

Students' Social Skills at MA Muhammadiyah Limbung: Enhancing Interpersonal Competence through Innovative Learning Approaches

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Article History: Received on 8 September 2025, Revised on 6 October 2025,
Published on 23 December 2025

Abstract: This study aims to describe the implementation of collaborative-based innovative learning in improving students' social skills at MA Muhammadiyah Limbung, Gowa Regency. A qualitative descriptive approach was employed, with data collected through interviews, observations, and documentation involving teachers and students. The data were analyzed using Miles, Huberman, and Saldana's (2014) interactive model, which includes data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The findings reveal that the application of collaborative-based innovative learning fosters an active, inclusive, and participatory learning environment. Students demonstrated improvements in communication, cooperation, empathy, and problem-solving skills. Through problem-based learning and project-based learning, students were trained to collaboratively address social issues relevant to their daily lives while internalizing the values of *ukhuwah* (brotherhood), *ta'awun* (mutual assistance), and *ihsan* (excellence). Teachers acted as facilitators who motivated and guided students to interact positively throughout the learning process. Theoretically, these findings reinforce the theories of social interdependence (Johnson & Johnson, 2009), constructivist learning (Vygotsky, 1978), and experiential learning (Kolb, 2015), all of which emphasize that social interaction and meaningful experiences serve as foundational elements in developing students' social skills and character. Hence, collaborative-based innovative learning in Islamic educational settings not only enhances academic competence but also cultivates students' social and spiritual character holistically.

Keywords: Collaborative Approach, Innovative Learning, Islamic Education, MA Muhammadiyah Limbung, Social Skills

A. Introduction

Social skills such as communication, cooperation, problem-solving, and empathy play a crucial role in academic success as well as in the development of personal and professional relationships. Within the educational context, these competencies contribute to students' ability to interact effectively with teachers and peers while

supporting their academic performance (Santrock, 2018). The capacity to collaborate, articulate ideas clearly, and appreciate others' perspectives represents essential competencies for future success (Johnson & Johnson, 1994). Therefore, strengthening social skills in schools is an integral part of preparing students to engage effectively beyond the classroom.

In Indonesia's culturally diverse context, social competence holds strategic importance. Students are expected to adapt to various social situations both within the school environment and in the broader community. The significance of social skills is even greater in Islamic schools, where students are encouraged to excel academically while embodying empathy, cooperation, and respect in accordance with Islamic teachings (Hariyanti, 2025). This study focuses on the development of students' social skills at MA Muhammadiyah Limbung, Gowa regency, South Sulawesi, by examining the effectiveness of innovative group-based learning approaches in enhancing students' social competence.

Although the importance of social skills has been widely acknowledged, understanding the effectiveness of innovative learning strategies in fostering these competencies remains limited, particularly in Islamic educational settings (Susanti et al., 2024). Previous studies have primarily examined the correlation between social skills and academic achievement, while relatively few have explored how student-centered learning strategies influence social development especially in contexts grounded in religious and moral values (Sarifah & Hanif, 2025). Therefore, this study seeks to investigate how learning approaches impact the enhancement of social skills within Islamic schools.

Earlier studies have demonstrated that group-based learning significantly contributes to the improvement of interpersonal competence. Pareda asserted that peer interaction in collaborative activities plays a key role in developing students' communication and empathy (Pareda, 2024). Similarly, Irmansyah et al. found that cooperative learning encourages students to collaborate, share ideas, and cultivate mutual respect (Irmansyah et al., 2024). Thus, group learning not only enhances academic outcomes but also strengthens students' social development.

The distinctiveness of this study lies in its focus on implementing group-based learning strategies at MA Muhammadiyah Limbung, an Islamic educational institution. The study aims to provide empirical insights into how student-centered innovative learning strategies can foster social skill development in Islamic educational contexts. The collaborative approach is believed to be an effective means of enhancing communication, cooperation, and empathy among learners.

This study also seeks to address the central research question: *Can collaborative learning activities enhance students' social skills at MA Muhammadiyah Limbung?* By exploring this

question, the study intends to offer new perspectives on the challenges and opportunities in fostering social competence among students in Islamic secondary schools in Indonesia.

Beyond academic achievement, this research underscores the importance of integrating emotional and social dimensions into the school curriculum. In Islamic education, the strengthening of social skills aligned with moral and religious values has a positive impact on character formation. Collaborative learning approaches are expected to serve as models for integrating academic achievement with students' holistic personal development (Johnson & Johnson, 1994). Therefore, this study emphasizes the urgency of creating learning environments that promote healthy social interaction, cooperation, and empathy. Integrating social skills training into group activities allows students to cultivate essential communication and collaboration abilities required in an interconnected global era. Islamic schools such as MA Muhammadiyah Limbung are expected to make social skill enhancement an integral component of the educational process alongside conventional academic learning.

B. Methods

This study employed a descriptive qualitative approach aimed at providing an in-depth understanding of the implementation of collaborative learning in developing students' social skills at MA Muhammadiyah Limbung. This approach was chosen because it allows the researcher to explore phenomena naturally without manipulating variables, focusing instead on interpreting the meanings derived from empirical field data (Creswell, 2003). Accordingly, the study emphasizes describing social realities as they are, based on participants' lived experiences within the context of Islamic education.

The research design was guided by Merriam's perspective that qualitative research is inherently interpretative and emphasizes understanding the social context in which a phenomenon occurs (Merriam, 2009). In this context, collaborative learning is understood as a social process that encourages students to interact, empathize, communicate, and cooperate actively. Johnson and Johnson further emphasized that collaborative learning effectively enhances social skills by positioning peer interaction as the central component of the learning process (Johnson & Johnson, 2009).

The study was conducted at MA Muhammadiyah Limbung, located in Gowa Regency, South Sulawesi, an Islamic secondary institution under the auspices of Muhammadiyah. This school was purposefully selected due to its strong vision of character development and social competence cultivation through value-based Islamic learning. Furthermore, the school's social and cultural environment provides

a relevant context for examining the effectiveness of collaborative learning in enhancing students' interpersonal skills.

Data were collected through observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation to obtain a comprehensive understanding of learning practices and students' social interactions. Data analysis followed the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, consisting of three main stages: data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing (Miles et al., 2014). This process enabled the researcher to identify emerging patterns and meanings related to the influence of collaborative learning on students' social skills.

To ensure data validity, the study employed triangulation of sources and methods, as recommended by Denzin. Triangulation was carried out by comparing findings from observations, interviews, and document analyses to enhance the credibility and reliability of the results (Denzin, 2017). Through this approach, the study aims to provide a holistic and nuanced understanding of the relationship between collaborative learning and the development of students' social skills at MA Muhammadiyah Limbung.

C. Results and Discussion

Improvement of Communication Skills

Observations and interviews revealed that the implementation of collaborative learning at MA Muhammadiyah Limbung had a positive impact on improving students' communication skills. During group discussions, students actively participated in expressing opinions, asking questions, and responding to their peers' ideas constructively. Teachers acted as facilitators, encouraging students to articulate their thoughts politely, openly, and in accordance with Islamic communication ethics. This process created a dialogical space that naturally fostered speaking confidence and interpersonal communication competence.

Several students admitted that they initially felt awkward and lacked confidence when speaking in front of their peers. However, after repeatedly engaging in group discussions and presentations, they experienced significant improvements in confidence and the ability to present ideas in a structured manner. The collaborative learning environment fostered a sense of safety and mutual respect, where every student's contribution was valued. This indicates that collaborative learning serves as an effective means of developing social communication skills that are not only academic but also emotional and ethical. These findings align with the research of Nabila et al. which demonstrated that collaborative learning significantly enhances students' voice and communication abilities by providing opportunities for them to express ideas in an egalitarian setting (Nabila et al., 2024). Similarly, Rismi et al. found

that group activities promote speaking and active listening skills while cultivating the ability to appreciate differing opinions (Rismi et al., 2022). In other words, collaborative learning not only enhances verbal communication but also strengthens social empathy, an essential aspect of interpersonal competence.

Furthermore, the process of communication in collaborative learning reflects the essence of dialogical education proposed by Paulo Freire, which emphasizes the importance of dialogue as a means of mutual humanization (Freire, 2020). Through dialogue, students are not positioned as passive recipients of information but as active participants in constructing meaning together. This dialogical process when aligned with Islamic principles such as *ta'aruf* (mutual understanding) and *shūrā* (consultation) creates a learning environment where respect, equality, and empathy become the foundation of meaningful communication.

In addition, the cultivation of communication skills through collaborative learning also contributes to students' emotional intelligence. As Goleman explains, effective communication is inseparable from self-awareness, empathy, and the ability to regulate emotions during interaction (Goleman, 1995). The collaborative learning setting at MA Muhammadiyah Limbung allows students to experience these aspects directly. When students learn to listen, negotiate, and respond calmly to differing opinions, they are not only practicing speech skills but also developing *akhlaq al-karimah* (noble character) as envisioned in Islamic education.

In the context of Islamic education at MA Muhammadiyah Limbung, this improvement in communication also possesses moral and spiritual dimensions. Teachers instilled *adab al-kalām* – the Islamic principles of speaking with politeness, refraining from interrupting others, and listening attentively. These values transform communication into not merely an exchange of information, but also a means of building moral character and mutual respect.

Strengthening Cooperation and Empathy

Observational data indicated that students at MA Muhammadiyah Limbung showed notable improvement in cooperation and social empathy, especially during *project-based learning* activities. Students were able to distribute roles according to their abilities, help one another, and demonstrate empathy toward peers facing difficulties. Teachers assessed not only the final project outcomes but also the collaborative processes, social attitudes, and individual contributions of each group member.

Interview data confirmed that collaborative learning helps build social awareness and a sense of shared responsibility. Students who were previously individualistic began to exhibit *positive interdependence*, viewing group success as collective achievement.

This shift marked a transition from a competitive to a cooperative and participatory learning culture.

This phenomenon is consistent with Johnson and Johnson's theory of *social interdependence*, which posits that effective cooperation enhances not only academic achievement but also social relationships and collective responsibility (Johnson & Johnson, 2009). Within the cultural-religious context of MA Muhammadiyah Limbung, such values are internalized through religious activities such as *kultum* (short sermons), *Jum'at Ibadah* (Friday worship), and acts of mutual assistance, all of which are integral to the school's ethos.

The findings are further supported by Fadil et al., who found that *project-based learning* fosters empathy and social solidarity, particularly when the projects are linked to spiritual and social contexts in Islamic educational settings (Fadil et al., 2025). Thus, the innovative learning approach at MA Muhammadiyah Limbung not only improves academic outcomes but also strengthens students' socio-religious character through the internalization of empathy, compassion, and *ukhuwah Islamiyah* (Islamic brotherhood). Moreover, the study revealed that collaborative-based innovative learning fosters a more inclusive and supportive classroom climate. Interactions among students extend beyond academic exchanges and develop into mutual and respectful social relationships. This demonstrates that collaborative activities serve not only as learning strategies but also as vehicles for building *social bonding* and nurturing Islamic character centered on communal harmony. This aligns with the findings of Wang, King, and Zeng, who concluded that a cooperative school climate positively correlates with students' socio-emotional competencies and promotes empathy and social concern within the learning environment (Wang et al., 2024).

Development of Problem-Solving Skills

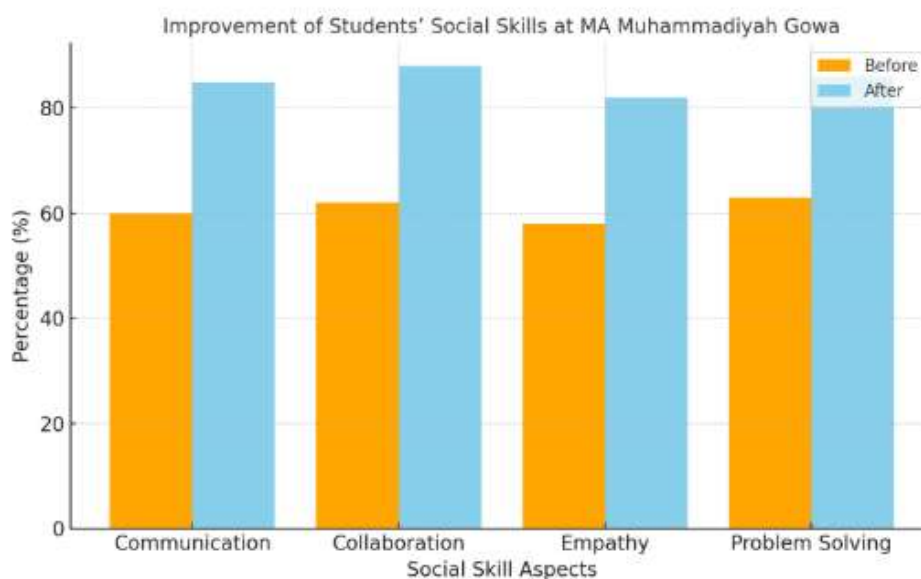
In addition to enhancing communication and cooperation, the study found that innovative collaborative learning also nurtures students' problem-solving skills. Through problem-based activities, students were trained to identify social or environmental issues around them and seek solutions grounded in Islamic values.

Teachers provided case studies on topics such as school cleanliness and concern for underprivileged peers. Through these activities, students learned to make collective decisions, express ideas with logical reasoning, and consider the social implications of their actions. This finding is consistent with Manik, who reported that *problem-based learning* enhances students' critical thinking and social responsibility through reflective processes and group discussions (Manik, 2025).

This learning model also aligns with Kolb, *experiential learning theory*, which emphasizes that knowledge is constructed through direct experience requiring

interaction, collaboration, and reflection (Kolb, 1984). Consequently, social skills develop not only as interpersonal abilities but also as expressions of moral and social responsibility within community life. Furthermore, the integration of Islamic ethical values into problem-based learning encourages students to approach challenges with a moral consciousness. In this model, decision-making is not merely a cognitive process but also a spiritual exercise, where students are guided to align their choices with the principles of *maslahah* (social benefit) and *ihsan* (benevolence). This combination of analytical reasoning and ethical reflection helps cultivate a generation of learners capable of solving problems with both rational and moral consideration.

In addition, collaborative problem-solving promotes critical dialogue among students, where diverse perspectives are shared and synthesized to find effective solutions. Such interactions help students move beyond rote learning toward reflective understanding, consistent with constructivist principles. Within the Islamic education context, these practices resonate with the Qur'anic command to "reflect" (*tafakkur*) and "deliberate together" (*shura*), reinforcing the idea that knowledge and problem-solving should serve communal welfare and spiritual growth.



Theoretical Discussion

The findings of this study reinforce the relevance of Johnson and Johnson's (2009) *social interdependence theory*, which asserts that individual success within a group is dependent on collective success. In the context of innovative learning at MA Muhammadiyah Limbung, this theory is reflected in the enhanced trust, empathy, and social responsibility among students. The positive social relationships formed through collaborative activities demonstrate *positive interdependence*, where group achievement

is perceived as a shared success. These findings confirm that cooperative learning fosters social bonding and creates an inclusive, harmonious learning environment.

The results also support Vygotsky, *constructivist learning theory*, which posits that learning is a social process in which knowledge is constructed through meaningful interaction and experience (Vygotsky, 1980). Group discussions and collaborative projects allow students to construct understanding together rather than merely receiving information from the teacher. Social interactions in this context serve as a medium for internalizing values such as empathy, responsibility, and social awareness, consistent with the *learning by doing* principle of constructivism.

From the perspective of Islamic education, these findings indicate a synthesis between modern educational theory and spiritual values. Innovative learning functions not only as a pedagogical strategy for enhancing social skills but also as a means of nurturing Islamic character rooted in *ukhuwah* (brotherhood), *ta'awun* (mutual help), and *ihsan* (benevolence). Through collaborative learning and religious activities such as project-based learning, kultum, and Jumat Ibadah, students learn to work together, empathize, and cultivate social responsibility as manifestations of Islamic ethics. Furthermore, the study's findings are consistent with Kolb, *experiential learning theory*, which emphasizes direct experience as the foundation of knowledge and skill formation (Kolb, 1984). Students at MA Muhammadiyah Limbung gained authentic experiences through project-based and problem-solving activities, followed by reflection sessions that deepened their understanding of moral and spiritual values. Thus, experiential learning not only strengthens intellectual competence but also enhances social and spiritual awareness as part of developing a holistic Muslim character.

Conceptually, the integration of *social interdependence*, *constructivist learning*, and *experiential learning theories* demonstrates that innovative collaborative learning at MA Muhammadiyah Limbung functions as a holistic educational approach. It emphasizes not only cognitive development but also affective (empathy, social responsibility) and spiritual (Islamic values) dimensions. Therefore, the success of this approach is reflected not only in academic improvement but also in the emergence of social and moral consciousness among students—embodying the essence of a comprehensive Islamic education.

D. Conclusions

This study demonstrates that the implementation of innovative collaborative learning at MA Muhammadiyah Limbung has a significant impact on improving students' social skills. Through group discussions, project-based learning, and problem-based learning, students experienced tangible development in communication, cooperation, empathy, and problem-solving abilities. Teachers played a crucial role as facilitators

who encouraged positive social interaction, creating a participatory, inclusive, and respectful learning atmosphere. Students' communication skills improved as they became accustomed to expressing opinions, asking questions, and responding to their peers' ideas in a polite and open manner. The collaborative learning process also provided a safe space for students to practice speaking and active listening. This reinforces the belief that innovative learning not only fosters academic confidence but also enriches interpersonal abilities grounded in Islamic manners and values. Moreover, project-based learning effectively strengthened students' cooperation and social empathy. Group activities trained them to share responsibilities, appreciate differences, and assist peers facing difficulties. The empathy and solidarity that emerged from these activities illustrate that innovative learning can serve as an effective medium for internalizing Islamic character values such as *ukhuwah* (brotherhood), *ta'awun* (mutual assistance), and *ihsan* (excellence), which form the moral foundation of education in madrasahs.

The enhancement of problem-solving abilities was also a key finding of this study. Through a problem-based learning approach, students learned to identify social issues within their school environment and develop solutions based on Islamic principles. This process trained them to think critically, make wise decisions, and consider the social implications of their actions. Thus, innovative learning serves as an effective means of cultivating social and moral responsibility among students. Theoretically, the findings of this study reinforce the Social Interdependence Theory (Johnson & Johnson, 2009) and Constructivist Learning Approach (Vygotsky, 1980), both of which emphasize that social interaction and meaningful experiences are crucial factors in building knowledge and social skills. Additionally, Experiential Learning Theory (Kolb, 2015) is also relevant to explain how direct experiences through collaborative activities help students reflect on social values and actions in everyday life.

In conclusion, innovative learning at MA Muhammadiyah Limbung not only enhances academic competence but also holistically shapes students' social and spiritual character. Such learning models can serve as a strategic alternative for Islamic schools to integrate intellectual intelligence with social and emotional intelligence, fostering a generation of morally upright, empathetic, and responsible individuals for the 21st century.

E. Acknowledgement

We would like to express our sincere gratitude to the teachers, students, and staff of MA Muhammadiyah Limbung for their active participation and invaluable contributions to this research. Their openness, cooperation, and willingness to engage in the research process were essential to its success. Without their dedication and enthusiasm, this study would not have been possible. We deeply appreciate the time

and effort invested by all participants in sharing their insights, experiences, and perspectives, which have greatly enriched the findings of this research.

Special thanks are extended to the teaching staff for their commitment to creating an environment that supports collaborative learning. Their guidance and support in facilitating group-based activities, as well as their willingness to adapt teaching methods to the needs of this study, were vital in ensuring that the research remained meaningful and impactful. The involvement of teachers not only provided valuable data but also ensured that the activities were aligned with the curriculum, offering real-world relevance to students' academic and social development.

We also express our heartfelt appreciation to the students, whose enthusiasm and active participation were key to the success of this study. Their openness to learning, willingness to collaborate with peers, and commitment to improving their social skills through group activities made this research truly transformative. Their hard work and exceptional engagement formed the foundation for the positive outcomes observed throughout this study.

Lastly, we extend our deepest gratitude to the administrative staff of MA Muhammadiyah Limbung for their tireless support in organizing the logistics of this research. Their assistance in coordinating schedules, ensuring access to resources, and facilitating communication between the research team and the school community was invaluable. We also appreciate the school leadership for fostering a culture of collaboration and inquiry that allowed this research to thrive. This collective effort highlights the importance of community involvement in the educational process, and we deeply value the contributions of everyone involved.

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