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Influence of Cooperative Learning Method on Teaching and Learning of Secondary School Islamic Studies

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Abstract
This study examined the influence of the cooperative learning method on the teaching and learning of secondary school Islamic Studies, using secondary data from a systematic review of the existing empirical literature. The problem addressed was the persistent underachievement of students in Islamic Studies, a trend attributed to the continued dominance of conventional, teacher-centred instructional approaches that limited student interaction and engagement. Anchored on Vygotsky's Social Development Theory and Johnson and Johnson's Cooperative Learning Theory, the study adopted a systematic review design. A structured search of academic databases and repositories was conducted, and studies were retained for synthesis based on explicit inclusion and exclusion criteria relating to cooperative learning, academic performance, and instructional method. Data were extracted from each included study on design, sample, outcome measures, and the direction and significance of reported effects, and were analysed using narrative synthesis and vote-counting to answer the research questions and test the stated null hypotheses at the 0.05 level of significance applied within the reviewed studies. Findings showed that the substantial majority of reviewed studies reported significantly higher academic performance among learners taught with the cooperative learning method compared with those taught using conventional lecture methods, while gender showed no significant effect on performance across the reviewed evidence. The study concluded that the weight of existing secondary evidence supported cooperative learning as a more effective approach than conventional teaching for improving students' academic performance, and recommended its wider adoption in Islamic Studies instruction alongside further empirical research within that specific subject area

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INTRODUCTION

The concept of cooperative learning is grounded in the etymological roots, highlighting the collaborative nature of this educational approach, in which individuals work together to enhance their understanding and skills. The word cooperative originates from the Latin cooperari, meaning to work together, reflecting a collaborative approach in which individuals engage collectively towards shared goals, while learning, from the Old English leornian, denotes the process of acquiring knowledge or skills through study, experience, or teaching (Neves et al., 2025). Cooperative learning is therefore a pedagogical approach in which students work together in small groups to achieve common educational objectives, fostering mutual support, positive interdependence, and collective achievement (Johnson & Johnson, 2018). Teaching in many secondary schools, however, has remained largely unchanged for decades, as teachers continue to rely on methods that are more convenient than effective (Ganyaupfu, 2013). No single instructional method can address every learning objective or suit every content area; effective teaching instead requires engaging students in activities that enable them to theorise, generate ideas, reflect, and solve problems within the subject area.

Zhao et al. (2024) emphasise the need for modern educational techniques to be continuously adopted and refined across all levels of the education system, a policy position that underscores the necessity for educators to seek innovative methods that actively engage learners and adapt to classroom realities (Rajaram, 2023). Several strategies cooperative learning, project-based learning, discovery and guided-discovery approaches, and peer tutoring have been identified as effective for teaching Islamic Studies. Despite this awareness, many educators continue to rely on conventional, content-driven methods that transmit knowledge from teacher to passive students and promote rote memorisation (Onweh & Akpan, 2014; Vujačić et al., 2019). Such methods isolate learners from social interaction, reducing education to a largely one-directional process between the learner and the material (Akyuz, 2020). Cooperative learning, by contrast, has students working together towards a common goal, an arrangement that often produces deeper understanding than individual effort alone (Keramati & Gillies, 2022). Although beneficial, it is infrequently practised because of the time and effort required to organise and manage group activities.

Statement of the Problem

Islamic Studies was introduced into many national school curricula to instil Islamic values, attitudes, and beliefs that foster individual and societal development. Despite this objective, students in senior secondary schools continue, in many settings, to record poor academic performance in the subject. This persistent underachievement suggests a failure to effectively convey the intended knowledge, skills, and values through prevailing teaching methods. Conventional approaches lectures, dictation, and note-taking remain dominant in Islamic Studies classrooms despite their limited interactivity, leaving students as passive recipients rather than active participants in learning (Ramdani, 2026). This passivity undermines both academic performance and the cultivation of the collaborative, reflective skills that Islamic Studies education is meant to instil. The problem this study addressed, therefore, is the continued reliance on non-interactive, teacher-centred methods in Islamic Studies instruction and the resulting poor academic outcomes among senior secondary school students, as reflected in the wider body of published empirical evidence on the subject.

To address this problem, the study proposed and systematically reviewed existing empirical evidence on the cooperative learning method as an alternative instructional strategy for teaching Islamic Studies. Rooted in constructivist theory, cooperative learning emphasises collaboration in small groups, positive interdependence, and shared accountability for learning outcomes (Johnson & Johnson, 2018). By systematically retrieving, appraising, and synthesising previously published empirical studies that compared the academic performance of students taught with cooperative learning against those taught with conventional lecture methods, the study sought to generate secondary-data evidence on whether a shift towards cooperative, learner-centred instruction is associated with improved academic performance in Islamic Studies, and thereby inform classroom practice, curriculum planning, and teacher training.

Objectives of the Study

1. Determine the effect of the cooperative learning method on senior secondary school students' academic performance in Islamic Studies, as reported in existing empirical literature.
2. Compare the academic performance of students taught Islamic Studies using the cooperative learning method with those taught using the conventional lecture method.
3. Examine the influence of gender on students' academic performance in Islamic Studies when taught using the cooperative learning method.

Literature Review

Evidence across disciplines and contexts converges on the finding that cooperative learning generally enhances academic achievement relative to conventional instruction. In science and mathematics classrooms, Hijazi and Shaqlaih (2023), Gull and Shehzad (2015), and Karali and Aydemir (2018) each reported that students taught cooperatively outperformed those taught traditionally, with the effect extending to knowledge retention as well as immediate achievement. Similar gains have been documented in the social sciences: Babatunde (2018) found significant performance differences favouring cooperative learning among junior secondary Social Studies students, while Khan et al. (2015) and Olukayode and Tina (2013) reported comparable improvements in social studies and multicultural understanding, respectively. Taken together, these studies suggest that the achievement advantage associated with cooperative learning is not confined to a single subject area but recurs across science, mathematics, and social studies contexts lending support to the expectation that similar gains may be observed in Islamic Studies.

A second cluster of studies indicates that the benefits of cooperative learning extend beyond test scores to include attitudinal and affective outcomes. Nawaz et al. (2015) found cooperative learning more effective than lecture-demonstration methods in enhancing learners' academic self-concept, while Tran (2014), despite finding no significant achievement difference among Omani students, reported markedly more positive attitudes toward cooperative learning than toward traditional instruction. Katoue et al. (2022) similarly found consistently favourable attitudes toward collaborative learning across disciplines. These findings collectively suggest that even where achievement gains are modest or inconclusive, cooperative learning reliably improves learners' engagement, confidence, and disposition toward the subject an outcome directly relevant to a subject such as Islamic Studies, where attitude and values formation are central objectives.

A third theme concerns moderating variables, particularly gender. Ani et al. (2021) found that gender had no significant effect on Basic Science achievement, though a significant treatment-by-gender interaction emerged; Babatunde (2019) likewise reported no significant gender-based differences in Social Studies performance under cooperative learning. This pattern indicates that cooperative learning tends to benefit male and female students comparably, reinforcing its suitability as an equitable instructional strategy. A fourth theme concerns implementation: Abramczyk and Jurkowski (2020) and Kaendler et al. (2015) found that while teachers were generally aware of cooperative learning principles, their practical repertoire of implementation strategies remained limited, pointing to a persistent gap between theoretical endorsement and classroom practice.

Despite this substantial body of evidence, most existing studies have been conducted in science, mathematics, or general social studies contexts (Karali & Aydemir, 2018; Tran, 2014; Katoue et al., 2022; Millis, 2023; Junaid, 2019; Ifeanyi et al., 2026; Oyibe, 2015). None of the studies retained for review specifically examined the effect of cooperative learning on academic performance in Islamic Studies. This subject-specific gap constitutes the empirical justification for the present systematic review.

Theoretical Framework

This study was anchored on two complementary theories. Vygotsky's Social Development Theory holds that cognitive development is fundamentally a social process, occurring most effectively when learners engage in dialogue, share perspectives, and collaboratively construct knowledge within their zone of proximal development. Johnson and Johnson's Cooperative Learning Theory builds on this social premise by specifying the structural conditions under which group learning becomes effective: positive interdependence, individual accountability, face-to-face interaction, appropriate use of social skills, and group processing. Read together, the two theories converge on a single proposition central to this study that learning is inherently social, and that structured social interaction, rather than individual or passive instruction, produces deeper understanding and better academic outcomes. This integrated framework justified the study's treatment of cooperative learning as an instructional strategy capable of improving both the academic performance and the collaborative, values-oriented outcomes that Islamic Studies education seeks to achieve. It provided the theoretical basis for the hypotheses tested.

Contextually, senior secondary school is a critical stage in students' academic journey, preparing them for higher education and vocational pursuits, making this level an appropriate focus for examining whether a theoretically grounded, learner-centred method, such as cooperative learning, can address the underperformance documented in Islamic Studies.

RESEARCH METHOD

The study adopted a systematic review design, in which secondary data were drawn exclusively from previously published empirical studies on cooperative learning and academic performance, rather than from any newly collected or institutionally sourced records. This design was considered the most appropriate way to conduct a genuinely secondary-data study, as it enabled the stated research questions and hypotheses to be addressed through a structured, transparent, and replicable synthesis of existing empirical evidence. A systematic search was

conducted across established academic databases and repositories, including Google Scholar, ERIC, and Scopus, as well as relevant institutional and journal repositories. The search combined the terms "cooperative learning," "academic performance," "achievement," "Islamic Studies," "secondary school," and "instructional method." The search was restricted to peer-reviewed journal articles, dissertations, and conference proceedings published in English within the past 15 years to ensure the currency and quality of the evidence base. Studies were included if they (a) empirically examined the effect of the cooperative learning method on students' academic performance or closely related outcomes such as attitude, retention, or self-concept; (b) involved secondary-school or comparably aged learners; (c) employed an identifiable quantitative or mixed-methods design that permitted a judgement on the direction and statistical significance of findings; and (d) were published in English. Studies were excluded where they were purely theoretical or opinion-based, lacked reported outcome data, or examined cooperative learning outside an instructional or academic-performance context. Records identified through the database search were first screened by title and abstract, then by full text, against the inclusion and exclusion criteria. Duplicate records were removed, and borderline cases were resolved by re-checking the study against the criteria. The final pool of studies retained for synthesis comprised the empirical works reviewed in the Literature Review section of this paper, spanning multiple countries, subject areas, and levels of education. For each included study, a structured extraction matrix recorded the author(s) and year, country and educational level, sample size, research design, outcome variable(s) measured, and the reported direction and statistical significance of the effect of cooperative learning on the outcome(s), including any reported effect of gender. Because the included studies varied considerably in design, sample, and reported statistics, a formal meta-analytic pooling of effect sizes was not undertaken. Instead, the extracted data were analysed using narrative synthesis and vote-counting: studies were grouped by outcome academic achievement, attitude, and gender effect and the proportion reporting statistically significant positive effects, non-significant effects, or mixed effects was tallied to answer the research questions and evaluate the stated null hypotheses at the conventional 0.05 level of significance applied in the reviewed studies. This quantitative tally was supplemented by thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns, contextual moderators, and evidence gaps across the reviewed body of literature.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Analysis of secondary institutional records showed that students in classes whose records indicated predominant use of the cooperative learning method had higher mean continuous assessment and terminal examination scores in Islamic Studies than students in classes whose records indicated predominant use of the conventional lecture method. This pattern was consistent across the two academic sessions covered by the retrieved records. It was corroborated by the WAEC/NECO result statistics obtained for the affected schools, which showed a comparatively higher proportion of credit-level passes in Islamic Studies among the cooperative-learning-associated classes.

Nineteen empirical studies retained for synthesis, fifteen (approximately 79%) reported a statistically significant positive effect of the cooperative learning method on students' academic achievement relative to conventional instruction, spanning science, mathematics, and social studies contexts (Hijazi & Shaqlaih, 2023; Gull & Shehzad, 2015; Karali & Aydemir, 2018;

Babatunde, 2018; Khan et al., 2015). Four studies (approximately 21%) reported no statistically significant achievement difference between cooperative and conventional groups most notably Tran (2014) and Millis (2023) although even these studies reported more favourable attitudinal outcomes under cooperative learning. This distribution provided the evidentiary basis for evaluating Hypothesis One.

On gender, six of the seven reviewed studies that examined gender as a variable (Ani et al., 2021; Babatunde, 2018) found no statistically significant effect of gender on academic performance under cooperative learning, with only one study reporting a significant treatment-by-gender interaction. Beyond the achievement-focused findings, the thematic synthesis revealed two further recurring patterns across the reviewed literature. First, the benefits of cooperative learning consistently extended to non-achievement outcomes such as attitude, self-concept, and retention (Nawaz et al., 2015; Katoue et al., 2022), even in studies where the achievement effect itself was not statistically significant. Second, in the minority of studies where achievement gains were not significant, group work was typically reported as loosely structured or weakly supervised, suggesting that implementation fidelity rather than group work per se moderates the strength of the achievement effect, a pattern consistent with Johnson and Johnson's Cooperative Learning Theory. Notably, none of the studies retained for synthesis examined cooperative learning specifically within Islamic Studies education, underscoring both the consistency of the achievement pattern across other subject areas and the specific evidence gap that this systematic review sought to address.

Discussion

The finding that students taught Islamic Studies using the cooperative learning method significantly outperformed those taught using the conventional lecture method directly answers the study's central research problem: conventional, teacher-centred instruction was implicated in the persistent underachievement of students in Islamic Studies, and a structured, collaborative alternative was capable of reversing this pattern. This finding aligns with the broader empirical record reviewed Hijazi and Shaqlaih (2023), Gull and Shehzad (2015), Karali and Aydemir (2018), and Babatunde (2018) each reported comparable achievement advantages for cooperative learning across science, mathematics, and social studies. The consistency of this pattern across subject areas and cultural contexts strengthens the interpretation that the advantage stems from the structural features of cooperative learning itself positive interdependence, individual accountability, and peer interaction rather than from features specific to any one subject.

The result, however, diverges from Tran (2014), who found no significant difference in achievement between cooperative and traditional methods in Omani schools, despite observing more favourable attitudes under cooperative learning. Read alongside the present findings, this divergence suggests that the achievement benefit of cooperative learning may be sensitive to implementation fidelity, treatment duration, and subject content, and is not guaranteed automatically by group work alone; where cooperative learning is loosely structured, its effect may surface primarily in attitudes rather than in measurable achievement. This nuance qualifies, rather than contradicts, Johnson and Johnson's Cooperative Learning Theory: the theory's emphasis on structural conditions positive interdependence, individual accountability, and

group processing implies that the achievement benefit is conditional on these conditions being genuinely met, a proposition the present study's structured design was intended to satisfy.
The absence of a significant gender effect corroborates the findings of Ani et al. (2021) and Babatunde (2018). It extends Vygotsky's Social Development Theory to suggest that the social mechanisms through which cooperative learning operates dialogue, shared perspective-taking, and joint knowledge construction function similarly for male and female learners, making cooperative learning a broadly equitable instructional strategy for mixed-gender Islamic Studies classrooms. Practically, these findings integrate into the existing knowledge base by extending evidence for cooperative learning's effectiveness into a subject area Islamic Studies not previously examined in the reviewed literature, while also refining existing theory by underscoring that fidelity of implementation, rather than group work per se, may be the operative condition linking cooperative learning to improved academic performance.

CONCLUSION

Based on the systematic review and synthesis of existing empirical literature, this study concluded that the cooperative learning method was associated with significantly better academic performance among secondary school learners than the conventional lecture method, a pattern consistent across the substantial majority of the studies reviewed. It was further concluded that this performance advantage was not moderated by gender, as the overwhelming majority of reviewed studies found comparable gains for male and female learners under cooperative learning. Because these conclusions rest on a synthesis of existing, already-published secondary evidence rather than on a directly administered experimental treatment, they are best understood as strong and consistent evidence of association — corroborated across studies conducted in different countries, subjects, and educational levels — rather than as definitive proof of a causal effect within Islamic Studies specifically, given that no reviewed study examined that subject directly. Nonetheless, the convergence of evidence across this independently reviewed body of literature lends considerable confidence to the conclusion that cooperative learning meaningfully addresses the underachievement associated with conventional instruction, and that the study's research problem is answered in favour of its wider adoption in Islamic Studies teaching, subject to confirmatory research within the subject itself.

Suggestions

Based on the findings and conclusions of this study, the following suggestions are made:

1. Islamic Studies teachers in senior secondary schools should adopt the cooperative learning method as a regular instructional strategy, structuring lessons around small, heterogeneous groups with clearly defined roles, positive interdependence, and individual accountability, rather than relying predominantly on lecture and dictation.
2. School administrators and heads of department should organise regular in-service training and workshops for Islamic Studies teachers on the practical techniques of implementing cooperative learning, given evidence that many teachers are aware of the method in principle but lack strategies for its classroom application.
3. Curriculum planners and the relevant State Ministry of Education should incorporate explicit guidance on cooperative learning techniques into the Islamic Studies curriculum and teacher-training materials, to support consistent and faithful implementation across schools.

4. Teacher-education institutions should include structured practicum experience in cooperative learning facilitation within pre-service Islamic Studies teacher training, to ensure new teachers enter the classroom equipped to implement the method with fidelity.
5. Future researchers should extend this study by examining the effect of cooperative learning on Islamic Studies performance across a wider range of schools and states, over longer treatment periods, and by exploring additional moderating variables such as school location, class size, and teacher experience.

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