

IMPROVING NARRATIVE WRITING SKILLS OF MADRASAH TSANAWIYAH STUDENTS THROUGH A GROUP INQUIRY LEARNING MODEL BASED ON RELIGIOUS CHARACTER VALUES

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ABSTRACT

This research analyzes the effectiveness of the group inquiry learning model based on religious character values in enhancing narrative writing skills, specifically in the form of diaries. The objective is to evaluate how this model integrates Islamic religious education with literacy culture while fostering religious character values in the learning process. Employing a quasi-experimental method with a matching-only pretest-posttest control group design, the study was conducted with 76 eighth-grade students from Madrasah Tsanawiyah Negeri in Magelang City, Central Java, Indonesia. Data were collected through observations, interviews, and tests assessing narrative writing that incorporated religious character values such as *siddiq*, *amanah*, *tabligh*, and *fathanah*. The results revealed that the experimental group, which used the group inquiry model, showed significant improvements in writing skills (t -count = 3.081, sig. = 0.018). The N-Gain for the experimental group was 22.33, compared to 0.52 for the control group, demonstrating the model's effectiveness. This research underscores the importance of integrating group inquiry learning with religious character values, as it significantly improves narrative writing skills, enhances student engagement, and instills core Islamic values, thereby contributing to the development of both literacy and character education in Islamic schools.

Keywords: Group Inquiry Learning, Literacy Culture, Narrative Writing, Religious Character Values

INTRODUCTION

Narrative writing is a fundamental skill that plays a crucial role in improving students' literacy competence globally. It allows individuals to express their thoughts, share experiences, and engage in critical reflection (Olowoyeye et al., 2023; Brandt, 2005; Damayanti & Santosa, 2024). As literacy becomes an essential marker of educational achievement, it is necessary to foster narrative writing abilities that are not only structurally sound but also rich in cultural and moral content (Brushwood Rose & Granger, 2013). Developing such skills is especially important in light of the growing need for students to communicate effectively in various contexts—academic, professional, and personal (Hayes & Flower 1986). However, many students still struggle with producing narratives that incorporate meaningful content, particularly in relation to religious character values, which form the foundation of moral education (Nasser, 2018; Bulqiyah et al., 2021).

In Indonesia, the issue of narrative writing is compounded by several contextual challenges. Despite the recognition of writing as a vital skill in both formal and informal education (Nandiyanto & Azizah, 2022; Nafilah & Sakti, 2022), students in Madrasah Tsanawiyah and other educational institutions often encounter difficulties in articulating their ideas in writing (Syahrani, 2013). With the advent of digital media, students' attention has shifted away from traditional writing practices (Coyne et al., 2013), resulting in diminished engagement with writing as a form of self-expression (Coyne et al., 2013). As a result, the gap between the necessity for strong writing skills and the actual competency levels remains a pressing issue.

Moreover, character education, particularly the integration of religious values, has not been adequately integrated into the narrative writing curriculum, leaving students without the opportunity to develop both their literary skills and moral character in tandem.

Previous studies have explored various approaches to improving writing skills, such as genre-based learning models and process-oriented pedagogies (Damayanti et al., 2021; Kurdi et al., 2020). Furthermore, research has also examined the role of character education in shaping student outcomes, highlighting the importance of instilling moral and religious values (Qoyyimah, 2016). However, there remains a gap in the literature regarding the integration of religious character values into narrative writing instruction. While the existing studies tend to focus on cognitive and technical writing aspects, fewer have addressed how religious values can be embedded within the writing process to enhance both the content and character development of students (Sulyman et al., 2024). The novelty of this study lies in its exploration of how the group inquiry learning model, when applied to narrative writing, can bridge this gap by improving writing skills while simultaneously fostering religious character values. The primary objective of this research is to examine the effectiveness of the group inquiry learning model in enhancing narrative writing skills and internalizing religious character values in Madrasah Tsanawiyah students.

To address the identified gap, this study uses the group inquiry learning model as a pedagogical tool to enhance students' narrative writing abilities. This model, which emphasizes collaborative learning and idea exploration, has the potential to improve students' understanding of narrative structure while promoting the integration of values such as honesty (*siddiq*), trustworthiness (*amanah*), transparency (*tabligh*), and intelligence (*fathanah*) in writing (Maoz & Henderson, 2013). Through group discussions, students engage in critical thinking and reflection, which not only fosters a deeper understanding of religious values but also encourages creativity and cooperation. By using this approach, the research offers a contextual solution to the challenges faced by students in writing narratives that reflect both linguistic competence and strong moral character.

METHOD

This study used a non-equivalent control group design with pre-test and post-test to assess the effectiveness of the group inquiry learning model in enhancing narrative writing skills while incorporating religious character values (Creswell, 2017; Susilawati et al., 2025). The experimental group received the group inquiry model treatment, while the control group followed the conventional teaching method. The study was conducted over four months (September to December 2024) and involved 76 eighth-grade students from Madrasah Tsanawiyah in Magelang City, with 38 students in each group. Data were collected through observations, interviews, documentation, and competency tests assessing narrative writing and religious values. Statistical analysis was performed using SPSS version 24.0 for Windows, with Cronbach's Alpha ensuring test reliability (Afifah et al., 2022). N-Gain scores measured improvements in writing, evaluating aspects such as content, organization, diction, sentence structure, spelling, and neatness. A t-test was applied to compare post-test results between the groups, with significance set at $p < 0.05$, indicating a statistically significant difference between the groups.

This study combines Constructivist Learning Theory and Islamic Education to promote both cognitive and moral development in students. Constructivist theory, particularly Vygotsky's social constructivism, emphasizes the role of social interaction and collaboration in learning (Arega & Hunde, 2025). In this study, the group inquiry model fostered peer discussions and collaborative exploration, allowing students to build knowledge about narrative writing while integrating religious values. Islamic Education, which focuses on holistic student

development—intellectual, moral, and spiritual—encourages reflection on values like honesty (*siddiq*), trustworthiness (*amanah*), transparency (*tabligh*), and intelligence (*fathanah*) (Rohana, 2018). By combining these frameworks, the study created an environment where students not only improved their writing skills but also developed their religious character, thus integrating academic and moral growth.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Implementing group inquiry learning model in Learning Narrative Writing

The implementation of the group inquiry learning model based on religious character values significantly enhanced students' narrative writing skills. This approach integrated religious values with writing practices, enabling students to express ideas more meaningfully. Through collaborative activities, students actively engaged in creative writing while reflecting on religious values in their daily lives. The process fostered critical thinking, improved their ability to work together, and heightened their awareness of integrity and morality in writing. This model effectively supported students in developing both writing skills and character traits necessary for adapting to the challenges of the digital era. The flowchart of learning models for narrative writing can be portrayed in Figure 1.

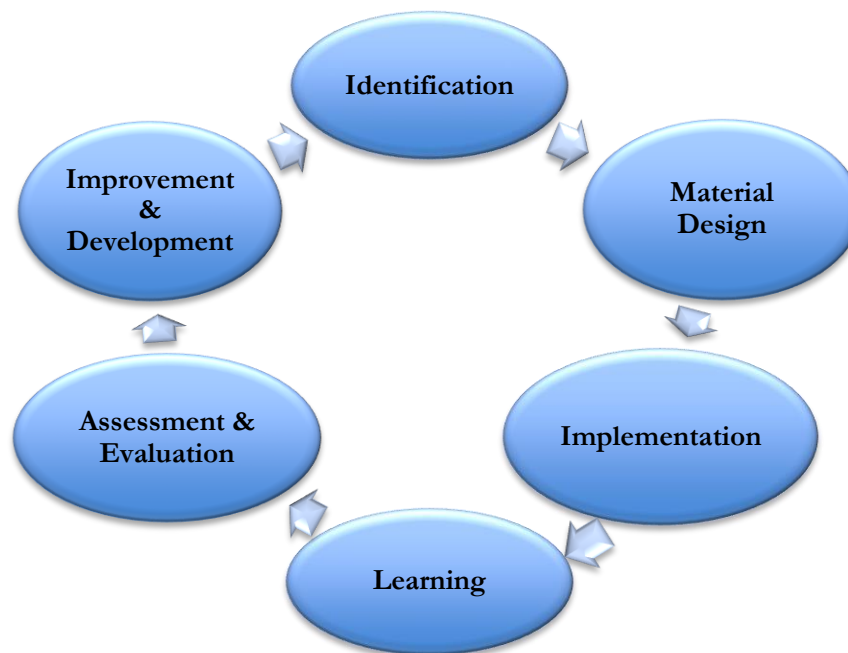


Figure 1. The flowchart of learning models for narrative writing

Figure 1 illustrates the structured steps involved in integrating religious character values into narrative writing, particularly through diary writing for Madrasah Tsanawiyah students. The process starts with identifying key religious character values, followed by designing instructional materials that incorporate these values to strengthen students' character development. To enhance engagement, the learning process utilizes inspirational settings such as cultural studies, religious study assemblies, and scientific discussions, allowing students to actively participate in discussions, exploration, and collaboration, which deepens their understanding. This collaborative approach fosters reflective learning, reinforcing the appreciation and internalization of religious values.

The assessment of students' narrative writing in the form of diaries is based on a rubric with specific criteria: (1) the quality and depth of content, including experiences, feelings, and the integration of religious values (*siddiq, amanah, fathbanah, tabligh*) (Darimis, 2016; Mazid et al., 2025); (2) the organization and presentation of ideas; (3) the accuracy of diction; (4) sentence structure effectiveness; (5) correct spelling and punctuation; and (6) the completeness and neatness of the writing format. The rubric assigns different scores to each aspect based on its difficulty level, with a maximum possible score of 100. Student writing proficiency is evaluated by interpreting the scores from the assessment, with the figure below providing a detailed interpretation of these results.

The diary writing scores used in this study, ranging from poor to excellent, were significantly improved following the implementation of the group inquiry learning model based on religious character values. In the pre-test, students faced challenges in expressing their ideas in a structured manner and incorporating language that reflected religious values. However, post-test results showed a noticeable enhancement in students' writing abilities after applying the group inquiry model. Students used richer language, demonstrated a deeper understanding of religious character values, and exhibited a more systematic approach to expressing their thoughts. These improvements underscore that integrating religious character values into the learning process not only enhances writing skills but also strengthens character development relevant to both social and religious contexts.

In the control class, which utilized the conventional learning model, there were also improvements in diary writing skills from the pre-test to the post-test. However, these changes were less pronounced compared to the experimental group. Each aspect of the writing, such as organization, language use, and structure, showed some improvement, though the extent of progress was less significant than in the experimental group. The results suggest that while the conventional model had some positive effects, the group inquiry model proved more effective in enhancing students' writing proficiency and character development.

Table 1 presents the comparison of improvements in diary writing aspects between the pre-test and post-test for the control class. This table illustrates the changes in various writing aspects, including content quality, organization, sentence structure, diction, spelling, and formatting, as measured by the pre-test and post-test scores. The data presented will help to assess the impact of conventional learning methods on students' writing abilities, providing a clear view of their progress.

Table 1. The Comparison of Improvement in Diary Writing Aspects in Pre-test and Post-test of Control Class

Dominant Order	Writing Aspects	Pre-Test	Dominant Order	Writing Aspects	Post-test
1	Quality and scope of content (contains elements of experience, feelings, and thoughts)	13.26	1	Quality and scope of content (contains elements of experience, feelings, and thoughts)	14.52
2	Organization and presentation of the ideas in the diary	10.29	2	Organization and presentation of the ideas in the diary	17.90
3	The accuracy of sentence structure usage	9.03	3	Quality and scope of content (characterized by	12.50

Dominant Order	Writing Aspects	Pre-Test	Dominant Order	Writing Aspects	Post-test
				local cultural wisdom and character education indicators)	
4	1.b Quality and scope of content (characterized by local cultural wisdom and character education indicators)	8.94	4	4 The accuracy of sentence structure usage	12.26
5	3 The accuracy of diction	7.16	5	3 The accuracy of diction	8.52
6	5 The accuracy of spelling and punctuation usage	6.03	6	5 The accuracy of spelling and punctuation usage	8.16
7	6 The completeness of diary writing format	4.19	7	6 Writing neatness	4.39
8	7 Writing neatness	3.87	8	7 The completeness of diary writing format	4.19
	QTY	62.77		QTY	63.29

Table 2 provides a detailed comparison of the pre-test and post-test progress in the control class regarding each aspect of diary writing. After applying the conventional learning model, the average scores for each writing aspect in the control group changed from pre-test to post-test. Initially, the highest score in the pre-test was for aspect 1.a (quality and scope of content), followed by aspect 2 (organization and presentation), and so on. In the post-test, there was a noticeable improvement in aspects 1.a, 1.b, 4, and 5, whereas aspects 2, 3, 6, and 7 showed a decrease. The ranking order of these aspects shifted, with aspects 1.a, 2, 1.b, and 4 becoming more prominent. The changes in diary writing skills, particularly in the control class, are clearly illustrated in Table 3, which highlights the specific gains in each writing aspect.

Table 2. The Gain of Each Writing Aspect in Control Class

Test		WRITING ASPECTS							TOTAL	
		1.a	1.b	2	3	4	5	6		7
Pre-test	\sum Score	411	277	319	222	280	187	130	120	1946
	Average	13.26	8.94	10.29	7.16	9.03	6.03	4.19	3.87	62.77
Post-test	\sum Score	450	291	293	214	287	189	124	112	1962
	Average	14.52	9.39	9.45	6.90	9.26	6.16	4.00	3.61	63.29
Gain	\sum Score	39	14	-26	-8	7	2	-6	-8	16
	Score	1.26	0.45	-0.84	-0.26	0.23	0.13	-0.19	-0.26	0.52

Table 2 shows the gain in each writing aspect for the control class, revealing changes in students' diary writing skills after the implementation of the conventional learning model. While some aspects saw an increase in scores, others showed a decline. Overall, the control class experienced a modest improvement, with a total score gain of 0.52 from the pre-test to the post-test. The pre-test results ranked aspects such as the quality and scope of content, organization, sentence structure accuracy, and others from highest to lowest. Following the treatment, all aspects showed score increases, with a new ranking order, including a shift towards the importance of local cultural wisdom and religious character values in the content. This improvement in writing skills is evident in the data presented in Table 3, which further details the changes in specific writing aspects.

Table 3 The Differences in the Order of Improvement in Writing Aspects on the pre-test and post-test of the Experimental Class

Dominant Order		Writing Aspects	Pre-test	Dominant Order		Writing Aspects	Post-test
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1	1.a	Quality and scope of content (contains elements of experience, feelings, and thoughts)	13.52	1	1.b	Quality and scope of content (characterized by local cultural wisdom and religious character education indicators)	18.00
2	2	Organization and presentation of the ideas in the diary	10.26	2	1.a	Quality and scope of content containing elements of experience, feelings, and thoughts.	17.90
3	4	Accuracy of usage Sentence structure	9.00	3	4	Accuracy of usage Sentence structure	12.50
4	1.b	Quality and scope of content (characterized by cultural local wisdom and religious character education indicators)	8.87	4	2	Organization and presentation of the ideas in the diary	12.26
5	3	The accuracy of diction	7.19	5	3	The accuracy of diction	8.52
6	5	Accuracy of spelling usage and punctuation	6.00	6	5	Accuracy of spelling usage and punctuation	8.16
7	6	Completeness of writing formats diary	3.90	7	8	Writing neatness	4.39
8	7	Writing neatness	3.87	8	7	Completeness The completeness of	4.19

Dominant Order	Writing Aspects	Pre-test	Dominant Order	Writing Aspects	Post-test
				diary writing format	
	QTY	62.61		QTY	85.94

Table 3 presents the differences in improvements between the pre-test and post-test for the experimental class. The results indicate an overall increase in average scores across all aspects of diary writing, with a total average gain of 23.33. The aspect showing the most significant improvement was 1.b (content relevance to the theme), with an average gain of 9.13, while a minor improvement was seen in aspect 6 (punctuation usage), which had a gain of only 0.29. Overall, the implementation of the learning model in the experimental class significantly enhanced students' writing abilities, particularly in content relevance, structure, and vocabulary usage. Table 4 further illustrates the improvement in diary writing skills.

Table 4: The Gain in Each Aspect of Diary Writing in the Experimental Class

Test		WRITING ASPECTS								QTY
		1.a	1.b	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Pre-test	Σ Score	419	275	318	223	279	186	121	120	1941
	Average	13.52	8.87	10.26	7.19	9.00	6.00	3.90	3.87	62.61
Post-test	Σ Score	555	558	380	264	388	253	130	136	2664
	Average	17.90	18.00	12.26	8.25	12.50	8.16	4.19	4.39	85.94
Gain	Σ Score	136	283	62	41	109	67	9	16	723
	Average	4.38	9.13	2.00	1.06	3.50	2.16	0.29	0.52	23.33

Table 4 shows significant improvements across all writing aspects after the treatment. The average pre-test score of 62.61 increased to 85.94 in the post-test, with a total gain of 23.33 points. The aspect with the highest improvement was 1.b (structure or organization of writing), which saw a gain of 9.13, followed by aspect 1.a (ideas and development) with a gain of 4.38. However, the aspect with the lowest increase was aspect 7 (style of language), which only saw a gain of 0.52. These results clearly demonstrate the effectiveness of the group inquiry learning model in enhancing students' writing abilities, particularly in the organization and development of ideas, which were the primary areas of focus in the research. Although improvements were observed in all aspects, the challenge remains in improving the style of language. This finding directly answers the research questions regarding the effectiveness of the learning model in improving students' narrative writing skills, highlighting the significant impact on content

organization and idea development. The second result, regarding the integration of religious character values in narrative writing, will be presented in the following section.

Integrating Religious Character Values in Group Inquiry Learning Model

The results of the study showed that the group inquiry learning model effectively reflected religious character values such as honesty, responsibility, mutual respect, and cooperation in students' behavior. This learning method encouraged students to engage in discussions, collaborative problem-solving, and analysis, which helped them develop attitudes of tolerance and concern. Furthermore, the inquiry-based approach strengthened spiritual values, including patience in problem-solving, gratitude for knowledge, and sincerity in sharing understanding. The data indicate that the integration of these religious character values through the group inquiry model contributed to the enhancement of both cognitive and moral development, as demonstrated in the students' improved writing skills. The findings underscore the potential of the group inquiry learning model in reinforcing religious character while fostering academic skills such as writing.

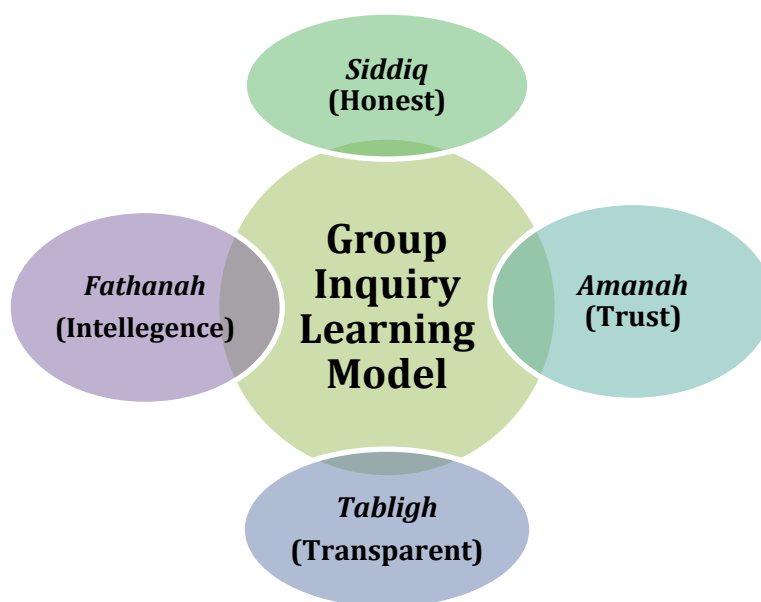


Figure 2. The Flow of the Group Inquiry Learning Model Based on Religious Character Values

The results of the research highlight the integration of religious character values, such as honesty, trust, transparency, and intelligence, within the group inquiry learning model. In Madrasah Tsanawiyah in Magelang City, students engaged in narrative writing tasks focused on values like mutual cooperation, tolerance, and religious habits. The students were encouraged to incorporate local and religious traditions into their writing, often conducting investigations outside the classroom through activities like field studies, interviews with community leaders, and discussions with religious scholars. These real-world learning experiences, combined with religious and cultural elements, enriched their writing, allowing them to explore these values more deeply. Extracurricular activities, such as the local wisdom literacy club and the creation of a school magazine highlighting local culture and religious values, further supported this integration.

The group inquiry learning model, which combines local culture with religious character values, created contextually relevant education that reinforced students' religious development through the writing process. By focusing on writing narratives based on religious character values, students were able to develop creative, meaningful, and reflective work. Throughout the learning process, students explored the application of honesty, trust, transparency, and intelligence in their writing, each reinforcing their personal and academic growth. The results underscore the model's potential to cultivate strong religious character while improving writing skills. This approach, with its focus on narrative writing and religious values, offers a valuable alternative to address contemporary educational challenges and the internalization of religious character values in students' lives.

This study contributes to the field of literacy and character education by offering a novel learning strategy that combines the group inquiry model with religious character education in the context of narrative writing. It is expected that the findings will provide valuable insights into how such integrated approaches can be implemented effectively in Islamic education settings, particularly in Indonesia. Ultimately, the study aims to contribute to the development of more engaging, contextually relevant, and meaningful learning experiences that not only enhance students' writing skills but also strengthen their moral and ethical development.

Based on the results of the present study, there are several points to discuss. The assessment conducted in this study aimed to measure the impact of the group inquiry learning model on students' narrative writing skills and the reinforcement of their religious character. As a form of expression, writing plays a vital role in shaping intellectual and moral development (Deane, 2018; Stroumsa, 2016). The assessment focused on the quality of the diary contents, which included students' experiences, thoughts, and feelings, while also evaluating how well religious character values such as honesty (*siddiq*), trustworthiness (*amanah*), transparency (*tabligh*), and intelligence (*fathahah*) were incorporated into the writing (Darimis, 2016). The rubric used for assessment reflected these criteria, highlighting the connection between writing quality and the internalization of religious values. The findings indicate that the group inquiry model not only enhanced students' writing proficiency but also facilitated the expression of religious character values through their narratives. Writing skills are crucial for students to navigate academic matters (Yudhiantara et al., 2024) and improve reading skills (Genlott & Grönlund, 2013). Learn in general (Klein & Boscolo, 2016), develop academic skills (Wrigglesworth & McKeever, 2010), and induce character building (Rohadi, 2019).

The results demonstrate that the group inquiry learning model was effective in improving students' writing abilities while integrating religious character values. The model encouraged active engagement through collaborative learning (Sari et al., 2024). Furthermore, reflective discussions allow students to explore and practice writing skills in a meaningful context. By engaging in problem-solving and group discussions, students were able to enhance their understanding of both academic content and moral values (Damkam & Chano, 2024). This process aligns with the principles of constructivist learning theory, where knowledge is built through active social interaction and personal reflection (Vygotsky, 1978). In the context of this study, students not only developed stronger writing skills (Nauman et al., 2011). However, it also deepened their understanding of religious values, reinforcing both cognitive and moral growth. The framework of constructivist learning theory underpinned the success of this study, where students actively engaged in collaborative learning to build knowledge and skills (Dong et al., 2025). The process of inquiry encouraged students to reflect on their learning, enabling them to apply their newfound knowledge to real-world scenarios (Geist, 2025; Gernsbacher, 2018).

The inquiry-based approach in this research aligns with constructivist principles by promoting student-centered learning that encourages exploration, critical thinking, and

collaborative problem-solving (Piaget, 1950). As students worked together, they were able to negotiate meaning, challenge assumptions, and share perspectives, thus developing a more nuanced understanding of how to integrate religious values into their writing (Allison, 2024; Damayanti & Santosa, 2024). This hands-on, participatory model of learning facilitated an environment where students could internalize the lessons being taught, demonstrating how group inquiry can enhance both academic skills and character development. The results highlight the importance of a learning model that goes beyond traditional methods by engaging students in active, collaborative exploration that fosters critical thinking and moral development (Arega & Hunde, 2025).

Furthermore, the integration of religious character values helped strengthen students' spiritual development (Muttaqin et al., 2024; Masturin, 2023). Values such as patience in problem-solving, gratitude for knowledge, and sincerity in sharing understanding were emphasized throughout the inquiry process (Siregar & Wantini, 2024). These values not only contributed to the students' moral growth but also had a direct impact on their academic performance (Rifki et al., 2024), particularly in writing tasks. The findings suggest that the group inquiry learning model is a powerful tool for promoting religious character while simultaneously fostering academic skills. This integration aligns with Islamic education principles, which emphasize the development of both cognitive and moral dimensions in students (Mahfudh, 2022; Saud, 2024; Darmayenti et al., 2021; Rahmatika et al., 2024).

This approach also supported the development of Islamic character education, which emphasizes the cultivation of values like sincerity, honesty, and responsibility (Baumeister & Juola Exline, 1999). The integration of these values into the learning process enhanced the students' ability to connect their academic skills with their ethical and spiritual development (Ismail, 2015). In the context of Islamic education, this learning model helps students grow holistically, combining intellectual knowledge with moral teachings that guide their actions and interactions with others (Puspitasari et al., 2024). By integrating Islamic character values such as *siddiq* (honesty), *amanah* (trust), *tabligh* (transparency), and *fathanah* (intelligence), the group inquiry learning model not only improved students' writing skills but also reinforced their religious and moral development (Huda et al., 2024). These values were not merely taught as concepts but were embedded in the learning process that triggered prosocial behavior (Safrihsyah et al., 2024), allowing students to practice and internalize them through real-life experiences and writing tasks (Craig & McKinney, 2016). The findings underscore the potential of integrating constructivist learning theory and Islamic education frameworks to create a comprehensive educational approach that supports both academic achievement and character and more real development (Rusmana et al., 2024), preparing students to navigate the challenges of the modern world with integrity and purpose.

CONCLUSION

The results demonstrated that this model significantly improved students' ability to write structured narratives, with the experimental class showing a substantial gain in writing proficiency (N-Gain = 22.33) compared to the control class (N-Gain = 0.52). The t-test confirmed a significant difference between the two groups (t-count = 3.081, sig. = 0.018), highlighting the effectiveness of the group inquiry model in promoting writing skills. By fostering collaboration and encouraging reflection on religious values, students could integrate values such as honesty, trust, transparency, and intelligence into their writing, enhancing both their cognitive and moral development. The findings of this study indicate that the group inquiry learning model is a highly effective strategy for addressing modern educational challenges, particularly in Islamic education. By combining academic skill development with the internalization of religious values, this model helps strengthen students' character, preparing

them to face the challenges of the digital era with integrity. This approach offers a valuable solution for integrating moral and academic learning, supporting the holistic development of students in line with Islamic educational goals.

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