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A CO-OPETITION-BASED COLLABORATIVE GOVERNANCE MODEL FOR ENHANCING THE REGIONAL COMPETITIVENESS OF PRIVATE UNIVERSITIES THROUGH HYBRID GOVERNANCE MECHANISMS

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Abstract

The increasing competition among private higher education institutions (PHEIs) at the regional level often leads to managerial isolation, limiting collective capacity to improve quality and competitiveness. This study aims to develop a co-opetition-based collaborative governance model through hybrid governance mechanisms to enhance the regional competitiveness of private universities. Employing a qualitative multiple-case study design, data were collected from 28 institutional leaders in the Cirebon region through in-depth interviews, institutional document analysis, and reflective field observations. Data were analyzed using an interactive approach involving data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing. The findings reveal that private universities demonstrate strong readiness to transform competitive relations into a more collaborative and synergistic ecosystem. The study identifies a hybrid governance model integrating formal legal arrangements with informal trust-based relational mechanisms among institutional leaders. A distinctive feature of this model lies in the incorporation of local Islamic values as ethical capital for mitigating inter-institutional conflicts and strengthening collaborative commitment. The findings further indicate that co-opetition practices contribute to resource-sharing efficiency, support accreditation improvement, and strengthen collective bargaining capacity at the regional level. This study contributes to the development of a co-opetition-based governance framework by integrating strategic, relational, ethical, and cultural dimensions into higher education governance practices. Practically, the study highlights the importance of institutionalized inter-university collaboration forums to sustain competitive synergy within emerging regional higher education ecosystems.

Keywords: Co-opetition; Collaborative Governance; Hybrid Governance; Islamic Education Management; Regional Competitiveness.

Abstrak

Persaingan yang semakin intensif antar Perguruan Tinggi Swasta (PTS) di tingkat regional seringkali mendorong terjadinya isolasi manajerial yang membatasi kapasitas kolektif dalam meningkatkan mutu dan daya saing. Penelitian ini bertujuan mengembangkan model collaborative governance berbasis co-opetition melalui mekanisme hybrid governance untuk meningkatkan daya saing regional perguruan tinggi swasta. Penelitian menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan desain studi kasus jamak. Data dikumpulkan dari 28 pimpinan perguruan tinggi di wilayah Cirebon melalui wawancara mendalam, analisis dokumen institusi, dan observasi lapangan reflektif. Analisis data dilakukan secara interaktif melalui proses kondensasi data, penyajian data, dan penarikan simpulan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa perguruan tinggi swasta memiliki kesiapan yang kuat untuk mentransformasikan hubungan kompetitif menuju ekosistem yang lebih kolaboratif dan sinergis. Penelitian ini mengidentifikasi model hybrid governance yang mengintegrasikan pengaturan legal-formal dengan mekanisme relasional berbasis kepercayaan antar pimpinan institusi. Keunikan model terletak pada integrasi nilai-nilai Islam lokal sebagai modal etis dalam memitigasi konflik antar institusi dan memperkuat komitmen kolaboratif. Temuan penelitian juga menunjukkan bahwa praktik co-opetition berkontribusi terhadap efisiensi berbagi sumber daya, mendukung peningkatan akreditasi, serta memperkuat daya tawar kolektif di tingkat regional. Penelitian ini berkontribusi pada pengembangan kerangka tata kelola berbasis co-opetition melalui integrasi dimensi strategis, relasional, etis, dan kultural dalam praktik tata kelola pendidikan tinggi. Secara praktis, penelitian ini menegaskan pentingnya institusionalisasi forum kolaborasi antar perguruan tinggi untuk menjaga keberlanjutan sinergi kompetitif dalam ekosistem pendidikan tinggi regional yang berkembang.

Kata Kunci: Co-opetition; Collaborative Governance; Hybrid Governance; Manajemen Pendidikan Islam; Daya Saing Regional

A. INTRODUCTION

The dynamics of higher education in Indonesia are increasingly shaped by globalization and digital disruption, compelling institutions to redefine their sustainability strategies. The transition from conventional education systems to digital ecosystems creates structural and managerial uncertainty, particularly for private universities, which often face a dilemma between maintaining institutional autonomy and complying with international quality standards (Farida et al., 2019; Yohan, 2019). Empirical evidence suggests that adaptive academic policies, such as independent curriculum implementation, can enhance flexibility and improve graduates' global competitiveness (Usanto, 2022). However, such transformations

also demand more strategic governance models that go beyond internal institutional reforms.

In Region III Cirebon, comprising Cirebon, Indramayu, Majalengka, and Kuningan the rapid growth of private universities has not been accompanied by proportional improvements in collective competitiveness. Although this region serves as a strategic economic gateway in eastern West Java, inter-institutional dynamics remain dominated by a sectoral mindset, where other universities are perceived more as competitors than as potential strategic partners (Marzuki et al., 2021; Rifa'i, 2019). This condition fosters a "zero-sum competition" pattern, particularly in student recruitment and accreditation processes, which ultimately limits opportunities for synergy and collaborative value creation (Al Hazmi, 2024; Rifa'i, 2019).

At the same time, the transformation of the Ciayumajakuning region into an industrial and economic growth corridor requires a more collaborative higher education ecosystem capable of producing a skilled and globally competitive workforce. Prior studies indicate that inter-institutional collaboration can accelerate internationalization, optimize resource utilization, and strengthen regional educational infrastructure(Fadhilah & Hudaidah, 2021; Marzuki et al., 2021). In this regard, the co-opetition strategy, integrating competition and collaboration has been recognized as an effective approach to enhance organizational performance while maintaining competitive advantage (Dukalang, 2018; Framesthi & Subrayanti, 2025). Nevertheless, most existing studies tend to examine collaboration and competition as separate constructions, rather than as an integrated governance mechanism.

In the context of Islamic education, governance practices cannot be separated from ethical and cultural dimensions. Integrating Islamic values into competitive strategies is essential to ensure that institutional interactions remain constructive and socially beneficial. Previous research highlights that ethical competition can reduce the risk of destructive rivalry among private universities and foster a more sustainable collaborative culture (Azizah & Fuad Raya, 2021; Fadhilah & Hudaidah, 2021). Principles such as *ukhuwah* (brotherhood) and mutual cooperation provide a normative foundation for building trust-based institutional relationships (Yohan, 2019). However, there remains a gap in translating these values into concrete governance models that are operational at the regional level.

Furthermore, the socio-cultural context of the Cirebon region characterized by strong Islamic traditions and local wisdom offers a unique foundation for developing context-sensitive governance models. Local values such as *Silih Asah, Silih Asih, Silih Asuh* and the philosophy of *Ingsun Titip Tajug* represent forms of ethical capital that can strengthen inter-institutional trust and collaboration. Despite this potential, many private universities still face challenges in transforming cultural assets into effective managerial practices. As a result, collaborative initiatives such as shared laboratories, joint research programs, and

digital library consortia remain underutilized (Rifa'i, 2019; Waskito, 2023; Yuspiani et al., 2023).

Despite the growing body of literature on collaborative governance and co-opetition in higher education, a significant gap remains in integrating these approaches within a hybrid governance framework that combines formal institutional mechanisms with informal relational dynamics, particularly within an Islamic value-based context. This study addresses this gap by proposing a co-opetition-based collaborative governance model that incorporates hybrid governance mechanisms while embedding local Islamic values as ethical drivers of collaboration. This integrative approach offers a novel contribution by bridging strategic management perspectives with culturally grounded governance practices in regional higher education systems.

This study is grounded in the assumption that competition and collaboration are not mutually exclusive but can be strategically integrated to enhance institutional performance and regional competitiveness. The findings of this study indicate that private universities in Region III Cirebon demonstrate a high level of readiness to adopt co-opetition strategies, supported by both formal governance arrangements and strong relational networks among institutional leaders. The integration of local Islamic values is found to play a critical role in mitigating inter-institutional conflicts and sustaining long-term collaborative synergy.

The main objective of this article is to develop a co-opetition-based collaborative governance model through hybrid governance mechanisms to enhance the regional competitiveness of private universities in Region III Cirebon. Specifically, this study examines patterns of resource sharing, curriculum synchronization, and research collaboration among institutions operating within a competitive environment. The study aims to transform inter-institutional rivalry into strategic partnerships that generate collective value while preserving institutional identity and uniqueness.

Theoretically, this research contributes to the development of co-opetition and collaborative governance frameworks by integrating hybrid governance mechanisms and Islamic ethical values into a unified model of higher education management. Practically, the study provides strategic guidance for university leaders and policymakers in designing institutionalized collaboration platforms that are equitable, effective, and sustainable.

This article is structured as follows: The first section presents the background of introduction and research. The second section explains the research methodology. The third section discusses the findings and analyzes the proposed governance model. The final section concludes with the study by outlining key findings, theoretical contributions, and practical implications.

B. RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a qualitative, multiple-case study design to examine collaborative governance at private universities (PTS) in Region III, Cirebon. This design was chosen to enable cross-institutional analysis to identify consistent patterns of co-opetition strategies in the Ciayumajakuning region. The researcher positioned himself as a key instrument, interacting directly with managerial realities to capture the essence of collaborative policies and practices (Creswell & Poth, 2016).

The research focused on seven institutional groups representing geographical diversity and managerial characteristics in Region III, Cirebon. Subjects were selected using purposive sampling techniques involving campus strategic policy makers. To maintain subject confidentiality and comply with blind-review standards, institutional identities were masked using alphabetic codes. Details of institutional profiles and respondent composition are presented in the following table:

Table 1 Profile of Sampled Institutions and Composition of Respondents

Code	Regional Location	Composition of Structural Positions of Respondents	*n*
PTS-A	*Cirebon* Regency	Vice Rector; Deans; Head of Institute; Head of Human Resources Bureau; Head of Study Program	10
PTS-B	*Kuningan* Regency	Rector; Vice Rector; Deans; Head of Institute (LPPM); Administrative Bureau	8
PTS-C	*Majalengka* Regency	Rector; Vice Rector; Deans	5
PTS-D	*Cirebon* City	Head of Public Relations and Cooperation Bureau	1
PTS-E	*Kuningan* Regency	Dean, Vice Dean	1
PTS-F	*Indramayu* Regency	Vice Rector / Vice Chair (Cooperation Affairs)	1
PTS-G	*Kuningan* Regency	Dean, Vice Dean	2
Total			**28**

Data collection techniques used triangulation, combining in-depth semi-structured interviews, institutional document analysis, and reflective field observations. The interviews explored participants' perspectives on competition, collaboration, and governance practices among private universities. Institutional documents, including memoranda of understanding (MoUs), cooperation reports, and policy documents, were analyzed to examine how collaborative commitments were formally institutionalized. Reflective field observations were conducted to capture relational dynamics and contextual interactions among institutional actors. Descriptive numerical indicators were used only as supporting evidence to

strengthen thematic qualitative interpretations and were not intended for statistical generalization.

The data analysis procedure follows a circular flow of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. The analysis process involved coding, categorizing, and interpreting data into major themes, including resource-sharing practices, ethical dimensions of competition based on local values, and hybrid governance structures. Researchers use cross-case thematic analysis to examine differences in collaboration challenges across districts (Miles & Matthew, 2014). Data validity is maintained through extended observation and member checks to ensure that the resulting governance model accurately reflects field reality (Yin, 2018). Credibility was strengthened through source triangulation, prolonged engagement, and member checking with selected participants.

C. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

RESULT

This section presents the empirical findings of the study, focusing on the patterns of co-opetition-based governance among private universities in Region III Cirebon. The findings are derived from thematic interpretations of interview data, institutional documents, and reflective field observations obtained from institutional leaders. To enhance clarity and analytical rigor, the findings are systematically organized into several key themes, including institutional readiness, the emergence of hybrid governance mechanisms, the role of ethical and local values, and the impact of co-opetition on institutional performance.

The presentation of results is supported by thematic synthesis tables and interpretative narratives to highlight dominant patterns and relationships among governance practices, as well as a conceptual model that illustrates the integration of formal and informal governance mechanisms. These findings provide the empirical foundation for understanding how co-opetition operates within a culturally grounded higher education ecosystem.

1. Institutional Readiness for Co-opetition Implementation

The findings indicate that leaders of private universities in Region III Cirebon demonstrate a high level of readiness to adopt co-opetition strategies. Institutional leaders increasingly perceive collaboration not as a threat to institutional identity, but as a strategic necessity for sustaining regional competitiveness and institutional resilience. This readiness is reflected in both normative (ethical) and structural dimensions. To provide a clearer overview, the distribution of key governance indicators is presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Thematic Representation of Co-opetition Governance Tendencies

No.	Indicator	Observed Tendency	Interpretation
1	Collective Moral Responsibility within the Region	4.39	Very High

No.	Indicator	Observed Tendency	Interpretation
2	Importance of Formal Agreements (MoU/MoA)	4.21	Very High
3	Implementation of *Silih Asah*, *Asih*, *Asuh* Values	4.21	Very High
4	Support for Accreditation / MBKM	4.07	High
5	Implementation of *Ingsun Titip Tajug* Value	3.96	High
6	Willingness for Cost-Sharing	3.89	High
7	Intensity of Competition among PHEIs	3.86	High
8	Importance of Personal Relationships among Leaders	3.86	High
9	Budget Efficiency through Collaboration	3.75	High
10	Need for Collaboration in Facilities / Human Resources	3.64	High
11	Confidence in Institutional Independence	3.50	High
12	Concern about Losing Data / Students	2.82	Moderate

The data show that ethical and collective dimensions dominate the readiness landscape, with collective moral responsibility emerging as the strongest driver. These findings suggest that collaborative awareness among institutional leaders is shaped not only by managerial considerations, but also by a shared perception of collective responsibility for strengthening the regional higher education ecosystem. In contrast, concerns about data or student loss remain relatively low, indicating a shift toward openness and collaborative orientation.

This finding is further supported by a statement from one institutional leader:

> *"Networking and cooperation are the keys to the success of a higher education institution today… institutional isolation will only accelerate decline"* (R-08).

2. Emergence of Hybrid Governance Mechanisms

The findings reveal the emergence of a hybrid governance pattern integrating formal and informal mechanisms. This pattern reflects the coexistence of structural governance arrangements and relational trust-based interactions among institutional leaders. This pattern is further synthesized in Table 3.

Table 3. Characteristics of Hybrid Governance Mechanisms

Dimension	Formal Mechanisms	Informal Mechanisms	Function
Governance Structure	MoU/MoA agreements	Personal leadership networks	Ensuring legitimacy and flexibility
Decision-Making	Institutional policy frameworks	Trust-based negotiation	Accelerating collaboration
Resource Management	Formal cost-sharing schemes	Mutual understanding	Improving efficiency
Conflict Resolution	Legal agreements	Informal communication forums (FGD)	Maintaining stability

The table demonstrates that collaboration is not solely dependent on formal regulation but is equally driven by relational trust, confirming the dual nature of governance practices in the region. The findings indicate that formal agreements provide institutional legitimacy, while informal relationships accelerate coordination and strengthen collaborative flexibility across institutions. This dual mechanism is reflected in the following statement:

> *"Cooperation must still go through formal processes such as MoUs, but personal relationships make implementation faster and more effective"* (R-22).

3. Role of Ethical and Local Values in Mediating Competition

The role of local Islamic values as ethical capital is synthesized in Table 4.

Table 4. Role of Local Values in Governance Practices

Value	Functional Role	Governance Impact
Silih Asah	Knowledge sharing	Enhancing academic collaboration
Silih Asih	Mutual care	Strengthening institutional trust
Silih Asuh	Mutual development	Supporting capacity building
Ingsun Titip Tajug	Moral responsibility	Reducing inter-institutional conflict

These findings confirm that ethical values are operationalized into governance practices, not merely symbolic principles. The integration of local Islamic values demonstrates that institutional collaboration is culturally embedded and guided by shared moral commitments rather than purely strategic interests. The role of ethical values is emphasized by one respondent:

"If one campus falls, the image of education in this region will also decline" (R-18).

4. Impact of Co-opetition on Institutional Performance

The practical outcomes of co-opetition implementation are summarized in Table 5.

Table 5. Impact of Co-opetition on Institutional Performance

Area	Observed Impact	Strategic Implication
Financial	Budget efficiency through cost-sharing	Resource optimization
Academic	Accelerated accreditation and MBKM	Quality improvement
Research	Joint research and publications	Increased visibility
Institutional	Stronger collective bargaining power	Regional competitiveness

These results indicate that co-opetition contributes not only to efficiency but also to long-term institutional strengthening. The findings further reveal that collaborative governance practices create opportunities for shared resource utilization, collective academic development, and stronger regional positioning among private universities. Leaders also emphasized the strategic direction of collaboration:

"Collaboration should focus on joint research and international publication to strengthen institutional competitiveness" (R-12).

Based on the synthesis of thematic findings and institutional interpretations, this study proposes a conceptual model of hybrid co-opetition governance that integrates ethical values, collaborative mechanisms, and competitive strategies.

DISCUSSION

1. Institutional Readiness for Co-opetition Implementation

The findings indicate that private universities (PTS) in Region III Cirebon have developed a mature collective awareness of institutional resource limitations, which serves as a foundational condition for the adoption of co-opetition strategies. Institutional leaders increasingly interpret collaboration as a strategic necessity for sustaining institutional resilience and regional competitiveness rather than merely an optional partnership mechanism. This awareness is not merely cognitive but reflects a deeper institutional realization that sustainability in the contemporary higher education landscape cannot be achieved through isolated competition. The coexistence of relatively high competition intensity and strong collaborative orientation particularly in

supporting accreditation and MBKM demonstrates that competition does not necessarily inhibit collaboration; rather, it can function as a catalyst for more strategic forms of interaction.

This condition confirms co-opetition theory, which posits that organizations can simultaneously compete for market share while collaborating in areas requiring efficiency and shared resources (Ahmed et al., 2024; Jhaerol & Sudianto, 2023; Pongsapan et al., 2024; Riyadi et al., 2022). The findings further suggest that within regionally bounded higher education systems, co-opetition emerges not only as a strategic choice but also as an adaptive response to institutional and structural constraints. The increasing pressure to meet accreditation standards, implement national policies such as MBKM, and respond to global competitiveness demands forces institutions to reconfigure their traditional competitive logic. In this sense, co-opetition is less an optional strategy and more an adaptive response to systemic constraints.

The persistence of competition, as indicated by the relatively high competition intensity score, suggests that institutional identity and differentiation remain important. Private universities continue to compete for students, reputation, and external recognition. However, this competition is increasingly being reframed. Rather than engaging in destructive practices such as price wars or reputational undermining, institutions are beginning to recognize the value of selective collaboration in areas where individual capacity is insufficient. This reflects a transition from a zero-sum paradigm toward a positive-sum logic, where collective gains are prioritized alongside individual positioning.

Furthermore, the relatively low level of concern regarding the loss of strategic data or students indicates a gradual transformation from closed institutional practices toward more open and collaborative orientations. The findings imply that institutional actors increasingly perceive shared resources and collaborative networks as collective assets capable of strengthening long-term institutional sustainability. This transformation reflects an implicit adoption of the Resource-Based View (RBV), where competitive advantage is no longer derived solely from exclusive resource ownership but also from the ability to manage strategic alliances and generate shared value (Abdillah, 2025; Dudija, 2018; Meranga, 2021; Narjono, 2025). Within this framework, resources such as academic expertise, research capacity, and infrastructure are seen as more valuable when combined across institutions rather than when held in isolation. The logic of “access over ownership” becomes increasingly relevant, particularly for smaller private universities with limited internal capacities.

Importantly, the readiness for co-opetition observed in this study is not solely driven by rational-economic considerations but is deeply embedded in a sense of collective responsibility toward regional development. Collaborative readiness is shaped not only by managerial interests, but also by shared moral commitments to strengthen the regional higher education ecosystem. This sense

of shared destiny reshapes the motivation for collaboration, moving it beyond instrumental goals toward more normative and value-driven orientations.

In this regard, the findings extend prior research by demonstrating that co-opetition readiness in higher education is shaped by the interaction between strategic necessity and socio-cultural context. While existing studies often emphasize efficiency, innovation, and competitive advantage as primary drivers of co-opetition, this study highlights the role of regional identity and collective commitment as equally important factors. The willingness to collaborate is not merely a response to resource constraints but also a reflection of a shared vision for advancing regional education quality.

Moreover, the readiness observed in this study suggests a shift in institutional mindset from short-term survival to long-term sustainability. By engaging in co-opetition, private universities are not only addressing immediate operational challenges but also positioning themselves within a more resilient and adaptive network. This network-based orientation enables institutions to respond more effectively to external pressures, including policy changes, technological disruption, and evolving labor market demands.

Another important dimension of readiness lies in the alignment between institutional goals and national policy frameworks. The strong support for accreditation and MBKM indicates that co-opetition is being leveraged as a mechanism to achieve compliance with regulatory standards while simultaneously enhancing institutional quality. This alignment reinforces the legitimacy of collaboration, as it is framed not as a deviation from competitive norms but as a strategic pathway to meet nationally defined objectives.

From a governance perspective, this readiness also signals a transition toward more collaborative forms of institutional management. Decision-making processes are increasingly influenced by inter-institutional considerations, and leaders are beginning to adopt a more outward-looking orientation. This shift has important implications for how governance structures are designed and implemented, particularly in terms of facilitating coordination, trust-building, and shared accountability.

In sum, the findings suggest that institutional readiness for co-opetition in Region III Cirebon is a multidimensional construct encompassing cognitive awareness, strategic orientation, relational openness, and normative commitment. This readiness enables private universities to navigate the tension between competition and collaboration in a more balanced and productive manner.

Thus, this study not only confirms the relevance of co-opetition theory in the higher education context but also advances it by demonstrating that readiness for co-opetition is shaped by a complex interplay of economic, institutional, and socio-cultural factors. In doing so, it provides a more nuanced understanding of how collaborative strategies can emerge and be sustained within regionally embedded higher education systems.

2. Emergence of Hybrid Governance Mechanisms

The findings reveal a clear duality between the strong emphasis on formal agreements and the continued importance of personal relationships among institutional leaders. This duality reflects a governance culture in which formal institutional arrangements and informal relational trust operate simultaneously as complementary mechanisms of collaboration. Rather than representing a transitional phase from traditional to modern governance, this pattern suggests the emergence of a hybrid governance system that is structurally anchored yet relationally driven.

At the formal level, instruments such as Memoranda of Understanding (MoU) and Memoranda of Agreement (MoA) function as essential components of institutional governance. These agreements serve as what can be conceptualized as “structural safeguards”, providing clarity in terms of roles, responsibilities, and expected outcomes. In a context where multiple institutions collaborate while maintaining their autonomy, formal agreements are crucial in reducing ambiguity and preventing potential conflicts. They establish a shared framework that ensures accountability and legitimizes collaborative actions within and across institutions.

However, the findings indicate that formal mechanisms alone are insufficient to sustain effective collaboration. Relational trust among institutional leaders functions as an informal governance mechanism that accelerates coordination, strengthens communication, and enhances collaborative flexibility. The relatively high importance of personal relationships among institutional leaders highlights the role of informal governance mechanisms as equally critical. These relationships, built on trust, mutual respect, and shared experiences, function as “relational catalysts” that accelerate decision-making processes and enable more flexible responses to emerging challenges. In practice, many collaborative initiatives are initiated, negotiated, and even implemented through informal channels before being formalized through official agreements.

This interplay between formal and informal mechanisms reflects a governance logic that is both pragmatic and context-sensitive. The findings demonstrate that effective collaborative governance within private higher education institutions depends on the strategic integration of legal legitimacy and interpersonal trust. In environments characterized by complexity and uncertainty, such as higher education systems facing rapid policy changes and resource constraints, rigid reliance on formal procedures can slow down responsiveness and innovation. Informal relationships, on the other hand, provide the agility needed to navigate such dynamics. Yet, without formal structures, collaboration risks becoming unsystematic and potentially unsustainable. The hybrid model thus represents a dynamic equilibrium, where structure and flexibility are continuously balanced.

This finding supports the broader argument that effective governance in higher education requires more than compliance with formal regulations; it

necessitates the cultivation of relational trust and social capital. In line with previous studies, the integration of these dimensions enhances both stability and adaptability in institutional collaboration (Kamilah, 2021; Li & Lv, 2024). However, this study goes further by demonstrating that the relationship between formal and informal governance is not merely complementary but synergistic. Each dimension amplifies the effectiveness of the other: formal agreements institutionalize trust, while informal relationships operationalize it.

From a theoretical perspective, the emergence of hybrid governance mechanisms challenges the conventional dichotomy between bureaucratic governance and relational governance approaches. The study suggests that these mechanisms are not competing alternatives, but mutually reinforcing dimensions within collaborative higher education systems. This insight contributes to collaborative governance literature by emphasizing the importance of multi-layered governance arrangements in regionally embedded educational systems.

Moreover, the hybrid governance model identified in this study reflects broader socio-cultural characteristics of the Indonesian context, where interpersonal relationships and social cohesion play a significant role in organizational behavior. The persistence of relational governance elements does not indicate a lack of professionalism; rather, it signifies a culturally embedded mode of coordination that complements formal institutionalization. As professional standards in higher education continue to evolve, the integration of relational and legalistic approaches becomes increasingly important for ensuring both legitimacy and effectiveness.

Another important implication of this hybrid model lies in its capacity to manage the inherent tension of co-opetition. The coexistence of competition and collaboration requires governance mechanisms that can simultaneously enforce rules and foster trust. Formal agreements provide the necessary boundaries to prevent opportunistic behavior, particularly in areas such as resource sharing and joint program implementation. Meanwhile, informal relationships help to mitigate potential conflicts and maintain a cooperative spirit, even in competitive contexts. This dual function is essential for sustaining long-term collaboration among institutions that are, by nature, competitors.

In practical terms, the hybrid governance approach also facilitates more efficient resource utilization. For instance, cost-sharing arrangements and shared infrastructure require clear contractual frameworks to ensure fairness and accountability. At the same time, their successful implementation depends heavily on the willingness of institutional actors to engage in open communication and mutual adjustment processes that are inherently relational. Thus, hybrid governance not only enhances coordination but also improves the overall efficiency and effectiveness of collaborative initiatives.

Furthermore, the emergence of hybrid governance mechanisms indicates a shift toward more network-oriented forms of institutional organization. Rather than operating as isolated entities, private universities in Region III Cirebon are

increasingly embedded within a web of interdependencies. Governance, in this sense, is no longer confined within institutional boundaries but extends across a network of relationships that require continuous negotiation and alignment. The hybrid model provides the structural and relational tools necessary to manage this complexity.

Therefore, this study complements and enriches existing governance literature by proposing hybrid governance as an adaptive institutional strategy that is particularly relevant in contexts characterized by strong social relations and evolving professional demands. It highlights that effective governance in higher education is not achieved through the dominance of either formal or informal mechanisms, but through their strategic integration.

In conclusion, the emergence of hybrid governance mechanisms represents a critical enabler of co-opetition in Region III Cirebon. By combining the stability of formal agreements with the flexibility of relational networks, this model allows institutions to navigate complex collaborative environments while maintaining both accountability and adaptability. As such, it offers a robust framework for understanding and advancing governance practices in contemporary higher education systems.

3. Role of Ethical and Local Values in Mediating Competition

One of the most distinctive and theoretically significant findings of this study is the central role of Islamic and local cultural values in shaping governance practices within co-opetition dynamics. The findings suggest that ethical and cultural values function not merely as symbolic institutional identities, but as operational principles guiding collaborative interactions among private universities. These findings indicate that ethical considerations are not peripheral elements but rather constitute the foundational logic underpinning inter-institutional collaboration.

Unlike conventional governance models that rely predominantly on rational-instrumental considerations, the governance practices observed in this study are strongly influenced by normative commitments rooted in religious and cultural traditions. Ethical values function as an internalized regulatory mechanism that guides institutional behavior beyond formal rules and contractual obligations. In this sense, governance is not solely enforced through external controls but is also sustained through shared moral understandings that shape expectations, responsibilities, and interactions among institutional actors.

These values have been transformed into a form of ethical capital, which plays a critical role in mitigating the potentially destructive effects of competition. In competitive environments, particularly in higher education where institutions often compete for students, funding, and reputation, there is a risk of opportunistic behavior and zero-sum strategies. However, the presence of strong ethical capital enables institutions to reinterpret competition in a more constructive manner. Instead of undermining one another, institutions are

encouraged to pursue excellence while maintaining a commitment to mutual benefit and collective advancement.

The principles of Silih Asah, Silih Asih, Silih Asuh, and Ingsun Titip Tajug have been transformed into forms of ethical capital that mediate institutional competition and strengthen collaborative commitment. These local values create a shared moral framework that encourages institutions to prioritize collective educational advancement over destructive competition. Rather than perceiving competition as a zero-sum process, institutional actors reinterpret it as a mechanism for generating mutual benefit and regional educational improvement.

This transformation is further reinforced through the principle of fastabiqul khairat, where competition is oriented toward collective contribution and social benefit. The findings indicate that governance practices grounded in ethical and spiritual values contribute to stronger institutional trust and long-term collaborative sustainability. Such values reduce opportunistic behavior and foster collective accountability among institutional leaders.

The implications of this value-based orientation are profound. First, it enhances the level of trust among institutions, which is a critical prerequisite for effective collaboration. Trust reduces the perceived risks associated with sharing resources, information, and strategic initiatives. Second, it facilitates the development of long-term relationships that are more resilient to external pressures and internal conflicts. Third, it creates a normative framework that discourages opportunistic behavior, thereby ensuring that collaboration remains sustainable over time.

This finding strengthens and extends previous studies by demonstrating that ethical and spiritual values can function as operational governance mechanisms, rather than merely normative ideals (Bosra, 2022; Huda, 2024; Prasetyo & Fadhillah, 2022). However, this study further demonstrates that ethical values can function as operational governance mechanisms that directly shape strategic collaboration practices within higher education institutions.

Moreover, the role of social capital rooted in spirituality and local culture aligns with research emphasizing its importance in fostering innovation and sustainable collaboration (Beisenbayev & Almukhametov, 2024; Saputra et al., 2022; Sudjatnika & Shafarini, 2022). Social capital, in this context, is not limited to networks of relationships, but also includes shared norms, values, and trust that facilitate coordinated action. The integration of ethical values into governance practices enhances the quality of social capital, making it more robust and effective in supporting collaborative initiatives.

From a theoretical perspective, this study contributes to the development of a value-based governance framework that integrates co-opetition theory with ethical and cultural dimensions. Traditional co-opetition theory tends to emphasize strategic and economic factors, such as resource efficiency and competitive advantage. By incorporating ethical values into this framework, the

study expands the analytical scope of co-opetition, highlighting the role of moral considerations in shaping strategic behavior.

In this regard, the application of *fastabiqul khairat* provides a unique conceptual contribution, positioning co-opetition within a governance paradigm that prioritizes social impact over purely competitive outcomes (Sofiyandi et al., 2024; Syihabudin et al., 2023). This perspective challenges the dominant assumption that competition is inherently self-interested, suggesting instead that it can be oriented toward collective well-being. Such a reorientation has important implications for how success is defined and measured in higher education, shifting the focus from individual institutional performance to broader societal contributions.

Furthermore, the integration of ethical values into governance practices enhances the legitimacy of collaborative initiatives. In contexts where institutions are accountable not only to regulatory bodies but also to communities and stakeholders, value-based governance provides a moral justification for collaboration. It aligns institutional actions with societal expectations, thereby strengthening public trust and support.

Finally, the findings suggest that ethical and local values can serve as a stabilizing force in the dynamic interplay between competition and collaboration. While formal governance mechanisms provide structure and clarity, and relational networks provide flexibility, ethical values provide direction and purpose. Together, these elements form a comprehensive governance system that can address both the technical and moral dimensions of institutional interaction.

In conclusion, the role of ethical and local values in mediating competition represents a critical dimension of co-opetition in Region III Cirebon. By transforming competition into a value-driven process oriented toward collective benefit, these values enable institutions to engage in collaboration without sacrificing their competitive identity. This not only enhances the effectiveness of governance but also contributes to the development of a more inclusive, sustainable, and socially responsive higher education ecosystem.

4. Impact of Co-opetition on Institutional and Regional Performance

The findings demonstrate that co-opetition generates tangible and multidimensional benefits at both institutional and regional levels. Collaborative governance practices enable institutions to optimize shared resources, strengthen academic capacity, and enhance collective regional positioning within an increasingly competitive higher education environment. At the institutional level, the most immediate impact is reflected in improved efficiency through resource sharing and coordinated academic initiatives.

Beyond efficiency, co-opetition also contributes to improvements in academic quality, particularly in relation to accreditation and the implementation of national higher education policies such as MBKM. Collaborative initiatives such as curriculum synchronization, joint research programs, and academic

partnerships enable institutions to reduce capability gaps and improve institutional competitiveness collectively. This collective approach reduces disparities in institutional capacity and creates opportunities for smaller institutions to benefit from the strengths of more established partners.

These findings align with previous studies highlighting the role of collaboration in improving organizational performance and resource optimization (Alifah et al., 2022; Fandir, 2024). However, this study extends and differentiates from earlier research by demonstrating that the impact of co-opetition is not confined to individual institutional outcomes. Instead, it operates at a broader systemic level, contributing to the development of collective regional competitiveness. This shift in analytical focus from institution-centric to region-centric performance represents a significant contribution to the literature on higher education governance.

At the regional level, co-opetition facilitates the emergence of a more coordinated and synergistic higher education ecosystem. The findings suggest that strategic collaboration among private universities contributes to stronger collective bargaining power, improved regional visibility, and greater alignment between higher education outputs and regional development priorities. The strategic alignment of curricula and collaborative research initiatives has important implications for positioning private universities within the *Rebana* industrial corridor, a rapidly developing economic zone. By aligning academic programs with regional economic priorities such as creative industries in Cirebon, agriculture in Majalengka, and tourism in Kuningan institutions can create a complementary rather than competitive landscape. This reduces redundancy in program offerings and minimizes destructive competition, such as price wars in student recruitment, which often undermine institutional sustainability.

Furthermore, the specialization of academic programs based on regional strengths enhances the relevance of higher education to local development needs. This alignment not only improves graduate employability but also strengthens the contribution of universities to regional innovation systems. In this sense, co-opetition serves as a mechanism for bridging the gap between higher education and industry, enabling institutions to play a more active role in supporting economic growth and social development.

The regional impact of co-opetition is also evident in the strengthening of collective bargaining power. When institutions collaborate, they are better positioned to engage with external stakeholders, including government agencies, industry partners, and international networks. This collective positioning enhances the visibility and credibility of the region, making it more attractive to prospective students, investors, and collaborators. As a result, the benefits of co-opetition extend beyond individual institutions to encompass the broader regional ecosystem.

If implemented consistently, the co-opetition model has the potential to transform Region III Cirebon into an integrated higher education ecosystem. Such

a system is characterized by interconnected institutions that share resources, coordinate strategies, and pursue common goals while maintaining their individual identities. This transformation not only improves accreditation outcomes but also enhances the economic and social resilience of the region, as supported by previous studies (Ariprativi et al., 2023; Kamaruddin & Auzair, 2020; Prihadini et al., 2023; Sarif, 2019; Suroso et al., 2022).

The broader implication of this transformation is the emergence of a new model of higher education governance that is both collaborative and competitive. In this model, competition is not eliminated but restructured in a way that supports collective advancement. Institutions continue to differentiate themselves in terms of identity, specialization, and strategic focus, but do so within a framework that encourages cooperation and mutual support. This balance between competition and collaboration is essential for ensuring both innovation and sustainability.

The synthesis of these findings suggests that the ideal governance model for private universities in Region III Cirebon is a hybrid co-opetition governance model that integrates multiple dimensions: formal legal frameworks, informal relational networks, ethical and cultural values, and strategic collaboration mechanisms. This integrated governance model enables institutions to balance competition and collaboration while maintaining institutional flexibility and collective sustainability. Each of these dimensions plays a distinct but interconnected role in shaping institutional behavior and outcomes. Formal frameworks provide structure and accountability; relational networks facilitate coordination and trust; ethical values offer direction and legitimacy; and strategic mechanisms enable practical implementation.

This integrated model enables institutions to balance competition and collaboration while maintaining flexibility in responding to dynamic regional challenges. It also addresses structural constraints, such as limited infrastructure and resources, by promoting shared utilization and collective investment (Fikri et al., 2025; Setiorini et al., 2024). In doing so, it creates a more efficient and equitable distribution of resources across institutions, reducing disparities and enhancing overall system performance.

In practical terms, the institutionalization of collaboration through structured inter-university forums, joint academic initiatives, and integrated resource-sharing mechanisms becomes essential for sustaining long-term co-opetition practices. The findings ultimately demonstrate that collaborative governance grounded in ethical values and hybrid governance mechanisms can strengthen both institutional performance and regional higher education competitiveness.

Moreover, the institutionalization of co-opetition requires a shift in leadership orientation. Institutional leaders must move beyond organization-centric thinking and adopt a more ecosystem-oriented perspective. This involves recognizing interdependencies, building long-term partnerships, and fostering a

culture of trust and openness. Leadership, in this context, becomes a critical driver of transformation, shaping both the strategic direction and the operational dynamics of collaboration.

Ultimately, the consistent implementation of this hybrid co-opetition governance model can position Region III Cirebon as an integrated education hub, where collaboration is not incidental but systematically embedded within governance practices. This transformation reflects a broader shift toward a more inclusive, sustainable, and value-driven higher education ecosystem. It also demonstrates that co-opetition, when effectively managed, can serve as a powerful tool for enhancing both institutional performance and regional development.

In conclusion, the impact of co-opetition extends far beyond efficiency gains and academic improvements. It reshapes the very structure of higher education systems, fostering integration, resilience, and collective advancement. By bridging institutional boundaries and aligning educational practices with regional priorities, co-opetition offers a viable pathway for addressing the complex challenges facing higher education in the global era.

D. CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the implementation of a co-opetition-based collaborative governance model among private higher education institutions (PHEIs) in Region III Cirebon represents a strategic response to the dual pressures of competition and resource limitations. The findings demonstrate that institutional readiness for co-opetition is not solely driven by economic rationality but is strongly reinforced by collective moral responsibility and shared regional commitment.

The study identifies hybrid governance as a key mechanism that enables the integration of formal institutional arrangements and informal relational dynamics. This dual structure allows institutions to maintain accountability while fostering flexibility and trust in collaborative practices. Furthermore, the incorporation of Islamic and local cultural values such as *Silih Asah*, *Silih Asih*, *Silih Asuh*, and *Ingsun Titip Tajug* emerges as a distinctive feature that transforms co-opetition into a value-driven governance model oriented toward mutual benefit and social impact.

From a theoretical perspective, this research contributes to the advancement of co-opetition and collaborative governance literature by demonstrating that governance effectiveness in higher education is shaped by the interaction between strategic, relational, and ethical dimensions. The study extends the Resource-Based View by highlighting that competitive advantage can be constructed through shared resources and collective capabilities embedded in culturally grounded governance systems.

Practically, the proposed hybrid co-opetition governance model provides a strategic framework for private universities to enhance efficiency, strengthen

academic quality, and build regional competitiveness. The model offers actionable pathways, including resource sharing, curriculum synchronization, joint research initiatives, and formalized collaboration mechanisms, which can collectively transform fragmented institutional practices into an integrated higher education ecosystem.

Despite these contributions, this study has several limitations. First, the research is geographically limited to Region III Cirebon, which may restrict the generalizability of findings to other regions with different socio-cultural and institutional contexts. Second, the study relies primarily on perceptions of institutional leaders, which may not fully capture operational-level dynamics. Third, the qualitative design, while providing depth, limits the ability to measure causal relationships between co-opetition practices and institutional performance outcomes.

Future research is recommended to expand the scope of analysis by incorporating comparative studies across regions or countries to examine the applicability of the hybrid governance model in diverse contexts. Quantitative approaches could also be employed to test the causal impact of co-opetition on performance indicators such as accreditation, research productivity, and graduate employability. In addition, further studies may explore the role of digital transformation in strengthening co-opetition ecosystems and investigate the perspectives of other stakeholders, including lecturers, students, and industry partners.

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