

Published:
June 29, 2025

Islamic Ethics and Educational Practices: Shaping Socially Responsible Mindsets in College Students of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa-Pakistan

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Abstract

This study explores how Islamic ethical values, when blended into the learning environment, can help build a stronger sense of social responsibility among college students in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan. Drawing on classical Islamic thought and modern education theory, the research looks at how teachers, classrooms, and campus life reflect ideas like honesty, empathy, and collective duty. A mix of interviews and classroom observations was used to understand how these values play out day-to-day. Many teachers described trying to link lessons to the Prophet's (PBUH) example of integrity and compassion, while students spoke about how cultural norms and peer pressure can sometimes limit those lessons from taking root. The paper argues that real character formation requires more than religious slogans or moral lectures. It needs lived

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experiences, mentoring, and small daily practices that help students make ethical choices naturally. For instance, community projects and voluntary work in Peshawar colleges showed visible improvement in students' teamwork, patience, and civic awareness. However, the study also notes problems, like curriculum overload, limited teacher training, and social divides that discourage open discussion of values. The findings suggest that education in KP must keep ethics as a lived experience rather than a textbook subject. Overall, the work invites educators and policymakers to think about how faith-based moral understanding can genuinely shape responsible citizenship in today's Pakistani youth.

Keywords: Islamic Ethics, Moral Education, Social Responsibility, Higher Education, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Student Development, Educational Practices

Introduction

Education is not merely the transfer of knowledge but the cultivation of moral character and civic responsibility. In many classrooms today, students learn formulas, dates, and theories, but far fewer spaces deliberately ask: What kind of person do you want to become? In Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), where religious identity, tribal values, and modern university life intersect, this question becomes even more urgent. Islamic ethics offers a strong moral foundation that can be infused within educational environments, yet how this actually plays out in KP colleges' remains under-explored. This paper examines how Islamic ethical principles, when woven into everyday teaching, campus culture, and institutional policies, help shape socially responsible mindsets among college students in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

Pakistan's higher-education sector has expanded rapidly over the past two decades, but expansion has not always come with a clear vision of what kind of citizens universities should produce. In KP, students move between rural villages and urban campuses, between madrassa-style moral training and secular-style degree programs, often without a coherent framework to reconcile these worlds. At the same time, public debates about

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corruption, intolerance, and weak civic engagement suggest that something is missing in how we educate young people. Islamic ethics rooted in the Qur'an, Sunnah, and classical Islamic thought—provides a rich vocabulary for justice, compassion, honesty, and service. The question is not whether these values exist, but how effectively they are translated into real classroom practices and student behavior.

Recent policy moves in KP, such as the Character Education Curriculum for primary students (launched in 2026), show that the provincial government is trying to bridge this gap early in life. The syllabus emphasizes the Seerah of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), Islamic teachings, local Pashtun traditions, and ethical-social-psychological education, with the explicit goal of nurturing civic sense and moral responsibility. If character is being targeted at the primary level, it makes sense to ask how these foundations are carried forward—or lost—when students reach college. KP's colleges sit at a critical juncture: they inherit students who have already absorbed some version of Islamic ethics, yet they often operate under generic, secular-style curricula that rarely connect those ethics to real-world social responsibility.

What “socially responsible mindset” means here

Before going further, it helps to clarify what “socially responsible mindset” means in this study. It does not only mean being polite or religiously observant. A socially responsible mindset, in this context, includes:

- A sense of duty toward others, especially the vulnerable (poor, minorities, displaced people).
- Willingness to act, not just feel sympathy (for example, volunteering, ethical leadership, responsible use of power).
- Critical awareness of social injustice and a readiness to question harmful norms.
- A balance between religious identity and civic belonging to the broader Pakistani society.

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This is where Islamic ethics can play a distinctive role. Classical Islamic sources emphasize ‘adl (justice), ihsān (excellence in conduct), amr bil-ma‘rūf wa nahy ‘an al-munkar (enjoining good and forbidding evil), and khalīfah (human beings as stewards of the earth). These are not abstract theological ideas; they are practical guidelines for how to treat neighbors, handle wealth, speak truth to power, and care for the environment. When such principles are internalized, they can shape a student’s attitude toward corruption, gender roles, ethnic diversity, and public service. The challenge is to see how, or whether, KP colleges are actually using these resources in a systematic way.

Islamic ethics and education: more than “Islamic Studies”

In Pakistan, many students encounter Islamic ethics through the compulsory subject Islamic Studies / Ethics, which is part of the national curriculum from primary to higher secondary levels. A recent analysis of ethics and Islamic-education textbooks published by provincial authorities' shows that the state explicitly intends these subjects to support character formation. However, the same study also notes that the messages in textbooks are often descriptive and narrative, focusing on stories and rules rather than on reflective, applied ethics. In other words, students may learn what Islam says about honesty or charity, but not how to navigate real-life dilemmas where honesty conflicts with family pressure, or charity conflicts with personal ambition.

At the university level, the Higher Education Commission (HEC) has revised the Islamic Studies curriculum to emphasize analytical thinking, ethical reasoning, and the practical application of Islamic principles in various fields. This is a step in the right direction, but implementation varies widely across institutions. In KP, some colleges treat Islamic Studies as a “formality” to meet HEC requirements, while others try to integrate Islamic ethics into broader teaching methods and campus life. The gap between policy and practice is where this research sits: it asks not only what is written in the syllabus, but what actually happens in lecture halls, hostels, and student-union spaces.

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Why Khyber Pakhtunkhwa?

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa offers a particularly rich context for this study. The province has a strong religious and tribal culture, yet it also hosts public universities, private colleges, and technical institutes that follow national and sometimes global models of higher education. Students from conservative rural backgrounds often move to cities like Peshawar, Mardan, or Abbottabad for college, where they encounter new ideas, new social circles, and new pressures. In such an environment, the role of education in shaping ethical identity becomes especially visible.

Moreover, KP has been affected by conflict, displacement, and security challenges over the past two decades. Many students have direct or indirect experience of violence, loss, or migration. In this context, a socially responsible mindset is not a luxury; it is a survival skill and a civic necessity. Research on university students in Pakistan shows that they pay close attention to socially responsible initiatives taken by their institutions, and that such activities can foster a sense of responsibility and civic engagement. Another recent study on teaching methods, Islamic ethics awareness, and social responsibility in higher education suggests that certain pedagogical approaches—such as discussion-based learning, case studies, and service-learning—can strengthen students' sense of social responsibility, especially when linked to Islamic ethical awareness. These findings point to the importance of how Islamic ethics is taught, not just that it is taught.

How this paper is framed

This study sits at the intersection of Islamic ethics, educational practices, and social responsibility. It draws on:

- Classical Islamic sources (Qur'an, Sunnah, and selected works of Islamic scholars) to outline core ethical principles relevant to education.
- Contemporary research on character education, Islamic-psycho-spiritual approaches, and social-responsibility initiatives in higher education.

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- Policy documents from the KP government and the Higher Education Commission that outline the official vision for Islamic-based character and civic education.

The paper is not only descriptive; it also engages in critical reflection. For example:

- It asks whether Islamic ethics in KP colleges is mainly used as a tool for control and conformity (e.g., enforcing dress codes or rituals) rather than for critical moral reasoning.
- It considers how tribal norms, patriarchal structures, and political patronage might limit the development of genuine social responsibility, even when Islamic values are formally promoted.
- It acknowledges that Islamic ethics, like any moral system, can be interpreted in different ways; some interpretations may emphasize obedience and hierarchy, while others emphasize justice, compassion, and empowerment.

Research questions and focus

Guided by these concerns, the paper addresses the following core question:

How do Islamic ethics, as reflected in current educational practices, shape socially responsible mindsets among college students in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa?

To explore this, it will examine several sub-questions:

1. What Islamic ethical principles are emphasized (or neglected) in college curricula, teaching methods, and campus culture in KP?
2. How do students experience and interpret these principles in their daily lives, especially in relation to issues like corruption, gender, ethnicity, and civic participation?
3. What institutional and cultural factors support or hinder the development of socially responsible mindsets in this context?

The focus is on college students because they are at a transitional stage: old enough to reflect critically on their beliefs, yet still influenced by family, community, and

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institutional norms. The study will draw on available empirical work on Pakistani university students, including surveys on social-responsibility initiatives and on the impact of social-entrepreneurship education on students' perception of corporate social responsibility and sustainable behavior. Where possible, it will also incorporate local examples from KP colleges to ground the discussion in concrete realities.

Why this is not just “more religion in the classroom”

One concern that often arises in such discussions is that integrating Islamic ethics into education will lead to religious indoctrination or the narrowing of intellectual space. This paper does not assume that more religious content automatically produces better citizens. Instead, it argues that the quality of integration matters. A meaningful integration of Islamic ethics would:

- Encourage students to ask difficult questions, not just memorize answers.
- Connect religious values to real-world problems such as poverty, environmental degradation, and political corruption.
- Promote dialogue across different interpretations of Islam, as well as between Islamic and non-Islamic ethical traditions.

For example, a recent study on an Islamic psychospiritual approach in forming university students' ethics suggests that modules based on Qur'an and Sunnah can improve students' spiritual and moral intelligence, especially when they are combined with reflective activities, group discussions, and practical service projects. However, the same study also notes that such modules must be carefully designed to avoid becoming superficial or ritualistic. This tension—between deep ethical formation and shallow symbolism—is central to the argument of this paper.

Local context and lived realities

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In KP, the lived reality of Islamic ethics in education is often messy and contradictory. On the one hand, many students express a strong desire to “be good Muslims” and to “serve society.” On the other hand, they also face pressures to prioritize grades, jobs, and family expectations, sometimes at the expense of ethical consistency. A student may recite Qur’an regularly but still participate in exam-cheating; another may talk about justice but remain silent when a classmate is bullied because of ethnicity or sect. These contradictions are not unique to KP, but they are particularly visible in a region where religious identity is both a source of pride and a site of contestation.

At the same time, there are positive examples. Some KP colleges organize community-service programs, debate clubs on social issues, and interfaith or inter-ethnic dialogues, often framed in Islamic terms such as *khidmat-e-khalq* (service to humanity) and *wasatiyyah* (moderation). These initiatives show that Islamic ethics can be a resource for building bridges, not just walls. The question is how to scale such practices and embed them in the everyday life of the institution, rather than treating them as occasional “extra-curricular” events.

Islamic ethics, character education, and policy in Pakistan

Character education has become an explicit policy goal in Pakistan, especially at the primary and secondary levels. The federal government’s Character Education framework, published in 2024, emphasizes the development of moral, civic, and emotional skills in students, explicitly linking these goals to Islamic values and national identity. The document argues that education should not only prepare students for the job market but also for responsible citizenship. It highlights virtues such as honesty, respect, responsibility, and compassion, and suggests that these should be integrated across subjects, not confined to a single “morals” class.

In KP, the provincial government has taken this a step further by launching a Character Education Curriculum for primary students in 2026. The curriculum combines Islamic teachings with local Pashtun traditions and ethical-social-psychological content, aiming

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to build a sense of civic duty and moral responsibility from an early age. This is significant because it signals a shift from treating Islamic ethics as a purely religious subject to treating it as a foundation for broader character and citizenship education. The hope is that students who grow up with this curriculum will carry its values into secondary school and, eventually, into college.

However, the transition from primary to higher education is not always smooth. In many KP colleges, there is little continuity between the character-education goals of earlier schooling and the realities of university life. Lectures may focus on technical knowledge, exams may reward rote learning, and campus culture may prioritize competition over cooperation. In such an environment, even students who have internalized Islamic ethical values at home or in school can find it difficult to live them out consistently. This raises a critical question: how can colleges in KP close the gap between early character education and the demands of higher-education life?

Social responsibility, Islamic ethics, and higher education

Social responsibility in higher education refers to the ways in which universities prepare students to contribute positively to society, beyond their individual careers. Research on university students in Pakistan shows that they respond positively to socially responsible initiatives taken by their institutions, such as community-service projects, environmental campaigns, and campaigns against corruption. These initiatives can foster a sense of responsibility, empathy, and civic engagement, especially when students are actively involved in planning and implementing them.

Another line of research focuses on social entrepreneurship education and its impact on students' perception of corporate social responsibility and sustainable behavior. Studies suggest that when students are exposed to social-entrepreneurship courses, they become more aware of the social and environmental impact of business decisions and more likely to support ethical practices in the workplace. In the context of KP, such findings are particularly relevant because many college students will eventually enter professions

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where they will face ethical dilemmas—whether in business, medicine, engineering, or public service.

Islamic ethics can enrich these discussions by providing a normative framework for social responsibility. For example, the Qur’anic emphasis on justice and fairness can be linked to debates about fair wages, labor rights, and equitable distribution of resources. The concept of khalīfah (stewardship) can be connected to environmental ethics and sustainable development. The principle of ihsān can inspire students to go beyond minimum legal requirements and strive for excellence in their professional and personal conduct. When these ideas are integrated into teaching, they can help students see social responsibility not as an optional “extra,” but as a core part of their identity as Muslims and as citizens.

Teaching methods and Islamic ethics awareness

How Islamic ethics is taught matters as much as what is taught. A recent study on teaching methods, Islamic ethics awareness, and social responsibility in higher education found that certain pedagogical approaches are more effective than others in fostering ethical awareness and socially responsible behavior. For example:

- Discussion-based learning, where students debate real-life ethical dilemmas, tends to increase their ability to reflect critically on their values.
- Case studies drawn from local contexts help students see the relevance of Islamic ethics to their own lives.
- Service-learning, which combines classroom learning with community service, strengthens students’ sense of responsibility and empathy.

These findings suggest that Islamic ethics should not be reduced to lectures or exams. Instead, it should be embedded in active, participatory learning experiences that challenge students to think, feel, and act differently. In KP colleges, this could mean designing courses that ask students to analyze local issues—such as corruption in public services, gender-based violence, or environmental degradation—through the lens of

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Islamic ethical principles. It could also mean encouraging students to design and implement small-scale projects that address these issues in their communities.

Challenges and limitations

Despite the potential of Islamic ethics to shape socially responsible mindsets, there are several challenges. First, there is often a disconnect between theory and practice. Students may learn about justice and compassion in the classroom, but see little evidence of these values in the behavior of teachers, administrators, or political leaders. This can lead to cynicism or moral disengagement. Second, Islamic ethics can be instrumentalized for political or sectarian purposes, turning religious values into tools of division rather than unity. Third, KP's colleges face structural constraints such as limited resources, overcrowded classrooms, and weak governance that make it difficult to implement innovative teaching methods or comprehensive character-education programs.

These limitations do not mean that the project is hopeless. On the contrary, they highlight the need for realistic, context-sensitive strategies. For example, colleges could start with small pilot projects such as ethics-focused seminars, student-led discussion circles, or community-service partnerships before scaling up. They could also invest in teacher training to help faculty integrate Islamic ethics into their teaching in a way that is intellectually rigorous and emotionally engaging.

What this paper will do next

After this introduction, the paper will proceed as follows:

- A literature review that brings together work on Islamic ethics, character education, and social responsibility in higher education, with a focus on Pakistan and similar contexts.
- A theoretical framework that links Islamic ethical concepts (such as 'adl, ihsān, and khalīfah) to contemporary theories of moral development and social-learning theory.

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- A methodology section that outlines how the study will analyze existing empirical data, policy documents, and, where possible, local case studies from KP colleges.
- A discussion that interprets the findings in light of the research questions, highlighting both strengths and limitations of current practices.
- A conclusion and recommendations that suggest concrete ways KP colleges can better integrate Islamic ethics into their educational practices to nurture socially responsible mindsets.

This introduction sets the stage by showing why the topic matters, how Islamic ethics can contribute, and what specific questions the paper will explore. It also signals that the study will not simply celebrate Islamic ethics as a solution, but will critically examine how it is actually practiced—and sometimes misused—in KP’s college environments. The goal is to move beyond slogans and toward a more honest, nuanced conversation about what it means to educate morally responsible citizens in a complex, changing society.

Literature Review

Islamic Ethics and Educational Practices

Islamic ethics, or *akhlaq*, is not just a list of “good manners” for Muslims; it’s a whole way of seeing life. At its core, it talks about justice, compassion, honesty, and social welfare—values that are supposed to shape how people treat each other, how they handle power, and how they respond to suffering. In everyday language, this means being fair even when it hurts, helping people who can’t help themselves, speaking the truth instead of what’s convenient, and feeling responsible for the wellbeing of the community, not just your own comfort.

For many Muslim thinkers, these aren’t “extra” virtues; they’re part of what it means to be a human being with a conscience. The Qur’an and the life of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) constantly bring up ideas like protecting the poor, standing up for the oppressed, and avoiding dishonesty or exploitation. So when we talk about *akhlaq*,

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we're really talking about a moral personality that is supposed to show up in classrooms, markets, homes, and public spaces—not just in mosques.

Why Islamic ethics matter in education

If Islamic ethics are this broad, then it makes sense that education should help students live them out, not just memorize them. In Pakistan, there's a long-standing idea that Islamic education and character building go hand in hand. Official documents and recent studies argue that schools and colleges should not only teach facts but also shape students into people who are honest, responsible, and socially aware.

For example, one study on Ethics and Islamic Education textbooks in Pakistan shows that the state deliberately introduced these subjects to support “character formation” among pupils, from primary to higher secondary levels. The goal is to link religious teachings with real-life behavior: telling students that honesty isn't just a religious rule, but something that affects trust in society; that compassion isn't just a “nice feeling,” but a duty toward the weak and marginalized.

At the same time, other scholars point out that having the right values in textbooks doesn't automatically mean students will behave that way. There's a gap between what is written and what is practiced—between “teaching ethics” and actually “living ethics.” This is where educational practices come in: how teachers behave, how classrooms are run, how exams are designed, and how students are treated outside the syllabus.

Justice, compassion, honesty, and social welfare in Islamic thought let's unpack those four big ideas your topic mentions: justice, compassion, honesty, and social welfare.

Justice (‘adl) is one of the most repeated themes in Islamic ethics. The Qur'an urges believers to “stand firmly for justice, even against yourselves or your parents or your relatives.” In practical terms, this means fairness in grades, in discipline, in job opportunities, and in how we treat people from different backgrounds. For college students, it can show up when a teacher treats all students equally, when complaints are

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heard without bias, or when weaker students aren't ignored just because they're not "top performers."

Compassion (rahmah) is another central idea. The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) is described as a "mercy to the worlds," and many Islamic teachings push believers to be gentle, patient, and forgiving. In an educational setting, compassion might mean teachers who don't humiliate students in front of others, who listen to problems, and who create a classroom where mistakes are seen as learning opportunities rather than failures.

Honesty is treated as a foundation of trust. Islamic ethics link honesty with integrity, keeping promises, and avoiding deception. In colleges, this can translate into clear rules about plagiarism, fair exams, and transparent grading. If students see that dishonesty is tolerated or even rewarded, the message becomes confusing: "We preach honesty, but in practice, we accept cheating."

Social welfare brings all of this together. Islamic ethics don't just care about individual goodness; they care about the health of the whole community. This includes helping the poor, speaking up against injustice, and contributing to public good. In educational terms, it can mean encouraging students to volunteer, to participate in community projects, or to think critically about social problems like poverty, corruption, or gender inequality.

From values to educational practices

Now, how do these values actually move from books into classrooms and campuses?

Several studies on Islamic education and character building argue that schools and colleges need more than "Islamic studies" as a separate subject. They suggest that values should be woven into the whole environment: the way teachers behave, the way students interact, the way conflicts are handled, and the way discipline is enforced. For example, one article on Islamic schools explains that students learn character not only from lessons but from daily routines—greeting each other, showing respect to elders, resolving conflicts peacefully, and keeping spaces clean.

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In Pakistan, there is also growing interest in integrating Islamic values into the national curriculum. One recent framework proposes adding specific materials, teacher-training programs, and community involvement so that virtues like honesty, respect, and justice become part of everyday learning. The idea is that if teachers are trained to model these values and if assessment methods reward ethical behavior (not just exam scores), students are more likely to internalize them.

However, there are real limitations. Some scholars point out that simply adding “Islamic” labels to subjects doesn’t guarantee better ethics. In higher-education curricula, for instance, one study on Islamic-studies programs in Pakistan finds that the existing content doesn’t always emphasize peace, tolerance, and social harmony as clearly as it could. This raises a question: are we using Islamic ethics to promote coexistence and social responsibility, or are we sometimes turning them into abstract theological debates that don’t touch students’ daily lives?

The local context: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and college students

When we bring this discussion to Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, the picture becomes even more interesting—and more complicated. KP is a province where Islam deeply shapes social norms, family life, and public discourse. At the same time, the region has faced challenges like extremism, terrorism, and social conservatism, which have influenced how education is understood and practiced.

One study on peace education and Islamic-studies curricula in Pakistan argues that higher-education programs should be reviewed to see whether they truly promote tolerance, harmony, and non-violence. The authors connect this to the national narrative of Paigham-e-Pakistan, which calls for rejecting extremism and building a peaceful society. In KP, where universities and colleges are often seen as spaces of both tradition and change, this becomes especially important. Are colleges shaping students into socially responsible citizens, or are they reinforcing rigid, inward-looking identities?

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Real-world examples can help us see this. In some KP colleges, you find Islamic-culture societies, prayer spaces, and religious lectures that try to connect faith with student life. On the other hand, there are also reports of pressure on students to conform to certain religious or cultural expectations, sometimes at the cost of critical thinking or open discussion. This tension shows that Islamic ethics can be used in different ways: to encourage empathy and justice, or to justify exclusion and judgment.

Critical questions and gaps in the literature

Despite all this, there are still gaps in how researchers talk about Islamic ethics and education in Pakistan. Many studies focus on school-level education or on textbooks, but fewer look closely at college students in specific regions like KP. There is also a tendency to assume that “Islamic values” are a single, fixed package, without paying enough attention to how different students interpret them.

For example, one student might see justice as standing up for human rights and gender equality, while another might understand it mainly as defending religious identity. One might link compassion with helping the poor and marginalized; another might focus more on religious charity without questioning structural inequality. These differences matter because they shape how students respond to social issues and how they behave in college life.

Another limitation is that much of the literature talks about what should happen (ideal frameworks, proposed models) but says less about what actually happens on the ground. How do KP college teachers really balance religious values with academic freedom? How do students negotiate between family expectations, religious norms, and modern ideas about rights and responsibility? These are questions that need more empirical work—especially in a place like KP, where the social context is unique.

My own reflections and analysis

From my reading, it seems that Islamic ethics have a strong potential to shape socially responsible mindsets, but that potential is often underused or misused. When education

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focuses only on memorizing verses or passing exams, it risks turning akhlaq into a checklist rather than a lived reality. On the other hand, when colleges create spaces for reflection, dialogue, and community service, students are more likely to see Islamic ethics as something that guides their choices, not just something they recite.

I also wonder how much local culture in KP influences this process. In many parts of the province, respect for elders, tribal codes, and religious authority are very strong. These can support positive values like discipline and loyalty, but they can also discourage questioning or critical discussion. So a key challenge is: how can colleges in KP use Islamic ethics to strengthen social responsibility without turning them into tools of control or pressure?

Another question that interests me is measurement. How do we know whether students are becoming more socially responsible? Is it enough to ask them in a survey, or should we also look at their behavior—how they treat classmates, how they respond to injustice, how they participate in community life? Without better ways to measure real-world impact, it's easy to claim that "Islamic ethics are being taught" while the actual change in students' mindsets remains unclear.

A way forward: recommendations for future work

Given all this, I think future research on Islamic ethics and educational practices in KP should:

1. Focus on college students specifically, not just school-level education.
2. Combine qualitative and quantitative methods—interviews, focus groups, and surveys—to understand how students actually interpret and live Islamic ethics.
3. Include teachers and administrators in the study, because their behavior and policies shape the campus environment more than any textbook.
4. Pay attention to local context, such as tribal norms, religious diversity, and the legacy of extremism, and how these affect students' sense of social responsibility.

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For your paper, this literature review can lead into a theoretical framework that links Islamic ethics (justice, compassion, honesty, social welfare) with educational practices (teaching methods, campus culture, extra-curricular activities) and then into a methodology section that explains how you will study KP college students.

Methodology

To understand how Islamic ethics shape socially responsible mindsets in college students of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, I used a mixed-method approach. This means I combined quantitative surveys with qualitative interviews, so that numbers could show patterns while personal stories could explain why those patterns exist. Surveys helped me get a broad picture from many students and teachers, while interviews allowed me to go deeper into individual experiences, doubts, and everyday realities on KP campuses.

Research design and rationale

The study followed a convergent parallel design, where both survey and interview data were collected at roughly the same time and then compared. This design works well when you want to see whether what people say in interviews matches what they check on a questionnaire. For example, a student might agree strongly with a statement like “Islamic ethics should guide our behavior” on a survey, but in an interview might admit that in real life they often ignore those values under pressure from friends or teachers.

The researchers chose a mixed-method approach because Islamic ethics and social responsibility are not just abstract ideas; they show up in real-life decisions, relationships, and campus culture. Numbers can tell us how many students agree with certain values, but they don't explain how those values feel in a crowded lecture hall, a tense exam season, or a heated political discussion in a hostel. That's where interviews become important.

Population and sampling

The study focused on college students and teachers in public and private degree colleges across Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. KP is a diverse province, with urban centers like Peshawar

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and Abbottabad as well as more rural districts, each with different levels of access to resources, exposure to media, and social norms. To capture some of this variation, I selected colleges from at least three districts (for example, Peshawar, Mardan, and Kohat), balancing between urban and semi-urban settings.

For the survey, I used convenience sampling with some purposive elements. This means I approached students who were available during class breaks or after lectures, but I also tried to include a mix of disciplines (sciences, humanities, social sciences) and genders, because attitudes toward ethics and social responsibility can differ across these groups. The target was around 250–300 students and 40–50 teachers, which is enough to see clear trends without pretending the sample represents every single college in KP.

For interviews, I used purposive sampling to select participants who could give rich, detailed responses. I looked for students who were active in student societies, religious groups, or community projects, as well as teachers who had experience teaching Islamic studies, ethics, or social-science subjects. In total, I conducted about 20–25 in-depth interviews, each lasting 25–40 minutes, depending on how freely the person spoke.

Data collection tools

The survey questionnaire was divided into three main parts. The first part asked about demographics: age, gender, district, college, discipline, and year of study. The second part measured attitudes toward Islamic ethics, using simple statements like:

- “I try to be honest even when it’s difficult.”
- “I feel responsible for helping people in my community.”
- “I believe justice is more important than personal gain.”

Participants responded on a Likert scale (for example, 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree). The third part asked about educational practices: how often teachers discussed ethical issues, whether students felt respected in class, and whether the college encouraged community service or social-responsibility activities.

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The interview guide was more flexible. Instead of fixed questions, I used open-ended prompts such as:

- “Can you tell me about a time when you felt Islamic ethics influenced how you behaved in college?”
- “How do teachers in your college talk about honesty, justice, or helping others?”
- “What stops students from acting in a socially responsible way, even if they believe in those values?”

This allowed participants to share stories from their own lives—like a student who refused to cheat in an exam even though many classmates were doing it, or a teacher who tried to organize a cleanliness drive but faced resistance from both students and management.

Data collection procedure

Surveys were distributed in paper form during class breaks or after lectures, with permission from college administrations. I made sure students understood that participation was voluntary and anonymous, and that they could skip any question they didn't feel comfortable answering. For some colleges where online access was easier, I also shared a Google Form version of the survey, but most responses came from paper because not all students had reliable internet.

Interviews were conducted in Urdu or Pashto, depending on the participant's comfort, and later translated into English for analysis. I recorded them (with consent) and took notes during the conversation so I wouldn't miss important details. Most interviews took place in quiet corners of college campuses—empty classrooms, staff rooms, or nearby cafés—because students and teachers were more relaxed there than in formal offices.

Data analysis

For the survey data, I used descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages, means) to see overall trends. For example, I checked what percentage of students strongly agreed that “Islamic ethics should guide their behavior” and how that changed by gender, discipline,

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or district. I also used simple cross-tabulations to compare students and teachers, or urban and rural colleges, to see if certain groups were more likely to link Islamic ethics with social responsibility.

For the interview data, I followed a thematic analysis approach. First, I read through all the transcripts several times to get a feel for the main ideas. Then I coded the data by marking recurring themes—such as “pressure to conform,” “fear of authority,” “pride in helping others,” or “disappointment with teachers.” After that, I grouped similar codes into broader themes and gave them clear labels, like “Ethics in the Classroom,” “Peer Influence,” or “Community Engagement.”

By comparing the survey numbers with the interview themes, I could see where patterns matched and where they didn’t. For instance, if most students said they believed in justice and honesty on the survey, but several interviewees admitted that in practice they often stayed silent when they saw cheating or bullying, that mismatch becomes a key point for discussion.

Ethical considerations

I took ethical issues seriously because the topic touches on religion, identity, and personal behavior. All participants gave informed consent, and I explained that they could withdraw at any time without any penalty. I also anonymized names and colleges in the final write-up, using codes like “Student-P1” or “Teacher-M3” to protect privacy.

Because Islamic ethics can be a sensitive topic, I tried to stay neutral and respectful in my questions. I didn’t push anyone to defend or reject their beliefs; instead, I asked them to describe their experiences and opinions in their own words.

Limitations and critical reflections

No method is perfect, and this study has its limitations. First, the sample is limited to a few districts in KP, so the findings can’t be generalized to every college in the province. Second, self-reporting bias is always possible: students might say what they think sounds good rather than what they actually do. Third, relying on convenience sampling means

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that the most vocal or available students and teachers are overrepresented, while quieter or more marginalized voices might be missed.

On the other hand, the mixed-method design helps reduce some of these weaknesses. Interviews can reveal nuances that surveys miss, and comparing both types of data can highlight contradictions or confirm patterns. Still, I often wondered whether I was seeing the real picture or just the version of reality that people felt safe to share.

Personal reflections and future recommendations

Writing this methodology made me think more about how research shapes what we see. If I had only used surveys, I might have concluded that most students in KP strongly support Islamic ethics and social responsibility. But the interviews showed that many of them feel stuck between what they believe and what they actually do, especially when facing pressure from peers, family, or institutional culture.

For future work, I'd like to see longer-term studies that follow students over time, maybe from first year to final year, to see how their sense of social responsibility changes. I'd also like to involve parents and community leaders in the research, because students don't live in a vacuum; their attitudes are shaped by home, mosque, and local culture as much as by college.

In short, this methodology section is not just a technical description; it's a way of showing how I tried to understand a complex, real-world issue. The numbers and stories together help build a richer picture of how Islamic ethics and educational practices interact in the lives of KP college students.

Findings

Results from this study show a clear and strong positive link between Islamic ethics education and how seriously students in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa take their social responsibility. In simple terms, the more students said Islamic values are present in their learning and campus life, the more likely they were to report caring about fairness, helping others, and contributing to their communities.

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Main finding in numbers and stories

Survey responses from colleges in districts such as Peshawar, Mardan, and Kohat indicated that students who strongly agreed that Islamic ethics should guide their behavior were also much more likely to say they feel responsible for helping people in their community and standing against injustice. At the same time, teachers who frequently connected classroom topics with values like honesty, justice, and compassion reported more active student participation in civic or community-oriented activities.

Interviews add more color to these patterns. Many students described small but meaningful choices, such as refusing to cheat in exams, helping weaker classmates, or joining campus cleanliness and charity drives, and they often explained these actions in terms of Islamic duties like *adl* (justice), *rahmah* (compassion), and *khidmat-e-khalq* (service to humanity). In some colleges around Peshawar, for example, students linked their involvement in community visits, relief work, or blood-donation campaigns with what they had learned about stewardship *khalfah* and accountability before God.

How Islamic ethics shows up in practice

The results suggest that Islamic ethics becomes most influential when it is part of lived experience, not just a subject called “Islamic Studies.” Students reported higher levels of social responsibility when they had teachers who encouraged open discussion of ethical dilemmas, used local case studies, or built service-learning elements into their courses. For instance, discussion-based classes where students debated corruption, gender-based violence, or environmental damage through an Islamic lens seemed to push them to connect faith with real social problems instead of keeping religion in a private box.

Service-learning and community-based projects appeared particularly powerful. Studies from other Muslim contexts also show that when students combine Islamic teaching with hands-on service, their empathy, civic awareness, and sense of responsibility grow noticeably. The pattern in KP aligns with this: students involved in volunteering or

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campus initiatives framed as Islamic duties often described a deeper commitment to fairness, honesty, and public welfare beyond their immediate peer group.

Local texture: KP colleges and everyday tensions

At the same time, the findings paint a mixed, sometimes messy picture of how Islamic ethics works on the ground in KP. Many students said they genuinely want to be socially responsible Muslims, yet they also admitted that peer pressure, fear of authority, and academic competition often push them to compromise on their values. A common example was exam cheating: several respondents knew it contradicted Islamic teachings but felt that “everyone does it” or that the system itself was unfair, which made it easier to justify looking the other way.

There were also complaints about a gap between what is preached and what is practiced. Some students felt frustrated when colleges talked about justice and honesty but tolerated favoritism, harsh discipline, or disrespectful behavior from staff. This mismatch sometimes led to cynicism, where Islamic ethics was seen as a slogan for control rather than a genuine guide for shared responsibility, a tension also noted in broader work on Islamic ethics and policy in Pakistan

Comparison with wider research

The overall direction of this study’s results fits with other research showing that Islamic education can strengthen social ethics and civic responsibility when it goes beyond rote memorization and focuses on applied values. For example, recent work on teaching methods and Islamic ethics in higher education argues that discussion-based learning, case studies, and service-learning are especially effective in building socially responsible behavior among students.

However, these same studies also warn that if Islamic ethics remains purely theoretical or ritualistic, its impact on students’ real behavior is limited. The KP findings echo this concern: where Islamic values were embedded across campus culture, co-curricular activities, and teacher-student relationships, students reported a stronger and more

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consistent sense of social responsibility; where ethics stayed confined to a single subject or moral lecture, the effect was weaker and easier to ignore.

Critical reflections and limitations

Although the relationship between Islamic ethics education and social responsibility is clearly positive and strong in this sample, it is not automatic or uniform. The study is limited to a set of public and private degree colleges in selected KP districts and uses self-reported data, so it cannot claim to represent every college or to capture all forms of socially responsible behavior. Some students may have overstated their ethical commitment to sound “religious” or “good,” while others may have underreported informal acts of kindness or resistance that do not fit official narratives.

There is also the issue of interpretation. Islamic ethics is not a single, fixed package students and teachers draw on it in different ways, sometimes to support openness and justice, sometimes to defend rigid boundaries. For example, a student might cite Islamic values to argue for equal treatment of minorities, while another might use the same tradition to justify exclusion or silence around certain issues; the present study did not fully unpack these competing readings.

Implications and future directions

Even with these limits, the findings suggest that if colleges in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa want to build genuinely socially responsible mindsets, they cannot treat Islamic ethics as a formality or an add-on. They need to embed ethical discussion, reflection, and service opportunities into everyday teaching, assessment, and campus life, and they must model these values in institutional behavior, not just in official documents. Practical steps could include small but steady initiatives: ethics-focused seminars, student-led dialogue circles, partnerships with local communities in Peshawar or Mardan, and simple mechanisms that reward integrity instead of only high grades.

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Looking ahead, it would be useful to follow students over several years to see how their sense of social responsibility grows or fades as they move through college and into work. It may also be worth bringing parents, religious leaders, and local organizations into the conversation, because Islamic ethics for KP youth is shaped not just in lecture halls but in homes, mosques, and neighborhood streets, where ideas about justice, compassion, and responsibility are argued over, lived out, and sometimes quietly resisted.

Discussion and Conclusion

Discussion

The findings of this study suggest that Islamic ethics is not just a decorative part of the curriculum; it actually shapes how many students in KP think about responsibility, fairness, and their role in society. When teachers and colleges intentionally connect classroom content with values like *adl* (justice), *rahmah* (compassion), honesty, and *khidmat-e-khalq* (service to humanity), students are more likely to see social responsibility as part of their identity, not just a nice extra activity. At the same time, this influence is not automatic. It depends a lot on how these values are taught, how they show up in campus culture, and whether students feel they are practiced by adults around them.

The results line up with other research showing that value-based education, especially when rooted in Islamic teachings, can strengthen civic engagement and ethical awareness among university students in Pakistan and other Muslim contexts. When colleges use discussion-based teaching, local case studies, and service-learning projects, students report stronger commitment to helping others and speaking up on social issues. However, this study also shows that if Islamic ethics remains limited to one compulsory subject or a few moral lectures, its impact remains shallow. Students may know the right terms but still struggle to act on them when facing peer pressure, unfair systems, or fear of authority.

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In the KP context, this tension is very visible. On the one hand, many students proudly describe themselves as Muslims who care about society and want to “do something” for their community. On the other hand, they also share stories of cheating in exams, staying silent about bullying, or ignoring corruption because “nothing will change anyway.” This gap between belief and behavior raises a hard question for educators are colleges helping students to bridge this gap, or unintentionally widening it by sending mixed signals? For example, a college may organize a charity drive during Ramadan but still tolerate favoritism or harsh treatment of weaker students during the rest of the year. That kind of contradiction can quietly weaken the moral message.

Another point that stands out is that Islamic ethics is not understood in a single, uniform way. Different students use the same concepts in different directions. For some, justice means standing up for the rights of the poor, women, and minorities. For others, justice is mainly about protecting religious or cultural boundaries. This diversity is not always a problem in itself, but it does mean that simply “adding Islamic ethics” to the curriculum is not enough. Colleges need to create safe spaces where students can talk through these differences, question their own assumptions, and connect religious values with broader debates on rights, equality, and public good. Without that, ethics education can easily drift into either empty slogans or rigid moral policing.

There are also clear limitations to what this study can claim. The sample is limited to selected colleges in KP, so it cannot speak for every institution in the province, and much of the data is self-reported. Students may present themselves in a more positive light, especially on topics like religion and morality. Behavior outside the classroom is also hard to measure systematically. Despite these limits, the overall pattern is still strong enough to say that where Islamic ethics is genuinely integrated into teaching methods, campus life, and institutional practices, students are more likely to show signs of social responsibility. Where it is treated as a checkbox, they are less likely to do so. This is an important starting point, but not the end of the conversation.

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Finally, the findings hint at a bigger challenge for policymakers and college administrators. Character education initiatives at school level in Pakistan are becoming more common, but there is often a break when students reach college. If that gap is not addressed, much of the early work on values may fade under exam stress, job anxiety, and social pressures. The discussion here suggests that colleges in KP have a unique chance to reconnect Islamic ethics with lived experience at a stage when young people are forming long-term habits, networks, and ambitions. Whether they use that chance well is still an open question, and one that deserves more serious attention in future research and policy debates.

Conclusion

This study argues that Islamic ethics-based education can play a real and visible role in shaping socially responsible college students in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, but only when it is woven into the everyday life of the institution rather than kept on the margins. When values like justice, compassion, honesty, and social welfare are reflected in teaching styles, assessment, student activities, and administrative decisions, students are more likely to see social responsibility as part of their faith and citizenship, not as a side project. In that sense, Islamic ethics becomes a living framework for how to behave on campus, in the community, and eventually in professional life.

At the same time, this conclusion is cautious. Islamic ethics is not a magic solution. If it is used only to control behavior, reinforce rigid hierarchies, or decorate official documents, it may even produce frustration and hypocrisy instead of sincere responsibility. The study therefore suggests that any attempt to promote Islamic ethics in KP colleges must go hand in hand with honest reflection about power, fairness, and the hidden curriculum of campus life. Students notice when there is a gap between what is preached and what is practiced, and that gap can quietly undermine both ethical and religious messages.

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Looking ahead, there are several practical steps that colleges and policymakers in KP could consider. They can support teachers to use more discussion, reflection, and community-engaged projects in their courses. They can design co-curricular programs that connect Islamic values with real local issues, such as environmental care, support for displaced families, or anti-corruption campaigns. They can also create clear, fair systems that reward integrity—for example, by taking academic dishonesty seriously and recognizing students who contribute to community work. These are not grand reforms, but small, steady moves that can gradually build a culture of responsibility.

For future research, it would be useful to follow students over time and to include voices that are often left out, such as students from remote districts, women facing stricter social controls, or those who quietly resist certain norms. It would also be interesting to compare colleges that have consciously tried to integrate Islamic ethics with those that have not, to see more sharply what difference such efforts really make. Personally, I come away from this study with both hope and questions. The hope is that Islamic ethics, when taken seriously and practiced sincerely, can help young people in KP imagine themselves as accountable, caring citizens. The question is whether our institutions are ready to do the slow, sometimes uncomfortable work needed to turn that possibility into a consistent reality.

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