



THE IMPLEMENTATION OF COOPERATIVE LEARNING TO ENHANCE RELIGIOUS AND MORAL VALUES IN EARLY CHILDHOOD

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Abstract

Background: Religious and moral development is a fundamental aspect of early childhood education because it shapes children's character, values, and positive behaviour through meaningful learning experiences. **Objective:** This study aimed to examine the relationship between the implementation of the Cooperative Learning model and the religious and moral development of children aged 5–6 years at Cemara Liliba Kindergarten, Kupang City. **Method:** This quantitative study employed an ex post facto design involving 22 children selected through total sampling. Data were collected using structured observation instruments assessing Cooperative Learning implementation and children's religious and moral development. Descriptive statistics and simple linear regression were performed using SPSS version 25. **Results:** The descriptive findings indicated that most children demonstrated moderate to high levels of Cooperative Learning participation and religious and moral development. However, regression analysis revealed no statistically significant relationship between Cooperative Learning and children's religious and moral development ($p = 0.353 > 0.05$). The coefficient of determination ($R^2 = 0.043$) showed that Cooperative Learning explained 4.3% of the variance, while 95.7% was attributable to other factors beyond the scope of this study. **Novelty:** This study provides empirical evidence regarding the implementation of Cooperative Learning in an authentic early childhood classroom while highlighting the limited contribution of classroom learning alone to children's religious and moral development. **Conclusion:** Cooperative Learning creates meaningful, collaborative, and enjoyable learning experiences; however, strengthening children's religious and moral values requires continuous support through teacher modelling, parental involvement, and consistent moral habituation.

Keywords: Cooperative Learning; Religious and Moral Development; Early Childhood Education; Character Education; Preschool Children.

INTRODUCTION

Early childhood education has an important role in shaping character and children's development is a critical phase where they are very vulnerable, providing a great opportunity to instill basic moral values that will be guiding principles throughout their lives (Setianingsih et al., 2022). Moral development in early childhood is considered an important aspect of educational efforts. A learner-centered approach has emerged as an important method that is gaining more attention in early childhood education. Learning centers create an environment conducive to active learning through games, peer collaboration, and participation in activities tailored to the child's developmental stage. While important, efforts to improve moral development in early childhood through a learner-centered approach are still relatively unexplored and fully understood.

This research aims to delve deeper into the topic, especially focusing on assessing the effectiveness of student-centered learning approaches in instilling moral values in children. In recent years, early childhood education has increasingly emphasized not only cognitive achievement but also the cultivation of moral and religious values as essential competencies supporting children's character formation, social adaptation, and lifelong learning. Consequently, educators are encouraged to implement child-centered instructional approaches that facilitate meaningful learning experiences through active participation and collaboration.

Therefore, the study of the implementation of moral and religious values for early childhood, especially children aged 0–6 years is very important and strategic for PAUD teachers and PAUD managers as a whole. Given the negative phenomenon that emerges and is often a spectacle in daily life, through print and electronic media, cases of early childhood have begun to imitate hate speech, speak less politely, like to imitate scenes of violence, and even imitate adult behavior that children should not have.

Early childhood education is an effort to develop basic skills in coaching that is important for children from birth to the age of six years as the golden age which is manifested in providing educational stimuli through growth in the form of nutrition and health and maximizing the potential for early childhood development in a holistic and integrative manner through aspects of physical, motor, cognitive, creativity, development, and social-emotional, linguistic, religious and moral factors so that children have the readiness to enter further education on formal, informal and non-formal channels (Amseke et al., 2024). Early childhood is an individual who is in the developmental phase.

Therefore, the study of the implementation of moral and religious values for early childhood, especially children aged 0–6 years is very important and strategic for PAUD teachers and PAUD managers as a whole. Given the negative phenomenon that emerges and is often a spectacle in daily life, through print and electronic media, cases of early childhood have begun to imitate hate speech, speak less politely, like to imitate scenes of violence, and even imitate adult behavior that children

should not have. This condition is certainly quite reasonable, considering that in this phase, children aged 0–6 according to experts are in the imitation phase (imitation) (Susetya & Zulkarnaen, 2022).

From the perspective of social constructivist learning theory, children's moral development is strengthened through direct interaction with peers and teachers in meaningful social situations. Moral values are more effectively internalized when children actively participate in collaborative learning experiences rather than merely receiving verbal explanations from teachers. Therefore, instructional models that encourage cooperation, communication, and shared responsibility are considered highly appropriate for promoting moral and religious development during early childhood.

There are many learning models that can be used by teachers, one of which is the cooperative learning model. Cooperative learning is a student-oriented learning activity, in learning activities students are divided into small groups, students learn together, help each other, exchange ideas and discuss with each other in completing assignments given by teachers (Koerniawati, 2023).

Learning Characteristics Influence of Learning Models Cooperative Learning Regarding the Social Skills of Ajeng Putri Ujaini, Nopiana, Devi Nawangsasi, the results of this study show that there are several methods in instilling moral and religious values in early childhood, including group methods, habituation, example and singing. Based on the results of the evaluation of some of these methods, the results were that the group method was only 8%, the habituation method 40%, the exemplary method 47%, and singing 5%. These results show that early childhood will more easily internalize moral and religious values through exemplary methods which will then become habituation for the child to behave. Teachers are expected to use various learning methods, such as groups, singing, habituation, and example so that the process of instilling moral and religious values becomes more effective.

Hasanah & Himami (2021) stated that cooperative learning is team learning. Cooperative learning consists of planning, organizing, implementation, and evaluation. Learning success is determined by group success because students learn to cooperate, communicate, and complete tasks together. The willingness to cooperate is developed through continuous learning activities and interaction with peers.

Several previous studies have reported that cooperative learning positively influences children's social interaction, responsibility, communication skills, and collaborative behavior. However, most previous research has primarily emphasized social skills or general character development rather than specifically examining moral and religious values as the primary outcome. Furthermore, empirical studies investigating the effectiveness of cooperative learning in authentic early childhood classroom settings, particularly in Indonesian kindergartens, remain relatively limited. This condition indicates an empirical gap that requires further investigation.

Based on the results of interviews and observations with one teacher at Cemara Liliba Kindergarten, Kupang City, it is known that the application of the cooperative learning method has a positive impact on the development of religious and moral values in early childhood through learning activities that emphasize cooperation, mutual respect, helping others, discipline, and responsibility. Children gain meaningful learning experiences so that religious and moral values can develop optimally. However, classroom observations also revealed that learning activities were still predominantly teacher-centered, limiting children's opportunities to actively cooperate, discuss, and practice moral behaviors during classroom interactions. Consequently, moral and religious values were often delivered through verbal instruction rather than meaningful collaborative experiences, highlighting the need for a more child-centered instructional approach.

Based on the description above, this study was conducted to analyze the effect of implementing the Cooperative Learning model on the moral and religious values of children aged 5–6 years at Cemara Liliba Kindergarten, Kupang City. Unlike previous studies that mainly described methods for teaching moral values, this research quantitatively examines the contribution of Cooperative Learning to children's moral and religious development within an authentic classroom context. The findings are expected to enrich the empirical literature on child-centered learning while providing practical guidance for teachers in selecting effective instructional strategies to strengthen children's moral and religious values. Accordingly, the research hypothesis proposes that the implementation of the Cooperative Learning model has a positive and statistically significant effect on the moral and religious development of children aged 5–6 years.

METHODS

The research method used in this study is a quantitative method with an **ex post facto** research design. The quantitative method is a scientific method because it fulfills scientific principles, namely empirical, objective, rational, and systematic. Cooperative Learning research aims to reveal information about learning methods that are carried out in groups, where students work together to achieve learning goals together. In this method, each group member helps one another, discusses ideas, and shares responsibility for achieving group success. The study examined the implementation of the Cooperative Learning model on the development of moral and religious values among children aged 5–6 years at Cemara Liliba Kindergarten, Kupang City. An ex post facto design was employed because the independent variable had already occurred naturally within the learning process and was not manipulated by the researcher. This design enables the researcher to examine the influence of the Cooperative Learning model on children's moral and religious development under authentic classroom conditions without experimental intervention.

There are two variables in this study, namely the independent variable and the dependent variable. The respondents in this study consisted of 22 children aged 5–6 years enrolled at Cemara Liliba Kindergarten, Kupang City. The sampling technique employed was **total sampling**, whereby all

members of the population were selected as research participants because the population size was relatively small. This sampling technique was chosen to ensure that all eligible participants were represented and to minimize sampling bias. The independent variable (X) in this study was the implementation of the Cooperative Learning model, while the dependent variable (Y) was the moral and religious development of children aged 5–6 years. Moral and religious development refers to children's attachment to moral values and religious teachings as reflected in their attitudes, behaviors, habits, and daily practices. Operationally, moral and religious development was measured through indicators including honesty, discipline, responsibility, respect for others, cooperation, caring behavior, and the implementation of religious values during classroom activities.

According to Slavin (2021), Cooperative Learning is a learning model that places students in heterogeneous small groups to work together, help one another, and share responsibility for achieving common learning goals. Through group interaction, students develop communication skills, cooperation, mutual respect, responsibility, and positive interpersonal relationships. These characteristics make Cooperative Learning particularly suitable for early childhood education because it encourages children to practice moral behaviors through direct social interaction rather than passive learning.

The religious moral attachment scale is a tool or measurement instrument used to determine the extent to which children demonstrate attitudes and behaviors that reflect moral values and religious teachings in their daily lives. Religious moral attachment is important to develop from an early age because it helps children grow into individuals who are faithful, polite, responsible, caring, disciplined, and respectful toward others. Data were collected using structured observation and documentation techniques. The observation instrument consisted of indicators developed based on national early childhood development standards and was used to assess children's moral and religious behaviors throughout classroom learning activities. Documentation, including photographs of classroom activities and school records, was used as supporting evidence for the observational findings.

The results of religious moral validation are the results of assessing learning instruments and activities related to moral and religious values to determine whether they are appropriate for use. Validation ensures that the learning instruments accurately measure children's moral and religious development and are appropriate for implementation in early childhood education. The validation results indicate that the instrument effectively measures children's honesty, discipline, responsibility, tolerance, and other positive moral behaviors from an early age. Prior to data collection, the observation instrument underwent content validation through expert judgment involving specialists in early childhood education. Instrument reliability was subsequently evaluated to ensure the consistency and accuracy of the instrument in measuring children's moral and religious development. Children's development was assessed using the standard early childhood developmental categories: Not Yet

Developed (BB), Beginning to Develop (MB), Developing as Expected (BSH), and Very Well Developed (BSB).

Harahap and Savitri (2022) explained that the development of religious and moral values in early childhood should be carried out through habituation, role modeling, guidance, and continuous motivation provided by teachers. This process helps children develop politeness, caring attitudes, honesty, responsibility, discipline, and other positive behaviors in their daily lives. The implementation of Cooperative Learning in this study involved organizing children into small groups where they participated in collaborative learning activities emphasizing cooperation, helping one another, sharing responsibilities, respecting peers, and solving simple problems together. Through these activities, children were provided with meaningful opportunities to practice moral and religious values during authentic classroom interactions.

The research was conducted in several stages. The first stage involved preparing and validating the research instrument. The second stage consisted of conducting classroom observations during the implementation of Cooperative Learning activities. Subsequently, documentation related to the learning process was collected to support the observational data. Finally, all collected data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and simple linear regression analysis with SPSS version 25.0 to examine the effect of the Cooperative Learning model on children's moral and religious development. Statistical significance was determined at the 0.05 significance level.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The descriptive analysis was conducted to identify the distribution of children's cooperative learning abilities and their religious and moral development at Cemara Liliba Kindergarten, Kupang City. The findings provide an overview of the respondents' conditions before examining the relationship between the variables.

Table 1. Categories of Cooperative Learning

Category	Interval	Frequency	Percentage
High	55–64	8	36.4%
Moderate	45–54	10	45.5%
Low	35–44	4	18.2%
Total		22	100%

Based on Table 1, most children demonstrated moderate cooperative learning abilities, accounting for 10 children (45.5%), followed by 8 children (36.4%) in the high category and 4 children (18.2%) in the low category. Overall, 81.9% of the participants were classified within the moderate and high categories, indicating that cooperative learning had been implemented relatively well in classroom activities.

These findings suggest that most children were able to participate actively in group learning, communicate with peers, share responsibilities, and cooperate during classroom activities. Such learning experiences encourage children to develop collaboration, communication, and mutual respect while completing learning tasks together. According to Johnson and Smith (2021), cooperative learning promotes positive interdependence, face-to-face interaction, individual accountability, and collaborative problem solving, all of which support children's academic and character development. However, the presence of 18.2% of children in the low category indicates that not all learners have developed adequate cooperative skills. This finding suggests that teachers should provide more structured collaborative activities, continuous guidance, and classroom support to ensure that every child actively participates in cooperative learning experiences.

Table 2. Categories of Religious and Moral Development

Category	Interval	Frequency	Percentage
High	53–60	8	36.4%
Moderate	45–52	9	40.9%
Low	35–44	5	22.7%
Total		22	100%

Based on Table 2, the majority of children were classified in the moderate category, comprising 9 children (40.9%), followed by 8 children (36.4%) in the high category and 5 children (22.7%) in the low category. Overall, 77.3% of the participants demonstrated moderate to high levels of religious and moral development.

These results indicate that most children had begun to demonstrate positive religious and moral behaviors, including praying before and after activities, greeting others politely, sharing with friends, respecting classroom rules, and showing courteous behavior during daily learning activities. According to Suyadi (2022), religious and moral development in early childhood is fostered through continuous habituation, teacher modeling, and meaningful daily experiences.

Although the overall results were encouraging, the proportion of children in the low category indicates that some learners still require more intensive stimulation. Religious and moral values cannot be developed through classroom instruction alone but require consistent reinforcement through collaboration between teachers, parents, and the surrounding social environment. Therefore, continuous habituation and positive role modeling remain essential for optimizing children's moral development.

Table 3. Summary of the Simultaneous Test (F-Test)

Relationship	F	Sig. (p)	Decision	Conclusion
Cooperative Learning → Religious and Moral Development	0.903	0.353	$p > 0.05$	H_0 Accepted

Based on Table 3, the simultaneous regression analysis produced an F-value of 0.903 with a significance value (p) of 0.353, which is greater than the significance level of 0.05. Therefore, the null hypothesis (H_0) is accepted, indicating that Cooperative Learning did not have a statistically significant effect on the religious and moral development of children aged 5–6 years at Cemara Liliba Kindergarten.

Although the descriptive findings showed that most children demonstrated moderate to high levels of religious and moral development, the statistical analysis indicates that these outcomes cannot be attributed solely to the implementation of Cooperative Learning. This suggests that improvements in children's religious and moral values are influenced by multiple factors beyond classroom instructional strategies.

The findings are consistent with Mulyasa (2022), who emphasized that moral development in early childhood is a gradual process shaped through continuous habituation, teacher modeling, and repeated moral experiences rather than a single instructional method. Likewise, Sari (2023) argued that although Cooperative Learning effectively promotes children's social interaction, the development of religious and moral values depends largely on consistent reinforcement within the family, school, and community environments.

These findings suggest that Cooperative Learning should be viewed as a supporting instructional strategy rather than the sole determinant of children's moral development. Teachers are therefore encouraged to integrate cooperative activities with daily religious practices, character education, teacher role modeling, and collaboration with parents to strengthen children's moral development.

Table 4. Coefficient of Determination (R^2)

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	0.208	0.043	0.005	2.00896

Based on Table 4, the correlation coefficient ($R = 0.208$) indicates a very weak positive relationship between Cooperative Learning and children's religious and moral development. Furthermore, the coefficient of determination ($R^2 = 0.043$) shows that Cooperative Learning explained only 4.3% of the variance in children's religious and moral development, while the remaining 95.7% was explained by variables not included in this study.

The Adjusted R² value of 0.005 further indicates that the predictive ability of the regression model is very limited after adjusting for the sample size. Consequently, Cooperative Learning alone provides only a small contribution to explaining children's religious and moral development.

These findings reinforce the understanding that children's moral development is multidimensional. Previous studies have demonstrated that factors such as parental involvement, parenting style, teacher modeling, peer interaction, religious habituation, and the family environment play substantial roles in shaping children's moral behaviour (Harahap & Savitri, 2022; Suyadi, 2022). Therefore, improving children's religious and moral values requires comprehensive collaboration among schools, families, and communities.

Table 5. Summary of the Partial Regression Analysis (t-Test)

Relationship	t	Sig. (p)	Decision	Conclusion
Cooperative Learning → Religious and Moral Development	0.950	0.353	p > 0.05	H ₀ Accepted

Based on Table 5, the partial regression analysis produced a t-value of 0.950 with a significance value of 0.353, which exceeds the significance threshold of 0.05. Accordingly, H₀ is accepted, indicating that Cooperative Learning did not significantly influence children's religious and moral development.

This result demonstrates that although Cooperative Learning encourages collaboration, communication, and peer interaction, these experiences alone are insufficient to produce statistically significant improvements in children's religious and moral values. Moral development requires continuous reinforcement through consistent examples, daily routines, and repeated practice both inside and outside the classroom.

These findings are supported by Mulyasa (2022), who explained that moral education is a long-term developmental process requiring continuous guidance and habituation. Similarly, Sari (2023) reported that Cooperative Learning improves children's social participation; however, its influence on moral development becomes meaningful only when supported by consistent moral practices at home and at school.

Consequently, the present findings suggest that Cooperative Learning should be integrated with character education programs, religious activities, teacher role modeling, and parental involvement to maximize children's religious and moral development.

Table 6. Descriptive Statistics of Cooperative Learning Implementation

Aspect	N	Range	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Error	Std. Deviation
Mindful Learning	22	2	18	20	19.64	0.124	0.581
Meaningful Learning	22	4	16	20	19.18	0.234	1.097

Joyful Learning	22	5	19	24	19.91	0.217	1.019
Valid N (listwise)	22						

Based on Table 6, the descriptive analysis shows that all three dimensions of Cooperative Learning were implemented at a relatively high level. Joyful Learning obtained the highest mean score ($M = 19.91$), followed by Mindful Learning ($M = 19.64$) and Meaningful Learning ($M = 19.18$). These findings indicate that classroom learning generally provided enjoyable, engaging, and meaningful experiences for children aged 5–6 years at Cemara Liliba Kindergarten.

The Mindful Learning dimension demonstrates that children participated attentively in classroom activities, followed teachers' instructions, and remained actively engaged throughout the learning process. The relatively low variability of responses indicates that most children experienced similar levels of participation. According to Widyastuti et al. (2025), mindful learning encourages learners to participate consciously and reflectively, enabling them to become more focused and actively involved during classroom instruction. These findings suggest that cooperative learning successfully promoted children's attention and participation during learning activities.

The Meaningful Learning dimension obtained a slightly lower mean score ($M = 19.18$) than the other dimensions. Although the score remains relatively high, it indicates that opportunities to connect learning experiences with children's everyday lives could be further strengthened. Meaningful learning occurs when new knowledge is linked to children's prior experiences, allowing them to understand the relevance and practical value of classroom activities. Azzahra and Jaya (2025) emphasized that meaningful learning enhances children's conceptual understanding because learning experiences are directly connected to authentic situations encountered in daily life.

Among the three dimensions, Joyful Learning achieved the highest mean score ($M = 19.91$), indicating that children perceived classroom activities as enjoyable and motivating. Learning through games, collaborative activities, songs, and interactive experiences encouraged children to participate actively while maintaining positive emotional engagement. Andayanie et al. (2025) reported that joyful learning increases children's motivation, participation, and enthusiasm by creating a positive and supportive classroom environment.

Overall, these descriptive findings indicate that Cooperative Learning was implemented effectively in terms of creating learning experiences that were mindful, meaningful, and joyful. However, these positive descriptive results should be interpreted cautiously because the inferential statistical analyses (F-test and t-test) demonstrated that Cooperative Learning did not have a statistically significant effect on children's religious and moral development ($p = 0.353 > 0.05$). This suggests that although children responded positively to the learning process, these experiences alone were insufficient to produce measurable improvements in religious and moral development.

The discrepancy between the descriptive and inferential findings may be explained by the multidimensional nature of moral development. Religious and moral values are formed not only through classroom learning but also through continuous interactions within the family, school, and broader social environment. Linda Darling-Hammond et al. (2021) argued that meaningful learning experiences enhance conceptual understanding and student engagement, whereas John Hattie (2023) emphasized that the effectiveness of collaborative learning depends on the quality of interaction, teacher facilitation, and sustained learning experiences. Therefore, enjoyable classroom activities do not automatically translate into significant improvements in children's moral behaviour.

Furthermore, the relatively small coefficient of determination ($R^2 = 0.043$) indicates that Cooperative Learning explained only 4.3% of the variance in children's religious and moral development, while 95.7% was attributable to other factors beyond the scope of this study. These factors may include parental involvement, teacher role modelling, daily religious practices, school culture, peer relationships, and children's home environments. Consequently, strengthening children's religious and moral development requires integrated efforts involving teachers, parents, and the wider community rather than relying solely on one instructional model.

Overall, the findings suggest that although Cooperative Learning successfully created an active, enjoyable, and meaningful learning environment, its contribution to children's religious and moral development was not statistically significant. These results highlight the importance of integrating Cooperative Learning with consistent moral habituation, teacher exemplification, religious activities, and parental collaboration to achieve more substantial improvements in children's religious and moral values.

CONCLUSION

Main Findings: This study found that the implementation of the Problem-Based Learning (PBL) model was positively associated with the social-emotional development of children aged 5–6 years at TK GMT Sion Camplong. Children demonstrated improvements in cooperation, emotional regulation, self-confidence, communication, empathy, and active participation in classroom learning following the implementation of PBL. **Research Contribution:** This study provides empirical evidence that Problem-Based Learning can serve as a child-centered instructional approach that supports social-emotional development in early childhood education, extending previous research that has predominantly emphasized cognitive and problem-solving outcomes. **Theoretical and Practical Implications:** The findings support constructivist learning theory by highlighting the importance of active participation, collaboration, and meaningful interaction in fostering children's social-emotional competencies. Practically, the study suggests that early childhood teachers can integrate Problem-Based Learning into daily classroom activities to promote cooperation, empathy, communication, and emotional regulation. **Research Limitations:** This study employed an ex post facto design involving

only 20 children from a single kindergarten, limiting the generalizability of the findings and preventing strong causal inferences. **Future Research Directions:** Future studies should employ quasi-experimental or experimental designs with larger and more diverse samples while examining additional factors, such as parental involvement, teacher competence, classroom climate, and family socioeconomic background, to provide a more comprehensive understanding of children's social-emotional development.

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