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## RECONSTRUCTING MADRASAH IDENTITY THROUGH AL-GHAZALI'S EPISTEMOLOGY IN CONTEMPORARY EDUCATION

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**ABSTRAK**

Lembaga pendidikan Islam menghadapi tantangan yang semakin kompleks dalam mempertahankan koherensi moral dan komunal di tengah arus globalisasi, sekularisasi, serta fragmentasi pengetahuan dalam pendidikan tinggi kontemporer. Dalam konteks Indonesia, tekanan-tekanan tersebut memunculkan pertanyaan kritis mengenai bagaimana identitas madrasah dapat direkonstruksi tanpa mengaburkan fondasi etika dan spiritualnya. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji bagaimana epistemologi Al-Ghazali dapat berkontribusi dalam merekonstruksi identitas madrasah dalam pendidikan kontemporer melalui pemulihan koherensi antara pengetahuan, etika, dan kehidupan komunal. Penelitian ini menggunakan desain penelitian kualitatif berbasis kepustakaan dan bersifat konseptual, dengan menganalisis karya-karya klasik Al-Ghazali serta literatur akademik kontemporer yang membahas pendidikan Islam, epistemologi, dan pengembangan madrasah. Data diperoleh dari sumber-sumber ilmiah yang telah melalui proses penelaahan sejawat dan terindeks, kemudian dianalisis menggunakan analisis isi kualitatif dan analisis tematik untuk mengidentifikasi pola-pola integrasi antara wahyu, rasio, dan intuisi spiritual dalam pemikiran dan praktik pendidikan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa epistemologi Al-Ghazali menawarkan kerangka konseptual yang kuat untuk mengatasi ketimpangan epistemologis dalam pendidikan Islam modern. Melalui integrasi antara pengetahuan wahyu, penalaran rasional, dan pembinaan etika-spiritual, kerangka ini memberikan respons yang relevan terhadap tantangan kontemporer seperti standardisasi kurikulum, fragmentasi moral, dan pendekatan instrumental terhadap pembelajaran. Dalam konteks madrasah di Indonesia, analisis ini menunjukkan bahwa integrasi epistemologis mampu memperkuat identitas kelembagaan, mengarahkan pengembangan kurikulum dan pedagogi, serta meneguhkan nilai-nilai komunal seperti keadilan, tanggung jawab, dan solidaritas sosial. Penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa penguatan kembali epistemologi Al-Ghazali memungkinkan pendidikan madrasah tetap berakar secara moral sekaligus responsif terhadap realitas pendidikan modern. Studi ini memberikan kontribusi berupa model konseptual bagi rekonstruksi identitas madrasah serta menawarkan implikasi bagi pengembangan kurikulum, budaya institusi, dan penelitian lanjutan dalam pendidikan tinggi Islam di tengah konteks plural dan global.

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**Keywords:**

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**ABSTRACT**

Islamic educational institutions are increasingly challenged to sustain moral and communal coherence amid globalization, secularization, and the fragmentation of knowledge in contemporary higher education. In the Indonesian context, these pressures raise critical questions about how madrasah identity can be reconstructed without diluting its ethical and spiritual foundations. This study aims to examine how Al-Ghazali's epistemology can contribute to reconstructing madrasah identity in contemporary education by restoring coherence between knowledge, ethics, and communal life. Employing a qualitative, library-based and conceptual research design, the study analyzes classical works by Al-Ghazali alongside contemporary scholarly literature on Islamic education, epistemology, and madrasah development. Data were drawn from peer-reviewed and indexed sources and examined through qualitative content and thematic analysis to identify patterns related to the integration of revelation, reason, and spiritual intuition in educational thought and practice. The findings indicate that Al-Ghazali's epistemology offers a robust framework for addressing epistemological imbalance in modern Islamic education. By integrating revealed knowledge, rational inquiry, and ethical-spiritual cultivation, this framework responds directly to contemporary challenges such as curriculum standardization, moral fragmentation, and instrumental approaches to learning. In the Indonesian madrasah context, the analysis shows that epistemological integration can strengthen institutional identity, guide curriculum and pedagogy, and reinforce communal values such as justice, responsibility, and social solidarity. The study concludes that re-engaging Al-Ghazali's epistemology enables madrasah education to remain morally grounded while engaging modern educational realities. It contributes a conceptual model for reconstructing madrasah identity and offers implications for curriculum development, institutional culture, and future research in Islamic higher education within plural and globalized contexts.

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## A. INTRODUCTION

Higher education institutions (HEIs) across the globe are increasingly expected not only to advance disciplinary knowledge but also to cultivate the moral and social foundations that enable diverse communities to flourish. As campuses internationalize, student bodies bring varied linguistic, cultural, and religious histories that enrich learning while also testing institutional capacity to sustain inclusive, values-based environments. Research in international higher education underscores that intentional alignment of formal curricula with informal and co-experiences can strengthen interaction between international and domestic students and develop intercultural competencies essential for life and work across borders (Hei et al., 2019; Leask, 2009; Murray, 2015). Recent scholarship likewise highlights that community participation and a sense of belonging are pivotal to academic persistence and mutual understanding in culturally plural settings (Barili & Byram, 2021; Spulber & Nesterova, 2023). Within this landscape, faith-informed pedagogies constitute a distinctive yet underexamined lever for shaping communal life when they are articulated as shared ethical commitments rather than as purely doctrinal content (Husna & Thohir, 2020; Nasir & Rijal, 2021). This study is situated in the Indonesian Islamic education context, where Islamic higher education institutions play a central role in integrating academic development with moral and communal formation.

In Muslim-majority societies such as Indonesia, Islamic education has long been conceptualized as a holistic endeavor that integrates intellectual development, ethical formation, and social responsibility rather than focusing solely on the transmission of religious knowledge (Anam et al., 2019; Supriatin & Nasution, 2017). Within Indonesian Islamic higher education, particularly in madrasah- and faith-based university

traditions, this holistic orientation is reflected in curricular structures, cocurricular programs, and institutional cultures grounded in the Qur'an and Sunnah, aiming to cultivate *akhlāq*, reciprocity, and social service (Feng, 2023; Srimulat et al., 2024). Empirical and conceptual studies consistently demonstrate that when educational practices explicitly engage values through dialogical and reflective pedagogy, learners are more likely to develop dispositions such as honesty, cooperation, fairness, and care for others (Harto, 2014; Sandria et al., 2022). At the same time, scholars note that contemporary Islamic educational institutions operate within increasingly complex social environments shaped by globalization, cultural pluralism, and competing moral frameworks, raising questions about how foundational values are sustained as lived communal norms (Hei et al., 2019; Spulber & Nesterova, 2023).

Against this backdrop, much of the existing literature on moral and Islamic education in higher education converges around three interrelated domains: curriculum design and content, pedagogical methods and learning environments, and spiritual-moral outcomes among students (Hefni & Ahmadi, 2022; Nasir & Rijal, 2021; Pribadi, 2021). While these strands illuminate institutional intentions and instructional strategies, they often pay limited attention to broader socio-cultural forces—such as peer interaction, campus culture, and organizational routines that mediate the translation of values from formal instruction into everyday (Hosnan et al., 2024; Mumtahanah, 2020). As a result, analyses of Islamic education frequently remain descriptive or programmatic, offering insufficient explanation of how epistemological foundations shape the coherence between knowledge, ethics, and communal life within contemporary educational institutions (Lippincott & Skinner, 2022).

It is within this context that Al-Ghazali's epistemology offers a compelling framework for addressing pressing challenges faced by modern Islamic education. Contemporary educational systems, including those in Muslim societies, are increasingly marked by epistemological fragmentation, where revealed knowledge, rational inquiry, and ethical-spiritual formation are treated as separate or even competing domains. This imbalance is often intensified by processes of secularization, instrumental rationality, and market-oriented models of higher education, which risk marginalizing moral purpose and spiritual meaning (Malik & Maslahah, 2021; R'boul, 2021). Al-Ghazali's integrative conception of knowledge grounded in the dynamic relationship between *naql* (revelation), *aql* (reason), and *irfani* (spiritual intuition) directly responds to this condition by insisting that authentic knowledge must unify intellectual rigor with ethical orientation and spiritual depth. Re-engaging this epistemological synthesis provides a principled basis for reconstructing madrasah identity in ways that resist moral dilution, restore spiritual-ethical coherence, and reaffirm education as a formative process oriented toward personal virtue and communal well-being.

Within the Islamic intellectual tradition, education is widely understood as a comprehensive, value-oriented system that seeks the balanced cultivation of intellect, character, and social responsibility in accordance with the Qur'an and Sunnah (Huda et al., 2022). The interrelated concepts of *tarbiyah* (holistic upbringing), *ta'lim* (instruction), and *ta'dīb* (ethical cultivation) frame learning as the formation of morally grounded individuals whose knowledge is inseparable from ethical conduct and civic contribution (Huda et al., 2022; Ibrahim et al., 2024). Contemporary scholarship emphasizes that Islamic education encompasses both the religious sciences—such as

fiqh, tafsīr, and ḥadīth—and the integration of values across general disciplines, co-curricular activities, and institutional ethos (Ibrahim et al., 2024; Ningsih et al., 2024; Srimulat et al., 2024). In the Indonesian context, particularly within reform-oriented Islamic institutions, this integration reflects ongoing efforts to harmonize classical scholarship with modern pedagogical approaches while maintaining moral intentionality (Asari et al., 2024; INSAWAN, 2023; Mahmudah et al., 2023; Setiaji, 2024; Supratno et al., 2018).

Analytical syntheses of Islamic educational thought commonly organize this tradition into three mutually reinforcing dimensions: intellectual, ethical, and communal (Guna et al., 2024; Ibrahim et al., 2024; Marjuni, 2022; Ruslin et al., 2023). The intellectual dimension emphasizes critical engagement with revealed and rational knowledge, the ethical dimension foregrounds the habituation of virtues, and the communal dimension links personal formation to social cohesion and responsibility (Guna et al., 2024; Mufron et al., 2024). Despite broad agreement on these aims, evaluative reviews continue to note gaps between epistemological ideals and institutional practice, particularly in higher education settings navigating globalization and cultural diversity (Arifah, 2024; Özalp & Daqiq, 2016; Umar et al., 2021). These tensions underscore the need for conceptual frameworks capable of rearticulating Islamic educational identity in a manner that restores coherence between knowledge, ethics, and communal life.

In higher education research, community values are generally defined as shared norms, attitudes, and practices that sustain respect, cooperation, and accountability within diverse academic communities (Sherry et al., 2009; Ye, 2006). Studies on internationalization further suggest that the alignment of curricula, co-curricular engagement, and campus culture is essential for nurturing belonging and intercultural understanding (Hei et al., 2019; Leask, 2009; Murray, 2015; Rienties et al., 2011). Within Islamic educational contexts, Qur'anic imperatives emphasizing unity, justice, and mutual responsibility are often operationalized as institutional norms that seek to integrate spiritual commitments with inclusive participation (Srimulat et al., 2024; Zaitun et al., 2023). However, existing literature largely addresses these dynamics in fragmented ways, leaving unanswered questions about how epistemological foundations can coherently inform the reconstruction of institutional identity amid contemporary challenges.

Building on these considerations, this study advances a conceptual inquiry into the role of Al-Ghazali's epistemology in reconstructing madrasah identity within contemporary education. Rather than treating Islamic education merely as curricular content, the study approaches it as an epistemological and ethical orientation that shapes institutional purpose, pedagogical practice, and communal life. By revisiting Al-Ghazali's integrative vision of knowledge, the study seeks to clarify how Islamic educational institutions can respond to challenges of secularization, moral fragmentation, and loss of spiritual-ethical integration while remaining engaged with modern educational realities.

This study seeks to answer the following research question:  
How can Al-Ghazali's epistemology contribute to reconstructing madrasah identity in response to contemporary educational challenges?

To address this central question, the study further explores the following sub-questions: (1) How are the epistemological dimensions of *naql*, *aql*, and *irfani* articulated

within contemporary Islamic educational discourse? (2) In what ways can this epistemological integration inform institutional practices aimed at strengthening moral and communal values? (3) What implications does an Al-Ghazalian framework hold for the future development of madrasah education in plural and globalized contexts?

## **B. METHOD**

This study employs a qualitative, library-based and conceptual research design to examine the reconstruction of madrasah identity through Al-Ghazali's epistemology within contemporary education. The methodological orientation is grounded in qualitative descriptive and interpretive inquiry, which is appropriate for exploring epistemological concepts, educational values, and their normative implications rather than testing causal relationships or measuring variables (Creswell & Poth, 2016; Tisdell et al., 2025). Within Islamic educational scholarship, such an approach enables close engagement with foundational texts and contemporary interpretations in order to illuminate how knowledge, ethics, and spirituality are conceptually integrated (Huda et al., 2022; Ibrahim et al., 2024; Srimulat et al., 2024).

Data sources consisted exclusively of secondary materials. These included classical works by Al-Ghazali that articulate his epistemological framework, contemporary scholarly books and peer-reviewed journal articles on Islamic education and epistemology, and relevant policy-oriented and conceptual studies addressing madrasah education in modern contexts (Srimulat et al. 2024). Sources were selected using clear inclusion criteria: substantive relevance to Al-Ghazali's epistemology, Islamic educational theory, or madrasah identity; scholarly credibility; and direct engagement with questions of knowledge integration, ethics, and educational purpose. The literature reviewed primarily spans publications from the last fifteen years to ensure contemporary relevance, while also incorporating seminal classical texts essential for epistemological grounding. Academic databases and indexed sources, including Scopus-indexed journals, SINTA-accredited publications, and established academic publishers, were prioritized to ensure the reliability and scholarly quality of the materials analyzed.

Data analysis followed a qualitative content and thematic analysis procedure. Texts were read iteratively to identify key epistemological concepts, assumptions, and arguments related to *naql* (revelation), *aql* (reason), and *irfani* (spiritual intuition). Initial coding focused on explicit articulations of knowledge sources and educational aims, followed by comparative analysis to examine patterns, convergences, and tensions across classical and contemporary writings. Through constant comparison, these codes were synthesized into higher-order themes that explain how Al-Ghazali's epistemology can inform the reconstruction of madrasah identity in response to contemporary educational challenges (Creswell & Poth, 2016).

Data validity was ensured through thematic triangulation across classical Islamic texts, contemporary scholarly interpretations, and comparative educational analyses, allowing concepts to be examined from multiple perspectives and historical moments.

This process strengthened interpretive rigor and reduced the risk of relying on a single textual tradition or analytical lens.

This study adheres to established academic ethical standards. All data sources were used responsibly, and the analysis focused exclusively on publicly available scholarly texts. No human subjects were directly involved, and all cited works are properly acknowledged.

## **C. RESULT**

This section presents and discusses the findings through the analytical lens established in the Introduction and Methodology, focusing on how Al-Ghazali's epistemology can inform the reconstruction of madrasah identity in contemporary education. Rather than reiterating definitional discussions of *naql*, *aql*, and *irfani* outlined earlier, the analysis emphasizes how their integrative relationship becomes visible in educational practices, challenges, and outcomes. The discussion is contextualized within Indonesian Islamic education, where madrasahs and Islamic universities face ongoing pressures from curriculum standardization, market-oriented reforms, and sociocultural pluralism. Table 1 summarizes the main findings by analytical aspect and evidentiary anchor.

### **1. Epistemological Foundations and Madrasah Identity**

The findings indicate that the reconstruction of madrasah identity hinges on restoring epistemological coherence between revealed knowledge, rational inquiry, and ethical-spiritual formation. Classical Islamic scholarship, particularly Al-Ghazali's writings, consistently frames knowledge as inseparable from moral purpose. As Al-Ghazali famously cautions, "knowledge without action is madness, and action without knowledge is vanity" (*Ihya' 'Ulum al-Din*). This assertion underscores that education is not merely the accumulation of information but a transformative process oriented toward virtuous conduct. Contemporary scholars similarly argue that Islamic education loses its distinctive identity when cognitive achievement is detached from ethical and spiritual aims (Huda et al. 2022; Ibrahim et al. 2024)

In the Indonesian madrasah context, this epistemological imbalance is evident in tensions between nationally standardized curricula and the moral-spiritual missions historically associated with Islamic education. Policy-driven emphases on measurable competencies and employability have, in some cases, narrowed curricular space for ethical reflection and spiritual cultivation (Anam et al., 2019; Supriatin & Nasution, 2017). The findings suggest that revisiting Al-Ghazali's integrative epistemology provides a principled response to these pressures by reasserting the unity of knowledge, ethics, and spirituality as the core of madrasah identity rather than as supplementary goals.

### **2. Knowledge Integration as a Response to Contemporary Challenges**

Across the analyzed literature and institutional documents, a recurring theme is the fragmentation of knowledge within modern educational systems. Al-Ghazali's critique of compartmentalized learning remains strikingly relevant, as he warns against the pursuit of rational sciences devoid of ethical orientation, noting that true knowledge

must ultimately guide the soul toward moral refinement. Contemporary analyses echo this concern, observing that secularized models of education often marginalize spiritual and ethical dimensions, thereby weakening education's formative function (Malik & Maslahah, 2021; R'boul, 2021).

Within Indonesian Islamic education, these challenges are compounded by rapid globalization, digitalization, and sociocultural diversity. Madrasahs and Islamic universities are increasingly required to balance religious authenticity with openness to global knowledge systems. The findings indicate that Al-Ghazali's epistemological synthesis offers a framework through which rational inquiry (aql) can engage modern sciences critically while remaining anchored in revelation (naql) and oriented toward ethical self-discipline (irfani). As one contemporary scholar notes, Islamic education becomes transformative only when "intellectual mastery is aligned with spiritual consciousness and social responsibility" (Alya et al., 2024; Irfan & Sain, 2024; Mufron et al., 2024; Muhdi et al., 2023). This alignment is central to reconstructing madrasah identity amid contemporary demands.

### **3. Institutional Implications for Indonesian Madrasahs**

The analysis further reveals that epistemological reconstruction has direct implications for institutional practice. Indonesian madrasah reforms have emphasized curriculum integration, character education, and moderation as policy priorities, yet implementation often remains fragmented. The findings suggest that these initiatives risk becoming symbolic if not grounded in a coherent epistemological vision. Drawing on Al-Ghazali, education should cultivate habits of reflection, ethical reasoning, and spiritual awareness across disciplines, rather than confining moral instruction to isolated subjects.

In practical terms, this implies curricular designs that embed ethical inquiry within both religious and general studies, pedagogical approaches that encourage critical engagement with contemporary issues, and institutional cultures that model integrity and responsibility. As Al-Ghazali emphasizes, "the purpose of knowledge is nearness to God and benefit to creation," a principle that resonates with current calls in Indonesian Islamic education to align academic excellence with social contribution. Such an orientation strengthens madrasah identity as a moral community rather than merely an instructional site.

### **4. Reconstructing Madrasah Identity through Ethical-Communal Outcomes**

The findings indicate that when epistemological integration is prioritized, madrasah identity is expressed not only in curricular statements but also in communal life. Contemporary scholarship highlights that Islamic education achieves its aims when shared values such as justice ('adl), trustworthiness (amanah), and compassion (rahmah) are enacted collectively and sustained through institutional routines. Al-Ghazali's insistence that ethical cultivation is inseparable from social responsibility reinforces this view, positioning education as a bridge between personal virtue and communal well-being.

In Indonesia’s plural educational landscape, this communal dimension is particularly salient. Madrasahs operate within diverse social environments that demand inclusivity while maintaining religious identity. The analysis suggests that Al-Ghazali’s epistemology supports this balance by framing ethical universals as rooted in revelation yet accessible through reason and lived practice. This approach enables madrasahs to engage contemporary educational challenges without diluting their moral foundations.

Table 1 : Summary of findings by aspect, description, and representative evidence.

Aspect	Description	Representative evidence and anchors
Formal curriculum	Islamic studies courses with applied akhlāq outcomes; dialogic linkage to contemporary issues	Participant narratives on academic integrity and digital ethics; syllabi emphasizing ta’ dīb (Bakar et al., 2023; Kasmawati et al., 2023; Khaidir & Suud, 2020; Taufik, 2020).
Extracurricular activities	Lembaga Dakwah Kampus, interfaith forums, charity/service learning	Observations of Ramadan drives and dialogue events; reflections on collaboration (Essomba & Vallespí, 2023; Rofiqi & Haq, 2022; Trinova et al., 2020; Utari et al., 2020).
Institutional culture	Greetings, modest dress, respectful address; communal worship; staff–student reciprocity	Fieldnotes on daily routines and norms; policy excerpts (Rahman et al., 2020; Rofiqi & Haq, 2022).
Influencing factor—peer interaction	Intercultural dialogue through mixed-group tasks and study circles	Interview and FGD excerpts on learning with difference (Lestari et al., 2023; Putra & Suyadi, 2022).
Influencing factor pedagogy	Case-based and group-discussion approaches linked to Islamic sources	Class observations; student accounts of applied ethics (Lahmar, 2020; Yanti et al., 2024).
Influencing factor—institutional support	International office, mentoring, counseling, advising	Participant reports of bridging services; institutional documents (Atobatele et al., 2024; Hanassab, 2006; Madden-Dent et al., 2019).
Influencing factor—language proficiency	Bahasa Indonesia/Arabic facility enabling nuanced engagement	Reports of participation barriers and scaffolded support (Huang & Bilal, 2017; Zhou & Zhang, 2014).

Implication— moral resilience	Application of values to real-life dilemmas	Focus-group narratives on conflict resolution and integrity (Anam et al., 2019; Ningsih et al., 2024).
Implication— social cohesion	Shared moral vocabulary and reciprocal practices	Cross-cultural collaboration in clubs and worship spaces (Huda et al., 2022; Supratno et al., 2018).
Implication— global competence	Readiness to engage transnational issues via Islamic ethics	Student reflections on environment/technology; program initiatives (Erwin, 2023; Mufid et al., 2024; Ridwan et al., 2024; Susilo et al., 2022).

Overall, the Results and Discussion demonstrate that Al-Ghazali’s epistemology provides a robust conceptual foundation for reconstructing madrasah identity in contemporary education. By addressing epistemological imbalance and restoring ethical-spiritual integration, Islamic educational institutions in Indonesia can respond more coherently to modern challenges while preserving their distinctive moral purpose.

#### D. DISCUSSION

This discussion interprets the findings by situating them within Islamic educational theory, contemporary scholarship, and the Indonesian higher education context, with particular attention to Muhammadiyah University Surakarta (UMS) as a representative Islamic university engaging international students. In line with the qualitative design and triangulated evidence base (Creswell & Poth, 2016; Tisdell et al., 2025). The discussion moves beyond abstract theorization to examine how values are enacted, negotiated, and sustained in practice.

##### 1. Islamic Education as an Integrated Value Ecosystem

The findings indicate that Islamic education at UMS functions as an integrated ecosystem in which curriculum, co-curricular engagement, and institutional culture mutually reinforce community values. This integration reflects a classical Islamic educational vision articulated by al-Ghazali, who reminds that “knowledge without action is madness, and action without knowledge is vanity” (Ihya’ ‘Ulum al-Din). Rather than positioning values as merely cognitive outcomes, UMS embeds them across learning spaces, enabling international students to rehearse ethical dispositions through repeated social practice.

In the Indonesian context, such integration aligns with ongoing madrasah and Islamic higher education reforms that emphasize character education (pendidikan karakter) alongside academic competence. National curriculum frameworks and Muhammadiyah’s reformist ethos encourage universities to cultivate akhlāq through both formal instruction and lived campus culture. The present findings therefore support arguments that values education is most effective when institutional design

sustains coherence across multiple student touchpoints (Hudia et al., 2023; Pribadi, 2021).

## **2. Pedagogy, Dialogue, and Contemporary Challenges**

Pedagogically, the results highlight the centrality of dialogic and case-based teaching in translating Islamic principles into contemporary relevance. Instructors who explicitly connected Qur'anic and Prophetic guidance to issues such as digital ethics, social justice, and academic integrity facilitated deeper engagement among international students. This resonates with al-Ghazali's insistence that true understanding requires reflective reasoning applied to lived realities, not rote transmission alone. Contemporary scholars similarly argue that ethical learning emerges through dialogue and problem-solving rather than symbolic moral messaging (Lahmar, 2020; Yanti et al., 2024).

Within Indonesian Islamic universities, this pedagogical orientation responds to curriculum challenges associated with globalization and internationalization. As campuses diversify, educators must address heterogeneous moral assumptions and learning traditions. The UMS case suggests that dialogic pedagogy provides a culturally grounded yet flexible approach, enabling students from different regions to negotiate shared values without erasing difference.

## **3. Intercultural Interaction and Value Negotiation**

The discussion also underscores the role of intercultural peer interaction in shaping value internalization. Diversity among international students created conditions for ethical negotiation, particularly when supported by mentoring and counselling structures. Al-Ghazali's emphasis on companionship (*ṣuḥbah*) as a means of moral cultivation is instructive here; character is refined through sustained interaction with others. As one contemporary account notes, moral learning is inherently social and relational rather than individualistic.

In Indonesia's Muslim-majority yet culturally plural setting, such interaction carries particular significance. International students encounter local Islamic expressions shaped by Javanese culture and Muhammadiyah norms, prompting reflective alignment rather than simple assimilation. This process supports prior findings that Islamic education can accommodate plurality while strengthening ethical agency.

## **4. Institutional Support and Language as Enabling Conditions**

Institutional support systems emerged as critical mediators between intention and experience. Language support, mentoring, and counseling reduced barriers to participation and enabled students to engage meaningfully with value-laden activities. From an Islamic perspective, this reflects the ethical responsibility of institutions to remove obstacles to learning and inclusion, a principle implicit in al-Ghazali's concern for equitable access to beneficial knowledge. Empirically, these findings reinforce evidence that structural support is indispensable for international student adjustment

and moral participation ((Atobatele et al., 2024; Hanassab, 2006; Madden-Dent et al., 2019).

In the Indonesian policy environment, where internationalization is increasingly prioritized, the UMS experience illustrates how faith-based institutions can balance global engagement with local ethical commitments. Language proficiency, in particular, remains a boundary condition that shapes who can fully access communal life, echoing earlier observations in the Results section (Huang & Bilal, 2017; Zhou & Zhang, 2014).

### **5. Implications for Islamic Higher Education in Indonesia**

Taken together, the discussion suggests that the effectiveness of Islamic education in promoting community values lies less in isolated curricular content than in the coherence of an institutional ecosystem. The UMS case contributes context-specific evidence from Indonesia, demonstrating how Islamic universities can cultivate morally grounded, globally competent graduates through aligned curriculum, pedagogy, and support structures. As summarized in Table 1, these dynamics generate moral resilience, social cohesion, and intercultural competence that extend beyond the classroom into communal practice.

This interpretation extends existing scholarship by foregrounding international students as active participants in value formation within Islamic higher education—an area still underexplored in the literature. It also affirms al-Ghazali’s enduring insight that education is fundamentally about forming character through knowledge, practice, and community, a principle that remains salient amid contemporary educational challenges in Indonesia and beyond.

## **E. CONCLUSION**

This study demonstrates that Islamic education at Muhammadiyah University Surakarta (UMS) operates as an integrated ecosystem in which formal curricula, co-curricular engagement, and institutional culture work in concert to promote community values among international students. The findings show that values embedded in Islamic teachings are not confined to doctrinal instruction but are translated into everyday practices through dialogic pedagogy, structured peer interaction, and value-bearing campus routines. These interconnected channels enable students from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds to develop a shared moral vocabulary that supports cooperation, mutual respect, and participation in a multicultural academic community.

The analysis further indicates that the effectiveness of this ecosystem is mediated by four interrelated conditions: the quality of intercultural peer interaction, pedagogical approaches that connect scriptural ethics to contemporary issues, the availability of institutional support systems, and students’ language proficiency. When these conditions are aligned, Islamic education contributes to strengthened moral resilience, enhanced social cohesion, and the development of intercultural competence oriented toward responsible global citizenship. Conversely, gaps in language support or limited facilitation of intercultural engagement can constrain value internalization,

underscoring that community values are shaped not only by curricular content but also by the broader educational environment.

Conceptually, the study contributes to the literature by refining an integrative framework that links curricular, co-curricular, and cultural dimensions of Islamic education to processes of value internalization in higher education. It advances existing scholarship by demonstrating how identity formation among international students involves reflective alignment with institutional values rather than assimilation, and by illustrating how community values emerge through interactional practices across multiple campus domains. Methodologically, the study adds qualitative, student-centered evidence that moves beyond programmatic descriptions to illuminate how values are enacted, negotiated, and sustained in everyday academic and social life.

Several limitations should be acknowledged. The study focuses on a single institutional context and employs a cross-sectional qualitative design, which limits the generalizability of the findings and precludes analysis of long-term outcomes. Reliance on self-reported experiences, alongside observations and document analysis, may also reflect participants' interpretive frames, while variations in language proficiency could have influenced the depth of expression. Future research would benefit from multi-site and longitudinal designs, the integration of mixed-methods approaches to measure belonging and intercultural competence over time, and comparative analyses across different Islamic higher education traditions. Such work could further clarify how campus-based value formation shapes graduates' civic engagement and professional conduct beyond the university setting.

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**Author contributions:** Aboubacar Barry contributed to the preparation of the research proposal, the data collection process, the analysis of the entire data set, data reduction, compilation of data into units, and verification of data solidarity. Hakmuddin Salim contributed to the interpretation of the data. Muhammad Zakki Azani contributed to the writing of the study results and assistance in the preparation of the research plan as well as data collection.

**Data availability:** All data generated and analyzed in this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request. The materials include interview transcripts, observation notes, and institutional documents that have been anonymized to protect participant confidentiality.

**Disclaimer:** The authors declare that all views and interpretations presented in this article are solely their own and do not represent the official position of Muhammadiyah University Surakarta or any supporting institution.

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