



Teachers' Strategies in Cultivating Gratitude Character through Islamic Education and Local Cultural Practices in Primary Schools: A Qualitative Approach

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Abstract

Fostering the character of gratitude in students often becomes trapped in static doctrinal approaches, failing to reach the affective depth necessary for meaningful transformation. This study aims to explore and analyze pedagogical strategies that synergize the values of Islamic education and indigenous wisdom to nurture gratitude in primary school students. The research adopted a phenomenology design. Data collection techniques included interviews, focus group discussions, and observations. Data analysis in this study utilizes Robert K. Yin's systematic protocol, involving 25 Islamic Religious Education (IRE) teachers as key participants to uncover the essence of their lived experiences in internalizing gratitude values. The findings revealed that cultivating a character is implemented through a comprehensive orchestration of strategies, including systematic habituation, behavioral modeling, reflection through muhasabah (self-introspection), and the application of cooperative and experiential learning methods integrated with local cultural values. These findings asserted that instilling a character of gratitude is not merely an individual theological disposition but a socio-pedagogical construction that requires the fusion of Islamic educational values and indigenous wisdom to establish robust habituation practices. The implications of this study underscore the importance of shifting the paradigm from moralistic instruction to a reflective, contextually aligned pedagogy that resonates with students' spiritual values and sociocultural realities. This study makes a significant contribution to the development of more dynamic and applicable character education curriculum models at the primary school level.

Keywords: Islamic Education, Indigenous Wisdom, Gratitude Character, Primary Education, Character Building.

Abstrak

Penanaman karakter kebersyukuran pada siswa sering kali terjebak dalam pendekatan doktriner yang statis sehingga gagal menyentuh pada kedalaman afektif. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengeksplorasi dan menganalisis berbagai strategi pedagogis yang mensinergikan nilai-nilai pendidikan Islam dan kearifan lokal dalam menumbuhkan karakter kebersyukuran siswa sekolah dasar. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan fenomenologi. Teknik pengumpulan data dilakukan dengan wawancara, focus discussion dan observasi. Analisis data menggunakan protokol sistematis Robert K. Yin, studi ini melibatkan 25 guru Pendidikan Agama Islam sebagai subjek kunci untuk menggali esensi pengalaman guru dalam menginternalisasi nilai-nilai kebersyukuran. Hasil penelitian mengungkap bahwa pembentukan karakter kebersyukuran dilakukan melalui orkestrasi strategi yang komprehensif, meliputi pembiasaan sistemik, modeling perilaku, refleksi melalui muhasabah, serta penerapan

pembelajaran kooperatif dan berbasis pengalaman yang diintegrasikan secara dengan nilai-nilai budaya lokal. Temuan ini menegaskan bahwa dalam menanamkan karakter kebersyukuran bukan sekadar disposisi teologis individual, melainkan sebuah konstruksi sosial-pedagogis yang membutuhkan perpaduan antara nilai pendidikan Islam dan kearifan lokal untuk menciptakan habituasi yang kuat. Implikasi dari studi ini menekankan pentingnya pergeseran paradigma dari instruksi moralistik menuju pedagogi reflektif-kontekstual yang selaras dengan nilai-nilai spiritual siswa dengan realitas sosiokultural. Studi ini memberikan kontribusi signifikan bagi pengembangan model kurikulum pendidikan karakter yang lebih dinamis dan aplikatif pada tingkat pendidikan dasar.

Kata Kunci: Pendidikan Islam, Kearifan Lokal, Karakter Kebersyukuran, Sekolah Dasar, Membangun Karakter.

INTRODUCTION

The era of globalization has led to a decline in character among primary school students. The various media content presented today weakens the moral value of gratitude (Ardianto et al., 2026; Fahrudin & Warti'ah, 2023; Nursyam et al., 2025; Samdani et al., 2025). In addition to the influence of information technology, the social environment also shapes increasingly materialistic, hedonistic, and individualistic lifestyles (Dittmar & Isham, 2022; Li et al., 2025; Parvatiyar & Sheth, 2023). These values have eroded students' character of gratitude. The conventional moralistic approach implemented in schools has been deemed ineffective in addressing the disruption of gratitude values (Abidin et al., 2025; Adiyono et al., 2025; Aryasutha et al., 2025; Aslihah & Wasehudin, 2023). Several field observations highlight the low level of gratitude among primary school students, as evidenced by behaviors such as bullying, feeling superior to peers, complaining about schoolwork, disregarding the kindness of others, dissatisfaction with what they possess, and selfishness (Oliveira et al., 2024; Xiang & Yuan, 2021; Zuniga et al., 2024). Such behaviors contradict gratitude values, which emphasize respect for others, understanding others' feelings, contentment in life, and fostering harmonious relationships (Makri & Turner, 2020). Therefore, integrative approaches are necessary to foster a character of gratitude grounded in religious values and local cultural wisdom.

Based on a review of the literature on strategies for fostering gratitude, three main patterns have been identified. First, cognitive intervention strategies. To cultivate gratitude, teachers implement gratitude journals in which students write about the good things they experience daily (Bohlmeijer et al., 2021; Jiang, 2020; Kaur et al., 2025). Second, parental mediation through dialogical methods. The cultivation of gratitude is guided and directed by adults to children (Chen et al., 2024, 2025; Hussong et al., 2020, 2021)—third, behavioral manifestation through social philanthropy. Gratitude is nurtured via participation in social activities (Armenta et al., 2022; Y. Yang et al., 2021; Zeng et al., 2023). These approaches to fostering gratitude assume that gratitude is a psychological disposition constructed through personal reflection and the reinforcement of the students' microsystem environment. However, previous studies tend to adopt an individualistic, mechanistic, and fragmented perspective that neglects students' broader sociocultural values. This study seeks to fill the theoretical gap by exploring the synergy between various reflective strategies in Islamic education, such as *mubasabah* (self-introspection), experiential learning, and values from local wisdom, within a holistic and contextual pedagogical framework. The research is crucial for exploring how teachers synergize and integrate students' religious and cultural values to instill a spirit of

gratitude, moving beyond a mere theological concept to form habits that shape students' character (Ismawati, 2023; Munawir et al., 2024; Tsani & Ali, 2024).

This study aims to explore and conduct an in-depth analysis of strategies for fostering gratitude in primary school students by synergizing Islamic educational values and local cultural wisdom. Previous studies generally emphasize strategies for cultivating gratitude that focus primarily on its psychological aspects, which tend to be personal and mechanistic (Ding et al., 2024; Fehr et al., 2026; Hollingsworth & Redden, 2022). Various approaches to instilling gratitude character also tend to be verbalistic and ritualistic, lacking engagement with the affective dimension (Salgado et al., 2026; Van Cappellen et al., 2025). However, few studies have examined the formation of gratitude character in a more holistic and integrative manner, combining Islamic education values with local cultural wisdom (Arizona et al., 2025; Indasari et al., 2025; Maswati et al., 2026; Rozanita et al., 2026; Sodikin et al., 2026). This study seeks to contribute to the development of knowledge on gratitude pedagogy by creating a synergy between Islamic education values and local cultural wisdom. It provides a new perspective on an in-depth examination of the strategies teachers employ to foster gratitude character, and its implications for students' theological understanding and the practical application of gratitude in primary schools.

This study is grounded in the internalization of gratitude as a character trait among students, which can be accelerated through a synergy of integrative and contextual pedagogical strategies. The application of these various strategies will not achieve optimal learning outcomes if implemented separately, without integrating local cultural values and Islamic education values into social life. Cooperative learning, which is based on students' experiential engagement in fostering gratitude character, addresses students' affective dimension. This model encourages transforming gratitude from a merely cognitive domain into a collective habit and a moral force. Such approaches are believed to bridge the moral disconnection gaps caused by conventional, individualistic methods. Therefore, the synergy between religious spiritual reflection and cultural practices in the learning process will shape a resilient and adaptive Islamic character education ecosystem for primary school students.

METHOD

This study employed a phenomenology design to explore and deeply analyze teachers' strategies for fostering gratitude character in primary school students in East Kalimantan Province. A case study design was chosen because it allows the researcher to investigate the complex phenomenon of internalizing gratitude values in real-life contexts. This internalization includes integrating Islamic educational values and local cultural wisdom. Through this approach, the researcher can capture the unique strategies teachers implement within a multicultural school ecosystem. The study was conducted in East Kalimantan Province from February to August 2025.

Data collection was conducted through semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs). The interviews were designed to gain an in-depth understanding of the pedagogical strategies that integrate Islamic educational values and local cultural wisdom in fostering students' gratitude character. An interview guide was employed to ensure the relevance and depth of the information obtained from the teachers' experiences. Focus group discussions

(FGDs) were used to explore collective insights from teachers on implementing various strategies to nurture a character of gratitude through the synergy of Islamic education values and local wisdom. This activity also served as a member reflection tool to verify the authenticity of the researcher's interpretations with participants, ensuring that the resulting holistic pedagogical framework authentically represents field realities. The researcher also conducted direct observations to verify the alignment between interview results and field realities. Through observation, the researcher was able to capture and understand real-life contexts (sensitivity to context) regarding how Islamic educational values and local cultural wisdom are practiced by teachers in classrooms.

This study involved 25 Islamic Religious Education (PAI) educators from diverse elementary institutions in East Kalimantan, comprising 11 men and 14 women, aged 24 to 51 years. Regarding educational background, 17 participants held bachelor's degrees (S1), and 8 held master's degrees (S2). Regarding employment status, 15 participants were civil servants (PNS), and 10 were non-civil servant teachers with at least 3 years of teaching experience. Geographically, the participants were distributed as follows: 12 teachers from Samarinda, 5 from Kutai Kartanegara Regency, 3 from West Kutai Regency, and 5 from East Kutai Regency. Several postgraduate students from various regions in East Kalimantan supported data collection.

Data analysis in this study adheres to (Yin, 2017) systematic protocol, integrated with phenomenological interpretation to explore the lived experiences of 25 informants. The analysis initiates with pattern matching, contrasting empirical patterns from participants' narratives against theoretical propositions regarding Islamic pedagogy and local wisdom. Subsequently, explanation building is employed to construct a coherent narrative on how gratitude is internalized through habituation and reflection. To enhance analytical generalization, cross-case synthesis is conducted to identify consistent findings across Samarinda, Kutai Kartanegara, East Kutai, and West Kutai. Finally, to ensure credibility and reliability, the study employs member reflection through Focus Group Discussions (FGD) to validate the researcher's interpretation of the synergy between Islamic educational values and local wisdom.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Habituation

Based on data collection, one strategy teachers employ to foster a sense of gratitude in students is through cultivating the habit of expressing and practicing gratitude. Students are taught to say "Alhamdulillah" (thank God) every time they receive a blessing, such as after completing a task, fulfilling a wish, receiving a gift, or receiving help from a friend, or other positive experiences they encounter in their daily lives. This habit is not only practiced during learning activities but is also integrated into daily activities both inside and outside the classroom. Students are also taught to care for one another, for example, by sharing food supplies and helping friends in need, as explained by Informant 1.

"I direct students to develop the habit of always saying 'Alhamdulillah' (praise be to God) when they receive something and to express gratitude to the person who gave it. For example, when students receive a good grade on an assignment, they should say 'Alhamdulillah' (praise be to God) and express gratitude for the grade and the knowledge they have gained". (Teacher 1).

Self-reflection (*Muhāsabah*)

Besides habituation, teachers also implement the strategy of self-reflection (*muhāsabah*) to cultivate a character of gratitude. Through self-reflection, the aim is to foster awareness of the blessings bestowed by God and every good thing received in life. The implementation of the self-reflection strategy is carried out through deep self-reflection on God's blessings. One way to conduct this reflection solemnly is by asking students to close their eyes and take a moment of silence. A teacher states, "I invite students to close their eyes for a moment and reflect on God's blessings, such as being able to breathe, having a family, and being able to learn". (Teacher 3)

Muhāsabah or self-reflection is also carried out by keeping a gratitude journal. Teachers ask students to write a list of the good things they receive each day. This statement aligns with a statement from Teacher 4.

"I asked students to keep a daily 'Gratitude Journal' for a week. Each day, students wrote down at least three things for which they were grateful. The activity concluded with a brief presentation to the class about their experiences of gratitude. Some students wrote simple things like 'grateful for being able to have breakfast' or grateful for having a friend who is willing to help". (Teacher 4).

Role model (*Uswah*)

The next strategy is role modeling. Through this example, teachers provide examples of words, attitudes, and actions of gratitude in everyday life. In this sense, teachers act as *uswah* hasanah or good examples for students. Teachers are always committed to being examples for students in being grateful for blessings, as stated by Teacher 2.

"As a teacher, I must first model grateful behavior in the classroom, such as saying Alhamdulillah when students complete their work/learning process and saying thank you when students collect their homework/assignments, even just because they are present and attend class without making a fuss, I say; Thank you, children, for being orderly and good in today's teaching and learning activities". (Teacher 2).

In addition to personal examples, teachers foster a sense of gratitude in students through stories of prophets, pious people, religious figures, and folktales as role models in life. These stories convey meaningful moral messages, including the importance of gratitude and appreciation. For example, the stories of the Prophet Muhammad, the Prophet Job, the Prophet Solomon, the Prophet David, the Companions of the Prophet, Lukman al-Hakim, and folktales such as Malin Kundang and Timun Mas, as well as local legends, as stated by Teacher 5.

"I use Islamic stories, like the story of the Prophet Ayyub (Ayyub) about patience and gratitude, to help people feel grateful". I tell the story with puppets, pictures, or short videos. After the story, I ask the kids to think about this: "How would we be thankful if we were in the Prophet Ayyub's place? " (Teacher 5).

Cooperative Learning

Through this storytelling activity, the teacher invited students to reflect on how they would feel if they were in the prophets' shoes. The results were then discussed, with a focus on how we can be grateful for God's blessings. In group discussions, each student was given the opportunity to share their opinions and experiences in expressing gratitude for God's blessings. It aligns with one teacher's statement, "I invited students to have a group discussion about why we should be grateful and how can we be grateful?" (Teacher 6).

Experiential learning

The character of gratitude is also fostered through extracurricular activities. Through these activities, students practice gratitude directly in real life. Several extracurricular activities foster gratitude in students, including community service at an orphanage, a food sharing program, planting and caring for plants, congregational prayer, Quran recitation, and the "One Day One Prayer of Gratitude" program. Teacher 8 confirmed by saying:

"I held a community service event at an orphanage to raise awareness among students about the joys of having a family. We also planted and cared for school plants as a way of expressing gratitude for nature. We also held congregational prayers, Quran recitation, and the 'One Day One Prayer of Gratitude' program. The goal was to get students accustomed to practicing gratitude in real life". (Teacher 8).

Local cultural approach

To foster a sense of gratitude, teachers also employ a local cultural approach. This approach aligns with the culture of Indonesian society, particularly in East Kalimantan, which boasts a highly diverse cultural landscape. East Kalimantan comprises a diverse mix of ethnicities and cultures, including Javanese, Bugis, Banjar, Kutai, Dayak, Lombok, Mandar, Batak, and Sundanese. This diversity influences teachers' strategies for fostering morality through the introduction and practice of local culture. Teachers engage in several activities to foster a sense of gratitude, including the tradition of giving alms to the earth (harvest thanksgiving), celebrations (selamatan), feasts (kenduri), and creating simple miniature classroom displays, such as bringing small crops, mini tumpeng rice cones, or fruit to eat together in class, as explained by one of the teachers.

"To foster gratitude, I use the Kenduri or Selamatan cultural approach. This activity is held as an expression of gratitude after an exam or a promotion. The teacher leads a prayer, then students share traditional foods (ketupat, lemang, tumpeng). This activity aims to train students to be grateful for their academic success and share their blessings in a communal atmosphere". (Teacher 7).

Another activity to foster gratitude, teachers also hold a Thanksgiving celebration together at school. In this activity, regional specialties are served (for example, ketupat, lemang, or tumpeng, nasi jaha, or traditional cakes) as a symbol of gratitude to Allah for the blessings given. Before various meals, students recite thanksgiving prayers together, following Islamic teachings. Students are invited to participate in the traditional harvest or sea thanksgiving celebration of the Lolak community. The activity begins with reading a prayer according to Islamic teachings (for example, the Qunut Nazilah prayer or the congratulations prayer). The teacher explains that in Islam, the produce of the land/sea is a blessing from Allah that must be appreciated and thanked for.

“One day, I invited students to learn outside the classroom with the theme ‘Learning Gratitude from Local Culture’, coinciding with our local tradition, namely the harvest celebration during the fruit and vegetable harvest season. Then, I explained that in our local culture, this tradition is not just about eating together, but also carries an important message of gratitude for the sustenance that has been provided. I invited students to reflect on how the harvest does not only come from the hard work of farmers, but also because of rain, fertile soil, and sunshine, all of which are gifts from God”. (Teacher 6).

In addition to introducing the culture of the big harvest, teachers introduce gratitude through the local culture of the "Beseprah" tradition.

"I explained to the students about the Beseprah tradition, a communal meal shared by the people of Samarinda as part of the city's anniversary celebrations. This tradition teaches togetherness, sharing, and gratitude for God's blessings. Experience: I shared my experience participating in Beseprah, where people sat together without distinction of social status. Students were encouraged to conclude that gratitude is demonstrated through togetherness and not being arrogant about the blessings one possesses". (Teacher 9).

Table 1. Strategies for Cultivating a Character of Gratitude

Strategy	Description
Habituation	Students are encouraged to say "Alhamdulillah" when receiving blessings, express gratitude for the kindness of friends, share food, and help friends in need.
Self-reflection (<i>Muhāsabah</i>)	Students are encouraged to reflect and introspect on the blessings and goodness they have received in life. Students are encouraged to keep a gratitude journal, listing the blessings they receive each day.
Role model (<i>Uswah</i>)	Teachers serve as role models for students in their attitudes and behavior. They also share exemplary stories of the Prophets and Apostles, as well as local legends.
Cooperative Learning	Teachers engage students in discussions about expressing gratitude and encourage them to participate in role-playing activities to reinforce this concept.
Experiential Learning	Through extracurricular activities, students practice gratitude by participating in community service at orphanages, food-sharing programs, planting and caring for plants, congregational prayer, reading the Quran, and the "One Day One Prayer of Gratitude" program.
Local Culture-Based Learning	Teachers introduce and engage students in regional cultural celebrations, such as the Earth Almsgiving (<i>sedekah bumi</i>), the tradition of giving back (<i>seprah</i>), and the celebration of thanksgiving (<i>selamatan</i>), and create miniatures of the Earth Almsgiving (<i>sedekah bumi</i>) traditions (<i>harvest thanksgiving</i>), celebrations, and feasts.

Discussion

This study aims to explore and analyze various teacher strategies in cultivating a character of gratitude through the integration of Islamic educational values and local cultural wisdom. Field practice shows that teachers integrate various strategies to cultivate a sense of gratitude in students. The study found that six strategies are integrated into the character-building process: habituation, self-reflection, role modeling, cooperative learning, experiential learning, and the integration of local traditions. First, the habituation strategy is used to create a conducive environment by routinely habituating students' attitudes, speech, and behavior in class. Second, self-reflection fosters student self-awareness by encouraging reflection and introspection on the goodness they feel every day. Third, *uswah* emphasizes the teacher's role as a role model for students. Fourth, cooperative learning emphasizes cooperation and intense interaction among teachers and students during the learning process. Fifth, experiential learning emphasizes students' experiences in practicing the values of gratitude, especially through extracurricular activities. Sixth, local culture-based learning that emphasizes the integration of local wisdom values in fostering a character of gratitude (Aziz et al., 2025; Fatah et al., 2025; Fathoni et al., 2024; Hasanah & Husna, 2025).

Strategies for cultivating a grateful character require a complex, comprehensive process that involves cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions. Modeling and habituation strategies play a crucial role in fostering a grateful character. Students require concrete examples and repetition to internalize the values of gratitude, thereby fostering automatic habituation (Bock et al., 2025; Carrillo et al., 2025). Self-reflection and experiential learning catalyze students' metacognitive reflection (Bhattacharjee et al., 2024; O'Flanagan & Y Jester, 2025). The value of gratitude is not merely a matter of discourse or belief, but rather a conscious awareness enacted in every action (Ali et al., 2020). Meanwhile, cooperative learning and the integration of local cultural values serve to contextualize the value of gratitude in everyday life (Cooray & Champion, 2022; Sakti et al., 2024; Thiele & Kordts, 2024). The implementation of these strategies has implications for the creation of religious values that align with local cultural identity, thereby strengthening social cohesion and minimizing individualistic behavior. Therefore, the synergy of the various strategies teachers implement to instill the values of gratitude is essential to building a foundation of spiritual maturity that shapes strong student character, enabling them to respond to global challenges with an appreciative attitude and strong integrity.

The findings differ from previous findings that position gratitude as a static, personal identity of a theological-doctrinal nature. In the character education literature, there are three dominant patterns in cultivating gratitude: first, positive psychology-based affective reinforcement (Dang et al., 2025; Van Cappellen et al., 2024; F. X. Yang et al., 2024), second, habituation of religious behavior routinely (Leonhardt et al., 2025; Razmus et al., 2024; Van Cappellen et al., 2024). Third, instructional role models through teacher modeling (Allen et al., 2024; Harrison et al., 2025; Pallathadka et al., 2023). These studies tend to view gratitude as an individual emotional disposition, formed through textual indoctrination and mechanistic repetition, without a deep understanding of its sociocultural context. Unlike previous studies, which tend to focus on a doctrinal approach, this research offers a novel integration of reflective dimensions, such as *muhasabah* (reflection), with local wisdom within a cooperative-applicative

learning framework. The synergy between Islamic educational values and local wisdom fosters a strong habit of gratitude. The results of this research are crucial for filling this gap by exploring various strategies to ground spiritual values in students' sociocultural realities. This study develops a more holistic and contextually grounded character education model suited to students' learning environments.

Instilling a sense of gratitude in elementary school students is a pedagogical synthesis process involving various strategies. This character-building process is not simply a transfer of knowledge about moral virtues, but also involves self-awareness of the existence of gratitude values in individual and social life. Instilling a sense of gratitude is an existential internalization that integrates religious-spiritual values with students' affective awareness in the context of social behavior. Synchronizing aspects of gratitude across the cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains in a conducive educational environment will foster a strong sense of gratitude in students (Kuo et al., 2024; Zhu et al., 2021). The use of habituation and reflection strategies, reinforced by teacher modeling, can transform theological understanding into concrete behavioral habits (Callahan, 2024). Furthermore, integrating local culture into experiential learning has proven effective in bridging Islamic educational values with students' sociocultural realities (Aulia et al., 2026; Aziz et al., 2025; Dewantoro & Susilo, 2025; Jura et al., 2024). This dynamic transforms the abstract understanding of gratitude into a practical, concrete social action. Therefore, the effectiveness of Islamic character education depends heavily on teachers' ability to synergize spiritual reflection with social practice through cooperative learning. This multidimensional strategy holistically transforms students' character from mere instructional compliance to deep, sustainable moral awareness.

Teachers' strategies for cultivating gratitude are crucial for fostering students' moral development amid globalization. Individualistic, hedonistic, and materialistic lifestyles characterize this era. This situation triggers an identity crisis and a sense of life dissatisfaction due to widespread social comparisons in the digital space. The synergy of various strategies for cultivating gratitude, such as self-reflection, modeling, and habituation based on local cultural wisdom, provides a theological-cultural strength to protect students from these negative influences (Green, 2025; Reyes et al., 2022). Experiential and cooperative learning encourage the transformation of gratitude from an abstract concept into a prosocial action that challenges individualistic values (Kates & DeSteno, 2021; Walsh et al., 2022). Therefore, the effectiveness of Islamic character education depends on teachers' ability to synergize Islamic educational values and local wisdom, thereby fostering a habituation of gratitude within the school's macro-ecosystem.

This study provides a new understanding of the pedagogical literacy of gratitude that is ecosystemic and integrative. Instilling a character of gratitude cannot be implemented through a single instructional approach. Character cultivation requires harmonization among various aspects, such as cognitive reflection and behavioral habituation in social life. For example, the synergy of self-reflection strategies and teacher modeling, contextualized with local cultural values, helps students understand divine values within the framework of local wisdom. Cooperative learning grounded in students' experiences helps build a collective awareness of God's blessings in every aspect of life. In this case, gratitude is transformed into social capital to build a more harmonious order of life (Lin et al., 2025; Oguni & Ishii, 2024). This

understanding reaffirms that the effectiveness of Islamic character education, such as gratitude, lies in the teacher's ability to devise strategies to ground prophetic values in sociocultural realities. Teachers are not merely instructors. They are moral architects who must connect spiritual values with meaningful social action.

This study emphasizes the need to transform the character education curriculum from a passive instructional model to an active, contextual pedagogical ecosystem, as the formation of a character of gratitude at the elementary school level requires the internalization of values that align with children's cognitive development and sociocultural identity. The use of self-reflection and modeling strategies integrated with local culture through cooperative learning can create meaningful and applicable learning experiences for students (Ar et al., 2025; Bhat & Bisati, 2025; Cahyani et al., 2026; Pang et al., 2021; Silva et al., 2021; Torrents et al., 2021). This multidimensional approach empirically strengthens students' moral resilience in the face of the challenges posed by materialism in the digital era. The future development of a character of gratitude must adopt a model that systematically integrates Islamic educational values and local wisdom. This implication demands strengthening teachers' competencies as moral architects capable of synergizing inner spirituality with sociocultural practices to create authentic and sustainable character habituation.

CONCLUSION

Based on the research results and analysis, several teacher strategies are available to foster gratitude in students, including habituation, self-reflection, modeling, cooperative learning, experiential learning, and integrating local culture into learning activities. These character-building strategies encompass the processes of moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action. This research provides a theoretical contribution as a basis for developing learning models that integrate gratitude values into the Islamic Religious Education curriculum, in particular, and other subjects. Integrating gratitude values into the curriculum enables a more structured and sustainable character-based learning program.

Despite its contributions, this study also has several limitations, including the small sample size of 25 Islamic Religious Education teachers in East Kalimantan. Although data collection was conducted in-depth through interviews, the generalizability of the results is limited due to the diverse strategies found in cultivating gratitude within local cultural contexts. Furthermore, this study focused on elementary schools, thus not encompassing all levels of education. Therefore, future research could include a larger sample size that encompasses educational levels from elementary school to high school. Further research could explore other Islamic character themes, such as forgiveness, *tawādu'* (humility), and *amānah* (trustworthiness). A mixed-methods approach could be developed to measure gratitude more thoroughly.

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