



## EXPLORING THE PERCEPTION OF IIUM STUDENTS TOWARDS THE CONCEPT OF SOCIAL SOLIDARITY IN MULTICULTURAL MUSLIM STUDENTS: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

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### Abstract:

IIUM, as an Islamic institution of higher education, aspires to be a centre of educational excellence that emphasizes Islamic values and internationalization. It is reflected in its vision and mission that embraces the Ummatic concept. In an attempt to examine students' experiences of IIUM in this respect, the study explores the perceptions of IIUM Muslim students of the concept of social solidarity in the multicultural Muslim community through their experience studying at IIUM. The study employed the phenomenological research design, where ten participants were selected using purposive sampling. The data were then analyzed using thematic analysis. Research findings of the study showed that participants perceive social solidarity at IIUM through the themes of collective commitment and spiritual motivation. It emphasizes the need to improve the curriculum, co-curriculum, and learning environment that considers the multicultural background of the students. The study reveals the need for educators and university management to work together to develop curriculum, teaching and learning, and management practices that promote social solidarity among multicultural students in Islamic universities such as IIUM

### Keywords:

Multicultural Students, Islamic Higher Education, Social Solidarity, Muslim.

### Introduction

In Islam, the issue of differences should not be a barrier for human beings to be kind, cooperate, and help each other. The Prophet Muhammad SAW showed respect for adherents of other

religions during his life; such an approach is an essential teaching in Islam. Islam sees ethnic diversity with a positive view of getting to know each other and helping others in matters of goodness (Rabiu & Modibbo, 2018). However, lots of problems occur in multicultural communities, which include the issues of multicultural violence such as discrimination, bias, stereotyping, racism, etc. (Kunesh & Noltemeyer, 2019; Youngju, 2021) in multiple sectors, including the education sector (McIntosh, 2018; Bruckner et al., 2022). Even the Muslim world is not excluded from the issue of prejudice and disunity (Sherwani, 2005). Following the problems of disunity among the Muslim community, there are some discussions in terms of social integration as well as social solidarity related to the Muslim community (Redekop, 1967; Cameron, 2015; Cobb et al., 2015; Nollert & Sheikhzadegan, 2016; Chua et al., 2022) and religious entity (Draper, 2014). Without question, religious affiliation has been among the most important indicators of social inclusion and exclusion in human history. This issue highlighted the role and significance of holistic education, which emphasizes the significance of good akhlak in the students' character building. Good akhlak is required to support the effort to build social integration and solidarity, especially among multicultural communities. Thus, the role of the Islamic educational institution in preparing a good man who can overcome the issues in a multicultural community is crucial.

Hence, a social construct through social solidarity among multicultural communities must be constructed to seek a solution to this particular issue. Nevertheless, in line with the mission to achieve social justice and equality in a multicultural atmosphere, there is limited concern in specific discussions with the concept of social solidarity in multicultural Muslim atmospheres in educational institutions, particularly in Islamic higher education. In contrast, other fields, such as geopolitics and the sociology of religion, have mainly discussed transnational Muslim solidarity (Cobb et al., 2015). Consequently, current research aims to examine IIUM Muslim students' understanding of social solidarity in a multicultural Muslim community. This objective is to know how far the students understand the concept that can contribute to the unity of Muslims (social solidarity) in tertiary education, particularly in Islamic education. This study is significant because it provides an in-depth look into the lived experience of multicultural university students and their interaction with a multicultural community of friends through phenomenology research. Numerous studies have studied multicultural and multiracial university students' perceptions (Alanay & Aydin, 2016; Ong et al., 2018; Wu et al., 2015; Chen et al., 2020). However, this study will be mainly conducted on Muslim students among postgraduate multicultural IIUM students to examine social solidarity. While examining the perceptions of the Muslim community of students of multiple nationalities and cultural differences in the concept of social solidarity, this study points out the role of Muslim identity (faith) as the backbone of the development of social solidarity in the community of multicultural Muslim students in IIUM. Therefore, religion or the sense of spirituality is the main contributing factor that the researcher explores in developing social solidarity in the multicultural Muslim community of students. Other than that, the role of higher education, particularly in the Islamic university, has been explored in how its educational system helps the development of social solidarity among multicultural Muslim students.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study is supported by three theories, namely, mechanical and organic solidarity (Durkheim, 1984), reciprocity theory (Molm, 2007), and intergroup contact theory (Allport, 1958), which shape the study's theoretical framework, as shown in Figure 1.0. A classical theory, mechanical and organic solidarity, has emphasized that religion is the element

highlighted by both kinds of solidarity introduced by Emile Durkheim (Durkheim, 1984). In fact, throughout several studies, social solidarity is synonymous with the discussion of religion. For instance, in the sense of globalization and its challenges to the human race, they discussed the position of Christianity in the growing economic polarities, cultural upheavals, and social disintegration; it addressed the question of social solidarity (Groody, 2008). Not only in Christianity, but social solidarity has also been discussed in Judaism (Rosati, 2012). Several studies have also discussed social solidarity in the Islamic narrative (Hameed, 2016; Krzyzowski & Nowicka, 2021). However, this current study is not going to discuss Islam per se on social solidarity but how the educational institution, notably higher education, which uses the name of ‘Islam’ such as IIUM, is implementing Islamic principles in their policies and practices to foster the spirit of social solidarity among multicultural Muslim students. To examine the perceptions of multicultural Muslim students in Islamic university such as IIUM on the concept of social solidarity, the researcher believes that each student’s religiosity level affects their awareness and culture to build social solidarity among Muslim students in IIUM. Hence, reciprocity theory is used to measure to what extent the student as a Muslim can contribute something good for their solidarity in their brotherhood (*ukhuwwah*). Therefore, the researcher assumes that one of the types of reciprocity theory, generalized exchange, would occur if a Muslim student thinks of social solidarity for the ummah without expecting any personal profit except the profit for general, which is for the ummah as a whole. However, to build social solidarity in a multicultural community of students, there must be challenges and obstacles. Therefore, the researcher uses intergroup contact theory to examine what factors contribute to positive contact among intergroups to reduce the feeling of prejudice as one of the challenges to building social solidarity. The researcher believes that positive contact among intergroups can help the efforts to develop social solidarity among multicultural Muslim students in IIUM. Suppose the critical concepts in Allport’s hypotheses in contact theory can be achieved. In that case, the effort to develop social solidarity will be expected to become easy despite various conflicts and challenges.

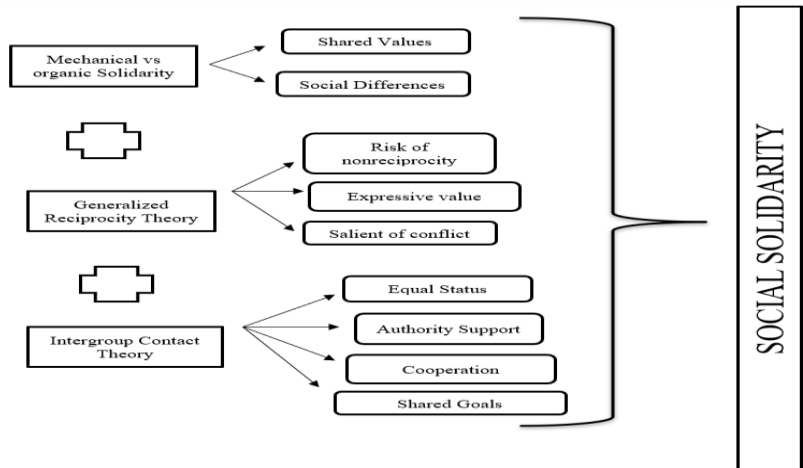


Figure 1.0: Theoretical Framework

**Literature Review**

**Social Solidarity In Education**

In the West, for example, social solidarity has been studied chiefly regarding inclusivity, equality, and educational human rights (Mayorga & Picower, 2018; Gelepathis & Giani, 2020). Other than that, social solidarity in education has also been studied in terms of its relation with

the other crucial sectors of the country, such as the economy (Zambeta & Kolofousi, 2014; Gelepithis & Giani, 2020). It forces society to have social solidarity through education to achieve their goal of a better national economy and sustainable development. Hence, social solidarity has been applied not only to create a peaceful environment but also has been used to achieve a clear goal and vision of a particular community, such as social justice and national economic achievement (Zambeta & Kolofousi, 2014). Not only in Western and Southeast Asia, social solidarity has also been studied in the educational sector, especially in multicultural and multi-ethnic countries (Liu et al., 2017; Patras et al., 2022). A sense of social solidarity is necessary for them to build a peaceful relationship among multi-ethnic residents while enhancing national integration and patriotism for their country. In South Korea, China, and Malaysia, for example, national integration and social solidarity have been discussed progressively in line with their national policy vision besides their national community consisting of multiple ethnicities and cultures (Liu et al., 2017; Patras et al., 2022). This policy is highly significant for their national stability, which also has the potential to affect other vital sectors in their state, such as economic and political conditions. Since previous studies showed that the sense of social solidarity is derived from certain motives and mutual goals such as national integration, national economy, and political stability, the researcher assumes that she is going to explore the concept of social solidarity in Islamic university (IIUM) in the motive and vision of Muslim unity.

### ***Social Solidarity In The Muslim Community***

Even the Muslim world is not excluded from the issue of prejudice and disunity (Sherwani, 2005). Following the problems of disunity among the Muslim community, there are some discussions in terms of social integration as well as social solidarity related to the Muslim community (Redekop, 1967; Cameron, 2015; Cobb et al., 2015; Nollert & Sheikhzadegan, 2016; Chua et al., 2022) and religious entity (Draper, 2014). Without question, religious affiliation has been among the most important indicators of social inclusion and exclusion in human history. One can see various instances of religious persecution throughout history (Schneider, 2002). In the second half of the 20th century, the traumatic experiences of the World Wars and the Civil and Human Rights movements have given rise to substantial initiatives in Western countries to institutionalize a culture of tolerance (Grant & Gibson, 2015). With the growth of Islamic consciousness in the Islamic world and its penetration into Western countries over the past two decades, however, there have been growing calls for the limitations of tolerance to be emphasized (Evans, 2011). Thus, Muslim solidarity has gained unparalleled political significance (Nollert, 2015). Most Western studies focused only on the perception of the native population in terms of the Muslim community who stay on their land (Cameron, 2015; Nollert, 2015). In fact, the perception of the Muslims themselves on social solidarity is under-researched at large (Siddiqi, 2014). According to the study of World Values Surveys and European Values Survey, they only examined the attitudes of native populations toward Muslims and not the values from Muslim orientations and also the attitudes toward social solidarity (Davidov et al., 2009). However, some studies reveal the extent of tolerance among multi-faith communities, including Muslims, such as the research by Inglehart and Norris (2012) and Tausch (2015), which address the tolerance from the community of Muslims across the states. However, according to the studies of Tausch and Karoui (2011) and Tausch (2015), their findings showed that the Salafist position in Europe is marginalized from other Muslim communities. In other words, there is no solidarity in the European Muslim community due to different understandings of Islamic thought. Miligan, Andersen, and Brym (2014) have recorded that European tolerance varies not only between nations but also between Muslims

and Christians, as well as between practitioners and non-practitioners. Lastly, based on a survey of Muslims of Turkish and Moroccan origin in six European countries, Koopmans (2015) argued that religious conservative attitudes are more generalized among Muslims than among indigenous Christians. Nevertheless, the above studies and data from the European and World Values Studies are of limited interest to this particular study as they do not examine actions and do not tell what social solidarity means to Muslims and what kind of solidarity they prefer.

### ***Higher Education As A Social Agent***

As lower education, higher education is also a significant institution as it has an ample opportunity to prepare future citizens. The attitude of being comfortable with diversity and the skills in interpersonal problem-solving are fostered in the universities (Thomas, 1997). Education institutes are taken as places for studying not just the substance of the syllabus but also values, opinions, and even behaviours. Gurin, Dey, Hurtado, and Gurin (2002) proposed that young people should have a psychosocial moratorium based on Erik Erikson's definition of identity development, where they can observe multiple social roles before committing to anyone. This idea ensures they do not contribute unassumingly based on previous experiences but make educated choices properly, especially for young people pursuing their studies at higher education institutions. Thus, the universities must ensure that they offer the best possible atmosphere and setting for the maturation of young adults into upright members of society who can become its strong pillars (Klafter, 2020). Gurin, Dey, Hurtado, and Gurin (2002) have pointed out that young adults have the potential to influence behaviours that have become concrete over the years. Again, This argument underlines an educational institution's obligation to foster successful students who could positively nurture good values in each other. Thus, universities become the focal point to teach students that diversity is valuable in social solidarity.

In line with that, as places where attitudes and values are nurtured, universities as higher education play a critical role in socializing the younger generation to be more open to diversity and less prejudiced against individuals from other communities, ethnicities, sects, faiths, or skills, etc. One of the fundamental mechanisms for implementing this is intergroup communication with the students (Green, 2019). A theory formally proposed by Allport (1958), intergroup interaction purports that when individuals associated with different groups engage in a supportive way, their prejudice towards each other is reduced. Hence, educational institutions should ensure ample space for meaningful contact to socialize their students. Previous research has shown that such an approach, also in schools and universities, has persistently reduced discrimination in intergroup contact (Mäkinen et al., 2019; Tropp et al., 2022).

In instances of intercultural communication, Simmons et al. (2010) considered educational institutions as outlets for promoting positive attitudes towards out-groups (i.e., a community that one does not belong to). For example, concerning racism, the US had targeted schools to reduce discrimination between Whites and African Americans through their degradation (Pettigrew, 2011). The value of intercultural interaction at educational institutions has also been highlighted in Northern Ireland, and it has been seen as having a consistently positive impact on group attitudes among opposing Christian groups (Everett, 2013). In addition, educational researchers have provided evidence for diverse academic interactions by comparing survey responses from students and teachers who thought that students valued contact with various races and ethnicities. Improved performance on different educational outcomes has been

identified, and studies benefit students and the community (Gurin et al., 2002; Tropp et al., 2022).

**Aim Of The Study**

The current study examines the understanding of IIUM students of the concept of social solidarity in the multicultural Muslim community of students. Through this aim, the study has one research question: 1) What are the perceptions of IIUM Muslim students of the concept of social solidarity in the multicultural Muslim community?

**Method**

**Participant**

This study has ten participants: eight for one-to-one interviews and two for dyadic interviews selected through purposeful sampling following a snowball technique. The following are the criteria for the candidates to be eligible for the study.

- 1) A participant who had been a post-graduate student in IIUM for at least three years.
- 2) A participant holding a position as a committee member of an academic/co-curricular society in IIUM (for a dyadic interview) and a student without any post in an academic/co-curricular society in IIUM (one-to-one interviews).

**Instrument**

The main instrument for this study is the interview questions. The interview questions are constructed based on the research question of the study. The researcher uses semi-structured interviews to obtain the required data. The interview starts with investigating the student’s background. Next, the researcher attempts to examine the student understanding of the concept of social solidarity and Muslim solidarity. The researcher examines the concept of social solidarity in a multicultural Muslim community based on their lived experiences and awareness. Then, the researcher examines the experiences with the multicultural community of students in their curricular/co-curricular activities which they are joining. Therefore, the study provides a set of rules for the interview protocol based on the research theory shown in Table 1.0.

**Table 1. Interview Protocol**

Code	Category	Subcategory
DE	Demography	Name Age Course/Kulliyah Level of study Duration of study/which year now? Hometown/Country Position in non/Academic Society Education background

UP	Understanding of phenomenon	Personal Examples based on observation and experiences	Definition
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*One-to-one Interviews.* In this study, the researcher conducted only eight participants to be interviewed in one-to-one interviews as the main data of the study. Those eight participants are postgraduate students who do not hold any position in the university, whether in academic or co-curricular society. They are interviewed to answer the first, second (particularly in the role of Muslim students), and last research questions of the study. Typically, face-to-face interviews take place. This approach may help the interviewer better grasp what is being said by allowing the researcher to decipher non-verbal signs through observation of body language, facial expression, and eye contact. They are questioned at different times and locations depending on their schedule and venue availability.

*Dyadic Interview.* According to Morgan, Ataie, Carder, and Hoffman (2013), dyadic interviews only involve two participants instead of one-on-one interviews and focus groups, which call for three or more. In-depth interviews have examined this approach, particularly with partners and couples (Taylor & de Vocht, 2011). For this study, the researcher requires two participants who represent the committee members of the university’s academic society and the committee members of the co-curricular club of the university. Those participants are needed to answer the second research question, particularly in how the institution (IIUM) fosters social solidarity in the multicultural Muslim community of students. They are expected to have broad experience in participating in various kinds of activities and programs in the university, which are organized by the university itself and by the students on their own.

**Study Design**

Since the researcher explores how multicultural Muslim students conceptualize social solidarity and how they can develop Muslim solidarity through their meaning of lived experiences in IIUM, multiple theories are used, namely mechanical and organic solidarity (Durkheim, 1984), intergroup contact theory (Allport, 1958) and reciprocity theory (Molm et al., 2007) to explain their interaction among them and how their mutual identity (Muslim) plays a role as a catalyst to develop the sense of social solidarity among Muslim community of students. Therefore, the researcher uses qualitative research to interpret the students’ perceptions through their lived experiences to answer the research question of how multicultural Muslim students understand the ideas of social solidarity and practically put them into Muslim solidarity. Since the researcher is exploring the phenomenon through students’ lived experiences, a phenomenology approach is chosen to get in-depth meaning and analysis from the participants. Hence, participants’ experiences are interpreted based on the meaning found among the participants. The study is framed in a constructivist theoretical framework to understand how social solidarity can be developed in the multicultural Muslim student community in a medium of Islamic university life experiences. Therefore, the study aims to understand and interpret how the participants conceptualized the meaning of social solidarity and developed ideas about Muslim solidarity in the multicultural community.

**Data Collection**

Triangulation is done to ensure the trustworthiness of the qualitative study, particularly for the credibility of the study. According to Denzin (1978) and Patton (2002), method triangulation

checks the consistency of findings generated by different data collection methods. For example, in-depth one-to-one and dyadic interviews are conducted in this study to collect participant data. The researcher conducted only eight participants to be interviewed in one-to-one interviews as the main data of the study. Those eight participants are postgraduate students who do not hold any position in the university, whether in academic or co-curricular society. Typically, face-to-face interviews take place. This approach may help the interviewer better grasp what is being said by allowing the researcher to decipher non-verbal signs through observation of body language, facial expression, and eye contact. They are questioned at different times and locations depending on their schedule and venue availability. Meanwhile, for another method, dyadic interview, the researcher requires two participants who represent the committee members of the university's academic society and the committee members of the co-curricular club of the university. They are expected to have broad experience in participating in various kinds of activities and programs in the university, which are organized by the university itself and by the students on their own.

### Data Analysis

After the data are collected, it has been analyzed using Moustakas' transcendental phenomenological model. This analysis included a reduction in phenomenology, textual explanation, and analysis synthesis (Moustakas, 1994; Patton, 2002). The researcher applies the phenomenological reduction method to manage a large chunk of raw data. In the first coding cycle, the researcher maintains the accuracy of the transcriptions by revising all transcriptions and making necessary corrections wherever needed. This step focuses on organizing data. The researcher organizes data by reviewing the interview guide to identify and differentiate between the questions/topics the researcher tries to answer. Atkinson (2013) and Saldana (2014) called the first cycle method a provisional coding, enabling the researcher to identify meaningful data and set the stage for interpreting and drawing a conclusion. The initial coding of the raw data is used as "the mechanics of the subtle process of having ideas and concepts of data" (Atkinson, 2013, p. 27). This progression of identifying a phenomenon of experiences helps the researcher to construct recurring themes into respective categories of the research question. Any overlapping meanings are disregarded while maintaining the central meaning. The coding process becomes fluid as the researcher continually reviews the data, ensuring higher analysis and interpretation. Yet, the emerging themes are labeled under each section of the category of the research question.

The second step is finding and organizing the participants' ideas and concepts related to the research question. The researcher created the category based on the interview questions, with the main leading questions minimizing the potential bias and preparing common themes. For further accuracy of transcriptions, the researcher listens to each response and compares the transcription with the audio records of participants' responses. In the third step, the researcher uses the "horizontalisation" process (Moustakas, 1994). The researcher looks for every significant statement about their perceptions of social solidarity. Any irrelevant responses are sorted out into a separate sheet to be determined later for use in the analysis process. The researcher also observes over-arching themes in the data. The fourth stage involves the development of clusters of meanings from the themes. For this process, Moustakas (1994) and Van Manen (1990) affirmed removing any unsupported statements from the main responses. Thus, the researcher creates textual descriptions developed from a cluster of themes of the research question. The researcher also revises all the themes and research question to ensure the validity of data and interpretation of the results. Finally, the researcher identifies the entire



big picture of how participants conceptualized social solidarity based on their lived experiences, developed ideas about Muslim solidarity through the practices of the students and the university, and integrated their ideas and experiences into their curricular and co-curricular activities.

**Results**

In this section, the researcher presents the qualitative results addressing the research question: perceptions of IIUM students of social solidarity in the multicultural Muslim community.

Question 1: In general, what do you understand about social solidarity?

This section presents the one-to-one and dyadic interview results to explore students’ perceptions and understanding of social solidarity. The researcher divides the students’ perceptions into two main themes: collective commitment and spiritual motivation. Table 2 below shows the main themes and their sub-themes that have emerged:

**Table 2. Themes And Sub-Themes Emerged**

Themes	Sub-themes
Collective commitment	-mutual trust -shared goals -
Spiritual motivation	togetherness -Islamic principles -ummatic thought

*Collective commitment.* The first sub-theme that the participants mentioned to define social solidarity is mutual trust. This value mentioned makes the researcher consider it one of the essential conditions for developing social solidarity. Kak mentioned the term mutual trust to define social solidarity by stating,

“It is a community of people who share common values like mutual trust and being united based on those shared values.”. (DU9)

According to Kak, mutual trust helps the people in the group to be united. Mutual trust represents the point of mutual values that she has highlighted. This statement is equivalent to the theory of mechanical solidarity by Durkheim (1984), which emphasizes the significance of shared values. Besides, despite other shared values, she has mentioned the importance of mutual trust to unite the people in the group, which the researcher assumes is to develop social solidarity in the multicultural community. Meanwhile, Ivo mentioned her thought by saying,

“In my opinion, social solidarity is emotional and moral feelings that are formed in relationships between individuals or groups. Besides, it is formed based on mutual trust.” (DU7)

She even added an example of her own experience by stating,

“Another example is social solidarity in the community, for example, helping our multicultural friends who face difficulties, regardless of ethnicity or religion. From these examples, a sense of trust will develop social solidarity”. (DU9)

Thus, the feeling of trust would easily develop on each other when someone is willing to help others even though those who have been helped are not related by blood or friendship. Even though they are from different racial identities and nationalities or even religions, the sense of humanity makes them feel secure and trust in each other. This feeling of trust is significant to individuals who willingly commit welfare commitments such as helping others in difficulties. This emotional and moral feeling of trust also may appear when the positive commitment, such as helping others in difficulties, has been a culture of a group of people, and it would be followed from generation to generation because it has become a habit or obligation.

The next sub-theme is shared goals. The researcher noticed that the terms they used have almost similar meanings, such as target, goal, or any specific aim or objective, such as to help people and to facilitate life, are parts of their responses in defining social solidarity. For example, Tis explained the shared goal as to help people in need. Kam mentioned a specific target, while Nai mentioned the significance of similar goals. Another participant, Man, the same Tis, explained the shared goal to facilitate life that can counter life's difficulties.

“solidarity is defined as the collective commitment of those who have the material means to help people in need or to cover obligations that they cannot meet.”(Tis: DU7)

I think it is a type of relationship toward specific target” (Kam: DU7)

“In my opinion, social solidarity is a feeling of the same destiny as fellow human beings. So, we have same goal to achieve which is to be a good Muslim and human being. As social beings, this social solidarity is important.”(Nai: DU7)

“Social solidarity for me means the society contribute to live good life or to facilitate the life. How you can counter the difficulties of life. Solidarity means how we can cover our weakness, how we can help each other. These are some meanings of solidarity for me.”(Man: DU7)

Besides that, Ivo and Ina, as part of the community of multicultural Muslim students in IIUM, shared their examples of experience, particularly in the idea of shared goals in their campus activities. They also shared their feeling and spirit as an ordinary student in IIUM.

“In my view, the same goal is the point that fosters solidarity among Muslim multicultural students at IIUM. International students from various countries are willing to leave their country because of the same goal: to seek and expand knowledge.”(Ivo: DU49)

“So, besides our goals are almost similar then we have to help on each other for example we must be helpful on each other in term of academic matter especially or any matter. We should voluntarily share, teach the knowledge among each other” (Ina: DU17)

Based on their responses, the researcher found that Ivo and Ina have a sense of social solidarity with their multicultural friends because of shared values. In the case of Ivo, an international student from thousands of miles from her hometown, she comes to the university highly determined to seek knowledge and succeed in her chosen field. Thus, with that spirit, she empathizes with other students from various countries who come to the university with their struggles. Some students come to the university alone, leaving their wives/husbands and children in his/her hometown for three to five years or until they finish his/her studies. Some students come to the university with their families and struggle to complete their studies while taking care of their family members in a foreign country with various challenges such as financial and time management and other challenges as the foreigners. So, with this empathy, she knows well that they have the same goal as her, which makes it easy to commit good things, such as helping them in difficulties. She is willing to help them feel social solidarity because she feels they have the same goal to achieve in this university: to seek and expand their knowledge and succeed for the ummah.

Another participant, Tis, as a representative of committee members in the academic association of the university, shared her experience when participating in an academic program for her faculty. In a small group of committee members, the spirit of social solidarity is felt stronger when they hardly make an effort to make the program they run successfully occur.

“Even though all committees come from different ethnicities and cultures, we certainly have the same goal, which is to strive for the success of the event.” (Tis: DU9)

It is shown that the determination to achieve the goal together strengthens the spirit of social solidarity to transcend the boundaries of existing differences. Thus, the existing differences can be put aside when achieving a common goal. Therefore, the value of shared goals, which the participants mentioned through multiple different terms such as target, goal, or any specific objectives, are the required condition to define social solidarity. On the other hand, the two values explained above have similarities: mutual trust and shared goals have the element of sameness, as stated by Durkheim (1984). The sameness is defined as they shared the same value. For example, they share the value of trust, and they are also sharing the value of their own goals.

Another sub-theme that contributes to the theme of collective commitment is togetherness. All participants mentioned the significance of togetherness in developing social solidarity. Based on their experiences, all of them have emphasized the element of togetherness in whatever activities they are doing with the community of multicultural Muslim students. Generally, they mentioned ‘being together’ while expressing their view to define social solidarity. For example, Kam defines social solidarity as,

“In my opinion, social solidarity is the impact of how the society being together and be united with the people in their environment.” (Kam: DU7)

In the particular case of the participants in this study, they relate lots of their activities to academic matters. They share their experience of ‘being together’ with their multicultural friends in the classroom or in academic activities. As stated by Ivo and Man:

“For example, doing assignments with a diverse ethnic team will work fine if we prioritize togetherness and build the same goals. Our goal is of course to complete the assignments well” (Ivo: DU21)

“For example, when we have an academic workshop which gather multicultural participants and we were doing activities together. I feel very-very happy.” (Man: DU23)

Like Ivo and Man, Khai also mentioned his togetherness with multicultural friends in the academic matter, particularly in the classroom setting. In his sharing, he mentioned the community of multicultural Muslim students in his classroom as the ‘international students.’ From the activities in the classroom with the community of multicultural students, he enjoys the learning process with them as he can actively exchange ideas and knowledge from multiple perspectives. As he stated,

“by staying in the same classroom with student from multicultural backgrounds, I can interact and exchange idea with international student while learning.” (Kai: DU24)

Meanwhile, Khai has emphasized the significance of togetherness as it can hit the ‘gap’ or differences between multicultural students. It means that he would focus more on the matter while they are together, such as discussing, learning, or even eating together, more than thinking about their gap and existing differences. He said,

“For me that’s no problem as long as we can discuss together, learn together and I would not focus with our difference like our faith.” (Kam: DU35)

Interestingly, his togetherness with the community of multicultural Muslim friends has indirectly created a sense of unity in the Islamic ummah. In contrast, the spirit of social solidarity for the ummah ignited immediately in his inner self. At the same time, he mentioned that he willingly works together for a common interest and purpose for the sake of ummah.

“well, by having friends from multicultural background, I can feel the oneness and unity of the Islamic ummah that live together and working together for common interest and purpose.” (Kai: DU9)

*Spiritual motivation:* Spiritual motivation is another theme that defines students’ understanding of social solidarity in IIUM. The theme of spiritual motivation emerged from the sub-themes

of Islamic principles and ummatic thought. All the participants for one-to-one and dyadic interviews relate their thoughts and experiences on social solidarity with Islamic principles. Based on their responses, they emphasized the significance of Islamic teaching. For example, Ivo highlights the similarities between the source of the guidelines they believe in, namely the Quran and the hadith, rather than the differences between them. This thought motivated her to continue practicing Islamic teachings that encourage people to do good to each other regardless of cultural boundaries. She said,

“, I still feel comfortable and happy to interact and relate to them even though our cultures are different, because our beliefs are the same, and our life guidelines are of course the same, namely the Holy Quran and Hadith.” (Ivo: DU29)

She also gets inspired by the story of Prophet Muhammad (Peace be Upon Him) on how to behave with someone who has different identities from us, such as race and faith.

“Actually, in principle I try to behave well to everyone, not differentiating between Muslims and non-Muslims. Rasulullah has given us an example, how Rasulullah always has a good character to anyone, even non-Muslims. There are many stories about the good attitude of the Prophet Muhammad towards non-Muslim Jews and Christians. This story is an inspiration for me to interact with. For example, if Muslim and non-Muslim friends ask me for help on campus, then I will try to help him, as long as I can, of course” (Ivo: DU33)

Besides that, one of the Qur’anic verses reminds one of the participants, Kam, that Allah SWT creates diversity and differences so that people can know each other. This verse directly motivated him to appreciate the differences around him. Consequently, this verse successfully shaped his mind and heart to avoid negative feelings towards differences while he enjoyed learning more about diversity.

“The environment here reminds me the ayah of Quran which Allah says, “... We created you from a male and a female, and made you into peoples and tribes so that you may ‘get to’ know one another....” I experienced myself with this ayah here where I see so many nations and cultural difference and I do not hate the differences besides I feel interested to know and learn more..”(Kam: DU9)

Another participant, Man, believes that Islamic teaching guides his life. As a Muslim, he feels responsible for obeying everything of Islamic principles. He would refer to Islamic teachings and principles in whatever cases he met. Regarding multicultural relations, it reminds him of one of the Qur’anic verses, as Kam mentioned above, particularly on the term “*litaa’rafu*” which means to know each other. He elaborated on the meaning of “*litaa’rafu*” as to understand and learn. It means that Islam encourages the value of openness that we must be willing to learn and understand from each other. As what Man stated,

“I think this is the master who conduct my life. My faith is the mean guide for me. Theoretically, the first thing is we as a Muslim. It relates

with my belief which is Islam. So for me the first thing is Islam” (Man: DU17)

“When answer this, we can practice this easily. Allah SWT says ‘litaarafu.’ This means understanding or learning. You can make ‘taaruf’ without learning. Otherwise, the conflict is easy to happen.” (Man: DU13)

Man is aware that if he does not hold the concept of ‘*lita’arafu*” or the other meaning to learn and understand more about others, he will face difficulties in dealing with differences, mainly when dealing with and communicating with the community of multicultural students. For example, conflict, such as misunderstanding, will easily occur when people do not try to learn and understand the existing differences.

Another sub-theme that forms the perception of students in defining the concept of social solidarity in Muslim ummah is Ummatic thought. Ummatic thought is a kind of thought where a community of Muslims thinks they are ‘one’ regardless of ethnicity, geography, and even religiosity. They feel sensitive to each other’s problems. Thus, they care for each other even though they do not know each other. Based on their responses, Ivo emphasizes the element of brotherhood in Islam (*ukhuwwah*). She perceives that all Muslims in this world are brothers. Therefore, brothers’ rights must be fulfilled even though we never knew them. Ivo shared that:

“I believe that all Muslims everywhere are brothers, even though they are different countries and even different continents. So, I still feel comfortable and happy to interact and relate to them even though our cultures are different”. (Ivo: DU29)

She then added that the feeling of brotherhood in Muslim ummah motivates her to obey God’s order. For example, she tries to interact and communicate with them as best as Allah’s orders, such as being a good friend, helpful, supportive, and understanding.

“I consider that all Muslims in this world are brothers, therefore I try to interact with them according to Allah’s orders. I try to be good friends, help each other, support each other, and understand each other”. (Ivo: DU31)

Meanwhile, the other participant, Kai, emphasizes the value of oneness, which he relates to the shared value of faith/religion of his multicultural international friends and the unity of Muslim ummah. As Kai shared his feelings,

“I also can feel the beauty of good relationship with all my international friends that come from different multicultural background, but we are following the same religion which is Islam.” (Kai: DU9)

“I can feel the oneness and unity of the Islamic ummah that live together and working together for common interest and purpose” (Kai: DU9)

Thus, the researcher considers this thinking a Ummatic thought as he feels that unity and oneness can help the ummah become more potent when working together to achieve a common purpose and goal.

### **Discussion**

This study examined students' understanding of social solidarity, as this concept can potentially develop a sense of Muslim solidarity among multicultural communities. The concept of social solidarity is chosen to overcome the issue of Muslim disunity and multicultural violence that has occurred for a long time. According to the study results, collective commitment and spiritual motivation represent the students' perception of social solidarity in multicultural Muslim students. The theme of collective commitment, which emerged from the sub-themes of mutual trust, shared goals, and togetherness, is supported by classical and contemporary theories according to the theoretical framework. Hall (2017), Suwidiyanti (2021), and Harkness, Chechire, and Cook (2022) have mentioned that mutual trust contributes to the development of social solidarity. Likewise, Brown and Lawrence (2020) and Achmad (2022) support that shared goals are also significant in developing social solidarity. The third element, togetherness, is supported by Lichterman (2015) and Morrow (2020), who agreed that social solidarity happens in the presence of togetherness.

Another theme, spiritual motivation, highlights the significance of faith to every Muslim student. Muslim students should always be advised to preserve their faith through Islamic principles and practices and try to become good Muslims. They should have ummatic thoughts while behaving with ummatic personalities. They should have a robust and empathetic feeling toward Muslim brothers and sisters. For example, they are sensitive to each other's problems and are actively helping each other whenever their brothers and sisters face difficulties. Thus, Muslim students must have positive attitudes and an additional quality value as a Muslim, which is ummatic thinking that can lead the steps in their behaviour due to their excellent education in an Islamic university. Thus, they have the value to contribute something beneficial to the ummah.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, findings indicate that every single student requires a collective commitment and spiritual motivation to boost the spirit of social solidarity in the multicultural Muslim community of students. The Muslim students are a significant segment of the society. They are intellectually alive, dynamic, idealistic, and can afford to look at global issues. They possess intellectual vitality, dynamism, and idealism, allowing them to approach issues with a sense of freedom from external pressures. They should use Islamic principles to get practical skills needed to succeed in an increasingly technical society. Accordingly, Islamic principles regarding social relations and dealing with others are fundamental. Muslim students must become good human beings with positive attitudes before becoming good Muslims.

Therefore, these findings emphasize the need to improve the curriculum, co-curriculum, and learning environment that considers the multicultural background of the students. The study reveals the need for educators and university management to work together to develop curriculum, teaching and learning, and management practices that promote social solidarity among multicultural students in Islamic universities such as IIUM.

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