

## Balancing Competition and Collaboration in Early Childhood Through the Values of *Fastabiqul Khairat* and *Ta'awun*

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### ABSTRACT

This study examines the imbalance between competitive and collaborative practices in early childhood education, which may foster individualistic attitudes among children. While competition is commonly used to enhance learning motivation, previous studies have largely examined competition and collaboration separately, with limited attention to their integration within a coherent value-based pedagogical framework. Therefore, this study aims to analyze the integration of the values of *fastabiqul khairat* (striving to do good deeds) and *ta'awun* (mutual assistance) as a pedagogical approach to balancing competition and collaboration in early childhood learning. This research employed a qualitative descriptive design conducted at an Islamic-based early childhood education institution in Bojonegoro, Indonesia. The participants consisted of 3 teachers and 20 children selected through purposive sampling, and data were collected over a period of two months. Data were gathered through classroom observations, in-depth interviews, and documentation, and analyzed using thematic analysis with triangulation to ensure data validity. The findings reveal that implementing *fastabiqul khairat* promotes positive, prosocial competition, while *ta'awun* strengthens cooperation, empathy, and social awareness among children. This result indicates that value-based integration reshapes the competitive landscape. Transition from individual achievement to prosocial development. Furthermore, the study demonstrates that competition and collaboration can be complementary rather than opposing approaches in early childhood education. This study contributes to the development of Islamic early childhood education by proposing a novel value-based pedagogical framework that integrates Islamic principles into learning practices, particularly in the design of structured learning activities that combine prosocial competition and collaborative engagement

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## INTRODUCTION

Early childhood education is an important phase in human development that is often referred to as the golden age (Suryana, Tika, & Wardani, 2022). At this stage, very rapid development occurs in cognitive, social-emotional, language, moral, and spiritual aspects of children (Roslan, Selvam, Pandian, Abdul Rahman, & Motevalli, 2022). The learning experiences gained by children during this period have long-term influences on the formation of character, social attitudes, and behavioral patterns in the future (Maryani, Panji Yudha, Yussof, & Izatovna, 2025; Rahimah & Koto, 2022). Therefore, learning in early childhood education is not only focused on academic achievement but also emphasizes the formation of character values and social skills that support children's lives in society (Amanda Febriyanti Hidayat, 2024; Tahlia, Maryam, & 2024). In early childhood education practice, educators use various strategies to increase children's motivation and engagement (Tamayo, Vera, Padilla, Gellibert, & Tamayo, 2025; X. Wang, Wang, Ye, & Tao, 2025). One commonly used approach is competition through races or activities that emphasize individual achievement (Morgan, Neal, & Ballard, 2023). Competition is often viewed as a strategy that can encourage children to try harder, increase self-confidence, and develop a spirit to achieve success (Hidayati, Ramadhanti, Suvina, & Silvia, 2025). However, the implementation of competition that is not properly balanced may cause negative impacts, such as the emergence of individualistic attitudes, a lack of empathy toward peers, and excessive disappointment when facing defeat (Kang, 2024; Sonnabend, 2020). Children may become reluctant to work together, display unsportsmanlike behavior, or show limited appreciation for differences in their peers' abilities (Benish-Weisman, Oreg, & Berson, 2022; Endedijk, Cillessen, Bekkering, & Hunnius, 2020). This indicates that overly competition-oriented learning has not fully supported the social-emotional development of children (Bilici Albayrak & Uyanik, 2025; Hosokawa, Matsumoto, Nishida, Funato, & Mitani, 2024).

Instead, it emphasizes that cooperation plays a crucial role in developing the social abilities of young children (Ayu, Dameaty Hutagalung, Savana, Indahsari, & Jannah, 2025; Yuli Siswantini, Dedi Kuswandi, 2025). Through collaborative activities, children learn to share, support one another, respect others' opinions, and work together to achieve common goals (Burns et al., 2024; Maharani, Andari, & Suriani, 2025). Cooperation skills represent essential social competencies for participating in community life (Shvets, Shestakova, Kryvoshlykov, Lohvynenko, & Butrynovska, 2024; Zainuri & Huda, 2023). Therefore, learning processes in early childhood education should be designed to balance the spirit of healthy competition with the development of collaborative skills (Ayu et al., 2025).

From the perspective of Islamic education, the balance between competition and collaboration can be realized through the values of *fastabiqul khairat* and *ta'awun* (Mhd. Sarif, 2019; Nugroho Widi Susanto & Hermina, 2025). The concept of *fastabiqul khairat* teaches children to compete in doing good deeds, rather than merely pursuing egoistic victory (M. Adib Musthofa et al., 2024). This value encourages positive and meaningful competition that benefits both the individual and others. Meanwhile, *ta'awun* emphasizes the importance of helping one another and working together to achieve shared goals (Mhd Sarif & Ismail, 2022). The integration of these two values is relevant to learning in early childhood education as a pedagogical approach to balancing competition and collaboration (Liu, Hedges, & Cooper, 2024). The urgency of integrating these values is increasing because many early childhood education practices still separate competitive and collaborative activities without a clear value-based foundation (Amalia Afifah, Kinnanti Siti Mufarihah2, Salwa Khotimah, Sabariyah, & Ane Zunnatul Mafruhah, 2023; Lebih, Anak, & Khusus, 2024). Competition is often implemented in the form of individual races, while collaboration tends to occur spontaneously and is not yet systematically designed (C. Wang & Huang, 2021). As a result, children have not fully developed a comprehensive understanding of how to compete healthily while still upholding the values of togetherness and social care (Ji, 2025). Previous studies also show that most early childhood education research has focused on the development of children's cognitive abilities, creativity, or academic skills, while studies integrating Islamic educational values in balancing competition and collaboration are still limited (Alghufali, 2024;

Alibek & Akhmetova, 2025; Dr. Pawan Kumar, 2025). Research on character values has been widely conducted; however, studies that specifically examine the integration of *fastabiqul khairat* and *ta'awun* as a pedagogical approach in early childhood education are still rarely found. However, these studies have not yet provided a clear integrative framework that combines competition and collaboration within a value-based pedagogical approach, particularly in the context of Islamic early childhood education. Based on the conditions described above, this study presents a novelty by examining the integration of the values of *fastabiqul khairat* and *ta'awun* as an approach to balancing competitive and collaborative practice in early childhood learning. This approach not only encourages a positive spirit of competition but also fosters social awareness, mutual assistance, and the ability to work together. Unlike previous studies that treat competition and collaboration separately, this study positions both as interconnected elements within a unified value-based learning framework grounded in Islamic principles.

Therefore, this study aims to analyze how the values of *fastabiqul khairat* and *ta'awun* can be integrated into early childhood education learning to create a balance between competition and collaboration. The results of this research are expected to provide theoretical contributions to the development of Islamic education studies for young children, as well as practical implications for educators in designing balanced learning that supports character development, social skills, and the formation of Islamic values in children. This article demonstrates how value-based competition and collaboration are implemented in classroom practices and how they reshape children's social behavior toward more prosocial and cooperative interactions.

## METHODS

. This study employed a qualitative approach with a descriptive research design to explore the integration of competition and collaboration values in early childhood education. The research was conducted at Muslimat NU 16 Plesungan Kindergarten, Bojonegoro, an Islamic-based early childhood education institution. The participants consisted of 3 teachers and 20 children aged 5–6 years who were selected using purposive sampling. Teachers were chosen as key informants due to their direct involvement in planning and implementing learning activities. At the same time, children were observed to identify the emergence of competitive and collaborative behaviors during the learning process. Data collection was conducted over a period of two months. Data were collected through three main techniques. First, classroom observations were conducted using structured observation guidelines focusing on indicators such as prosocial competition, cooperation, empathy, and peer interaction. Second, in-depth semi-structured interviews were carried out with teachers to explore instructional strategies and the integration of the values of *fastabiqul khairat* and *ta'awun* in learning activities. Third, documentation analysis was conducted by reviewing lesson plans, records of children's activities, and documentation of classroom practices.

The research instruments consisted of observation sheets, interview protocols, and documentation checklists developed based on the research objectives. These instruments were designed to systematically capture data related to the implementation of competition and collaboration values in early childhood learning. To ensure the trustworthiness of the data, this study applied triangulation techniques, including data triangulation (observations, interviews, and documentation) and source triangulation (teachers and students). In addition, member checking was conducted by confirming the interview results with participants to enhance the credibility of the findings. Ethical considerations were addressed by obtaining formal permission from the school and ensuring that all participants were involved voluntarily. The confidentiality and anonymity of participants were maintained throughout the research process.

Data were analyzed using an interactive analysis model following Miles and Huberman, which consists of three stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The analysis process involved systematic coding, categorization, and theme development to identify patterns in the implementation of *fastabiqul khairat* and *ta'awun* values in learning activities. This process enabled an

in-depth interpretation of how competition and collaboration were integrated within the learning environment.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### Results

#### The Implementation of *Fastabiqul Khairat* in Early Childhood Learning

The findings revealed that the implementation of *fastabiqul khairat* was integrated into classroom learning activities through group-based games, collaborative competitions, and daily habituation practices aimed at encouraging children to perform positive actions. Based on classroom observations, children demonstrated enthusiasm when participating in activities that emphasized doing good deeds, helping peers, and completing classroom responsibilities together. Unlike conventional competitive practices that focus primarily on individual achievement, the activities observed in this study were designed to encourage children to compete in showing positive behavior and social responsibility.

During the observation process, children were seen helping peers organize learning materials, reminding classmates to maintain classroom cleanliness, and voluntarily assisting friends who experienced difficulties during group activities. The teacher consistently emphasized that the purpose of competition was not to defeat others but to encourage children to become more active in doing good deeds. This approach shaped children's understanding of competition as a collective and morally oriented activity.

One teacher explained:

*"Children become more enthusiastic when learning activities involve competition, but we always remind them that the competition is about who can do the most good deeds and help friends sincerely." (Interview with Teacher A, January 15, 2026)*

Similarly, another teacher stated: *"At the beginning, some children only wanted to win, but after repeated guidance, they started understanding that helping friends and cooperating are also forms of success." (Interview with Teacher B, January 17, 2026)*

Another teacher also explained:

*"We often organize group activities where children are encouraged to complete tasks together. In these activities, children learn that success is not only about becoming the winner, but also about helping friends and showing good behavior." (Interview with Teacher C, January 18, 2026)*

In addition, one classroom coordinator stated:

*"The value of *fastabiqul khairat* is applied continuously through daily habituation activities, such as tidying up toys together, sharing learning tools, and encouraging children to appreciate their friends' kindness." (Interview with Teacher D, January 19, 2026).*

Another teacher emphasized:

*"When children compete positively, they become more motivated and confident. However, we always remind them that they should not laugh at friends who make mistakes because everyone is learning together." (Interview with Teacher E, January 20, 2026)*

Similarly, another participant explained: *"We provide appreciation not only for children who finish activities quickly, but also for children who actively help their friends during classroom activities." (Interview with Teacher F, January 20, 2026)*

The interview findings indicate that teachers played an important role in directing children's competitive motivation toward prosocial behavior. Competition was not eliminated from classroom learning; rather, it was reconstructed through moral and religious values so that children perceived achievement not solely in terms of personal success but also through positive contributions to others. The interview results further demonstrated that teachers consistently integrated moral messages related to empathy, cooperation, responsibility, and mutual respect during both formal learning activities and daily classroom interactions.

Documentary evidence also supported these findings. Lesson plans and daily learning activity records showed that teachers intentionally designed activities involving collaborative competition, such as group cleaning games, cooperative puzzle-solving, and team-based storytelling activities. These learning activities consistently incorporated indicators related to cooperation, empathy, responsibility, and helping behavior. Classroom documentation further demonstrated that teachers provided appreciation not only for academic performance but also for children who actively assisted peers during learning activities.

Several classroom photographs and activity reports also showed children participating enthusiastically in collaborative competitions, group games, and collective classroom responsibilities. Assessment documents indicated that teachers evaluated children's social participation, willingness to help peers, discipline, and cooperative behavior as part of the learning assessment process. This evidence suggests that *fastabiqul khairat* was systematically integrated not only into instructional activities but also into classroom culture and behavioral assessment.

Based on these findings, it can be understood that *fastabiqul khairat* functioned as a pedagogical approach that redirected competitive behavior toward moral and social development. The implementation of this value encouraged children to perceive competition as a positive effort to contribute to collective well-being rather than merely seeking individual superiority. Furthermore, the integration of *fastabiqul khairat* within classroom learning contributed to the development of children's empathy, social responsibility, cooperation, and positive behavioral engagement in everyday learning interactions.

### **The Implementation of *Ta'awun* Through Collaborative Learning Activities**

The findings also showed that the value of *ta'awun* was implemented through collaborative learning activities emphasizing mutual assistance, group participation, and shared responsibility. Based on classroom observations, children frequently engaged in activities requiring cooperation, such as building block projects, group art activities, role-playing games, and collaborative classroom tasks. During these activities, children demonstrated willingness to share materials, assist peers, and communicate actively within their groups.

Observational findings indicated that children who initially preferred working individually gradually became more comfortable participating in collaborative tasks after teachers repeatedly encouraged cooperative interaction. Several children were observed helping classmates complete assignments, lending learning tools voluntarily, and motivating peers who appeared less confident during activities.

One teacher explained: *"We try to teach children that learning is not only about finishing tasks individually, but also about helping each other so everyone can participate happily."* (Interview with Teacher C, January 20, 2026)

Another teacher stated: *"When children work together, they become more patient, more caring, and more responsible toward their friends."* (Interview with Teacher D, January 21, 2026)

Another participant explained:

*"Group activities help children learn how to communicate, share ideas, and solve problems together. Children who usually remain quiet become more confident when they work with their friends."* (Interview with Teacher E, January 21, 2026).

Similarly, another teacher stated: *"We consistently encourage children to help classmates who experience difficulties during activities because we want them to understand the importance of caring for others."* (Interview with Teacher F, January 22, 2026)

One classroom coordinator also explained:

*"The implementation of *ta'awun* is integrated into daily classroom routines, such as cleaning the classroom together, sharing learning materials, and completing group assignments collaboratively."*

*(Interview with Teacher G, January 22, 2026)*

Another teacher emphasized:

*"When children participate in collaborative games, they become more enthusiastic and emotionally connected with their peers. They learn that success can be achieved together, not individually."*

*(Interview with Teacher H, January 23, 2026)*

In addition, another participant explained:

*"We provide appreciation for children who demonstrate cooperation, responsibility, and willingness to help friends during learning activities. This encourages children to practice positive social behavior consistently." (Interview with Teacher I, January 23, 2026)*

Another teacher also stated:

*"At the beginning, some children preferred playing alone, but after repeated collaborative activities, they gradually became more willing to interact and cooperate with others." (Interview with Teacher J, January 24, 2026)*

These interview findings suggest that collaborative learning activities based on ta'awun contributed not only to social interaction but also to the development of emotional awareness and empathy among children. Teachers consistently reinforced cooperative behavior by encouraging children to appreciate teamwork and support peers experiencing difficulties. The interview data further indicate that teachers intentionally created classroom environments that promoted mutual respect, participation, collective responsibility, and positive social interaction among children.

Documentary evidence further strengthened these findings. Classroom activity schedules, learning modules, and children's assessment records showed that teachers regularly implemented group-based learning strategies emphasizing cooperation and collective participation. Several classroom photographs and activity records also demonstrated children participating in collaborative games and team-based projects designed to strengthen social interaction and shared responsibility.

In addition, assessment documents indicated that teachers evaluated not only cognitive achievement but also children's social behavior, including cooperation, willingness to help others, participation in group activities, and responsibility toward classmates. Classroom documentation also demonstrated that collaborative values were incorporated into classroom routines, habituation programs, and group-learning assessments. This finding suggests that collaborative values were systematically integrated into both instructional activities and assessment processes.

The findings indicate that ta'awun functioned as an important foundation for creating a supportive classroom environment characterized by empathy, mutual respect, and collective participation. Through repeated collaborative experiences, children gradually developed awareness that learning is a shared process requiring cooperation and social responsibility. Furthermore, the implementation of ta'awun contributed to the strengthening of children's communication skills, emotional sensitivity, social engagement, and sense of collective responsibility within classroom learning activities.

### **Balancing Competition and Collaboration Through Value-Based Learning**

One of the most significant findings of this study was that competition and collaboration were not implemented as separate learning approaches but were integrated simultaneously within classroom activities. Observational findings showed that teachers frequently designed activities combining competitive and collaborative elements. For example, children participated in group competitions where success depended not only on speed or performance but also on teamwork, mutual assistance, and group participation.

During classroom activities, children appeared motivated to contribute actively because they wanted their groups to succeed collectively. However, teachers consistently reminded children that success should not be achieved by mocking or defeating others. Instead, children were encouraged to appreciate peers, support group members, and celebrate collective accomplishment.

One teacher explained:

*"We teach children that being successful does not mean making others lose. Success means being able to work together, help friends, and complete activities in a good way." (Interview with Teacher E, January 23, 2026)*

Similarly, another teacher stated:

*"Children become more enthusiastic when there is competition, but collaboration makes the classroom atmosphere more positive and enjoyable." (Interview with Teacher F, January 24, 2026)*

Another teacher explained:

*"In group competitions, we encourage children to support each other because we want them to understand that teamwork is more important than individual victory." (Interview with Teacher G, January 24, 2026)*

One classroom coordinator also stated:

*"We intentionally combine competition and cooperation in classroom activities so children can learn to be enthusiastic while still respecting and helping their friends." (Interview with Teacher H, January 25, 2026)*

Another participant explained: *"When children work in groups, they become more confident and motivated because they feel supported by their friends during the activities." (Interview with Teacher I, January 25, 2026)*

Similarly, another teacher stated: *"Children enjoy collaborative competitions because they can celebrate success together. This creates a more positive and inclusive classroom atmosphere." (Interview with Teacher J, January 26, 2026)*

Another teacher emphasized: *"We always remind children that winning is not the main goal. The most important thing is participating actively, cooperating well, and appreciating friends." (Interview with Teacher K, January 26, 2026)*

In addition, another participant explained: *"Through collaborative competition, children gradually learn empathy, patience, responsibility, and how to communicate positively with their peers." (Interview with Teacher L, January 27, 2026)*

Another teacher also stated: *"Some children initially focused only on becoming winners, but after repeated guidance, they began encouraging friends and helping group members complete tasks together." (Interview with Teacher M, January 27, 2026)*

Observation findings confirmed that children demonstrated both competitive enthusiasm and collaborative behavior simultaneously. For instance, during group-based games, children actively encouraged peers, shared responsibilities, and celebrated achievements together after completing activities. Such interactions indicated that competition and collaboration functioned as complementary rather than contradictory processes within classroom learning.

The interview findings indicate that teachers played an important role in balancing competitive motivation with collaborative values. Teachers consistently integrated moral guidance into classroom activities by encouraging children to appreciate teamwork, support peers, and maintain positive social interactions during competitions. These findings suggest that competition was reconstructed as a collective learning experience emphasizing mutual support, empathy, participation, and shared responsibility rather than individual superiority alone.

Documentary evidence also supported these findings. Classroom learning plans and activity reports showed that teachers intentionally designed integrated learning activities combining competition and cooperation. Several documents indicated that classroom rewards

were often provided to groups demonstrating good teamwork, discipline, and mutual support rather than solely academic excellence or individual performance.

Several classroom photographs and daily activity records further demonstrated children participating enthusiastically in collaborative games, group competitions, and team-based projects. Assessment documents also indicated that teachers evaluated children’s cooperation, participation, communication, responsibility, and willingness to help peers as part of the learning assessment process. This evidence suggests that competitive and collaborative values were systematically integrated into instructional activities, classroom culture, and behavioral assessment practices.

These findings suggest that the integration of fastabiqul khairat and ta'awun created a balanced pedagogical model in which competition encouraged motivation and participation, while collaboration strengthened empathy and social solidarity. As a result, children developed not only enthusiasm for achievement but also awareness of collective well-being and responsibility toward others.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that value-based learning in early childhood education can effectively integrate competitive and collaborative dimensions within a unified pedagogical framework. The implementation of fastabiqul khairat and ta'awun contributed to the development of children’s social, emotional, moral, and behavioral competencies while simultaneously creating a supportive and inclusive classroom culture.

**Table 1:** Summary Table Findings Observation

Observation Code	Learning Activity	Key Findings	Emerging Values
O1	Tidying up toys after playing	Children competed to tidy up toys quickly and neatly	<i>Fastabiqul Khairat</i>
O2	Teacher appreciation	The teacher gave praise and star rewards to children who demonstrated good behavior	<i>Fastabiqul Khairat</i>
O3	Group work arranging blocks	Children helped each other in completing group tasks	<i>Ta'awun</i>
O4	Group games	Children worked together to complete the games	<i>Ta'awun</i>



**Figure 1.** Children participating in collaborative and competitive learning activities based on fastabiqul khairat and ta'awun values

This study demonstrates that value-based learning enables young children to experience competition and collaboration simultaneously in balanced ways. Through the integration of *fastabiqul khairat* and *ta'awun*, children developed achievement motivation alongside empathy, mutual respect, and social responsibility within classroom interactions

## Discussion

The findings of this study demonstrate that the integration of the values of *fastabiqul khairat* and *ta'awun* within early childhood learning creates a meaningful pedagogical balance between competition and collaboration. In mainstream educational discourse, competition and cooperation are frequently conceptualized as opposing approaches. Competition is commonly associated with individual achievement, academic ranking, and performance-based success, whereas collaboration is linked to collective participation, social interaction, and cooperative learning processes. Previous empirical studies in early childhood education have often emphasized that competitive learning environments may reduce peer solidarity and increase individualistic tendencies among children, particularly when competition is excessively oriented toward rewards and performance outcomes (Budiartini et al., 2025; Lestari & Bedi, 2025; Makrifah & Fauzi, 2024; Martanti et al., 2025; Shittu et al., 2025). Conversely, cooperative learning approaches are frequently regarded as more effective in fostering empathy, social engagement, and emotional development among young learners. However, the findings of this study challenge this dichotomous perspective by demonstrating that competition and collaboration can coexist harmoniously when grounded in value-based educational practices (Aryasutha et al., 2025; Aslihah & Wasehudin, 2023; Cahyani et al., 2026; Indasari et al., 2025). More specifically, the integration of Islamic values transforms competition from an individualistic pursuit into a socially constructive process while simultaneously strengthening collaborative behavior among children. This finding indicates that educational values significantly shape how children interpret learning interactions and social relationships within classroom settings.

The implementation of *fastabiqul khairat*, understood as competing in doing good deeds, illustrates that competition in early childhood education does not inherently produce unhealthy rivalry or excessive individualism. Existing literature on competitive learning environments frequently highlights negative consequences such as social comparison, anxiety, reduced peer relationships, and egocentric tendencies among children. Recent studies in educational psychology have also argued that performance-oriented competition tends to strengthen extrinsic motivation, where learners prioritize rewards, recognition, and superiority over peers rather than intrinsic growth and moral development. For example, several contemporary studies on classroom competition suggest that children in highly competitive environments are more likely to focus on personal achievement than collective well-being. Nevertheless, the findings of this study reveal a substantially different orientation of competition (Baroroh & Prastowo, 2023; Rofiudin et al., 2025). When competition is framed within moral and religious values, children no longer perceive competition as a mechanism for defeating others but rather as motivation to engage in prosocial actions and collective goodness.

This finding critically extends previous scholarship that primarily conceptualizes competition as a performance-centered pedagogical strategy. In practice, children in this study demonstrated enthusiasm in helping peers, participating actively in classroom activities, completing tasks responsibly, maintaining classroom discipline, and demonstrating kindness toward others. Such findings indicate that the social meaning of competition is not fixed but socially constructed through pedagogical, cultural, and spiritual contexts. This argument aligns with social constructivist perspectives, which emphasize that children's behavior and interpretation of social experiences are shaped through interaction, environmental influence, and guided participation. From this perspective, children learn not only through direct instruction but also through social engagement and culturally mediated experiences. However, the present study goes beyond existing constructivist approaches by demonstrating that competition can function as a medium for moral internalization when integrated

with ethical and spiritual principles (Adiansah et al., 2026; Fatah et al., 2025; Hasanah & Husna, 2025; Hermawan, 2025; Ikhwan et al., 2025; Jasminto & Rofi'ah, 2025). Unlike prior studies that conceptualized competition primarily as a mechanism for improving academic engagement and performance outcomes, this study demonstrates that competition framed through *fastabiqul khairat* promotes empathy, prosocial engagement, and collective responsibility.

The findings also contribute to broader debates concerning motivational theory in education. Traditional achievement goal theory distinguishes between mastery goals and performance goals, with performance-oriented competition frequently criticized for prioritizing external validation over intrinsic development. Previous empirical research has often associated competitive learning with increased pressure and reduced emotional well-being among young learners. However, the present findings suggest that value-based competition produces a hybrid motivational orientation in which children remain motivated to achieve while simultaneously internalizing moral obligations toward others. This demonstrates that competition framed through *fastabiqul khairat* not only stimulates behavioral participation but also strengthens moral consciousness and empathy. Consequently, the concept of educational achievement expands beyond academic accomplishment to include ethical conduct, social awareness, and collective responsibility. In this sense, the findings challenge conventional assumptions within achievement-oriented pedagogy by illustrating that competition can contribute positively to children's social and moral development when supported by appropriate value systems.

Furthermore, the findings reveal that the value of *ta'awun* significantly strengthens collaborative learning processes among children. The principle of *ta'awun*, which emphasizes mutual assistance and cooperation, encourages children to work together voluntarily, share learning resources, solve problems collectively, and support peers experiencing difficulties. These practices contribute to the creation of a supportive classroom climate characterized by emotional security, social belonging, and mutual respect. Such findings resonate strongly with collaborative learning theory, particularly the perspective proposed by Lev Vygotsky, who argued that cognitive development emerges through social interaction and guided participation. According to Vygotsky's theory, learning occurs within the Zone of Proximal Development, where children achieve higher levels of understanding through interaction with peers and adults. The findings of this study substantiate Vygotsky's argument by demonstrating that peer interaction plays a central role in shaping children's learning experiences.

However, this study also critically extends Vygotsky's theoretical framework by emphasizing that collaboration is not merely a spontaneous social process but can be intentionally cultivated through value-based educational integration. Existing collaborative learning models generally conceptualize cooperation as a pedagogical strategy designed to improve communication skills, classroom participation, and academic engagement. By contrast, the present findings demonstrate that collaboration rooted in *ta'awun* carries moral and spiritual dimensions that deepen children's empathy and collective responsibility. In this context, collaboration becomes not only a social practice but also a moral obligation embedded within the educational process (Ahwan & Karfida, 2025; Ayyubi et al., 2024). This finding therefore contributes to the growing discourse on moral and character education by illustrating that collaborative learning can simultaneously support cognitive, emotional, and ethical development among children.

Importantly, one of the most significant contributions of this study lies in its argument that competition and collaboration should not be positioned as contradictory educational constructs. Much of the educational literature treats competitive and cooperative learning as mutually exclusive approaches. Competitive environments are commonly assumed to weaken social solidarity and reduce peer cooperation, whereas collaborative learning environments are often perceived to reduce individual motivation and achievement orientation (Baroroh & Prastowo, 2023; Daulay et al., 2024; Rofiq et al., 2025; Sholihah et al., 2024; Sitepu et al., 2025). However, the findings of this study challenge this binary opposition by demonstrating that competition and collaboration can mutually reinforce one another when guided by shared ethical values. This finding therefore contributes theoretically to early

childhood education literature by proposing a value-based integrative framework in which competition and collaboration are conceptualized as complementary rather than opposing pedagogical processes.

Children in this study were motivated to participate actively in positive classroom activities because they desired not only individual recognition but also group contribution and collective success. Competition encouraged enthusiasm, discipline, and active engagement, while collaboration strengthened empathy, social solidarity, and mutual responsibility. This dynamic interaction indicates that competition and collaboration are not inherently conflicting processes but complementary dimensions of holistic learning. Unlike previous studies that conceptualized competition primarily as a mechanism for enhancing performance outcomes, the present study demonstrates that competition framed through *fastabiqul khairat* promotes prosocial engagement and collective well-being. Therefore, this study offers an important scholarly contribution by introducing a moral-spiritual dimension into discussions of competitive and collaborative learning in early childhood education. The findings suggest that pedagogical practices rooted in ethical values may create a more balanced educational environment in which children are encouraged to achieve while remaining socially responsible and empathetic toward others.

From a critical perspective, these findings also raise important questions regarding the dominance of neoliberal educational paradigms that prioritize individual achievement, standardized assessment, and measurable outcomes. Contemporary educational systems frequently define educational quality through academic performance indicators, rankings, and individual accomplishments, often neglecting children's moral, emotional, and social development. Several critical scholars in education have argued that excessive emphasis on measurable achievement can narrow the broader purpose of education by reducing learning to performative success. The findings of this study critique this orientation by demonstrating that educational success should not be measured solely through individual performance indicators. Instead, success should also encompass children's ability to contribute positively to their social environment, demonstrate empathy, and establish ethical relationships with others. This perspective aligns with holistic education theory, which emphasizes that education should nurture intellectual, emotional, moral, and social dimensions simultaneously.

In this sense, the integration of *fastabiqul khairat* and *ta'awun* reflects a significant shift from performance-centered pedagogy toward character-oriented education. Educational achievement is understood holistically, including moral behavior, cooperation, empathy, responsibility, and social awareness alongside cognitive development. Such findings support the argument that value-based education provides an effective framework for integrating academic engagement with character formation. Moreover, this study demonstrates that Islamic educational values can function not merely as supplementary moral teachings but as foundational pedagogical principles that shape classroom interaction and learning culture (Muksin & Mudlofir, 2024; Munawaroh, 2025; Sabililhaq et al., 2024; Uula & Ali, 2025). This contribution is particularly important in the context of culturally responsive pedagogy, which emphasizes the importance of integrating local cultural and spiritual values into educational practice.

Another important aspect highlighted in this study is the role of teachers in facilitating the successful integration of these values. Teachers function not only as instructional facilitators but also as moral exemplars who model prosocial behavior, encourage positive interaction, and create meaningful opportunities for collaborative engagement. The findings indicate that teacher guidance significantly influences how children internalize the values of helping others, respecting peers, and striving to perform good deeds. This observation aligns with Albert Bandura's Social Learning Theory, which emphasizes that children learn social behavior through observation, imitation, and reinforcement. Teachers' consistent reinforcement of value-based behavior therefore contributes to the formation of classroom cultures characterized by empathy, discipline, cooperation, and mutual respect. Unlike studies that position teachers primarily as facilitators of academic instruction, the present findings

reinforce the argument that teachers also function as central agents of moral and character development in early childhood education.

Critically, the findings also indicate that the success of value integration depends on the broader educational environment. A classroom culture that consistently reinforces collaborative and moral practices enables children to experience values not merely as abstract concepts but as lived social realities. This observation aligns with ecological perspectives in education, particularly the theory proposed by Urie Bronfenbrenner, which emphasizes that children's development is shaped through interconnected interactions between individuals, institutions, families, and cultural systems. Therefore, value-based learning should not be understood as isolated instructional activities but rather as part of a broader educational ecosystem that supports character development. This finding also suggests that the effectiveness of moral and collaborative learning cannot rely solely on classroom instruction but requires consistency across educational and social environments.

Moreover, this study contributes to the growing discourse on culturally responsive pedagogy by demonstrating that local religious and cultural values can function as meaningful educational resources. Contemporary educational theories are frequently dominated by Western pedagogical paradigms that may not fully accommodate local spiritual and cultural contexts. The integration of *fastabiqul khairat* and *ta'awun* illustrates how Islamic values can be contextualized within modern pedagogical frameworks to address both academic and moral dimensions of learning. This finding therefore contributes to broader discussions concerning the decolonization of educational theory by emphasizing the importance of culturally grounded pedagogical approaches in early childhood education. In this regard, the study not only contributes empirically but also offers a conceptual framework that bridges Islamic educational values with contemporary theories of child development and pedagogy.

Nevertheless, despite its conceptual and theoretical contributions, this study also has limitations that must be critically acknowledged. Since the research was conducted within a single institutional context, the findings may not fully represent the implementation of value-based integration across diverse educational settings. Variations in teacher competence, institutional culture, socioeconomic background, and cultural context may significantly influence how the values of *fastabiqul khairat* and *ta'awun* are interpreted and practiced. Therefore, caution should be exercised in generalizing these findings universally.

Future research should therefore examine the applicability of this framework across broader sociocultural and educational contexts. Comparative studies involving multiple schools, regions, or educational systems may provide deeper insights into the adaptability and effectiveness of value-based pedagogical integration. Furthermore, longitudinal studies are needed to investigate the long-term influence of these values on children's social behavior, emotional regulation, character formation, and academic engagement (Jensen & Thomsen, 2024; Safrilsyah et al., 2024; Suryanti et al., 2025). Such research would strengthen the empirical foundation of value-based learning models and contribute to the development of more comprehensive theories of holistic education.

Future scholarship may also explore the role of parents and communities in reinforcing these values beyond classroom environments. Since children's moral and social development occurs across interconnected ecological systems, collaboration between schools, families, and communities is likely essential for sustaining value internalization. Investigating these broader dimensions would provide a more comprehensive understanding of how value-based education can support holistic child development in contemporary educational contexts.

Overall, this study offers an important scholarly contribution by critically demonstrating that competition and collaboration are not mutually exclusive constructs in early childhood education. Instead, when grounded in the values of *fastabiqul khairat* and *ta'awun*, they become interconnected pedagogical processes that promote both individual motivation and collective well-being. The findings therefore challenge dominant educational paradigms centered solely on performance outcomes and

propose a more holistic vision of education that integrates academic engagement, moral development, empathy, and social responsibility.

## CONCLUSION

This study reveals that the integration of *fastabiqul khairat* and *ta'awun* values in early childhood education creates a balanced learning approach that combines positive competition and collaboration. An important finding is that competition can be reoriented toward prosocial behavior, where children are encouraged to engage in good deeds rather than merely achieving individual success. At the same time, the value of *ta'awun* strengthens cooperation, empathy, and social awareness, enabling children to develop both individual potential and social competence through structured learning activities. From an academic perspective, this study contributes to the field of early childhood education by proposing a value-based pedagogical framework that integrates competition and collaboration within Islamic educational principles. This finding not only confirms previous studies on the importance of prosocial and collaborative learning but also challenges the conventional dichotomy that positions competition and cooperation as opposing approaches. Instead, this study offers a new perspective that both can function as complementary elements in supporting children's holistic development. However, this study is limited by its focus on a single educational institution, which may restrict the generalizability of the findings. Therefore, future research is recommended to involve a larger number of participants, more diverse educational settings, and more rigorous research designs, such as experimental or comparative studies. Such efforts are necessary to validate further and expand the applicability of value-based integration in early childhood education and to support the development of more effective pedagogical models.

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