

The meaning of *ta'awun* in boarding school life: An interpretative phenomenological perspective

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ABSTRACT

This study addressed the limited number of in-depth investigations into the lived meaning of *ta'awun* among students in Islamic boarding schools, despite its crucial role in shaping their social and spiritual character. Using a qualitative phenomenological approach, this research explored how students experience and interpret *ta'awun* in their daily dormitory life. Six students, who had lived for two to five years in a Muhammadiyah boarding school in Banyumas, Central Java, participated in semi-structured interviews lasting. Data were analysed ideographically and subsequently synthesized across cases using *Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis* (IPA). The findings revealed complementary interpretations of *ta'awun*, as emotional regulation through empathy, as worship that fosters sincerity and inner calm, as mediation in conflict resolution, and as a means of strengthening *ukhuwah* and social inclusivity. The cross-case synthesis illustrated *ta'awun* as an evolving spiritual-emotional process, beginning with worship that cultivates sincerity, followed by emotional regulation facilitating relational mediation, leading to social inclusion and *ukhuwah*, and ultimately culminating in social harmony and inner tranquillity. Overall, *ta'awun* is not merely an act of helping but a continuous process that fosters emotional balance and restores social relationships within the dormitory context. Islamic values, collective awareness, and group identity serve as the foundation sustaining consistent prosocial behavior. This study deepened the phenomenological understanding of *ta'awun* as a form of lived spirituality that integrates faith, emotional regulation, and communal restoration. Future studies are encouraged to examine other educational contexts to expand its transferability and relevance for character education grounded in Islamic values.

INTRODUCTION

Boarding schools serve two main purposes: supporting academic growth (Tong et al., 2024) and encouraging the development of students' social character (Pfeiffer et al., 2016). Daily cultural norms nurture religious devotion, nationalism, compassion, tolerance, cooperation, responsibility, honesty, patience and discipline. Boarding-school environment channels these values into actions, proving culture's pivotal role; institutions must preserve and enhance such structured moral ecosystems for future generations (Lindawati et al., 2023). Students face additional pressures from a dual curriculum, high cognitive load, homesickness, a sense of not belonging, and disrupted sleep patterns, all of which contribute to a decline in their well-being (Na'imah et al., 2025).



Despite the psychosocial challenges, boarding school life offers adolescents valuable opportunities to cultivate independence and build meaningful social relationships. This suggests that boarding schools create an environment that fosters personal growth and autonomy, distinct from family influences (Pfeiffer et al., 2016). Pratiwi et al., (2023) found that Islamic boarding schools intentionally promote values of independence, cooperation, and self-discipline through structured routines and peer interactions, thereby enhancing adolescents' autonomy and supportive friendships.

Although boarding schools offer opportunities for character development, several studies have revealed that students face various psychosocial challenges, including culture shock, loneliness, academic pressure, and difficulties in social relationships (Mander et al., 2015). In addition, students may also struggle to build interpersonal relationships with teachers, meet high academic expectations, adapt to boarding life, and form social connections with peers. Fahrezi et al. (2024) also noted feelings of discomfort and homesickness, which reflect emotional dissatisfaction among students. Amidst this complexity, an important but under-researched social behavior emerges—*ta'awun*.

From a psychological perspective, *ta'awun* is closely related to prosocial behavior—voluntary actions intended to benefit others. Prosocial behavior includes components such as social norms, relationships, altruism, and personal traits. In Islamic studies, *ta'awun* has a deeper spiritual meaning. It is viewed as an act not only for social benefit but also for seeking the pleasure of Allah. In the Qur'an, *ta'awun* consists of two parts: seeking help from Allah SWT and helping fellow humans for His cause (Saputra, 2022). This value is considered essential in facilitating social adaptation, but few studies have examined its meaning from the student's perspective.

Mutual respect is a crucial aspect of social interaction and identity development. As a value with both religious and social dimensions, it reflects mutual respect and embodies interactions grounded in a sense of togetherness, empathy, and moral responsibility (Azizah et al., 2023; Muthoifin et al., 2023). From the perspective of social identity theory, self-concept is linked to identity within a social context and how this identity influences intergroup dynamics. When social identity is salient, individuals adjust to ingroup norms and values. Under inclusive norms, mutual respect is established as a core standard that promotes prosocial engagement and moral obligations across groups (Hafer et al., 2023). Intergroup behavior is shaped by group membership and status, with social identity influencing self-concept and collective self-esteem through dimensions such as attachment, social role, pride, and social group comparison (Suud et al., 2025).

However, another perspective suggests that boarding school experiences not only affect social aspects but also students' long-term self-concept and identity. Simpson et al. (2022) argue that boarding school significantly influences the formation of self-identity and self-concept over time. Social identity theory offers a useful lens through which to understand this phenomenon. This theory suggests that individuals are more likely to assist those they perceive as part of their in-group. This tendency arises because a shared identity cultivates a sense of togetherness and mutual support (Edding, 2013). *Ta'awun* behavior can be understood through four main elements of social identity: the significance of identity, the boundaries of identity, the content of identity, and the strategic importance of identity (Levine & Manning, 2013). These four elements explain how students understand their roles within the group, identify group members, internalize values such as mutual assistance, and leverage group identity to foster harmony and social support.

Additionally, collective consciousness theory emphasizes the significance of collective consciousness in guiding individual behavior within a community. This concept plays a crucial role

in enhancing our understanding of mutual trust and cooperation among individuals (Shteynberg, 2024). *Ta'awun*, or the spirit of mutual assistance, is a vital social force that fosters solidarity, strengthens interpersonal bonds, and promotes unity (Dianita & Abdussalam, 2020). Therefore, this study explores the lived experience of *ta'awun* among students, how they feel, make sense of, and enact helping in day-to-day dormitory life, using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). Our focus is idiographic (case-by-case) prior to generating cross-case insights.

METHODS

This study employed a qualitative approach with a phenomenological design to gain an in-depth understanding of individuals' life experiences. The participants were senior high school students who had lived in the dormitory for two to five years at Muhammadiyah boarding school in Banyumas Regency, Central Java. The group consisted of three females and three males aged 16 to 18 years. Purposive sampling was employed to recruit students who had direct experience with the focal phenomenon within the past 12 months and were able to recount concrete lived episodes. To enhance transparency, we specified our operational criteria: a minimum length of stay of at least two years (to ensure sustained exposure to communal practices), an active role or responsibility in dormitory or student activities (e.g., committee membership or peer facilitation), and the willingness and ability to provide detailed, first-person narratives. These criteria were designed to identify information-rich cases (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Palinkas et al., 2015). In line with Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), this study prioritizes depth over breadth by employing a small, information-rich sample ($n = 6$).

In this study, data collection was conducted through semi-structured interviews with students in the Islamic boarding school environment. Before conducting the interviews, the researcher obtained official permission from the teachers and caretakers of the Islamic boarding school to facilitate a smooth research process. The interviews were conducted in a quiet room within the school dormitory to ensure the participants' comfort and confidentiality. Participants who agreed to take part signed a consent form after receiving a clear explanation of the research objectives, procedures, and their rights. Each interview lasted between 45 and 60 minutes.

Data were analyzed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) to examine the meaning of *ta'awun* as experienced by boarding school students. IPA is grounded in three primary philosophical foundations: phenomenology, hermeneutics, and idiography. The first stage involved within-case analysis through repeated readings, initial noting, derivation of emergent themes, and mapping of thematic connections within each transcript (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). The second stage comprised cross-case synthesis using constant comparison to identify convergences and divergences, cluster themes into superordinate categories, and articulate a "chain of meaning" for the phenomenon (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). This process involves understanding students' narratives, which can reveal the complex and layered meanings associated with *ta'awun* behavior in the boarding environment.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In accordance with the idiographic principle of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), the results are presented by first providing an in-depth examination of each case individually, followed by a cross-case synthesis. For each participant, a description of their daily experiences in the dormitory, the accompanying emotional responses, and the personal significance of *ta'awun*

behavior are provided. This approach preserves the uniqueness of each individual's experience, what it is like, while establishing a solid foundation for identifying common patterns in the subsequent section.

Participant F (male, 17 years old, 2 years in the dormitory)

Superordinate Theme: *Ta'awun* as empathetic regulation, that is, *ta'awun* entails not only providing assistance but also consciously managing emotion and energy to foster shared calm and relational peace.

"Yes, I helped my friend not because the teacher asked me to or because I wanted praise, but because I felt sorry for her. She didn't understand the lesson, so I sat next to her, her breathing rapid, her eyes restless. I lowered my voice and explained slowly until she nodded. When she finally said, "Oh, I get it," I felt relieved, my hands warmed. My fatigue disappeared, and I felt calm and grateful."

Ta'awun is construed as co-regulation, calming a peer through a soft voice and slower conversational tempo and as empathic pedagogy, namely step-by-step scaffolding until comprehension. The sequential experience of relief, calm, and gratitude signifies the affective rewards of helping and aligns with the conceptualization of assistance as an enactment of worship in the social sphere.

"Even though he was a friend I had helped before, when the conflict arose, I chose to take a breath, control my emotions, and then invite him to have a good chat after class so as not to embarrass him. I slowly explained my intentions and listened to his explanation. Sometimes I felt impatient, oh my God, this is so annoying. Well, that's when we are tested on how we respond to this person... we have to respond with a cool head."

The participant described a conflict with a peer whom they had previously helped. The account reveals emotional ambivalence—a tension between disappointment and the desire to preserve the relationship. Although acknowledging negative emotions such as irritation and impatience, the participant reported exercising self-regulation by taking deep breaths, withholding immediate reactions, and choosing a calm dialogue. The decision to “talk privately after class” exemplifies interpersonal emotion regulation aimed at resolving the issue without causing public embarrassment. This process indicates that *ta'awun* is understood not only as providing assistance when needed but also as sustaining relational harmony through self-control. Practiced empathically, by offering help attentively, regulating emotions, and adjusting the rhythm of interaction, *ta'awun* facilitates mutual restoration: the peer gains understanding, while the participant experiences relief, calm, and gratitude.

Participant Z (female, 16 years old, has lived in the dormitory for five years)

Superordinate Theme: *Ta'awun* as a form of social worship, meaning that *ta'awun* (mutual help) is not merely a social or moral action but a form of worship that fosters emotional tranquility.

"If we do good to others, whoever they are, Allah will surely repay us with something better. Although we don't know when, I'm sure Allah never forgets even the smallest act of kindness. So, I try to help as much as I can."

"Yes, because worship is broad, not just prayer or fasting. Helping others sincerely is also an act of worship. Sometimes it actually brings us peace, a sense of inner satisfaction. Especially when the person we help ends up smiling or thanking us."

Participants exhibited reflective, spiritually nuanced positive emotions in their experiences of helping others. They expressed inner peace and a profound belief in divine retribution, as reflected in their assertion that every act of kindness will be rewarded by God with something even better. The feelings of calm and satisfaction they experienced arose not from social recognition but from a spiritual conviction that every act of kindness holds intrinsic value before God. Thus, this experience illustrates the integration of emotional and spiritual dimensions in the practice of ta'awun, where helping others becomes a means of actualizing the values of faith.

Participant E (Female, 16 years old, has lived in the dormitory for 5 years)

Superordinate Theme: ta'awun as mediation for problem solving and relationship restoration.

"I can be a go-between for my friends, so maybe it's a form of mutual assistance. Sometimes friends are confused about a problem or don't know who to talk to, so I help find a solution or calm them down. It feels good to be able to help them a little and make them feel calmer."

"Maybe they're having a problem with another friend, and I can be a go-between for them. Sometimes I help explain what we're trying to say to avoid misunderstandings. I don't want anyone to get angry at the other, so I try to help calm them down."

Participants interpreted ta'awun as mediation aimed at resolving problems and restoring relationships. They were attentive to their friends' confusion, acted as intermediaries, and de-escalated emotional tensions before pursuing solutions. Their desire to prevent misunderstandings reflected a strong sense of relational responsibility. After helping to solve the problem, they experienced an affective reward of joy and calm, demonstrating effective emotional regulation. Thus, ta'awun not only provided practical assistance but also maintained emotional balance and social harmony.

Participant G (male, 17 years old, has lived in the dormitory for 5 years)

Superordinate Theme: ta'awun as an expression of religious awareness.

"Allah commands us to help one another, so we must also carry out that command. Practice this in simple ways, such as listening to a friend's concerns, helping with a task, or comforting a friend. With sincere intentions, helping becomes a way to draw closer to Him and maintain brotherhood. Even if it's small, Allah sees the effort, so there's a reward, and my heart feels calm and strong."

"I like helping people, even if they don't reciprocate, I remain sincere, because I believe Allah always sees our intentions."

Participants interpreted ta'awun as a form of social worship rooted in sincerity and spiritual awareness. For them, helping others is not merely a good deed but an act of obedience to God's commands, expressed through simple actions such as listening to a friend's concerns, assisting with chores, or offering comfort. They believe that every act of kindness, no matter how small, is always seen and rewarded by God. This belief cultivates inner peace and strength, even when their help goes unacknowledged.

Participant K (Male, 17 years old, has lived in the dormitory for 5 years)

Superordinate Theme: ta'awun as a strengthener of Islamic brotherhood.

"Because it's an Islamic commandment, we continue to feel the benefits of helping each other. So, it's in line with Islamic values."

"Because helping each other is part of Islamic teachings. If we help others, God willing, Allah will repay us."

"Sometimes I help a friend with their homework when they're sick. I know that if they were healthy, they'd want to help me too. So, I just help them, willingly."

"Because of Islamic brotherhood, we... must help each other, we can't be picky."

Participants described helping behavior as an expression of Islamic teachings. Assisting others is regarded as a moral and spiritual obligation that provides dual benefits—both for the recipient and the helper. Everyday actions, such as supporting an ill friend, listening to someone's distress, or comforting a peer, are understood as tangible manifestations of Islamic values and ukhuwah Islamiyah (Islamic brotherhood). *Ta'awun* is understood as a form of religious consciousness in which faith transcends mere cognitive assent and is embodied through social action. This orientation fosters sincerity, inner tranquility, and a strong sense of social responsibility aimed at maintaining harmonious relationships. Islamic spiritual values serve as intrinsic motivators for helping others while simultaneously reinforcing the bonds of *ukhuwah* within the community.

Partisipan M (Female, 18 years old, has lived in the dormitory for 5 years)

Superordinate Theme: ta'awun as relational reconciliation.

"What do we usually do? We chat. It might be quiet at first, but... we just start talking again, then we bring up the problem from yesterday, and then we forgive each other."

"If we help someone and they're happy, we're happy too. But most importantly, we help for the sake of Allah."

"At first it was quiet, but because we needed each other, we ended up talking again. Then we slowly discussed the problem."

Participants described ta'awun as more than merely "completing a task. It also involves maintaining brotherly relationships because they rely on one another. With this intention, assistance is offered even if it is not reciprocated. When the person receiving help feels happy, the participants also experience happiness.

Although each participant presents a distinctive experiential profile, all accounts are grounded in Islamic religiosity and a moral commitment to sustaining social harmony and the thematic analysis for each participant showed in the Table 1

Table 1

Thematic analysis for each participant.

Participants	Individual Main Themes	Focus on Meaning
F	Ta'awun as empathetic regulation	Helping by managing emotions and maintaining peaceful relationships

Z	Ta'awun as social worship	Helping others as a form of worship that soothes the soul.
E	Ta'awun as mediation for problem solving	Helping by serving as an intermediary and facilitating the restoration of relationships.
G	Ta'awun as an expression of religious awareness	Helping as a form of obedience and spiritual awareness
K	Ta'awun as a strengthening of Islamic brotherhood	Helping to strengthen bonds of brotherhood
M	Ta'awun as relational reconciliation based on religiosity	Helping to improve relationships

Based on these findings, a cross-case synthesis analysis was conducted, and the results are presented in Table 2.

Table 2

Cross-case synthesis regarding the meaning of ta'awun

Participant	Individual Superordinate Theme	Key Meaning Captured	Sub-Themes		
F (Male, 17 years)	Ta'awun as Empathic Regulation	Helping entails consciously regulating emotion and energy to maintain relational calm.	Self-control	during	conflict; empathic communication; affective payoff (relief, gratitude)
Z (Female, 16 years)	Ta'awun as Social Worship	Helping is an act of worship that soothes the heart and draws one closer to God.	Belief in divine reward; inner calm; spiritual satisfaction after helping.		
E (Female, 16 years)	Ta'awun as Mediation and Problem-Solving	Acting as an intermediary and resolving conflict as a form of helping that sustains social harmony.	Mediating role; prevention of misunderstanding; emotion regulation through dialogue.		
G (Male, 17 years)	Ta'awun as an Expression of Religious Awareness	Helping as obedience to, and enactment of, God's commands in everyday life.	Sincerity without expectation of return; consistent religiosity; feelings of calm and strength after doing good.		
K (Male, 17 years)	Ta'awun as the Strengthening of Ukhluwah Islamiyah	Helping tightens bonds and nurtures solidarity grounded in Islamic values.	Applied religious consciousness; faith-based social ties; inner satisfaction after helping.		
M (Female, 18 years)	Ta'awun as Relational Reconciliation Grounded in Religiosity	Helping functions to restore relationships and cultivate empathy after conflict.	Emotional openness; mutual forgiveness; happiness when social harmony is achieved.		

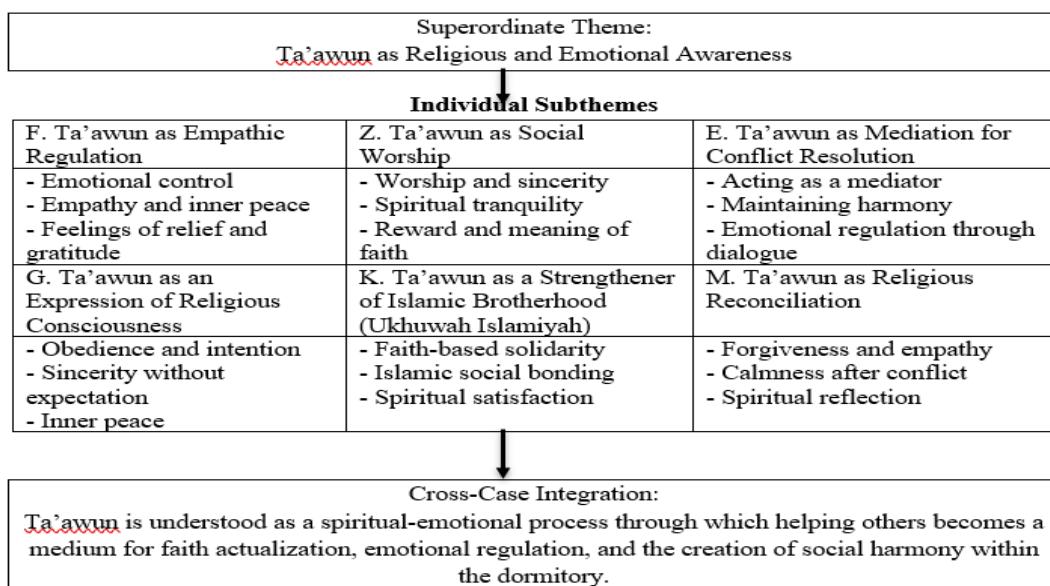
The cross-case synthesis indicated a shared understanding among all participants that *ta'awun* is a social practice grounded in Islamic values. They consistently emphasized sincerity, inner tranquility, and social responsibility as the core of helping behavior. Helping was construed not

merely as a moral act but as an expression of worship that strengthens one's relationship with Allah SWT while preserving social harmony within the dormitory context. Nonetheless, nuances emerged by experience and gender: male participants tend to highlight self-control, religious awareness, and moral duty, whereas female participants more often underscored empathy, emotional warmth, and relational reconciliation.

Integratively, *ta'awun* emerges as a dual-purpose spiritual-emotional process: it entails helping others while concurrently calming the self. This process reflects the integration of spirituality and emotional strength, whereby helping functions as a vehicle for the actualization of faith, the regulation of emotion, and the cultivation of social harmony. The analytic model is depicted in Figure 1

Figure 1

Structure of Superordinate and Subordinate Themes: The Meaning of Ta'awun



The analysis revealed a consistent understanding of *ta'awun* as a socio-spiritual practice: helping serves as a means of emotion regulation, social relational repair, the strengthening of *ukhuwah*, and the enactment of worship. Presenting idiographic case accounts followed by a cross-case synthesis preserves the distinctiveness of individual experiences while identifying a cohesive overarching pattern. To gain a more comprehensive understanding of the *Ta'awun* phenomenon within a psychological framework, several theories serve as the analytical foundation, including social identity theory, collective consciousness theory, and social cognitive theory. These three approaches offer complementary perspectives on how collective and religious values can influence prosocial behavior within the context of boarding school community life.

Emotional Regulation and Empathy

Findings for participant F indicated a pattern of emotion regulation characterized by calibrated communication and the attenuation of negative effect, culminating in feelings of relief, calm, and gratitude. Theoretically, this aligns with the framework of interpersonal emotion regulation (IER), the regulation of emotion that occurs within direct social interaction, whereby individuals help others manage their emotions while concurrently managing their own (Messina et al., 2021).

Complementarily, evidence suggests that engaging in helping behaviors often improves mood and supports helpers' mental health, such as those who assist others commonly experience a "warm glow" and enhanced well-being afterward (Miles et al., 2022).

Participants described social concern grounded in empathy and sincerity rather than compulsion or reward. This aligns with evidence that empathy consistently predicts prosocial behavior across age groups (Decety et al., 2016). When individuals help out of an internal awareness of others' burdens, the helping experience can strengthen trust and relational closeness within the group (Van Houwelingen & Van Dijke, 2023). Moreover, when assistance is driven by intrinsic motivation rather than external incentives, prosocial behavior tends to be more stable and to foster positive effect in both helper and recipient (Eisenberg et al., 2010). Thus, *ta'awun* rooted in empathy and intrinsic motivation not only sustains helping over time but also reinforces trust and relationship quality while yielding emotional benefits for all parties involved.

Mediation & Reconciliation of Relations (E, M)

For the reconciliation of their peers' social relationships, E and M enacted a process that began with down-regulating emotions and clarifying shared goals. E assumed the role of intermediary to ensure mutual understanding, whereas M initiated calm dialogue and encouraged mutual forgiveness. This approach accords with the concept of interpersonal emotion regulation, whereby emotions are organized through soothing, nonjudgmental interactions that create space for reflection (Messina et al., 2021). In school settings, a comparable strategy is evident in peer mediation, in which students serve as mediators to clarify messages and co-construct mutually acceptable solutions, enabling conflicts to be resolved peacefully (Ibarrola-García, 2024). Subsequently, M emphasized forgiveness as a means of unwinding the conflict cycle and fostering warmer relationships. Empirical evidence indicates that forgiveness education increases the capacity to forgive and reduces anger—prerequisites for constructive communication to resume (Rapp et al., 2022).

Participants not only provided direct support but also managed conflict constructively, serving as attentive listeners, mediators who bridged the parties' intentions, and facilitators who helped co-create shared solutions. In practice, they promoted emotional regulation, reframed and summarized messages, and negotiated fair steps toward repair. Evidence indicates that peer mediation effectively increases peaceful resolution in school settings, while restorative practices repair relationships without humiliating any party, thereby strengthening trust, psychological safety, and group cohesion (Lešková & Ilavská, 2023; Perrella et al., 2024).

The findings of this study indicated that this act of helping extends not only to close friends but also to anyone in need, reflecting a shared understanding and awareness of the values that emerge from the intensive communal life in the dormitory. Furthermore, these findings support Émile Durkheim's theory of collective conscience (Shteynberg, 2024), as the students demonstrate a collective awareness of mutual assistance, which is an integral part of the values instilled in the pesantren.

Ukhwah & Inclusiveness (K)

K stated that they "do not pick and choose" when helping others. Assistance is not constrained by personal closeness or group identity, thereby reinforcing the role of group norms in activating inclusive prosocial behavior within the dormitory. This pattern is consistent with evidence that inclusive social norms foster prosocial engagement across group boundaries and reduce tendencies toward exclusion (Valsecchi et al., 2024). Participants also emphasized that helping is motivated not

only by personal ties but by moral and religious values. They explicitly linked helping to Islamic teachings; in particular, K referred to the concept of *Ukhuwah Islamiyah*. Prior work underscores that religiosity provides a normative framework for universal care, preserving brotherhood, respecting each person's dignity, and restoring social harmony (Syawaludin, 2020).

These findings also demonstrated the existence of a reciprocal dynamic between individual beliefs, the social environment, and behavior, as articulated in the concept of reciprocal determinism (Bandura, 1989). According to the participants, values such as sincerity, responsibility, and compassion are not solely intrinsic; rather, they are cultivated and refined through interactions with the pesantren culture, which emphasizes solidarity. *Ta'awun* not only serves as a reflection of students' values but also as a foundation for the pesantren's social and cultural norms that promote solidarity and cooperation. These findings reinforce the assertion made by Muthoifin et al., (2023) that *ta'awun* is a fundamental principle in Islamic teachings, highlighting the importance of social solidarity and collaboration in fostering a just and equitable environment. In the participants' reflections, *ta'awun* behavior is understood not only as a social obligation but also as a manifestation of faith that permeates their daily lives.

Social inclusion in *ta'awun* is evidenced by participant K's commitment to shared values rather than personal ties. Thus, "nonselective" helping can be understood as norm-based inclusive prosocial behavior reinforced by religious values, which in turn cultivates robust communal solidarity in the boarding-school context. Collective conscience refers to a set of beliefs, ideas, and moral values shared by members of a community, which serve as a unifying force guiding social action (Callegaro, 2020) and shaping *ta'awun* behavior through shared concern. Furthermore, social inclusiveness is not simply an attitude of acceptance; it is reinforced by the consistent practice of *ta'awun* in daily life, thus fostering spiritual habits that bridge individual differences (Hapsari et al., 2024). In Islamic school environments, values-based parenting and peer support have been shown to encourage prosocial behavior in adolescents, which aligns with the spirit of *ta'awun* (Layyinah et al., 2025). Furthermore, spirituality and volunteer involvement are associated with a stronger prosocial orientation (Alzaareer & Abdalla, 2023; Khalili et al., 2023). Ultimately, the integration of these findings confirms that the meaning of *ta'awun* develops through a reflective and relational process, where religious values, social connections, and shared experiences enrich self-awareness.

In the participants' experiences, helping actions stemmed not only from normative obligations but also from a sense of belonging to a group that shared values and goals. Therefore, social identity in this context is not only understood structurally but also subjectively experienced as a sense of belonging and connectedness to others (Edding, 2013). The dormitory culture, emphasizing collective values, brotherhood, cooperation, and the avoidance of open conflict, aligns with restorative practices in schools that repair relationships without humiliating any party, while simultaneously strengthening community cohesion (Perrella et al., 2024).

Religious Awareness (Z, G)

Z and G link *ta'awun* to divine reward and oversight, such that the motivation to help does not depend on human recognition. The intensive interaction and communal life in the dormitory create a vital context in which students interpret *ta'awun* as an integral aspect of their moral and spiritual responsibilities. They not only adhere to social rules but also actively cultivate a sense of belonging and connectedness among community members. Consequently, concepts such as social capital and

social cohesion are not only present in a structural sense but are also experienced subjectively and emotionally by the participants, contributing to the shared process of creating meaning in their lives together (Lloyd & Lewis, 2024).

These findings aligned with evidence that religiosity and spirituality provide a relatively stable sense of meaning and direction, which in turn undergirds everyday prosocial behavior (Yaden et al., 2022). Beyond conferring meaning, religious dimensions are also associated with a sense of coherence, which correlates positively with mental health (Jeserich et al., 2023). This convergence strengthens the interpretation that helping is carried out calmly and consistently, as reported by Z and G. *Ta'awun* is not only a social action but also a behavior that reflects the values of Islamic brotherhood and holds spiritual significance. Religious motivation, which is an integral part of one's identity, encourages students to help friends, resolve conflicts, and share their time and energy. Religious motivation in Islamic schools fosters volunteerism, cooperation, and compassion, while also strengthening religious identity (Alzaareer & Abdalla, 2023; Khalili et al., 2023). In this context, *ta'awun* is regarded as a principle of mutual assistance in goodness, aligning with prosocial behaviors such as sharing, helping, cooperating, giving voluntarily, and facilitating the affairs of others (Suud et al., 2025).

Accordingly, helping is understood not only as a social practice but as a spiritual obligation, as emphasized in the Qur'an's call to cooperate in righteousness and piety, thereby strengthening individual faith (*tawhid*) and social solidarity (Saputra, 2022). From an Islamic perspective on altruism and social exchange, *ta'awun* likewise motivates benevolent action without expectation of return (Abd Jalil, 2020). Apriyani et al. (2024) argue that Quran serves as a moral foundation that guides brotherhood, solidarity, mutual assistance, and fair treatment. Similarly, Hapsari et al. (2024) argue that Quran is understood as a guide to mercy, which encourages religious coping and psychological balance. Thus, Quranic values are not merely norms but also a foundation for life that strengthens self-identity and prosocial relationships.

The participants recognized that *ta'awun* is not merely a social act but also a form of worship mandated by Islam, helping others is framed as cooperation in goodness that accrues spiritual merit (Sudarti et al., 2021). Assisting others is believed to be rewarded by Allah and contributes to spiritual goodness, a view that aligns with broader evidence that religiosity is positively associated with prosocial tendencies (Kelly et al., 2024). This understanding emerged both explicitly and implicitly, fostering prosocial behavior within the dormitory environment.

Participants understood spirituality as not being limited to rituals, it also encompassed social actions, thereby reflecting a contextual understanding of religion. Inner satisfaction stems from social connectedness; however, the highest motivation is directed toward the transcendental aspect. Empirical studies by Weiss-Sidi & Riemer (2023) show that altruistic/helping behavior reliably elevates subjective well-being, supporting the participants' reports of inner calm and gratitude after helping. Participants associate *ta'awun* with the hope for reward and the pleasure of Allah, which serves as an internal motivation for helping others, consistent with evidence that (intrinsic) religiosity predicts prosocial decisions (Weiss & Forstmann, 2024).

This affirmation reflects the internalization of religious teachings as the primary motivation for prosocial behavior, establishing a connection between faith-based values and tangible social actions. The participants indicated that their desire to help was based on spiritual beliefs, not material rewards. This reflects a level of maturity in understanding sincerity as a manifestation of faith, an attitude that is in line with the findings (Olmos-Gómez et al., 2023) that transcendental values and intrinsic religious motives are related to prosocial tendencies.

Furthermore, participants described *ta'awun* not only as a social responsibility, but also as an experience of mutual support that includes physical, emotional, and social assistance integral to daily life in the dormitory. Physical support, such as helping a sick friend, driving them to the health unit, or sharing daily tasks, serves not only as practical assistance but also as a genuine expression of empathy and emotional bonding. This finding aligns with the concept of tangible support (Uchino, 2009), which states that instrumental assistance is a key component of support that directly assists individuals in facing daily challenges. In the boarding school context, these actions reflect the existence of a strong support network among students.

This study makes a conceptual contribution to enriching Social Identity Theory (SIT) by demonstrating that collective identity rooted in Islamic values is not only explained theoretically but also subjectively experienced and interpreted by students, thus becoming the foundation for prosocial behavior. Spiritual attachment has been shown to intersect with adolescents' prosocial behavior across cultures, strengthening the idea that religious motivation can encourage sincere and fair helping. This is supported by findings from (Coman et al., 2024), which indicate that religiosity in schools is correlated with more positive social behavior among students. Furthermore, volunteering in Islamic schools was found to foster prosocial orientation in adolescents.

Participant narratives demonstrated that identifying as members of a religious community not only strengthens social relationships but also provides meaning that guides helpful behavior. When religiosity is internalized, students tend to be more self-accepting and flourishing; this religious meaning also fosters a prosocial orientation (Aini et al., 2024). Similarly, social piety, such as solidarity, cooperation, honesty, and patience supports flourishing, thereby reinforcing the connection between Islamic values and prosocial virtues (Hidayat et al., 2024). The practical implications point toward a need for strengthening the Islamic character education curriculum. The *ta'awun* values already practiced by students can be systematically integrated through experiential learning and reflection on social life in Islamic boarding schools to cultivate noble character (Suud et al., 2025; Zakiyah et al., 2024).

Although this study effectively explores the meaning of *ta'awun* behavior within the context of students living in a boarding school, several limitations must be acknowledged. The research was conducted in a single geographical location with a relatively small and homogeneous group of participants, which naturally constrains the contextual diversity of experiences captured. Consequently, the findings should not be interpreted as statistically generalizable but rather as analytically transferable to settings with similar cultural and institutional characteristics. The specific social and religious environment of the Muhammadiyah boarding school may have influenced how *ta'awun* was understood and practiced. Future studies could extend this line of inquiry by involving multiple sites, different cultural or educational contexts, and comparative approaches to examine how the meaning and expression of *ta'awun* may vary across diverse environments.

CONCLUSION

Ta'awun is construed as a worship-infused prosocial practice that integrates faith, emotion regulation, and relational repair. In everyday dormitory life, it is experienced as a pathway to calming oneself and others, sustaining brotherhood, and attaining inner peace. Conceptually, *ta'awun* unfolds through a sequential process: worship strengthens sincerity; sincerity undergirds emotion regulation; emotional stability enables relational mediation; mediation, in turn, reinforces *ukhuwah* and

inclusivity; and this chain culminates in social harmony and inner tranquility. This trajectory indicates that *ta'awun* is not a set of discrete acts but a constellation of interrelated experiences. The study thus enriches understanding of *ta'awun* as a spiritual-emotional process that balances self and context. Faith, sincerity, and dialogic communication function as integral components of *ta'awun* and help sustain social relationships in the dormitory setting. Overall, the findings affirm that the core meaning of *ta'awun* is worship-in-action that generates inner calm and social harmony through emotion regulation and relational reconciliation.

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