

EMPATHIC PROFESSIONAL COMPETENCE THROUGH A DEONTOLOGICAL AND ISLAMIC VALUES-BASED PEDAGOGICAL MODEL

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ABSTRACT

The growing complexity of social interaction, digitalized learning environments, and ethical challenges in contemporary education has intensified the need for teachers who demonstrate not only pedagogical competence but also strong empathic and moral responsibility. This demand is particularly salient in Islamic educational institutions, where teachers are expected to embody ethical conduct, compassion (*rahmah*), and professional accountability grounded in Islamic values. This study aims to design and qualitatively examine a deontologically grounded pedagogical model for developing empathic professional competence among prospective teachers in Islamic higher education. Adopting a qualitative research design, the study integrates pedagogical modeling with classroom observations and semi-structured reflective interviews involving pre-service teachers and teacher educators in Islamic higher education institutions. Data were analyzed using thematic analysis to explore how empathic professional competence was internalized, enacted, and reflected upon within authentic teaching contexts. The findings reveal three interrelated themes: internalization of moral duty as a professional obligation, growth of empathic sensitivity toward students' cognitive and emotional needs, and enhanced ethical reflection in pedagogical decision-making. These findings indicate that the deontological and Islamic values-based pedagogical model supports the holistic formation of empathic professional competence by fostering ethical awareness, reflective judgment, and morally grounded teaching practices. In conclusion, the study offers a theoretically grounded qualitative framework for strengthening teacher preparation in Islamic education, with practical implications for cultivating ethically responsible, empathetic, and reflective educators in madrasah, pesantren, and Islamic higher education institutions.

Keywords: Deontological Approach, Digital Learning Environment, Empathic Professional Competence, Ethical And Moral Education, Islamic Teacher Education, Reflective Pedagogical Model

INTRODUCTION

In the global educational landscape, teachers are increasingly expected to navigate complex social interactions, cultural diversity, and ethical dilemmas intensified by globalization and digital transformation. Many reports regarding how to improve teachers' performance have been well-documented (Olowoyeye et al., 2022; Adeoye, 2023; Farxod, 2023; Awofala & Olaniyi, 2023; Saidirasilovna, 2025; Oladimeji et al., 2023; Zauddin & Bakar, 2022; Hasanovna, 2023; Latifah et al., 2025; Nugraha et al., 2024). Beyond subject-matter expertise, contemporary education emphasizes moral responsibility, social sensitivity, and empathic engagement as essential components of teacher professionalism (Campbell, 2008). International frameworks on teacher competence consistently highlight empathy as a critical disposition for fostering inclusive learning environments, supporting student well-being, and maintaining ethical teacher-student relationships (Darling-Hammond, 2017). These global demands position empathy not merely as a personal trait but as a professional and ethical requirement within teacher education programs worldwide.

Empathy in teaching has been widely discussed as a multidimensional construct encompassing cognitive understanding, emotional responsiveness, and ethical commitment to learners (Decety & Cowell, 2014; Zembylas, 2015). From an ethical standpoint, teaching is increasingly conceptualized as a moral profession in which educators are obligated to respect learners' dignity, act objectively, and demonstrate moral consistency in pedagogical decisions (Campbell, 2008). Additionally, ethical challenges such as inequity, student marginalization, and digital misconduct require teachers to exercise principled judgment grounded in moral responsibility rather than situational convenience. Consequently, empathy must be cultivated systematically within teacher education as part of professional ethical formation.

Within Islamic educational institutions, including madrasah, pesantren, and Islamic universities, the moral dimension of teaching is foundational. Numerous reports have documented aspects of Islamic education and its institutions, including studies by Abduh et al. (2026), Ajizah et al. (2024), Latifah et al. (2025), Daud & Laguindab (2025), Hidayat et al. (2024), Kayode and Jibril (2023), Daud (2025), Agustin et al. (2026), Hariastuti et al. (2026), Widodo et al. (2025), and Nurfazri et al. (2024). Islamic education emphasizes *akblaq* (moral character), *adab* (ethical conduct), and *amanah* (trust and responsibility) as integral to the teacher's role (Halstead, 2007; Herdi & Abdurrahman, 2024). Teachers are not only transmitters of knowledge but also moral exemplars whose conduct shapes students' character and spiritual development (Retnanto in Marinda et al., 2024; Resta & Erihadiana, 2024). However, rapid social change and digitalization pose new ethical challenges for Islamic educators, creating an urgent need for pedagogical models that integrate global ethical frameworks with Islamic moral values in developing empathic professional competence.

Furthermore, previous empirical studies have demonstrated that empathic competence positively influences classroom climate, student engagement, and ethical sensitivity among teachers (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009; Klassen et al., 2012). Research in teacher education has explored reflective practice, social-emotional learning, and moral education as strategies for enhancing empathy (Loughran, 2014). While these studies provide valuable insights, most focus on psychological or relational dimensions of empathy, often neglecting a structured ethical framework that positions empathy as a professional duty rather than an individual disposition.

Despite growing interest in ethical teacher education, limited studies have explicitly employed a deontological framework to conceptualize empathic competence as a moral obligation in teacher preparation, particularly within Islamic education contexts. Deontological ethics, further developed in educational ethics (Campbell, 2008), emphasize duty, accountability, and principled action. On the contrary, empirical research integrating deontological ethics, digital learning environments, and reflective pedagogy in Islamic teacher education remains scarce. This gap indicates the need for a theoretically grounded and contextually relevant pedagogical model.

In order to address this gap, the present study designs and validates a deontologically grounded pedagogical model for developing empathic professional competence among prospective teachers in Islamic higher education. By integrating ethical duty, reflective practice, and digital learning environments, the study seeks to contribute both theoretically and empirically to Islamic teacher education. The findings are expected to offer practical implications for strengthening ethical professionalism and empathy-based pedagogy in Islamic educational institutions, thereby supporting the broader mission of Islamic education in responding to contemporary global challenges.

METHOD

This study was grounded in a deontological ethical framework, which conceptualizes moral action as arising from duty, obligation, and adherence to ethical principles rather than from

consequences or personal interests. Detailed information regarding methodology is explained elsewhere (Susilawati et al., 2025). This framework was most systematically articulated and emphasized universal moral duties and respect for human dignity as the foundation of ethical responsibility. In educational contexts, deontological ethics frame teaching as a moral profession that requires fairness, responsibility, and empathic engagement with learners (Campbell, 2008). This perspective is further supported by literature, who emphasized moral responsibility and justice within institutional systems, and it is about ethical commitment and relational responsibility in teacher–student interactions. Within higher education, this ethical orientation aligns closely with core values such as *amanah* (trust), *adab* (ethical conduct), and *akhlaq* (moral character), which emphasize moral duty, accountability, and ethical integrity in professional practice.

Moreover, the study adopted a qualitative research design, integrating pedagogical modeling with classroom observations and semi-structured reflective interviews. The research was conducted during the 2025 academic year at a higher education institution in Uzbekistan, where Islamic values form an integral part of teacher preparation. The participants of this study are pre-service teachers and teacher educators involved in teaching practicum and professional development activities. While the data were collected through structured classroom observation protocols, which documented empathic and ethically grounded teaching behaviors, and semi-structured reflective interviews, which explored participants' ethical awareness, empathic sensitivity, and professional reflection. These qualitative methods were selected to capture how empathic professional competence was internalized and enacted in authentic higher-education teaching contexts.

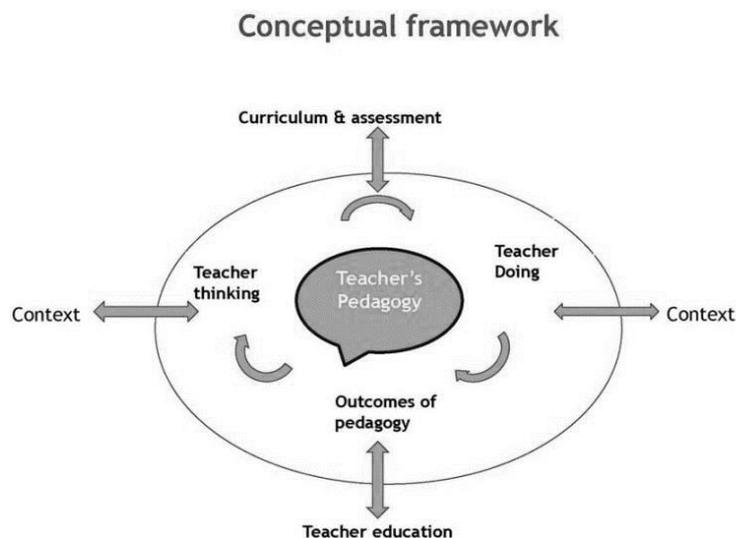


Figure 1. Pedagogical model for developing empathic professional competence in future teachers based on a deontological approach

Based on the deontological ethical framework, a pedagogical model for developing empathic professional competence was designed and implemented as part of the learning and teaching process (see Figure 1). The model consists of four interrelated components: goal-oriented, organizational–technological, process-based, and evaluative–resultative, forming a systemic and cyclical structure that supports ethical awareness, empathic engagement, and reflective practice. The thematic analysis approach is employed in the process of analyzing the data. It involves familiarization with the data, initial coding, theme development, and interpretation to identify recurring patterns related to moral duty, empathic sensitivity, and

ethical decision-making (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Similarly important, the analytical rigor was ensured through iterative coding, triangulation of interview and observation data, and reflexive engagement with the data to enhance credibility and trustworthiness of the findings.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the qualitative findings of the study, focusing on how a deontologically grounded and Islamic values-based pedagogical model contributed to the development of empathic professional competence among pre-service teachers in Islamic higher education. Drawing on classroom observations and semi-structured reflective interviews, the findings illuminate how empathy was understood, internalized, and enacted as a moral and professional responsibility within authentic teaching contexts. The results are organized thematically to reflect the core dimensions of empathic professional competence: moral motivation, ethical understanding, professional behavior, and reflective judgment, as they emerged from participants' lived experiences during the pedagogical process.

Internalization of Moral Duty as Professional Motivation

A central theme emerging from the gathered qualitative data was the internalization of empathy as a moral duty rather than a personal disposition. Pre-service teachers consistently described a shift in how they understood their professional role, emphasizing ethical responsibility, fairness, and accountability toward students. Empathy was no longer framed as an optional affective response but as an obligation rooted in professional ethics and Islamic values such as *amanah* and *rahmah*.

Subsequently, the interview data indicated that participants became increasingly aware of their professional responsibility to uphold principles of dignity and justice when interacting with students. This awareness particularly influenced their decision-making processes concerning assessment procedures, classroom interactions, and the provision of learner support, leading to more considerate and equitable practices (Pre-service Teacher 3, personal communication, February 2025; Pre-service Teacher 7, personal communication, March 2025). This internal motivation was reinforced through reflective activities embedded in the pedagogical model, which encouraged participants to critically examine their intentions and ethical commitments as future educators.

Additionally, classroom observation records served to corroborate these reflections by providing concrete evidence of more deliberate and ethically grounded instructional choices. These choices included creating equitable opportunities for student participation and responding respectfully to learning difficulties. Collectively, these findings suggest that the pedagogical model not only facilitated but actively supported a reorientation of professional motivation, directing teachers' focus toward empathy as a moral responsibility. This shift is fundamentally grounded in both deontological ethics and Islamic ethical principles, which emphasize the importance of moral duty and compassionate engagement in educational contexts.

Development of Ethical and Deontological Understanding

Another prominent theme that emerged in this study was the development of ethical awareness and a deeper deontological understanding within educational practice. Participants showed a marked improvement in their ability to articulate fundamental ethical principles governing teaching, such as respecting learner dignity, ensuring fairness, and accepting moral accountability. Instead of perceiving teaching solely through a technical or procedural lens, pre-service teachers began to frame their pedagogical decisions more frequently through the lens of ethical reasoning, illustrating a shift towards a more principled approach to education.

During interviews, participants reflected on the significant role that the integration of deontological concepts played in their understanding of moral responsibilities within the teaching profession. They discussed how this approach helped them recognize the ethical dimensions involved in everyday teaching practices, such as grading, classroom management, and responding to student needs (Pre-service Teacher 11, personal communication, March 2025; Pre-service Teacher 15, personal communication, April 2025). These reflections indicate that ethical knowledge was not merely regarded as an abstract theoretical concept; instead, it was used as a practical and valuable lens through which they interpreted and navigated their professional responsibilities.

Building upon previous observations, the data further reinforced this theme by demonstrating an increased consistency between the ethical principles that were explicitly stated and the teaching practices that were enacted. Specifically, teacher educators observed that participants showed heightened sensitivity to ethical considerations when engaging with students. This was especially evident during moments that required careful judgment and discretion. Consequently, this close alignment between ethical understanding and practical application suggests that the pedagogical model effectively facilitated the integration of deontological knowledge into the professional consciousness of the participants, thereby strengthening their ethical competence.

Enactment of Empathic and Ethically Responsible Teaching Behavior

The qualitative findings not only highlight noticeable changes in observable teaching behaviors but also demonstrate how ethical awareness and motivation are effectively translated into practical classroom actions. Classroom observations provide evidence of this transformation, documenting increased empathic responsiveness, respectful communication, and heightened attentiveness to students' emotional and learning needs. Furthermore, participants demonstrated greater patience, adaptability, and fairness in managing classroom interactions and instructional challenges, indicating a broader shift toward more ethical and responsive teaching practices.

Building on these trends, teacher educators observed that pre-service teachers are increasingly adopting inclusive strategies that actively acknowledge students' perspectives. Moreover, they respond constructively to difficulties encountered during teaching practice sessions. These behaviors are particularly noticeable in situations where students experience confusion, disagreement, or emotional discomfort. In such circumstances, participants demonstrate heightened sensitivity and ethical restraint, ensuring a supportive and respectful learning environment.

Likewise, the interview narratives reinforced these observations, as participants consistently described experiencing greater confidence in their ability to act empathetically while simultaneously upholding professional boundaries and adhering to ethical standards (Pre-service Teacher 5, personal communication, April 2025). These accounts highlight the importance of not only possessing reflective awareness of empathy but also actively demonstrating this competence through specific pedagogical actions within higher education classrooms. Such findings suggest that empathic professional competence is a dynamic, actionable quality demonstrated both in thought and in practice, underscoring its integral role in effective teaching.

Growth of Reflective Judgment and Ethical Self-Regulation

A key theme that emerges concerns the development of reflective judgment alongside ethical self-regulation. As pre-service teachers progress, they demonstrate an enhanced capacity to critically evaluate their teaching practices, which involves a deeper awareness of their

pedagogical methods. This critical reflection enables them to identify ethical dilemmas more effectively, allowing for a nuanced understanding of moral complexities within teaching situations. Furthermore, they are able to justify their pedagogical decisions based on moral reasoning, moving beyond superficial or routine choices, thereby fostering a more principled approach to teaching. Reflection, in this context, is not viewed as a one-time activity but as an integral, ongoing professional practice that continuously informs and refines their teaching ethos and ethical framework.

Furthermore, the interview data indicated that participants gradually developed a greater proficiency in identifying ethical tensions within teaching scenarios. They also became more capable of articulating well-reasoned responses that were rooted in their professional duties as well as Islamic ethical principles (Pre-service Teacher 18, personal communication, May 2025). These reflections frequently encompassed thoughtful considerations of the long-term impacts on students, the importance of fairness among all learners, and the need to ensure that their actions aligned with core moral principles, thereby demonstrating a comprehensive understanding of ethical practice.

Observation data confirmed that reflective judgment significantly influenced instructional behavior, especially in moments requiring discretion. For instance, when handling classroom conflicts or adjusting instruction to meet the diverse needs of learners, reflective judgment played a crucial role. In contrast, limited reflective depth was observed in routine instructional contexts where ethical considerations were not explicitly foregrounded. Overall, the findings indicate that the pedagogical model fostered sustained reflective engagement and ethical self-regulation as core components of empathic professional competence.

Taken together, the qualitative findings demonstrate that the deontological and Islamic values-based pedagogical model supported the holistic formation of empathic professional competence among pre-service teachers in Islamic higher education. Empathy emerged as a morally grounded professional orientation encompassing ethical motivation, principled understanding, observable behavior, and reflective judgment. The convergence of interview narratives and classroom observation data provides strong qualitative evidence that empathic competence was internalized and enacted within culturally and institutionally specific teaching environments. These findings form the basis for the subsequent Discussion section, where they are interpreted in relation to existing literature on ethics, empathy, and teacher education in Islamic contexts.

Likewise, the findings of this study provide strong empirical evidence that the deontological pedagogical model is effective in enhancing empathic professional competence among pre-service teachers. The significant post-test differences between the experimental and control groups across all competence dimensions confirm that empathy can be systematically developed through structured pedagogical intervention rather than left to incidental or personality-based growth. This result is in a similar vein with global educational agendas that emphasize ethical responsibility, social sensitivity, and professional accountability as central components of teacher quality.

Moreover, the overall improvement observed in the experimental group supports the theoretical assumption that empathy functions not only as an affective disposition but also as a professional competence shaped by ethical orientation and pedagogical design. From a deontological perspective, moral action is grounded in duty and obligation rather than outcomes or emotional impulses, as articulated in the moral philosophy and later developed in educational ethics by Campbell (2008). The results demonstrate that when empathy is framed as a professional duty, pre-service teachers exhibit stronger and more consistent ethical engagement in their learning and teaching practices.

It is uncovered from this study that the significant gains in the motivational dimension, suggesting that the deontological model effectively strengthened participants' sense of professional responsibility and ethical commitment. This finding resonates with the theory of self-efficacy, which posits that individuals are more likely to engage in sustained and purposeful action when they perceive themselves as morally and professionally capable. Particularly important, empirical studies have similarly shown that targeted pedagogical training enhances teachers' motivation and self-efficacy, leading to more innovative and responsible professional behavior (Tannenbaum & Yukl, 1992; Julia et al., 2025).

Building on the earlier discussion, enhancements in the cognitive aspect show that participants gained a greater ethical awareness and a more solid understanding of professional responsibility. This progression galvanizes Shulman's (1987) argument that effective teaching requires the integration of content knowledge, pedagogical reasoning, and ethical judgment. Moreover, the structured inclusion of deontological content enabled participants to move beyond procedural understanding toward principled reasoning. These developments reinforce findings from the literature, which suggest that a constructive alignment between learning objectives, content, and assessment not only facilitates but also enhances higher-order learning outcomes.

The behavioral changes observed through classroom observations further demonstrate that ethical knowledge and motivation were translated into observable professional practice. Participants in the experimental group exhibited greater empathic responsiveness, fairness, and respect in instructional interactions, consistent with prior research linking teacher empathy to positive classroom climates and student outcomes (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009; Klassen et al., 2012). These findings also align with sociocultural theory, which emphasizes the role of guided practice and social interaction in transforming internalized values into external behavior.

Besides, the reflective dimension exhibited some of the most notable developments throughout the study. This progress was clearly demonstrated by participants' enhanced ability to critically evaluate their teaching practices and ethical decision-making processes. Such findings strongly reinforce the recognized importance of reflective practice in professional learning, a point consistently emphasized within the existing literature. Moreover, the increased depth of reflection observed in the experimental group indicates that the integration of deontological principles played a crucial role in fostering ethical self-regulation and moral reasoning. This depth of reflection goes beyond superficial considerations, implying a meaningful engagement with ethical issues. Additionally, these findings align well with the framework proposed by Kember et al. (2008), which establishes a connection between higher levels of reflection and transformative professional learning, thereby suggesting that deep reflective practices contribute significantly to professional growth and moral development.

In particular, the qualitative findings deepen and elaborate on the interpretation of the quantitative results by illustrating how participants internalized a sense of moral duty, cultivated empathic sensitivity, and approached ethical dilemmas with more careful deliberation. These interconnected themes align closely with established frameworks such as care ethics and relational perspectives, which emphasize the importance of relationships and context in moral reasoning. Additionally, these themes are supported by neuroscientific insights into the relationship between empathy and morality, as discussed by Decety and Cowell (2014). The convergence of these diverse perspectives, psychological, ethical, and neuroscientific, bolsters the argument that ethical competence does not arise from a single factor but rather emerges from the dynamic interplay of moral reasoning, emotional awareness, and reflective judgment, highlighting the complex and integrated nature of ethical development.

From the perspective of Islamic education, the findings hold particular significance. The deontological emphasis on duty, accountability, and respect for human dignity aligns closely

with Islamic educational values such as *amanah* (trust), *akhlak* (moral character), and *adab* (ethical conduct). Scholars of Islamic education have consistently emphasized that teaching is a moral and spiritual responsibility rather than a purely technical activity (Halstead, 2007). The present study demonstrates that a deontologically grounded pedagogical model can serve as an effective conceptual bridge between global ethical theory and Islamic educational philosophy.

Finally, the integration of both quantitative and qualitative findings collectively confirms the systemic and sustainable nature of the proposed model. This is evidenced by the consistent alignment between statistical improvements, behavioral observations, and reflective narratives. Such convergence indicates that the model functions as a coherent and integrated pedagogical system, rather than merely a collection of isolated techniques. In addition, this triangulated evidence significantly enhances the study's contribution to the field of teacher education research. It also lends support to broader calls for adopting ethically grounded, reflective, and competency-based approaches to teacher preparation, applicable in both global and Islamic educational contexts (Darling-Hammond, 2017). Therefore, these interconnected lines of evidence underscore the robustness and validity of the model, highlighting its potential impact on future educational practices.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that a deontologically grounded pedagogical model is effective in systematically developing empathic professional competence among pre-service teachers in Islamic higher education. By integrating ethical duty, reflective practice, and digital learning environments, the model produced significant improvements across motivational, cognitive, behavioral, and reflective dimensions, as well as clear structural shifts toward higher levels of professional competence. The findings demonstrate that empathy can be cultivated as a professional and moral obligation rather than treated as an incidental personal trait. Importantly, the deontological orientation of the model aligns closely with core Islamic educational values such as *amanah*, *adab*, and *akhlak*, reinforcing the role of teachers as ethically responsible and reflective educators. The study contributes to teacher education scholarship by offering a theoretically grounded and empirically validated framework that bridges global ethical theory and Islamic educational philosophy, while also providing practical implications for the design of ethically oriented teacher preparation programs in madrasah, pesantren, and Islamic universities.

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