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Exploring Islamic-Oriented Cooperative Learning through Faith-Driven Collaboration in among University Students in Islamic Education Courses

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Abstract In the context of Islamic higher education, there is a growing need to align pedagogical practices with faith-based values, particularly in creating collaborative learning environments. However, limited research has explored how cooperative learning is shaped by Islamic ethical principles within the domain of Islamic Educational Sciences. This study addresses that gap by examining how Islamic ethical values influence the implementation of cooperative learning in Islamic Educational Sciences courses at Indonesian Islamic universities. Guided by social constructivist learning theory, cooperative learning theory and Islamic pedagogical ethics, this research employed a qualitative phenomenological design. Data was collected through in-depth interviews with six lecturers and 22 students from three Islamic higher education institutions. The findings revealed that when infused with values such as mutual assistance, brotherhood and sincerity, cooperative learning is transformed into a pedagogical and spiritual act, worship, promoting both academic achievement and moral development. Three major themes emerged: (1) Islamic values establish an ethical framework for group accountability and conflict resolution; (2) lecturers act as moral facilitators by embedding religious rituals and monitoring ethical conduct; and (3) students experience personal transformation marked by increased empathy, sincerity and responsibility. Despite these benefits, challenges such as grade-oriented mindsets and institutional focus on performance metrics hinder consistent application. The study proposes a Faith-Driven Cooperative Learning Model that integrates traditional Islamic educational practices with contemporary cooperative learning strategies. Recommendations include faculty development programs on

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values-based pedagogy and institutional realignment of assessment systems to support character education. Although limited by its reliance on interview data, this research offers theoretical and practical contributions to faith-integrated pedagogy in Islamic and broader values-based educational contexts.

Keywords: Islamic education; cooperative learning; faith-based pedagogy; character education; Indonesia

1. Introduction

In the context of Islamic higher education in Indonesia, promotoring the intellectual and spiritual development of learners continues to be a fundamental objective. Institutions such as Universitas Islam Negeri (UIN), Institut Agama Islam Negeri (IAIN), and various Islamic colleges (*Perguruan Tinggi Keagamaan Islam or PTKI*) bear the dual responsibility of delivering rigorous academic instruction while nurturing moral and ethical character in accordance with Islamic teachings (Sukirman, 2022; Achruh & Sukirman, 2024). Within this broader mandate, the discipline of *Ilmu Pendidikan Islam* (Islamic Educational Sciences) plays a pivotal role. It functions not only as a theoretical foundation for understanding the philosophy and practice of Islamic education, but also as a practical framework for preparing prospective educators and scholars to address pedagogical challenges in Islamic schooling systems (Felsenthal & Agbaria, 2025).

However, the instructional practices employed in these courses often rely heavily on traditional lecture-based methods, rote memorization of religious texts, and passive knowledge transmission. These methods are important for preserving religious content and textual fidelity. However, they may be less able to develop critical thinking, self-reflection, and meaningful interaction with others. These aspects are essential for developing holistic Muslim individuals who are smart, with strong values and a sense of responsibility to society.

To address such pedagogical limitations, cooperative learning is regarded as an effective approach for students, particularly in Islamic educational settings. Grounded in social constructivist learning theory (Soundy, 2024) and cooperative learning theory (Millis, 2023), this instructional model emphasizes collaborative knowledge construction through peer interaction, shared problem-solving, mutual accountability, and active participation (Li & Lin, 2025; Wolfe & Picazo, 2025; Taggart & Wheeler, 2025). In conventional or secular contexts, cooperative learning has consistently been shown to enhance academic achievement, promote social competence and improve classroom climate.

However, when situated within an Islamic epistemological and ethical framework, cooperative learning assumes an expanded significance. It aligns with and is enriched by core Islamic values such as *ta'awun* (mutual assistance), *ukhuwah* (brotherhood), *musyawarah* (consultation), *Amanah* (trust), and *ikhlas* (sincerity) (Muchtar & Inayah, 2025; Saiin et al., 2022; Sakka, 2025; Serevan, 2025; Suarni et al., 2024). These values, far from being supplementary or ornamental, constitute an ethical-spiritual architecture that underpins Islamic educational

thought and practice. Their integration into cooperative learning practices is not intended to merely Islamize a Western-derived pedagogical method, but rather to reactivate classical Islamic traditions of collective inquiry and moral formation, historically embodied in settings such as *halaqah* (study circles) and *pesantren* (Islamic boarding schools).

The present study emerges from and responds to these dynamics, particularly in light of Indonesia's diverse Islamic educational landscape and the national emphasis on character education (Sukirman & Linse, 2024) as outlined in policy initiatives like *Penguatan Pendidikan Karakter* (PPK). The simultaneous push for curricular modernization and the preservation of Islamic values presents both opportunities and tensions for educators attempting to implement student-centered pedagogies. In this case, this study aims to see how cooperative learning in Islamic educational is affected by Islamic ethical and values. The research specifically foucses on the lived experiences and teaching strategies of lecturers and students who practice faith-integrated cooperative learning in selected Islamic higher education institutions in Indonesia.

Guided by what this study defines as the Faith-Driven Cooperative Learning Model, this approach conceptualizes cooperative learning not only as a cognitive and social process but also an act of *ibadah* (worship) that supports both academic success and moral character formation. This model combines social constructivist theory, cooperative learning theory and Islamic pedagogical ethics. It proposes that when values such as sincerity (*ikhlas*), mutual help (*ta'awun*), and brotherhood (*ukhuwah*) are made explicit within collaborative learning frameworks, the classroom becomes a space for spiritual as well as intellectual development.

In practical application, the model involves intentional pedagogical strategies, such as integrating prayer, encouraging ethical reflection, and establishing collective intentions, which aim to develop both individual virtue while strengthening communal responsibility. Furthermore, it draws on classical Islamic learning practices as inspiration for structuring group dynamics and enhancing the moral substance of collaboration.

Guided by this conceptual framework, the study investigates the following research questions: (1) How is cooperative learning implemented in Islamic Educational Sciences courses with the integration of Islamic values? (2) What Islamic ethical and spiritual principles are evident in student interactions and group dynamics during cooperative learning activities? (3) How do lecturers and students perceive the educational and moral outcomes of faith-driven cooperative learning? and (4) What challenges and enabling factors are encountered in the application of Islamic-oriented cooperative learning within higher education institutions?

Through these questions, the study seeks to contribute a comprehensive understanding of how cooperative learning, when rooted in Islamic values, can function as a transformative pedagogical strategy in Indonesia's Islamic higher

education system. By doing so, it offers a framework that not only enhances academic engagement and achievement but also nurtures ethically conscious graduates equipped to contribute meaningfully to their communities and the broader Muslim ummah.

2. Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored in an integrative theoretical framework. It combines social constructivist learning theory, cooperative learning theory, and Islamic pedagogical ethics. The aim is to explore how Islamic values can be embedded in cooperative learning practices within Islamic Education courses in Indonesian Islamic higher education institutions. The integration of these three frameworks provides a clear picture of faith-based collaboration. It highlights its impact not only on teaching and learning but also on students' ethical and spiritual development. This perspective is useful for understanding the values, processes, and outcomes of classroom practices aimed at connecting Islamic educational principles with a student-centered approach.

The first part of this framework is social constructivist learning theory (Chuang, 2021). This theory emerged from the work of Lev Vygotsky, who emphasized that learning is a social process. Vygotsky and Cole (1978) explain that humans do not learn in isolation. Learning develops through interaction, dialogue, and shared meaning within the cultural environment in which students find themselves. One of Vygotsky's central ideas is the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). This zone represents the gap between what students can do independently and what they can achieve with the help of more experienced peers (Vygotsky & Cole, 1978).

The ZPD plays a crucial role in cooperative learning because it demonstrates the importance of peer support for students' intellectual and emotional growth. In relation to Islamic education, this theory is closely related to long-standing Islamic traditions such as *halaqah* (study groups), *talaqqi* (direct learning), and *majlis al-ʿilm* (study meetings). Such practices consistently support dialogue and collective learning. These traditions not only support the social aspect of learning but also highlight its spiritual and moral dimensions – values often overlooked in teaching models that focus only on skills or cognition.

Building on this social constructivist foundation is cooperative learning theory. Johnson and Johnson (2000) define it as a structured form of group work. It promotes positive interdependence, individual accountability, and promotive interaction. It also encourages group processing and the development of interpersonal skills. Unlike unstructured group activities, cooperative learning is intentional and systemic, designed to promote both academic and social-emotional growth (Taggart & Wheeler, 2025). Students are not only responsible for their own learning but also for helping their peers learn, thereby cultivating a sense of collective responsibility and mutual success (Li & Lin, 2025; Millis, 2023).

This theory is especially relevant to the study at hand because it provides a practical pedagogical framework that can be implemented in classroom settings, with clear guidelines and measurable outcomes (Millis, 2023; Wolfe & Picazo,

2025). Moreover, it introduces a democratic ethos to education by encouraging inclusive participation, shared authority and dialogic interaction – all of which mirror Islamic values such as *shura* (consultation [Amir & Rahman, 2025]), *ukhuwah* (Muchtar & Inayah, 2025), and *ta'awun* (Sakka, 2025; Suarni et al., 2024). When contextualized within Islamic Education Science courses, cooperative learning strategies not only enhance engagement and comprehension but also provide authentic opportunities to practice Islamic ethical values through meaningful interaction and collaboration.

The third and most distinctive component of this theoretical framework is the inclusion of Islamic pedagogical ethics (Sahin, 2017), which draws upon Qur'anic principles, prophetic traditions (Sunnah), and the classical heritage of Islamic education to inform the moral and spiritual aims of learning. Islamic education is not value-neutral; it is inherently teleological, aiming to cultivate individuals who are not only knowledgeable but also morally upright, spiritually aware and socially responsible. This study draws specifically on Islamic ethical concepts such as *ikhlas* (Saiin et al., 2022), *amanah* (Serevan, 2025), *musyawarah* (Khalil & Saputro, 2025), *ukhuwah* (Muchtar & Inayah, 2025), and *ta'awun* (Sakka, 2025; Suarni et al., 2024) as foundational values that should guide all educational interactions.

These values are not merely abstract ideals; they are operationalized in the daily lives of Muslims and, by extension, should be embodied within educational settings, especially in institutions that explicitly claim to nurture Islamic character. Traditional Islamic educational practices emphasized these virtues not only in content but in pedagogy – students were trained to respect their teachers, collaborate with their peers, and internalize knowledge as a means of personal and communal transformation (Sahin, 2017). The ethical-spiritual vision of education thus complements the social and cognitive dimensions of learning, offering a more holistic and faith-integrated model of pedagogy.

This study combines all three theories to form its main framework, called the Faith-Driven Cooperative Learning Model. The model questions the common division between modern teaching methods and Islamic tradition, showing that cooperative learning, when shaped by Islamic ethical values, is neither foreign nor secular in Islamic education. Instead, it continues and renews classical Islamic learning practices that were naturally communal, dialogical, and value based.

In this model, social interaction is not simply a tool for thinking, as Vygotsky explains, or a way to improve academic achievement, as demonstrated in the Johnson and Johnson cooperative learning model. Social interaction is also seen as a spiritual and moral practice. Through social interaction, students apply the values they learn, learn sincerely and respectfully, and engage in shared reflection that builds knowledge and character. The Faith-Driven Cooperative Learning Model. integrates the cognitive, social, emotional, and spiritual aspects of learning into one meaningful, context-based approach.

3. Research Method

This study employed a qualitative method (Lim, 2025) with a phenomenological approach. The focus was on the lived experiences of students and lecturers participating in Islamic-based cooperative learning in Islamic Education courses at Islamic universities in Indonesia (Achruh & Sukirman, 2024). The phenomenological approach was chosen because it helps uncover the personal meanings and perspectives inherent in their experiences (Souba, 2014). This was crucial for exploring how they understand ethical values, spiritual insight, and group learning. The primary objective of this study was to examine how participants practice Islamic values in cooperative learning.

Data was collected through in-depth, semi-structured interviews (Adeoye-Olatunde & Olenik, 2021). This method provided space for participants to share stories and describe details of their teaching and spiritual experiences. The use of interviews was a deliberate choice. This aligns with the nature of phenomenological research and reflects the Islamic tradition of dialogic learning, where storytelling and teacher-student dialogue have long been central to knowledge-sharing and moral growth.

This study used interviews because they provided participants with the opportunity to share their perspectives in their own words and ways. Other methods, such as observation or surveys, cannot capture this depth. Interviews allow for exploration of the inner, reflective, and emotional aspects of teaching and learning (Adeoye-Olatunde & Olenik, 2021). These aspects are crucial when studying education shaped by religious and ethical values. The conversations revealed not only what participants said about their actions in the classroom but also how they felt, what they believed, and how they understood their actions from an Islamic perspective. Participants explained that values such as *taʿāwun* (mutual assistance), *amānah* (trust), *ukhuwah* (brotherhood), and *ikhlāṣ* (sincerity) shaped the way they carried out cooperative learning.

At the same time, the study recognizes a limitation in relying only on interview data, since classroom dynamics are complex and there may be differences between teachers' stated beliefs and their actual practices. While participants provided detailed reflections on how Islamic ethical principles guided their cooperative learning strategies, the study did not incorporate observational methodologies that could have verified how these techniques were actually implemented in the classroom. Without direct observation, it remained difficult to determine with certainty whether, how consistently and to what extent the described methods, such as group formation, task delegation and value-based interaction, were enacted by lecturers and engaged with students.

Classroom observations would have offered critical insights into real-time teaching behaviors, instructional decisions and the ways students responded to and participated in collaborative learning activities. For instance, they could have revealed how values such as *ta'awun* (mutual assistance) or *ukhuwah* (brotherhood) were operationalized during group work, and whether these values were merely aspirational or effectively integrated into classroom routines.

Observational data would also have enabled the triangulation of interview accounts, helping to identify alignment or discrepancies between what lecturers claimed and what actually transpired during lessons.

Participants were drawn from three types of Islamic higher education institutions: a UIN, an IAIN, and a *Sekolah Tinggi Agama Islam* (STAI). These sites were purposefully selected to reflect the variety of institutions within Indonesia's Islamic higher education landscape. The aim was to capture differences in structure, curriculum focus, and teaching practices, so as to provide a wider picture of how cooperative learning infused with Islamic ethical values is implemented. Including all three types made it possible to develop a more balanced and comparative understanding of how Islamic-oriented cooperative learning is understood and practiced across diverse institutional settings.

The participants were drawn from two main groups: lecturers who taught Ilmu Pendidikan Islam using cooperative learning approaches informed by Islamic ethics, and students who had taken part in these courses. A purposive sampling method (Achruh & Sukirman, 2024; Lim, 2025) was applied to ensure that every participant had direct and relevant experience with the focus of the study. Lecturers were included if they had explicitly applied cooperative learning techniques, such as Jigsaw, Think-Pair-Share or Group Investigation, while embedding Islamic values like *ta'awun*, *ukhuwah*, *amanah*, and *ikhlas* in their classroom teaching. Students were selected if they had participated in these learning settings and could reflect meaningfully on their experiences.

A total of six lecturers and 22 students were interviewed individually. Although the number of student participants may seem high for individual interviews, this choice was made to capture a broad range of perspectives from different institutions and classroom settings. Individual interviews were selected instead of group discussions to give students the chance to share more personal and in-depth reflections on sensitive issues related to values, beliefs, and learning experiences. The research team carefully tracked the data collection, and thematic saturation was reached once no new ideas appeared in the final interviews. For this reason, the number of participants was intentional and methodologically appropriate.

The interviews were carried out in Bahasa Indonesia to ensure participants could communicate clearly, comfortably, and with emotional expression. Each session lasted between 50 and 75 minutes and took place in a location chosen by the participant, usually a private office or a quiet campus room, to create a relaxed and open atmosphere. A semi-structured format was used to provide consistency across interviews while still allowing the researcher to explore unexpected ideas or emotional responses.

An interview guide was prepared for each group of participants, but the conversations were allowed to flow naturally according to their interests and priorities. Lecturers were asked about how they planned and led cooperative learning activities that reflected Islamic values, what outcomes they noticed in

their students, and the challenges they faced in bringing faith-based teaching together with modern pedagogical models. Students were invited to share their experiences of group learning, the values they felt were highlighted or practiced, the emotional and spiritual impact of working together, and their overall views of the approach.

All interviews were audio-recorded with participants' written consent and subsequently transcribed verbatim by the researcher. To complement the transcripts, detailed field notes were taken during and immediately after each interview. These notes captured non-verbal cues, emotional tone and key contextual observations, which enriched the interpretation of the verbal data. The collected data were securely stored using encrypted digital devices, and pseudonyms were assigned to protect participants' confidentiality. Ethical clearance was obtained from the appropriate institutional review board, and all participants received information sheets outlining the voluntary nature of their participation and their right to withdraw at any point without penalty.

To check the quality of the research tool, the interview guide was reviewed before data collection. Three academics with backgrounds in Islamic education, qualitative research and cooperative learning reviewed it. They provided comments on the clarity of the questions and their appropriateness to the culture and objectives of the study. Based on their suggestions, the questions were revised to be more precise and neutral. Preliminary interviews were conducted to ensure the guide was practical and clear. Further changes were then made. Then, data analysis involved the thematic analysis approach by Braun and Clarke (2012).

The same method has also been used in other studies, such as Sukirman and Kabilan (2023). Researchers read the transcripts multiple times to understand the data. Codes are created to capture recurring ideas and keywords. These codes are then grouped into larger themes. These themes reflect the participants' theories and lived experiences. Some of the main themes were faith as a driver of teamwork, ethical issues in group work, Islamic values in peer learning, and learning through spirituality. To enhance the reliability of the findings, triangulation was employed.

The researchers used more than just interviews. Institutional documents such as course syllabi and activity plans were also reviewed. Cooperative learning sessions were observed, where possible. These sources were compared with the interviews for consistency. Peer-to-peer discussions with other researchers were also conducted throughout the study. These discussions helped researchers reflect and mitigate bias.

4. Findings

This section presents the research findings. Data was drawn from interviews with six lecturers and 22 students at three Islamic universities in Indonesia. Four main themes emerged. These themes describe how participants understand, experience and use cooperative learning in line with Islamic values. Each theme is supported

by translated quotations from the interviews. These quotations are coded (R1-R28) to maintain clarity and protect participants' identities.

4.1 Cooperative Learning through the Lens of Islamic Values

One of the most prominent themes that emerged from the data was the centrality of Islamic values in shaping cooperative learning practices. Participants often mentioned values like *ta'awun* (helping each other), *ukhuwah Islamiyah* (Islamic brotherhood), *ikhlas* (sincerity), *amanah* (trust), and *musyawarah* (consultation). They saw these values as the moral base of working together in groups. These values were not only seen as ideals. They were practiced in both actions and intentions. Many students stressed their religious duty in group work. As R3 said:

> *"If I don't help my friend complete our assignment, I feel like I'm neglecting my duty as a Muslim. Ta'awun is not just a concept – it's a real responsibility."*

R11 pointed to sincerity as the main principle in her academic collaboration.

> *"Previously, I did group work out of fear of getting bad grades. But now, I intend to help my peers for Allah's sake. It feels more peaceful and less burdensome."*

For lecturers, Islamic values serve as both a teaching objective and a benchmark for assessing student behavior in class. R7, a senior lecturer, explained:

> *"I often emphasize that group work is not just about academics. We want to train students to view helping peers as a form of devotion to Allah."*

This evidence suggests that Islamic-oriented cooperative learning is understood not merely as a teaching method, but as a moral and spiritual practice, in which equal emphasis is placed on both intention and process.

4.2 Peer Interaction as a Forum for Moral Dialogue and Spiritual Development

Participants stated that cooperative learning served as a forum for moral discussion, peer correction, and spiritual reflection. In this atmosphere, students reminded each other of Islamic values. They also corrected misbehaviour using religious arguments. Many viewed their group as a small representation of the broader community. R14 shared one example of peer correction:

> *"My friend often submitted our tasks late. I told him, 'Remember, we must be trustworthy – don't make things harder for others.' He eventually changed and became more diligent."*

R18 recounted how group disagreements were managed through Islamic consultation:

> *"We once disagreed about an assignment, but we tried to resolve it through consultation (musyawarah). We learned that disagreement doesn't mean hostility – it's a chance to complement each other."*

Lecturers affirmed that these interactions aligned with their pedagogical goals. R1 stated:

> *"I'm pleased when students advise each other using religious language instead of anger. That shows they are learning cognitively, affectively and spiritually."*

Such findings indicate that peer interaction in cooperative learning, when grounded in Islamic values, promotes a reflective and ethically dynamic learning environment.

4.3 The Lecturer as a Moral and Pedagogical Facilitator

Another recurring theme was the expanded role of the lecturer as a facilitator of Islamic character, not merely a transmitter of content. Students appreciated when lecturers initiated learning with religious rituals such as *niyyah* (intention setting) and *doa* (prayer), provided moral guidance and monitored group dynamics with sensitivity. R9 explained how her lecturer's approach affected her mindset:

> *"Our lecturer always started class with shared intention and prayer. That made me realize that learning is worship. I became more sincere in helping my group members."*

R4, a lecturer, described his assessment method:

> *"I don't just assess the final result – I also assess the process. I observe whether tasks are divided fairly, whether students are honest and if someone dominates the group."*

R21 mentioned the emotional safety fostered by her lecturer:

> *"We felt safe during discussions because our lecturer didn't get angry when we made mistakes. Instead, he helped us correct them while reminding us about manners and brotherhood."*

These findings suggest that the lecturer plays a key role in modelling, mediating and reinforcing faith-driven cooperative learning.

4.4 Constraints in Practicing Values Consistently

Despite participants' commitment to Islamic values, various challenges were reported that hindered the full realization of faith-oriented cooperative learning. These included variable student motivation, lack of understanding of Islamic ethics, and an institutional overemphasis on product over process.

R15 highlighted a common concern:

> *"Sometimes my peers join the group just to get a grade. They're not serious and don't understand why Islamic values matter in group work."*

R6, a lecturer, noted systemic obstacles:

> *"Even though we teach Islamic values, not all students are ready to apply them. Especially when the university system focuses more on final grades than on learning processes."*

R17 described the emotional toll of unequal collaboration:

> *"We know ukhuwah is important, but it's hard to practice – especially when someone in the group is inactive. It gets frustrating. So, we need patience."*

These accounts emphasize the need for deeper institutional and curricular support for values-based learning to flourish.

4.5 Transformative Impact on Students' Academic and Moral Growth

Despite the challenges, most participants expressed that faith-integrated cooperative learning had positively influenced their personal development, learning motivation and social awareness. Students said they became more disciplined, more caring and more aware of their faith. R24 shared his changes:

> *"I used to be quiet and reluctant to speak. But because of group work and reminders about my responsibility as a Muslim, I learned to speak up and support others."*

R5 saw a change in the way students relate in class:

> *''Students became more empathetic. They began helping each other without being prompted, and the classroom atmosphere became more peaceful and productive."*

R26 gave a summary of her experience:

> *"After learning through this model, I feel that learning is not just about the brain, it's also about the heart. I feel closer to my religion and more sensitive to others."*

This finding confirms that Islamic-oriented cooperative learning is not only effective in delivering learning materials but also in shaping a generation of learners who are spiritually grounded and have social awareness.

5. Discussion

This section describes the main findings of the study. This study examines how cooperative learning is used and understood in Islamic Education courses at Islamic universities in Indonesia. It also explores how Islamic ethics shape this practice. The analysis reveals five main themes. These themes connect teaching methods to spirituality and values-based education. They are discussed using ideas from Islamic teachings, social constructivism, and character education. These themes are also situated within a broader discussion of educational change in Muslim-majority countries like Indonesia. This discussion demonstrates the strengths and opportunities of Islamic cooperative learning. It also highlights its limitations, tensions, and practical impacts.

The first theme demonstrates the strong role of Islamic values in group learning. Values such as *ta'awun* (mutual assistance), *ukhuwah* (brotherhood), *musyawarah* (consultation), *amanah* (trust), and *ikhlas* (sincerity) guide how students and lecturers work together. These values are not viewed as distant ideals – they are treated as moral obligations in everyday group work. Students often state that working in groups is part of their religious obligations. They connect their faith to

actions such as helping peers, sharing tasks fairly and avoiding selfishness. Many view cooperative learning as an act of worship.

This differs from many western views, which focus solely on thinking skills and social skills. In the Islamic context, cooperative learning has a higher meaning. It is about learning together as well as about growth in morality and faith. It reflects the idea that knowledge (*'ilm*) is inseparable from action (*amal*) and intention (*niyyah*). Faith and shared learning support the view of education as tarbiyah (education). This means the full growth of mind, heart and soul, which is the essence of Islamic teachings.

This understanding also contributes to ongoing debates within Islamic education about the compatibility of "modern" pedagogical methods with Islamic values (Sahin, 2018). Rather than seeing cooperative learning as a western import that needs to be Islamized post-hoc, participants in this study demonstrated that Islamic teachings already contain a rich reservoir of communal learning ethics. Thus, when implemented with intention and contextualization, cooperative learning does not oppose Islamic values but rather actualizes them in a structured educational format. It exemplifies what Alkouatli (2024) describes as "faith-centered critical pedagogy," in which knowledge production and transmission are embedded within the moral and metaphysical framework of Islam.

However, such integration also requires careful reflection. While students and lecturers aspired to embody Islamic values in cooperative settings, these values can easily be instrumentalized or reduced to performative checklists without deeper internalization. Therefore, the pedagogical challenge is not merely about inserting Islamic values into group work activities, but about cultivating an ethical consciousness that sustains these values even under institutional pressures and interpersonal tensions.

The second theme related to peer interaction as a site for moral reflection and ethical correction. Students not only engaged in collaborative knowledge construction but also in mutual moral development. They reported advising one another, correcting irresponsible behavior and encouraging sincerity through Islamic discourse. This finding builds on Vygotsky's social constructivist theory (Chuang, 2021), which argues that learning occurs through social interaction, but it extends the theory by showing that interaction in Islamic settings also functions as a medium for spiritual and ethical growth.

In this context, group learning is not only cognitive scaffolding (Lin et al., 2025) – it is also ethical scaffolding. The way students used Islamic terms to shape how their peers behaved shows that language itself acted as a moral guide. When they referred to concepts like *ukhuwah* or *amanah* to resolve conflicts, it reflected what can be seen as an Islamic moral grammar, a shared set of value-based expressions that helped regulate relationships and decision-making.

This moral framework (Lin et al., 2025), however, carries two sides. On the positive side, cooperative learning builds a sense of shared duty. It goes beyond

the focus on the individual that is common in regular education. On the negative side, it also brings worries about power and pressure. When students correct each other in the name of religion, some may feel coerced, guilty or left out. This can happen to those who are still learning about their faith or who cannot follow all the rules. Peer correction can help with moral growth. But it only works if it comes with care, kindness and a safe space led by the teacher (Peng et al., 2025). Without this, cooperative learning can feel like moral control instead of shared growth.

The role of the teacher is very important here. Teachers are not only experts in the subject. In this study, they saw themselves as *murabbi,* mentors who guide both knowledge and character. They often started class with *doa* and intention setting. They reminded students about *adab* (manners) and paid attention to the moral tone of group work. This follows Islamic teaching, where teachers are seen as models of *akhlaq* (good character) and as spiritual guides (Pangastuti et al., 2025). It also fits Sahin's (2018) idea that Islamic teachers guide both the mind and the heart.

This approach is very different from how many lecturers work in higher education. In many places, teaching only means giving lessons and checking results (Shi et al., 2020). In the Islamic setting, the lecturer is also a moral guide in class, but this role takes a lot of energy and needs strong support from the school (Gkonou & Miller, 2021). Without training or recognition, lecturers may find it hard to do this work and may feel alone in their efforts. The success of this model is not only about the sincerity of lecturers. It also needs good conditions. Classes should not be too big. Teachers need time to reflect. Leaders must give support. The curriculum should see learning as a process, not only as a final score (Creagh et al., 2025). In many PTKI campuses, the strong push to meet targets for accreditation and publications can weaken this mission. It can make schools focus more on numbers than on true learning.

The fourth theme, challenges in practicing Islamic values during group work, highlights the tension between educational ideals and classroom realities (Barak, 2024). While participants strongly affirmed the importance of integrating Islamic values, they also pointed to obstacles such as uneven participation, lack of sincerity among some members, shallow understanding of values, and limited institutional support for moral development. These issues mirror broader difficulties often found in character education, where gaps frequently appear between policy and practice. In Indonesia, for instance, the Ministry of Education's PPK policy promotes the inclusion of moral values at all levels of education yet provides little guidance on how these should be embedded in classroom teaching, especially in higher education (Pangastuti et al., 2025).

Another concern, mentioned indirectly by students, was the problem of performative religiosity. Some admitted joining group work only for grades, while others expressed frustration when peers failed to live up to shared ethical commitments. These dynamics suggest that Islamic-oriented cooperative learning requires more than just changing course content, it also calls for a cultural shift in education that places sincerity, effort, and ethical conduct on the same level as

academic performance. Without this, the method may look cooperative on the surface, but the underlying mindset can remain competitive and individualistic.

The final theme, students' transformation in both moral and academic aspects, shows the potential of faith-based cooperative learning. Many students shared that they became more thoughtful, empathetic, confident, and spiritually grounded through group activities. These results highlight how Islamic-oriented cooperative learning can support holistic growth, consistent with the classical goals of Islamic education: *ta'lim* (instruction), *tarbiyah* (nurturing), and *ta'dib* (character formation). This also resonates with modern educational theories that stress social-emotional learning and whole-person development. The strength of this approach is its ability to form not only capable learners but also ethical members of society who can live by Islamic values in daily life.

However, such transformation did not happen automatically or equally for all students. Some students experienced it more profoundly than others, and several noted that group success depended heavily on individual personalities (Kramer et al., 2014), prior religious understanding and the lecturer's approach. These nuances point to the need for a developmental, differentiated approach to implementing cooperative learning in Islamic contexts. It is not enough to assume that all students come equipped with the same ethical dispositions (O'Brien, 2025). Therefore, Islamic-oriented cooperative learning must be accompanied by explicit discussions about values, space for ethical reflection and opportunities to connect personal growth with communal learning goals.

6. Conclusion

This study investigated the integration of Islamic ethical values into cooperative learning practices within *Ilmu Pendidikan Islam* courses at selected Islamic higher education institutions in Indonesia. Through a qualitative approach centered on participant interviews, the study explored how students and lecturers interpreted and enacted faith-inspired collaboration in academic contexts.

The findings demonstrate five core themes: (1) cooperative learning grounded in Islamic ethics enhances both cognitive and spiritual development; (2) *ta'awun* (mutual assistance), *ukhuwah* (brotherhood), *amanah* (trust), *musyawarah* (consultation), and *ikhlas* (sincerity) serve as foundational principles shaping group interactions; (3) students increasingly conceptualize collaborative activities as *ibadah*, reinforcing their sense of spiritual accountability; (4) lecturers act as both pedagogical guides and moral mentors (*murabbi*), embedding *adab* and ethical reasoning in their facilitation; and (5) Islamic cooperative learning has the potential to nurture holistic learners who are intellectually competent, socially empathetic and spiritually grounded.

Theoretically, the study contributes to Islamic pedagogy by presenting a faith-based framework of cooperative learning that complements established educational theories. Practically, it offers insights for educators, curriculum developers and policymakers on how to embed Islamic values authentically into instructional strategies, particularly in character education and moral

development. These findings hold implications for rethinking how faith, ethics and collaborative learning intersect in higher education.

Nonetheless, several limitations should be acknowledged. The study relied solely on interview data, without methodological triangulation such as classroom observations or analysis of institutional documents. While this was a deliberate methodological choice due to constraints in time and access, future research should adopt triangulated or mixed-methods approaches to ensure richer, more robust insights and to reduce the potential bias associated with self-reported data. The absence of observational data may limit the study's capacity to fully capture real-time teacher practices and classroom dynamics, particularly in relation to how Islamic ethical principles are operationalized during cooperative tasks. Furthermore, the study did not conduct a formal validation of the interview protocol through expert review, which could have further strengthened the credibility of the findings. Future studies should incorporate rigorous instrument validation procedures to enhance trustworthiness.

Despite these limitations, this study sheds light on both the opportunities and challenges of implementing Islamic-oriented cooperative learning. While many students and lecturers affirmed the transformative power of values-based collaboration, issues such as unequal participation, superficial religiosity and institutional pressures suggest that deeper pedagogical and structural reforms are needed. Institutions must promote a culture that prioritizes ethical integrity alongside academic achievement, including through assessment policies that reward sincerity, honesty and mutual respect.

To move forward, Islamic higher education institutions should equip educators with professional development programs that integrate Islamic ethics with cooperative pedagogies. National policy frameworks such as *PPK* should be actively and intentionally implemented at the tertiary level. Faith-based teaching models deserve institutional recognition, curriculum support and sustained research funding to optimize their educational impact. Future research may benefit from longitudinal designs that assess how values-based learning shapes graduates' ethical decision-making in their professional and personal lives.

To capture the full complexity of Islamic-oriented cooperative learning, both in its philosophical underpinnings and its practical application, future research should consider employing a mixed-methods or ethnographic design that includes structured classroom observations alongside interviews. This would ensure a more strong and verifiable understanding of both teacher implementation and student engagement within the framework of Islamic educational ethics.

7. References

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