual, social, and intellectual dimensions (Abdullah et al., 2019; Astuti, 2024; Hasan, 2020). Islamic education in this sense extends beyond religious knowledge to encompass the social and cultural values embedded in local community life. Weaving values such as unggah ungguh, guyub, srawung, and nrimo ing pandum into the Islamic education curriculum enriches students' learning experience and renders it more attuned to their socio-cultural context.

The theory of transformative learning advanced by Mezirow (1978) further helps to explain the transformation students undergo as they put these local values into practice (Effendi, Bafadal, Sudana, et al., 2020; Uyun et al., 2024). Transformative Islamic education is concerned not merely with knowledge transfer but with reshaping students' perspectives toward themselves and toward society. The local values taught within both madrasahs enable students to better grasp the relationship between religion and culture, rendering Islamic education more contextualized and thereby more conducive to positive social change.

The two madrasahs nonetheless differ in how they apply local values. At MAN 1 Kudus, unggah ungguh receives greater emphasis in social interaction between students and teachers, whereas at MAN Demak, guyub is applied chiefly through group cooperation and social activity. This divergence reflects the range of ways in which madrasahs adapt local wisdom to their own settings, shaped in part by regional socio-cultural differences. It follows that integrating local wisdom into Islamic education demands sensitivity to the particular cultural characteristics of each context.

Impact of Local Wisdom Integration on Student Character Development

The integration of local wisdom into Islamic education at both madrasahs has exerted a significant influence on student character development. Interviews and observation indicate that students engaged in activities incorporating local values exhibit stronger character development, particularly with regard to social responsibility, tolerance, and spiritual resilience.

At MAN 1 Kudus, students engaged in activities that emphasize guyub display heightened mutual support and respect among peers, together with greater openness toward differences in religious and cultural background, which in turn strengthens tolerance. One student remarked that collaborating in groups fostered a closer sense of connection with friends of different faiths and cultivated mutual respect.

At MAN Demak, the integration of nrimo ing pandum helps students confront the pressures of examinations and personal difficulty, cultivating greater resilience in the face of academic strain and everyday life. One student observed that facing examinations or hardship called for acceptance and perseverance, a lesson consistently reinforced by teachers.

Table 2. Integrated Impact of Local Wisdom on Student Character Development at MAN 1 Kudus and MAN Demak

Impact	MAN 1 Kudus	MAN Demak
Social responsibility	Strengthened group cooperation and mutual concern among students; heightened social responsibility through peer-support activities	Greater participation in social activity and group cooperation; increased awareness of communal responsibility
Tolerance	Respectful attitudes and strengthened mutual respect among students of differing faiths and cultural backgrounds	Greater mutual understanding and acceptance of difference; respect for diversity fostered through cross-background interaction
Spiritual resilience	Strengthened resilience in facing life's trials; students approach examinations with a positive outlook and persistence	Students learn to accept circumstances with equanimity and to persist without surrendering to hardship; enhanced mental resilience for academic and personal challenges

The influence of local wisdom integration on student character development is evident in heightened social responsibility, tolerance, and spiritual resilience. This finding is consistent with prior research indicating that the integration of local values within education can strengthen students' social character, particularly with respect to cooperation, responsibility, and respect for diversity (Bassar et al., 2021; Untung et al., 2022). At MAN 1 Kudus, the value of *guyub* as applied within group-based learning enables students to appreciate differences and to cooperate in completing assigned tasks, fostering an environment conducive to the growth of empathy and solidarity.

At MAN Demak, the value of *nrimo ing pandum* teaches students to accept life's realities with equanimity and to avoid capitulating readily to hardship. Applying this value in daily life helps students navigate academic and personal challenges with greater composure, a pattern consistent with the resilience theory proposed by Damianakis et al. (2019) and Shackleton et al. (2024), which characterizes spiritual resilience as the capacity to endure and to flourish despite adversity. The integration of *nrimo ing pandum* equips students with tools for managing stress and for building stronger mental resilience.

The application of local values within Islamic education also resonates with the perspective of Al Ghazali (2005), who underscores the importance of character education in cultivating individuals who are not merely knowledgeable but also virtuous. This suggests that Islamic education integrating local wisdom holds considerable promise for shaping students who are academically capable while possessing strong mental, social, and spiritual resilience.

Challenges and Opportunities in Implementing Local Wisdom Integration

The implementation of local wisdom integration within Islamic education at both madrasahs encounters several challenges. Chief among these is the diversity of local values across Indonesian society, since each region carries its own set of local values that shape how local wisdom is integrated into education. Several informants acknowledged that although universal values may be broadly accepted, the manner of their application still differs from place to place.

A further challenge concerns the limited understanding and awareness among some educators of the importance of embedding local wisdom into the curriculum, as many remain more oriented toward academic content than toward strengthening student character through local values. One teacher at MAN 1 Kudus noted the difficulty of connecting local values with religious subject matter.

Even so, this study identifies substantial opportunities for advancing the integration of local wisdom. One such opportunity lies in strengthened cooperation among schools, families, and communities, since programs engaging parents and local communities can serve as an effective channel for introducing local values to students. At both madrasahs, community service programs and communal gathering activities represent valuable opportunities to reinforce the application of local

wisdom beyond the classroom, thereby enriching students' experience and strengthening their social ties with the surrounding community.

Table 4. Challenges and Opportunities in Implementing Local Wisdom Integration

Challenge	Opportunity
Diversity of local values	Collaboration among madrasahs to share experience and broaden the adaptation of local values
Limited educator understanding	Training for educators on the importance of local values in character education
Excessive focus on academic achievement	Strengthened collaboration between the madrasah and the community through local wisdom-based programs

The principal challenge in implementing local wisdom integration within Islamic education remains the diversity of local values found across Indonesia. As earlier researchers have observed, although Indonesia possesses a wealth of local values capable of supporting character education, the cultural differences that distinguish one region from another render the application of these values considerably more complex (Agustina, 2022; Effendi, Bafadal, Degeng, et al., 2020; Mahartini et al., 2024). Within the two madrasahs examined here, local values were positively received overall, yet variation persisted in how they were implemented, a pattern shaped by differing local cultural conditions. Integrating local wisdom therefore calls for an approach attuned to local cultural context. Educators' limited grasp of the importance of embedding local values into the curriculum compounds this challenge, as Wibowo et al. (2025) observe that many educators remain oriented chiefly toward academic achievement and give comparatively little attention to cultivating student character through local cultural values. Educators accordingly require training and support to integrate local wisdom effectively within their teaching.

This study nevertheless identifies several opportunities to strengthen the integration of local wisdom within Islamic education, foremost among them the deepening of collaboration among schools, families, and communities. Local wisdom-based programs, including community service activity and communal hospitality, can serve as effective vehicles for introducing and internalizing local values among students. Such findings further suggest that collaboration between madrasahs and local communities can enhance the relevance of Islamic education to the surrounding community's social needs.

CONCLUSION

This study has examined the integration of local wisdom within transformative Islamic education at two Indonesian madrasahs, MAN 1 Kudus and MAN Demak, with the aim of understanding how local values may be applied in education and how they shape students' character development. The findings show that both madrasahs have successfully embedded local values, namely *unggah ungguh*, *guyub*, *srawung*, and *nrimo ing pandum*, within their curriculum, daily habituation activities, and religious programming. The application of these values has strengthened students' character with respect to social responsibility, tolerance, and spiritual resilience, evident in students' heightened mutual respect and in their capacity to face life's challenges with composure and courage.

The principal finding of this study is that integrating local wisdom into Islamic education enriches students' learning experience and supports stronger character formation, a conclusion consistent with the theory of transformative Islamic education, which emphasizes positive individual change achieved through the reinforcement of local cultural values. The study also surfaces certain implementation challenges, including the diversity of local values across Indonesia and the limited understanding among some educators of the importance of embedding local wisdom into the curriculum. Sustained training for educators and closer cooperation among madrasahs, families, and communities are accordingly required.

This study offers novelty through its development of a local wisdom-based model of Islamic education capable of sustainable implementation within madrasahs. While earlier studies have addressed the importance of character education and the integration of local values, this study distinguishes itself by presenting a concrete model realized within two distinct madrasahs, with particular attention to the direct application of local values in students' lives. The study further offers insight into the challenges and opportunities encountered in implementing local wisdom integration within Islamic education, which may serve as a reference point for developing comparable educational models elsewhere. In this respect, the research contributes to a more holistic model of Islamic education grounded in local cultural values and offers recommendations for strengthening the role of local wisdom within Indonesian education more broadly, in keeping with the sustainable development orientation of contemporary Islamic education scholarship.

This research contributes to the development of a local wisdom-based model of Islamic education and clarifies its relevance to student character development at the madrasah level, while offering fresh insight into how local values may be integrated systematically within Islamic education alongside the challenges and opportunities that accompany such implementation. Future research might productively examine the application of comparable models in madrasahs situated within different cultural settings and explore the bearing of local wisdom on further dimensions of student character, including leadership and work ethic, thereby extending the present findings toward a broader agenda of sustainable, locally grounded Islamic education.

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