

BUILDING DEMOCRATIC CHARACTER EDUCATION THROUGH COOPERATIVE LEARNING BASED ON CONCEPT MAPPING

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Abstract

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A crucial component of education, particularly in madrasahs, is fostering political spirit. By using the paradigm, this study seeks to characterize democratic character education. Class XI MA Matholi'ul Anwar's Islamic Cultural History (SKI) course uses concept mapping as the foundation for cooperative learning. This study employs a descriptive design, an instrumental case study type, and a qualitative methodology. Participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and documentation were used to gather data from 30 students who were purposefully chosen as subjects and SKI teachers. The study's findings demonstrated that using this strategy produced participative, cooperative, and active learning. The attitudes of tolerance, consideration, accountability, and respect for one another all increased among the students. Therefore, the Concept Mapping-based Cooperative Learning paradigm works well in. Thus, the model Cooperative Learning based on Concept Mapping is effective in forming students' democratic character through meaningful and enjoyable learning.

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INTRODUCTION

Today's educational system faces a number of issues that impede the best possible learning process, such as poor comprehension of the subject matter and social issues brought on by a lack of character education. Democratic character, which embodies virtues like accountability, self-control, tolerance, respect for differing viewpoints, and the capacity for collaborative decision-making, is one facet of character that should be developed. These principles are crucial for developing students who are engaged, active, and prepared to live in a pluralistic democracy (Sari, 2024; Erwanto & Usiono, 2025).

However, the field's reality reveals that many students continue to engage in undemocratic behavior, such as skipping class, arriving late, and disregarding classmates' viewpoints (Muthmainna, 2025; Santoso et al., 2023). This issue is frequently caused by boredom during the learning process and a lack of comprehension of the material, which is made worse by the fact that teaching continues to be heavily focused on the one-way lecture approach. This situation underscores the significance of modernizing learning methods that prioritize the social and emotional growth of the whole student, in addition to cognitive skills (Santoso et al., 2023; Sari, 2024).

As a result of this, democratic character education must be introduced early on through collaboration between teachers, families, and the social environment. The concept mapping-based model cooperative learning model (Martina et al., 2023) is one method that is seen as relevant and promising. Concept mapping enables students to visually grasp the connection between ideas, while this model promotes collaboration, discussion, and idea sharing in groups. The combination of the two enhances comprehension of the subject matter and fosters a democratic mindset through hands-on experience in a cooperative learning setting (Baehaqi, 2020), (Rahmawati et al., 2023). The goal of this study was to examine the XI class students at Madrasah Aliyah Matholi'ul Anwar, an Islamic school with a significant role in helping children develop their character. In fact, instruction in this madrasah, particularly in the subject of Islamic Cultural History, continues to rely heavily on lecture techniques, which don't give students enough opportunity to think critically, engage in debate, and participate actively. In fact, Islamic ideals are in perfect agreement with democratic ideals like respecting opinions and deliberation. For this reason, it's crucial to investigate how the use of concept map-based cooperative learning in madrasahs might promote democratic character (Simamora et al., 2024), (Dotson, 2001).

This research intends to explain the execution of the cooperative learning model founded on concept mapping, examining the student interaction process that showcases democratic principles, and recognizing indicators of democratic character growth that arise during the learning experience (Gemünden & Vinke, 2023). Multiple earlier studies conducted in the past five years have explored comparable themes: Wulandari et al., (2025) investigated democratic character education within PPKn; Arifin (2022) looked into cooperative learning at the high school level; Na & Razali (2023) examined the role of concept maps in enhancing student comprehension; and Yuliana et al.,

(2022) analyzed strategies for character education. Nonetheless, none have directly combined the two methods concerning madrasahs and democratic character education.

The novelty of this research is in combining the cooperative learning model with an integrated concept mapping technique, aimed at developing a democratic character. This research also focuses on the madrasah setting, which is infrequently examined in terms of democratic education rooted in collaborative practices. Although earlier research often centers on academic results or broader character traits, this study highlights the shift in democratic values via participatory, reflective, and visually-oriented learning experiences (Rista & Wiranata, 2024).

The necessity of this study is propelled by the critical demand for a learning method that can tackle the character crisis and the absence of dialogue opportunities among students. In a polarized digital age, students must possess the abilities to listen, articulate thoughts, and value diversity. The concept mapping model of cooperative learning provides solutions that address both pedagogical needs and the enhancement of values. The findings of this research are anticipated to serve as a useful guide for educators in creating effective and human-centered learning, while also promoting relevant and applicable character education policies in madrasahs and other educational institutions.

RESEARCH METHODS

This research employs a qualitative descriptive approach backed by field study data to thoroughly detail the use of cooperative learning through concept mapping in enhancing democratic character education. The study took place at MA Matholi'ul Anwar, a madrasah rooted in pesantren that promotes Islamic principles. The participants in the study included the Islamic Cultural History (SKI) teacher, Mr. Robach Wahabi, and 30 grade XI students who were intentionally chosen. This class is a special olympiad group with advanced conceptual skills, yet some students display behavior that does not demonstrate democratic qualities, such as inadequate mutual respect, minimal responsibility, and a tendency to miss school or arrive late. This class, characterized by significant academic potential and a demand for intensive collaboration, is deemed suitable for applying a learning model that promotes character development, notably through cooperative learning that utilizes concept mapping. The findings from (Silva et al., 2022) also back this model, demonstrating that cooperative

learning, whether used alone or with concept mapping, is superior to the lecture approach in enhancing critical and creative thinking abilities

Data collection was conducted through three main techniques: participant observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation. Observations were conducted directly in the learning process to observe the implementation of the model, interaction patterns between teachers and students, and student involvement in group work. Semi-structured interviews were used to explore teachers' and students' views on the learning model being implemented. Meanwhile, documentation was used to complete the data through the collection of learning tools such as lesson plans, student work results, activity photos, and teacher reflection notes. All collected data were analyzed using the stages of data reduction, data presentation, verification, and drawing conclusions (Huyler, 2022).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of the study indicate that the implementation of cooperative learning based on concept mapping is part of the efforts of educators at MA Matholi'ul Anwar to improve students' democratic character education, especially in grade XI. This finding is in line with Mulyani's study which shows that the use of a mind mapping-based cooperative learning model not only increases learning activities but also encourages active student involvement in character-based learning (Mulyani, 2020). This model is considered effective in forming active participation and democratic attitudes such as responsibility, ability to work together, and self-confidence.

This effectiveness is evident in the promotion of values like tolerance, respect for differing opinions, and accountability in finishing group tasks. Chumaidah's research supports this by demonstrating that cooperative learning fosters the development of democratic character through genuine acts of collaboration and dialogue (Hasanah & Himami, 2021). Furthermore, Ridha demonstrates that cooperative approaches like Numbered Head Together can effectively cultivate students' democratic traits, particularly within the realm of religious education (Ridha, 2023). These values are not solely conveyed through theory; they are actively engaged in via discussions, sharing of perspectives, and collaboration in the educational process

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In the Islamic Cultural History (SKI) subject, students are encouraged to explore character values embedded in historical events (Munawir, Beauty Dewi Negari, 2023). This approach positions learning as a medium for instilling democratic values in a contextual and meaningful way. The cultivation of a democratic attitude is part of the broader effort to embed character education in students, not only within the classroom but also through experiences outside of it (Ahmad Reza Maulana et al., 2024). Through SKI learning, for example, students can observe how early Islamic figures engaged in discussions, practiced deliberation, and resolved conflicts with wisdom. These historical insights are essential in shaping students into individuals who are democratic and responsible (Anandari, 2025).

In addition to classroom implementation, the integration of democratic values should begin at the learning design stage. The success of democratic character education largely depends on the teacher's awareness and active role in developing learning strategies that reflect these values (Sundawa, 2023). Education, therefore, functions not only as a means of transferring knowledge, but also as a formative process for shaping learners into individuals who are open-minded, responsible, and capable of equitable collaboration in everyday life. This underscores the importance of embedding character values—such as democracy—within teaching preparation documents like lesson plans or learning modules. Teachers are expected to design learning experiences that incorporate these values from the outset, ensuring that character education becomes an intentional and structured part of the learning process (Analysis, 2024).

One of the strategies employed by teachers in the educational process is the use of group discussion methods. This approach is considered effective because it encourages students to appreciate differing viewpoints, take collective responsibility for group tasks, and develop confidence in expressing their ideas (Mulyanti, 2023). Such a strategy is particularly relevant to the implementation of the cooperative learning

model based on concept mapping, which plays a key role in fostering democratic character education within the madrasa environment (Fonseca et al., 2024). In the context of SKI (Islamic Cultural History) learning, for instance, teachers often select the discussion method to habituate students to listening and showing respect toward the opinions of their peers. Through this process, students naturally build a sense of responsibility, confidence, and cooperation—core values that align closely with the goals of character education rooted in democratic principles (Hidayahtus, 2024).

Based on observations during the implementation of the cooperative learning model based on concept mapping, it was found that students demonstrated increased active participation. In the SKI (Islamic Cultural History) subject, particularly in the lesson on "Imitating the Attitudes and Struggles of the Khulafaur Rasyidin," students were divided into groups and tasked with collaboratively creating a concept map. Throughout this activity, students engaged in open discussions, shared their ideas, listened attentively to their peers, and reached group decisions through deliberation. The process of creating and presenting the concept map encouraged students to actively articulate their thoughts and ask questions. Notably, even students who were previously passive began to participate more actively, both during group discussions and in class presentations. This indicates that the use of cooperative learning combined with concept mapping effectively supports the development of communication skills, confidence, and collaborative learning attitudes among students.

The implementation of cooperative learning based on concept mapping serves as an effective medium for cultivating students' democratic character. This participatory and collaborative learning approach allows students to experience democratic values directly, rather than merely understanding them as abstract concepts. Within this model, students are encouraged to express their opinions, accept constructive feedback, and respect differing viewpoints (Kooperatif, 2024). Positive social interaction is fostered through the clear division of tasks, mutual responsibility, and timely completion of group assignments through deliberation. This learning environment enables students to develop essential democratic skills such as cooperation, accountability, and respectful communication—skills that are vital for their growth as responsible members of society.

The integration of democratic character education through the implementation of the cooperative learning model based on concept mapping has proven to be highly

effective in fostering active student participation and instilling core democratic values such as responsibility, self-confidence, and mutual respect. This learning approach creates a space where students are actively involved in discussions, freely express their opinions, and collaborate in creating concept maps. Students are observed to take ownership of group responsibilities and demonstrate respect for differing viewpoints. Additionally, this model contributes to a more engaging and enjoyable classroom atmosphere, which helps reduce feelings of boredom and increases student attendance and attentiveness during lessons. Several students also reported feeling more focused and comfortable in expressing ideas, as the learning environment encourages mutual listening and supports the development of confidence without fear of judgment.

The cooperative learning model is an instructional approach that emphasizes not only academic achievement but also the development of students' self-confidence and their ability to engage with learning materials more deeply. By working collaboratively in groups, students are given the opportunity to share their understanding, ask questions, and express their thoughts in a supportive environment that minimizes fear of judgment. This approach helps create a learning atmosphere where students feel safe to participate, make mistakes, and learn from one another. As a result, students become more confident in presenting ideas, more engaged in discussions, and more proactive in constructing knowledge—not only through interaction with the teacher but also through peer-to-peer learning. This mutual exchange fosters deeper comprehension and encourages students to take an active role in the learning process.

An analysis of the research findings reveals that the implementation of democratic character education through cooperative learning combined with concept mapping has had a significantly positive impact on students. Interviews with teachers indicate that this learning approach effectively supports students in understanding the subject matter more thoroughly, while also enhancing their confidence in expressing opinions. One teacher from Badarul Munir MA noted that students demonstrated a clearer grasp of learning content by constructing concept maps that displayed the interconnections between ideas. The students were observed to be more active during discussions, more willing to express differing viewpoints, and more attentive to the opinions of their peers. Their direct involvement in the learning process not only improved comprehension but also fostered a greater sense of self-confidence and responsibility.

Democratic character education highlights the significance of absorbing values like freedom of expression, tolerance, discussion, and social accountability within the educational setting (Na'imah & Bawani, 2021). The results in the area indicate that these values are prominently integrated into the learning experience, particularly during group discussion tasks. Students seem engaged in sharing their views, replying to peers' thoughts respectfully, and reaching decisions about the concept map's contents through a consensus process. The interactions that take place demonstrate that democratic values are not only expressed theoretically, but are assimilated through shared learning experiences. Therefore, one can conclude that a robust connection exists between the theory of democratic character education and classroom learning practices, particularly regarding collaborative decision-making and appreciation for diverse viewpoints.

Utilizing cooperative learning encourages students to engage actively in group discussions, assist one another in grasping the material, and collaboratively create concept maps (Baehaqi, 2020). Implementing cooperative learning serves as a remedy for the lack of interest in SKI subjects that were previously taught in a passive manner. Engaging students actively enhances the learning experience, making it more dynamic, enjoyable, and comprehensible. Formerly passive students started to demonstrate changes in their attitude, including the willingness to voice their opinions and participate in group activities. This aligns with Robert E. Slavin's view, highlighting that cooperative learning centers on teamwork by emphasizing active involvement, positive interdependence, and personal responsibility as essential elements for effective learning (Simamora et al., 2024).

Concept map created by students demonstrates their comprehension of the connections among rights, duties, standards, and democratic principles. During presentations, students can likewise articulate the connections between concepts in a logical and coherent manner (Kartikasari et al., 2023). This indicates that the application of concept mapping effectively promoted comprehensive conceptual understanding, aligning with a constructivist approach to education. This reinforces Joseph D. Novak's theory that strategy concept mapping promotes students in establishing links between concepts, enhancing critical thinking abilities, and comprehensively and meaningfully grasping the structure of knowledge (Ruslan & Agus, 2024).

The research findings indicate that the cooperative learning model allows students to collaborate, engage in discussions, and distribute responsibilities when working on group tasks. In practice, this model can enhance social interactions and develop strong communication abilities and tolerance. Utilizing concept mapping within this model enhances the learning experience by aiding students in comprehending the connections between concepts in a more organized manner. By using concept maps, students are encouraged to engage in critical thinking and visually arrange information, thereby enhancing their comprehension of the content and reinforcing democratic principles via teamwork.

The conceptual framework presented in this study depicts the connection between the concept mapping-based cooperative learning model and democratic character education. The educational journey starts with educators designing lessons that embed democratic principles in activities, succeeded by a collaborative process in small groups that inspires students to engage in discussions and create concept maps collaboratively. This activity leads to an enhancement of character traits like bravery in sharing views, accountability, and teamwork. The anticipated long-term effect is the establishment of a democratic educational culture within the school setting.

Field observations indicate that this educational method yields favorable outcomes for the growth of student character. Students who previously exhibited passive behavior started to engage actively in discussions, felt encouraged to share their views, and took greater responsibility for group tasks. Active engagement throughout the learning process enabled students to naturally absorb democratic values. Educators play a crucial role in creating learning activities that facilitate discussion and teamwork among students, while also guiding concept mapping to align with the subjects addressed, such as the historical evolution of democracy in Islam within the SKI course.

Based on interview and observation results, students displayed a favorable reaction to collaborative learning that utilized concept mapping. They believed they appreciated the learning experience more, comprehended the content more thoroughly, and were encouraged to participate in class. Educators observed a rise in students' critical thinking abilities and favorable attitudes toward a variety of perspectives. This indicates that collaborative learning affects not just academic success, but also the development of character.

In general, the use of cooperative learning through concept mapping has demonstrated success in promoting democratic qualities in students. This approach not only fosters an engaging educational atmosphere but also develops the attitudes and values essential for community living. A well-crafted learning design along with teacher guidance can serve as an alternative educational model that effectively balances content mastery and character development in students at the same time.

CONCLUSION

From the findings of the conducted research, it can be inferred that the cooperative learning model utilizing concept mapping has demonstrated effectiveness in fostering and enhancing democratic character among grade XI students at Madrasah Aliyah Matholi'ul Anwar. The results indicate beneficial developments in students, including greater confidence in voicing their thoughts, an attitude of valuing diversity, active participation in group dialogues, the capacity to reach consensus, and a feeling of social accountability for the group's achievements. Employing concept mapping aids students in visually and systematically grasping the material while fostering significant collaborative interactions among group members. This engaging and participatory educational environment fosters a supportive setting for the contextual and sustainable integration of democratic values within the learning experience.

Theoretically, the results of this research reinforce the notion that cooperative learning structured with a conceptual framework can serve as an effective method in character education, particularly for democratic character. Practical suggestions include the necessity for educators to create learning experiences that focus not only on cognitive elements but also incorporate character values throughout the entire process of planning, execution, and assessment. Nevertheless, this research has limitations, specifically that quantitative assessments have not been conducted regarding the impact of learning on students' democratic character, and it has not thoroughly examined the external factors that also affect character development. Consequently, the researcher suggests that additional studies could broaden the research scope utilizing a mixed approach (mixed methods) or longitudinal studies to yield more comprehensive results that can inform character education policies at the madrasah level.

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