

Fethullah Gülen's Inspirational Dialogue: A Sustainable Path to Global Harmony

AHMAD SUNAWARI LONG^{*1}, MOHD HATIB ISMAIL², KAMARUDIN SALLEH¹

¹Research Centre for Theology and Philosophy, Faculty of Islamic Studies, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, 43600 Bangi, Selangor, Malaysia

²Centre for the Promotion of Knowledge and Language Learning, Universiti Malaysia Sabah, 88400 Kota Kinabalu, Sabah, Malaysia.

*Corresponding Author: email: aslong@ukm.edu.my

Received: 13 August 2025 /Revised: 3 September 2025/Accepted: 9 September 2025/

Publish: 1 December 2025

ABSTRACT

The main issue addressed in this research is the challenge of fostering genuine interfaith and intercultural dialogue in an era marked by prejudice, extremism, and cultural fragmentation. This study grounds its theoretical framework in Islamic teachings, drawing especially on the Qur'an's perspective on diversity (Qur'an 49:13), the example set by the Prophet, and Sufi ethics influenced by Said Nursi and Jalal al-Din Rumi. Gülen's philosophy views dialogue not as diplomacy but as a spiritual and moral imperative rooted in sincerity, humility, and service. The research objectives are threefold: to analyse Gülen's fourfold framework of dialogue (Words, Heart, Living, and Action), to examine its practical application through the global Hizmet movement, and to evaluate the challenges that hinder authentic dialogue alongside Gülen's ethical countermeasures. Methodologically, the study employs a qualitative, interpretive approach, using textual hermeneutics of Gülen's writings, Qur'anic exegesis, and case-based illustrations from Hizmet institutions. The research found that Gülen's dialogical philosophy promotes intellectual understanding, spiritual kinship, everyday coexistence, and cooperative service. Despite extremism and politicisation, sincerity and humility emerge as essential counterweights. The conclusion underscores that Gülen's dialogical vision offers a theological framework and a practical, sustainable model for global peacebuilding and harmonious coexistence.

Keywords: Gülen; interfaith dialogue; sufism; Hizmet Movement; pluralism

ABSTRAK

Isu utama yang ditangani dalam penyelidikan ini ialah cabaran untuk memupuk dialog antara agama dan antara budaya yang tulen dalam era yang ditandai dengan prasangka, ekstremisme, dan pemecahan budaya. Kajian ini meletakkan latar belakang teorinya dalam ajaran Islam, khususnya visi kepelbagaian al-Quran (Qur'an 49:13), model kenabian, dan etika sufi yang diilhamkan oleh Said Nursi dan Jalal al-Din Rumi. Falsafah Gülen memandang dialog bukan sebagai diplomasi tetapi sebagai kewajaran rohani dan moral yang berakar pada keikhlasan, kerendahan hati, dan khidmat. Objektif penyelidikan ini mempunyai tiga tujuan, iaitu: untuk menganalisis kerangka empat bentuk dialog Gülen (Perkataan, Hati, Kehidupan, dan Tindakan), untuk mengkaji aplikasi praktikalnya melalui pergerakan Hizmet peringkat global, dan untuk menilai cabaran yang menghalang dialog tulen bersama langkah-langkah tindak balas etika yang dibawa oleh Gülen. Kajian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif, tafsiran, menggunakan hermeneutik tekstual tulisan Gülen, tafsir al-Quran, dan ilustrasi berasaskan kes daripada institusi Hizmet. Penyelidikan mendapati bahawa falsafah dialog Gülen menggalakkan pemahaman intelektual, persaudaraan rohani, kewujudan secara bersama setiap hari, dan memberi khidmat kerjasama. Walaupun terdapat halangan seperti ekstremisme dan politik, keikhlasan dan kerendahan hati muncul sebagai pengimbang yang penting dalam pelaksanaan dialog. Kesimpulannya visi dialog Gülen menawarkan bukan sahaja rangka kerja teologi tetapi juga model praktikal, mampan untuk pembinaan keamanan global serta kewujudan bersama yang harmoni.

Kata kunci: Gülen; dialog antara agama; sufisme; Gerakan Hizmet; pluralisme

INTRODUCTION

Fethullah Gülen (b. 1941) is a Turkish Muslim scholar, preacher, writer, and spiritual leader best known for his teachings on Islam, education, interfaith dialogue, and civic service. Born in Erzurum, eastern Turkey, he received a traditional Islamic education in Qur'anic studies, Arabic, and theology under local scholars, later serving as a state-employed preacher (vaiz) in various cities (Aviv 2025). Deeply influenced by the teachings of Said Nursi, Gülen became a central figure in the Nurcu movement, eventually forming his own interpretation that combined Islamic ethics with modern scientific and educational principles (Fitzgerald 2017). For example, Nursi interpreted the Qur'an in ways that emphasized compassion, mercy, and universality. He advocated for peaceful coexistence with different faiths. Gülen expanded on this by actively promoting interfaith dialogue (Sertkaya 2023), hosting discussions with Christian and Jewish leaders, and emphasizing common moral values across religions a stance rooted in Nursi's inclusive hermeneutics (Yucel 2010).

Accordingly, Gülen, offers a comprehensive, nuanced, and deeply spiritual approach to interfaith and intercultural dialogue. Rooted in the ethical teachings of Islam and influenced by Sufi traditions, Gülen views dialogue not merely as a tool for diplomacy or social harmony, but as a moral and spiritual imperative that arises from the very essence of human dignity and divine purpose. For him, engaging with individuals of different faiths, cultures, and worldviews is an act of service and a pathway to achieving peace, justice, and mutual understanding in an increasingly pluralistic world. Drawing from the Qur'anic vision of human diversity "*We have made you into nations and tribes so that you may know one another*" (Qur'an 49:13) Gülen argues that dialogue is a sacred responsibility that must be grounded in sincerity, humility, and mutual respect. His approach encompasses various dimensions, including verbal dialogue, dialogue through education, dialogue of the heart, and dialogue through action or service. Through his teachings and the global Hizmet movement he inspired, Gülen has demonstrated how dialogue can transcend religious boundaries, break down stereotypes, and foster a shared commitment to the common good, human solidarity, and peaceful coexistence (Yucel & Albayrak 2014).

Gülen's conception of dialogue draws inspiration from the Prophetic model of engagement with others. He frequently highlights how the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) interacted with Jews, Christians, and pagans with respect, justice, and compassion, creating a precedent for peaceful coexistence (Ünal & Williams, 2000). Gülen argues that dialogue is in fact embedded in the Qur'anic ethos, citing verses such as, "*O mankind, We created you from a single (pair) of a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, that you may know each other*" (Qur'an 49:13). This verse, according to Gülen, underscores diversity as a divine sign and mutual knowledge as a divine command.

For Gülen, dialogue is founded on universal human values compassion, justice, love, tolerance, and empathy which transcend religious or cultural boundaries. He emphasizes that "religions are not competitors in a race for individual superiority but are instead partners in service to the same sacred values" (Gülen 2004). In this spirit, Gülen calls for dialogue among people of all faiths and cultures to promote peace and resolve conflicts. His advocacy for interreligious dialogue has led to initiatives involving Catholics, Jews, Buddhists, and secular humanists, often through institutions inspired by the Hizmet movement, such as the Journalists and Writers Foundation in Turkey.

Moreover, Gülen stresses the importance of education and intellectual engagement in cultivating the openness required for meaningful dialogue. He warns against dogmatism and urges Muslims to deepen their understanding of both their own faith and that of others (Michel 2003). This approach encourages critical empathy, where the goal is not agreement but mutual understanding and coexistence (Yavuz & Esposito 2003).

However, Gülen, identifies multiple challenges to authentic interfaith and intercultural dialogue. These obstacles emerge from both internal dispositions (individual and communal attitudes) and external contexts (socio-political and historical conditions). Thus, he outlines six primary impediments. First, prejudice and mistrust often rooted in historical grievances, cultural misperceptions, and entrenched stereotypes constitute a major barrier to dialogue. He emphasizes the need to transcend these divisions through humility, sincerity, and empathetic engagement (Gülen 2004). Second, religious fanaticism and extremism represent a critical threat; Gülen critiques both Muslim and non-Muslim extremists who exploit religion to legitimize violence

and exclusion, noting that such actions betray the fundamental values of compassion and mutual respect (Ünal & Williams 2000). Third, secularist hostility toward religion, particularly in secular contexts such as Turkey, can marginalize religious voices and portray dialogue as regressive. Gülen advocates for reciprocal respect between secular and faith-based perspectives (Yavuz 2003). Fourth, the political instrumentalization of religion where dialogue is co-opted for propaganda or political gain undermines its sincerity and breeds public cynicism. Fifth, deficits in education and intellectual openness hinder constructive dialogue, as ignorance and insularity impair individuals' ability to engage with alternative worldviews. Finally, egoism and arrogance, especially the assumption of one's religious or cultural superiority, obstruct meaningful exchange. Gülen underscores the necessity of self-reflection, spiritual humility, and ethical maturity as preconditions for genuine dialogue.

Based on this background the primary purpose of this study is to provide a comprehensive understanding of Fethullah Gülen's philosophy of dialogue as both a theoretical framework and a practical approach to interfaith and intercultural engagement. Rooted in Islamic ethics and universal human values, Gülen's vision of dialogue has become a significant model for addressing the challenges of pluralism, religious tension, and cultural fragmentation. In line with this focus, the study is guided by three specific objectives:

1. To analyze Fethullah Gülen's dialogical philosophy by examining his fourfold framework Dialogue of Words, Dialogue of the Heart, Dialogue of Living, and Dialogue of Action and highlighting how these principles are grounded in the Qur'an, prophetic traditions, and Sufi ethics.
2. To examine the practical application of Gülen's concept of dialogue through the global Hizmet movement, particularly in educational institutions, interfaith initiatives, and humanitarian projects, which provide real-world validation of his theoretical model.
3. To identify and evaluate the challenges that hinder authentic dialogue, including prejudice, extremism, and political misuse, while analyzing Gülen's proposed ethical and spiritual countermeasures; sincerity, humility, and service as pathways to building sustainable peace and coexistence.

In line with the interpretive and qualitative orientation of this study, the following hypotheses are proposed as guiding assumptions rather than testable variables. They serve to frame the inquiry into Fethullah Gülen's dialogical philosophy and its practical implications.

1. It is hypothesized that Gülen's fourfold typology of dialogue; Dialogue of Words, Dialogue of the Heart, Dialogue of Living, and Dialogue of Action, provides a comprehensive lens through which the ethical and spiritual dimensions of interfaith engagement can be more deeply understood.
2. It is expected that the practices of the Hizmet movement will illustrate how Gülen's theoretical concepts are embodied in practical initiatives, particularly in education, intercultural coexistence, and humanitarian service, thus validating the lived dimension of his philosophy.
3. It is hypothesized that Gülen's integration of Qur'anic injunctions and Sufi spirituality highlights the significance of religious values as enduring foundations for sustaining authentic dialogue across cultural and religious boundaries.
4. It is anticipated that exploring challenges such as prejudice, extremism, and political misuse will reveal how sincerity, humility, and service operate as ethical counterweights, enabling dialogue to function as a transformative force for peace and coexistence.

METHODOLOGY

The method used in this article is primarily a qualitative, interpretive analysis of Fethullah Gülen's dialogical philosophy, structured around his fourfold typology; Dialogue of Words, Dialogue of the Heart, Dialogue of Living, and Dialogue of Action. This article does not employ statistical or experimental methods; instead, the study synthesizes textual, historical, and thematic evidence from Gülen's writings, Qur'anic exegesis, Sufi ethics, and secondary scholarly interpretations.

The method of the study involves textual analysis of primary sources, including Gülen's own books and speeches (e.g., *Toward a Global Civilization of Love and Tolerance*), identifying key concepts, principles, and scriptural references that underpin his model of dialogue. These texts are interpreted through hermeneutic engagement

examining Qur'anic verses such as 49:13 and 5:2, and prophetic traditions, to contextualize Gülen's emphasis on sincerity (*ikhlas*), humility (*tawadu'*), and service (*khidmah*).

Second, the article applies comparative contextualization, situating Gülen's thought within broader Islamic intellectual traditions especially Said Nursi's inclusive hermeneutics (Ihsan et al. 2022) and Jalal al-Din Rumi's Sufi emphasis on divine love. This comparative framing reveals both continuity and innovation in Gülen's approach.

Third, the study employs case-based illustration through examples from the global Hizmet Movement. Institutions such as the Journalists and Writers Foundation, Niagara Foundation, and Hizmet-affiliated schools serve as real-world implementations of the four dialogues. These examples function as practical validations of Gülen's theoretical model, demonstrating how verbal exchange, spiritual fellowship, everyday coexistence, and joint service projects operate in diverse cultural contexts.

Finally, the article integrates critical reflection by acknowledging obstacles such as prejudice, fanaticism, political misuse, and educational deficits and discussing Gülen's proposed countermeasures. This evaluative dimension shows that the method is not only descriptive but also prescriptive, offering actionable strategies for operationalizing dialogue as a path to sustainable peace.

Therefore, the methodological approach blends textual hermeneutics, conceptual categorization, and illustrative case studies to articulate a holistic, ethically grounded framework for interfaith and intercultural engagement.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The philosophy of dialogue articulated by Fethullah Gülen has received significant scholarly attention within Islamic studies, interfaith dialogue, and peacebuilding literature. Scholars emphasize that his dialogical model, grounded in Qur'anic ethics and Sufi spirituality, provides a holistic framework that addresses intellectual, spiritual, social, and practical dimensions of human engagement (Ünal & Williams 2000). Gülen's fourfold framework; Dialogue of Words, Dialogue of the Heart, Dialogue of Living, and Dialogue of Action represents a unique integration of theology, ethics, and lived practice. However, his work is best understood in dialogue

with both Islamic intellectual traditions and broader global perspectives on interfaith engagement.

Gülen's thought builds upon the Qur'anic vision of diversity as a divine blessing (Qur'an 49:13). Yucel (2010) traces this emphasis to Said Nursi, whose writings stressed compassion, mercy, and inclusivity, particularly in pluralistic societies. Gülen's extension of these ideas emphasizes dialogue as a moral obligation, not a political strategy, underscoring his departure from utilitarian models of interreligious exchange. Scholars such as Michel (2003) argue that education is central to Gülen's framework, serving as the foundation for openness, empathy, and mutual learning. Nicholson's (1926) work on Rumi also sheds light on Gülen's mystical influences, where dialogue of the heart embodies love (*mahabba*) and humility (*tawadu'*), aligning with the Sufi ethic of service (*hizmet*).

The institutionalization of dialogue through the Hizmet movement has been another focal point of analysis. Ebaugh (2010) demonstrates how Gülen-inspired schools and dialogue centers act as laboratories of intercultural engagement, where daily encounters embody the Dialogue of Living. Yavuz and Esposito (2003) further argue that Hizmet's educational and humanitarian initiatives provide global platforms for translating theory into practice. Iner and Cufurovic (2022) frame these activities within Islamic universalism, showing how Hizmet's initiatives embody an ethic of service that transcends cultural and religious boundaries.

Despite its appeal, Gülen acknowledges obstacles such as prejudice, extremism, secular hostility, and political misuse. Gülen (2004) prescribes sincerity (*ikhlas*), humility, and service as ethical remedies. Fitzgerald (2017) points out the tension between Gülen's faith-inspired activism and Turkey's secular-nationalist framework, which often views religiously motivated initiatives with suspicion. Suraya, Azizan, and Khadijah (2012), writing from a Malaysian perspective, emphasize how Gülen's Dialogue of Life resonates in contexts where daily coexistence between Muslims and non-Muslims is essential to social harmony.

Placing Gülen alongside global interfaith thinkers enriches the literature. Hans Küng's (1991) *Global Ethic* project parallels Gülen's approach in emphasizing shared moral principles such as compassion, justice, and peaceful coexistence as prerequisites for global harmony. While Küng speaks from a Catholic background, his call for a "minimum of common values" aligns with Gülen's

stress on humility and sincerity. Both see dialogue not as theological compromise but as ethical convergence. However, Gülen differs by grounding dialogue explicitly in Qur'anic injunctions and Sufi spirituality, thereby offering a distinctively Islamic rationale for universal cooperation.

Similarly, John Hick's (2004) philosophy of religious pluralism intersects with Gülen's thought but also diverges. Hick's "pluralistic hypothesis" views all religions as different responses to the same transcendent reality, advocating theological relativism. Gülen, by contrast, does not argue for doctrinal relativism but for ethical partnership. For Gülen, religions are not competitors but collaborators in serving shared moral values (Gülen 2004). This difference illustrates that while Hick emphasizes metaphysical unity, Gülen stresses moral and spiritual action, making his approach more accessible in Muslim-majority contexts.

Ahmad Sunawari, Mohd Hatib, and Zulazmi (2022) note that Gülen's selective use of Islamic sources has been criticized as idealized or decontextualized. Yet, they argue that his contributions remain vital in presenting Islam as a force for peace rather than conflict. Yavuz (2003) situates Gülen's work within Turkey's contested political-religious landscape, highlighting its balancing act between secularism and Islamism. In comparative terms, Küng and Hick often write for Western contexts marked by secularization, whereas Gülen's emphasis on *hizmet* (service) grounds interfaith dialogue in lived action, particularly in educational and humanitarian sectors.

Overall, the literature demonstrates that Gülen's framework is both contextually Islamic and globally relevant. His approach aligns with Küng's vision of a global ethic and partially resonates with Hick's pluralistic theology, but it retains its distinctive grounding in Islamic spirituality and praxis. By integrating theology, mysticism, and civic service, Gülen provides a dialogical model that is at once practical, spiritually profound, and responsive to the contemporary crises of polarization, extremism, and intercultural mistrust.

DATA ANALYSIS

In this article, data are collected from Fethullah Gülen's primary writings, Qur'anic interpretations, Sufi ethics, and secondary scholarly sources. These textual materials are managed thematically and arranged according to Gülen's fourfold framework of

dialogue: Dialogue of Words, Dialogue of the Heart, Dialogue of Living, and Dialogue of Action. The analysis proceeds by categorizing concepts, values, and scriptural references into these dimensions, allowing a systematic exploration of their meanings and implications.

The researchers then interpret the data through hermeneutic analysis, extracting ethical principles such as sincerity, humility, and service, and connecting them to Qur'anic verses and prophetic traditions. Comparative insights from Nursi and Rumi are integrated to highlight continuity and innovation in Gülen's thought. Practical data are further drawn from the global Hizmet movement, which are arranged as illustrative case studies validating theoretical claims. Finally, the analysis is critically refined by discussing challenges like prejudice, extremism, and political misuse, alongside Gülen's proposed solutions.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

GÜLEN'S INSPIRATIONAL DIALOGUE

Fethullah Gülen identifies various forms of inspirational dialogue in his writings and thought, each grounded in Islamic ethical principles and universal human values. These forms encompass both theoretical foundations and practical approaches to fostering engagement among different faiths, cultures, and communities. Presented below are four types of dialogue as articulated by Gülen, they are Dialogue of Words, Dialogue of Heart, Dialogue of Living and Dialogue of Actions.

1. Dialogue of Words (Verbal Dialogue)

This is the traditional form of interfaith or intercultural dialogue, where individuals or groups from different backgrounds engage in conversation to perform three kinds of activities, they are; to share beliefs and values, to clarify misunderstandings and to foster respect and empathy. This form of dialogue, involving open, respectful, and meaningful conversations between people of different faiths and worldviews, serves as both a practical and ethical response to global religious misunderstandings and cultural conflicts.

Gülen's advocacy for dialogue of words is deeply rooted in Islamic teachings. He draws upon Qur'anic verses and the life of Prophet Muhammad to demonstrate that respectful dialogue is a religious

obligation rather than a modern innovation. One often-cited verse is:

“O mankind! We created you from a single pair of a male and a female and made you into nations and tribes that you may know one another” (Qur’an 49:13).

For Gülen, this verse underscores that human diversity is divinely intended not to incite conflict or division, but to encourage mutual recognition and understanding. In this context, verbal dialogue is more than a diplomatic tool it is an ethical and spiritual act that embodies a sincere commitment to the principles of justice, humility, and compassion. Gülen also refers to the example of Prophet Muhammad, who consistently engaged in respectful and open dialogue with Jews, Christians, and polytheists (*musyrik*) in both Mecca and Medina (Ünal & Williams 2000). According to Gülen, these interactions exemplify a prophetic model of dialogue grounded in respect for diversity and a sincere pursuit of truth and reconciliation.

It is clear that Gülen’s notion of the *Dialogue of Words* does not seek theological uniformity or religious conversion. Instead, its core objectives include reducing prejudice and misconceptions, cultivating mutual respect and empathy, promoting peaceful coexistence, and creating avenues for collaborative moral action. He argues that in the modern world, marked by religious extremism, secular intolerance, and cultural isolation, dialogue based on words and reason is essential to dismantle barriers of ignorance and fear (Gülen 2004). Dialogue of words also considered a preparatory stage for deeper forms of engagement, such as cooperation in social service (dialogue of action) or spiritual affinity (dialogue of the heart). The dialogue provides the space for intellectual and emotional openness, without which other forms of dialogue cannot flourish (Michel 2003).

While the dialogue of words is essential for fostering understanding, cooperation, and peace, it is also susceptible to several challenges that may impede its effectiveness. One significant issue is the diversity of participants’ linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Even when a shared language such as English is employed, variations in meaning, idiomatic expressions, and religious terminology can lead to miscommunication. For instance, the term *jihad* may be understood by Muslims as a spiritual struggle, whereas others, influenced by media narratives, may interpret it as an act of violence. Without early clarification, such differences can

disrupt the flow and purpose of the conversation. Secondly, participants may join the dialogue while holding conscious or unconscious biases, which can manifest as judgmental attitudes, unfounded assumptions, or dismissive behaviours that hinder open and respectful communication. For example, a Christian might presume that Muslims are resistant to pluralism, while a Muslim may suspect that Christians are primarily motivated by proselytism. These preconceived notions can obstruct genuine listening and mutual understanding. Moreover, when deeply held beliefs are challenged, it may provoke strong emotional responses such as anger, defensiveness, or withdrawal particularly when individuals perceive that their religion, identity, or core values are being undermined or attacked. Finally, some religious participants may harbor concerns that engaging in dialogue risks compromising their faith, leading to syncretism, or giving the impression of endorsing beliefs they do not share. For instance, a Muslim may perceive participation in an interfaith prayer as a theological concession, while a Christian might worry that acknowledging Islamic ethical principles could weaken their own doctrinal commitments. Additionally, historical grievances such as colonialism, religious wars, or persecution can evoke emotional defensiveness or hostility among participants. These deep-seated wounds may influence the dialogue, even if not directly addressed. For example, interfaith conversations between Muslims and Christians in the Middle East may be overshadowed by lingering memories of the Crusades or recent religious-political conflicts, such as those in Gaza, which can resurface and hinder effective communication.

To advance meaningful interfaith and intercultural engagement of dialogue of words, Fethullah Gülen articulates several core principles of dialogue, including *ikhlas* (sincerity), which calls for entering dialogue with pure intentions aimed at understanding rather than persuasion; *adab* (respect and courtesy), which emphasizes gentleness even amid disagreement; mutual listening, which recognizes dialogue as a reciprocal exchange rather than a monologue; and humility, which entails acknowledging that no single group holds an exclusive claim to truth. Gülen cautions against the instrumentalization of dialogue for political purposes or its reduction to symbolic interfaith events lacking depth. Instead, he advocates for sustained, transformative conversations particularly among religious scholars, educators, and community

leaders that foster genuine understanding (Yavuz & Esposito 2003). The Hizmet movement (Neval 2024) inspired by Gülen's vision, has operationalized these ideals globally through institutions such as the Journalists and Writers Foundation (JWF) in Turkey and various dialogue centres across the United States, Europe, and Asia. These initiatives have organized numerous conferences, panels, and roundtable discussions that bring together Muslims, Christians, Jews, Buddhists, and secular thinkers. Beyond dismantling stereotypes, such efforts have fostered interreligious solidarity, especially during times of crisis for example, following the 9/11 attacks or natural disasters where communities have united in both speech and action. Gülen asserts that authentic dialogue restores the moral voice of religion in the public sphere, offering a counterbalance to both extremism and moral relativism. As he aptly states, "We need dialogue more than ever, for the world is hungry for understanding. If we do not speak to one another, we will become deaf to truth" (Gülen 2004).

2. Dialogue of the Heart (Spiritual Dialogue)

Dialogue of the Heart or spiritual dialogue refers to the inner dimension of interfaith dialogue, where individuals from different religious traditions connect on a spiritual and emotional level. For Gülen, such dialogue is rooted in the concept of *ihsan* (excellence) and *mahabba* (divine love), in which the heart is seen as the seat of sincerity and moral vision. This form of dialogue is not primarily concerned with dogma, but with the essence of spirituality compassion, mercy, and the pursuit of truth. This is drawing from the Qur'anic verse: "*The servants of the Most Merciful are those who walk upon the earth humbly...*" (Qur'an 25:63),

Gülen emphasizes humility and love as essential qualities for meaningful spiritual engagement. He asserts that the heart can perceive truths that rational argument may overlook, and thus, dialogue that originates from the heart can touch others more deeply than dialogue of mere words (Gülen 2004). He articulates four key principles that characterize this unique form of dialogue, they are: (i) Sincerity (*Ikhlâs*): True dialogue must be entered with a pure heart, free from hidden agendas, political goals, or theological superiority; (ii) Empathy and Love: Dialogue of the heart is sustained by genuine care and love for the other, not just as a member of another religion, but as a fellow human soul on a spiritual journey; (iii) Shared Moral Vision:

Participants recognize the common ethical ground across religious traditions, including peace, justice, humility, and service, and; (iv). Transcending Doctrinal Disputes: Dialogue focuses not on debating differences, but on cultivating mutual spiritual inspiration (Michel 2003).

Gülen's concept of the *Dialogue of the Heart* draws deep inspiration from the mystical teachings of Jalal al-Din Rumi, the 13th-century Sufi master and poet. Central to Rumi's thought is the idea that the heart is the seat of divine love and spiritual transformation. Rumi's emphasis on love (*ishq*), compassion, and unity in diversity directly informs Gülen's understanding of interfaith and intercultural harmony. Rumi wrote, "*Come, come, whoever you are... ours is not a caravan of despair*" (Nicholson 1926), a call for radical inclusivity rooted in divine love. Gülen extends this vision by promoting dialogue as a spiritual duty, encouraging individuals to transcend ego and approach others with humility and a heart attuned to divine mercy.

Gülen interprets Rumi's approach as a model for inner purification and spiritual solidarity. As Rumi believed that the heart must be emptied of pride to receive divine wisdom, Gülen teaches that the precondition for fruitful dialogue is a pure heart, free from prejudice. Both thinkers advocate listening deeply, not only to others' words but to the unspoken language of the soul. Through schools, relief work, and personal conduct, Gülen promotes the Sufi-inspired ethic of selfless service (*hizmet*), mirroring Rumi's ideal of loving humanity for God's sake. Ultimately, *Dialogue of the Heart* in Gülen's thought is not simply about coexistence, but about co-transformation sharing spiritual depths in a way that echoes Rumi's vision of the heart as the mirror of God.

A distinctive feature of Gülen's concept of the "Dialogue of the Heart" is its emphasis on non-verbal forms of communication, including shared acts of worship or meditation, periods of silence and contemplation, participation in spiritual retreats, and the exchange of ethical experiences. According to Gülen, such practices enable individuals to engage with one another's spirituality in a direct and experiential manner. In this framework, dialogue transcends verbal discourse to become an exchange of presence, wherein participants perceive each other's sincerity and devotion, fostering inner transformation (Ünal & Williams 2000). Initiatives inspired by Gülen such as the Journalists and Writers Foundation, the Niagara Foundation, and interfaith

iftar gatherings have cultivated environments conducive to the practice of the Dialogue of the Heart. Within these contexts, religious leaders and spiritual practitioners from diverse faiths share personal narratives, spiritual reflections, and interreligious moments of prayer. Notably, Christian and Muslim leaders who have participated in such inter-spiritual events, particularly those organized by Hizmet-affiliated groups in Europe and North America, frequently report experiencing a profound sense of spiritual kinship and emotional resonance.

These efforts are not aimed at theological agreement but at fostering moral fellowship and emotional solidarity, particularly in times of crisis. After the 9/11 attacks, many Hizmet-affiliated centers invited members of all faiths to gather for silent prayer and remembrance, demonstrating the healing power of spiritual presence in the face of fear and division (Ebaugh 2010). In an age marked by secular materialism, spiritual emptiness, and interreligious tension, Gülen's Dialogue of the Heart provides a much-needed antidote. He insists that modern society must rediscover the spiritual roots of human dignity and fraternity. Dialogue of the Heart is not about uniformity, but unity in diversity: a spiritual bond formed through shared experiences of awe, devotion, and conscience. Gülen writes, "*True dialogue can only flourish when hearts are open, not just minds. The warmth of the heart is more convincing than the sharpness of reason*" (Gülen 2004).

3. Dialogue of Living (Everyday Coexistence)

The dialogue of living includes elements of everyday interaction, such as casual encounters among ordinary people non-experts in religious teachings, who engage in informal conversations that can happen anytime and anywhere. These interactions reflect a mutual willingness to coexist peacefully and are driven by a desire to understand and learn from one another, fostering loving relationships regardless of religious differences (Suraya, Azizan & Khadijah 2012).

This form of dialogue emphasizes daily interactions, mutual respect, and peaceful coexistence among people of different faiths, cultures, and worldviews within shared social environments. For Gülen, such everyday encounters form the foundation for deeper understanding, social harmony, and sustainable peace. Thus, "Dialogue of Living" is the informal and continuous communication that occurs naturally in multicultural

and multi-religious societies through neighbourly relations, workplace cooperation, community involvement, and shared public life. Unlike formal dialogue settings or theological discussions, this type of dialogue is grounded in daily human interaction, where individuals demonstrate tolerance, respect, and kindness through their behaviour rather than formal speech. Gülen believes that in pluralistic societies, people can and should "get to know one another through shared spaces and shared experiences," echoing the Qur'anic principle: "*We made you into nations and tribes so that you may come to know one another*" (Qur'an 49:13). This verse, according to Gülen, reflects divine wisdom in human diversity. It is not intended to be a source of division but a call to mutual recognition and peaceful engagement (Gülen 2004).

At the heart of Dialogue of Living is the concept of "adab" (etiquette) a deeply rooted Islamic value emphasizing politeness, moral discipline, and care in human relations. Gülen argues that moral character, patience, and integrity are more powerful in conveying the values of one's religion than doctrinal preaching. He frequently states that people are often more convinced by how a person lives than by what they say (Ünal & Williams 2000).

Gülen's approach to interfaith and intercultural dialogue is deeply rooted in Sufi ethical principles, particularly the imperative to serve others and to recognize the presence of the Divine in every human being. He emphasizes that peaceful coexistence in everyday life constitutes a form of spiritual practice. Ordinary actions such as greeting a neighbor or assisting a colleague can become meaningful acts of dialogue when carried out with sincerity and benevolence (Michel 2003). In this context, Gülen articulates several foundational principles of what he terms the "Dialogue of Living": (i) *Tolerance and Patience* the respectful acceptance of others as they are; (ii) *Modesty and Humility* the avoidance of imposing one's views or asserting superiority; (iii) *Mutual Service* collaboration among individuals of diverse backgrounds in addressing common needs; and (iv) *Consistency of Character* the alignment between one's actions and beliefs, fostering trust and credibility. These principles have been operationalized within the Hizmet movement, which emphasizes ethical conduct and harmonious social engagement as integral means of serving both God and humanity.

Gülen-inspired educational and social institutions provide practical settings for this

concept. For example, Hizmet-affiliated schools and dialogue centres across the world bring together students, parents, and staff of different religious and cultural backgrounds. While these institutions do not engage in overt proselytizing, they are spaces of everyday engagement where dialogue happens organically through shared experiences classes, projects, community service, and mutual respect. In countries like Turkey, the United States, and South Africa, Gülen-inspired communities have organized intercultural dinners, neighbourhood iftar gatherings, and community clean-up projects, all of which foster peaceful daily interactions and break down stereotypes (Ebaugh 2010). Such practices do not require theological discussion to be effective; rather, they show the humanity of “the other” and build bridges through lived reality.

Fethullah Gülen's concept of the *Dialogue of Life*, is profoundly shaped by the historical, social, and religious landscape of his native country, Türkiye. As a country that straddles both East and West geographically, culturally, and religiously Türkiye provides a unique context where diverse communities have long lived side by side. This coexistence, albeit with tensions at times, offered Gülen a living model of pluralism that deeply influenced his thinking. Türkiye's Ottoman legacy, where Muslims, Christians, and Jews lived under the *millet* system with relative autonomy and mutual recognition, serves as a historical inspiration for Gülen's inclusive ethos (Yavuz 2003). Although the Republic of Turkey adopted a more secular-nationalist approach after 1923, elements of communal life and religious diversity continued, especially in Anatolian towns, where Gülen was raised. These environments fostered in him an appreciation for practical coexistence people of different faiths interacting peacefully in markets, neighbourhoods, and workplaces.

Gülen's concept of the *Dialogue of Life* emerges from the Turkish context of everyday interactions among diverse religious and ethnic communities. He asserts that genuine interfaith dialogue is not confined to formal meetings between religious leaders, but is best embodied in simple, everyday acts of kindness, respect, and cooperation. Ordinary gestures such as greeting neighbours, sharing festive meals, or offering assistance during hardship serve as meaningful expressions of interreligious engagement (Gülen 2004). His perspective was shaped by Türkiye's unique sociopolitical landscape, particularly the tension between secularism and

Islam. Gülen observed how rigid secularism often marginalized religious individuals, while religious exclusivism threatened societal cohesion. These experiences led him to advocate for a middle path: a model in which faith motivates individuals to engage in service, empathy, and peaceful coexistence within a pluralistic society. This lived reality in Türkiye became a formative ground for Gülen's dialogue philosophy a dynamic synthesis of coexistence and cultural negotiation. He envisioned the Dialogue of Life not as abstract theory, but as a lived ethic practiced through daily social interactions. Ultimately, Gülen redefined dialogue as a moral and spiritual commitment to living harmoniously with others, grounded in shared humanity and mutual respect.

Dialogue of Living is ongoing and sustainable. It creates a social climate where diversity is normalized and appreciated. Gülen argues that this is the most effective form of dialogue, especially in secular or religiously plural societies, because it engages people not as religious representatives but as neighbours, coworkers, and citizens. Dialogue of Living serves as a form of grassroots peacebuilding, where civil society itself becomes the engine of tolerance and understanding.

4. Dialogue of Action

Dialogue of Action refers to collaborative efforts between individuals or communities of different faiths and backgrounds to address common human needs such as education, poverty, disaster relief, healthcare, and social justice. It transcends mere conversation it embodies a dynamic interplay between thoughtful engagement and tangible deeds. He firmly believed that dialogue should not remain theoretical but transform into compassionate social action, thereby fostering both inner transformation and societal harmony. For Gülen, cooperation embodies the ethical essence of religion, which calls believers to love, serve, and uplift others (Gülen 2004). Drawing from the Qur'anic injunction, “*Help one another in righteousness and piety*” (Qur'an 5:2), he argues that working together for the common good forms a sincere and spiritual bridge between communities (Ünal & Williams 2000).

Gülen's understanding is influenced by the Islamic tradition of “*ihsan*” (doing what is beautiful) and “*khidmah*” (service), where genuine acts of charity transcend sectarian divides. He affirms that dialogue is not just an intellectual exercise, but a “way of being” a moral posture demonstrated in

how one treats others in real life. Dialogue of Action rests on several key principles: (i) Sincerity and Intentionality: Service must be offered with pure intentions, without seeking to convert or dominate others. The goal is mutual understanding and human solidarity, not proselytization (Michel 2003); (ii) Inclusiveness: Relief efforts and community services should be accessible to all, regardless of religion, ethnicity, or nationality. This inclusivity demonstrates the universality of moral values.; (iii) Service as Communication: Gülen asserts that actions often speak louder than words. A kind gesture, medical assistance, or a scholarship can communicate goodwill far more powerfully than dialogue sessions, and (iv) Cooperation over Competition: Faith communities should collaborate, not compete, in addressing societal challenges. Shared service fosters trust and lasting relationships (Yavuz & Esposito 2003).

Gülen's ideals were institutionalized through the Hizmet (Service) Movement, which built schools, dialogue centres, and interfaith platforms worldwide (Dumovich 2024). His movement's educational and civic initiatives are living embodiments of dialogue turning into service a practical application of his philosophical vision (Ahmad Sunawari et al. 2022).

Notwithstanding its appeal, Gülen's approach has not been without criticism. Opponents have argued that his selective use of Quranic verses and prophetic narratives for dialogue constitutes a decontextualized or ideological interpretation. Some critics assert that such usages like the Prophet's Medina Charter or migration to Abyssinia are historical events, not dialogue models for modern interfaith engagement.

CONCLUSION

Fethullah Gülen's concept of dialogue presents a profound ethical and spiritual response to the contemporary challenges of pluralism, religious tension, and cultural fragmentation. Far from being a mere diplomatic formality, dialogue in Gülen's vision is a way of life rooted in Islamic principles, Sufi ethics, and universal human values. His fourfold typology Dialogue of Words, Dialogue of the Heart, Dialogue of Living, and Dialogue of Action offers a comprehensive framework that addresses the intellectual, spiritual, social, and practical dimensions of human interaction.

Through Dialogue of Words, Gülen advocates respectful, informed communication as a counter

to prejudice and misrepresentation. Dialogue of the Heart emphasizes empathy, sincerity, and divine love, creating space for spiritual intimacy beyond doctrinal boundaries. Dialogue of Living operationalizes tolerance and coexistence in daily interactions, encouraging ordinary people to embody moral virtues in shared spaces. Finally, Dialogue of Action enables interfaith collaboration in addressing global human needs, grounding dialogue in compassionate service.

Importantly, Gülen's dialogical philosophy is not naïve to the impediments of fanaticism, political manipulation, secular resistance, and egotism. Instead, he offers moral counterweights sincerity (*ikhlas*), humility (*tawadu'*), and shared service (*khidmah*) as practical antidotes. His emphasis on education and inner purification reflects a deeper commitment to transforming not only structures but hearts.

The legacy of the Hizmet movement provides living testimony to Gülen's vision, as it implements these dialogical principles in diverse educational, humanitarian, and intercultural contexts across the globe (Iner & Cufurovic 2022). In a world plagued by polarization and conflict, this model of spiritually inspired dialogue offers a sustainable path toward mutual understanding and global harmony. Ultimately, Gülen teaches that dialogue is not about theological compromise, but about ethical convergence a shared journey towards justice, mercy, and peace through everyday acts of compassion and solidarity.

Fethullah Gülen's vision of inspirational dialogue centres on the belief that open, respectful communication across cultures, religions, and ideologies is the key to lasting peace. He emphasizes that dialogue must go beyond mere tolerance, fostering empathy, mutual understanding, and a shared commitment to human dignity. Rooted in Islamic values yet universal in scope, Gülen's approach encourages people to see diversity as an asset, not a threat.

Central to his philosophy is the idea that sustainable harmony requires both intellectual engagement and moral responsibility. By promoting education, interfaith initiatives, and service to humanity as he stated in his four categories of dialogues, Gülen inspires individuals to break down prejudice and build bridges of trust. Gülen asserts that dialogue should be proactive initiated not only in times of conflict but as an ongoing investment in peace.

In today's interconnected yet polarized world, Gülen's model offers a sustainable path: one where cooperation replaces confrontation, and compassion overrides fear. It is a call for each person to act as an ambassador of goodwill, engaging sincerely with others to create a global community rooted in respect, justice, and shared purpose. His inspirational dialogue is not just an ideal it is a practical framework for building a more harmonious future for all.

This study has provided valuable insights into Fethullah Gülen's dialogical philosophy, structured through his fourfold framework of dialogue. However, several avenues remain open for further scholarly exploration. First, future research could expand beyond textual and hermeneutic analysis by incorporating empirical fieldwork, such as interviews and surveys with participants in Hizmet-inspired institutions, to assess how Gülen's theoretical ideals are practiced in diverse cultural contexts. Second, comparative studies could be conducted between Gülen's dialogical model and other global interfaith frameworks, such as Hans Küng's *Global Ethic* or John Hick's pluralistic theology, to highlight convergences and differences in philosophical underpinnings and practical applications. Third, further research should examine the sociopolitical reception of Gülen's dialogue philosophy in different regions, especially in contexts marked by secularism, religious nationalism, or conflict, where dialogue initiatives may face resistance or politicization. Finally, future work could evaluate the long-term sustainability and transformative impact of Hizmet's educational and humanitarian projects, especially in fostering grassroots peacebuilding. Such studies would not only enrich academic understanding but also provide actionable insights for policymakers, educators, and interfaith practitioners seeking to implement authentic dialogue in pluralistic societies.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The authors would like to thank to the Faculty of Islamic Studies, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia for supporting this research.

AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

Conceptualized the study, developed the theoretical framework based on Gülen's philosophy. Also drafted the initial sections of the manuscript, particularly the literature review discussion, and revised the manuscript critically for intellectual

content, Ahmad Sunawari Long.; Designed the qualitative research methodology and analysed the empirical data, Mohd Hatib Ismail.; Contributed substantially to the findings section and revision, Kamarudin Salleh.

REFERENCES

- Ahmad Sunawari Long, Mohd Hatib Ismail & Zulazmi Yaakob. 2022. Fethullah Gülen: Interfaith dialogue as a way to the global peace. *International Journal of Islamic Thought*. 21 (June): 13-23.
- Aviv, E. 2025. Religion as a tool of outreach: Historical reflections on the Gülen and Adnan Oktar Movements in their relations with Israel. *Religions*. 16(9): 1089.
- Dumovich, Liza. 2024. A home in the Hicret: Morality, domestic space and belonging in a Turkish Muslim community in Brazil. *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory*. 14 (2): 341-355.
- Ebaugh, H. R. 2010. *The Gülen Movement: A Sociological Analysis of a Civic Movement Rooted in Moderate Islam*. n.l : Springer.
- Fitzgerald, Scott T. 2017. Conceptualizing and understanding the Gülen movement. *Sociology Compass*. 11 (3): 1-10.
- Gülen, F. 2004. *Toward a Global Civilization of Love and Tolerance*. Somerset, NJ: The Light Inc.
- Hick, J. 2004. *An Interpretation of Religion: Human Responses to the Transcendent*. 2nd edition. Connecticut: Yale University Press.
- Ihsan, N.H, Permana, R.F., & Maulana, A.M.R. 2022. Bediuzzaman Said Nursi and the nature of human creation in his major works: considering a new breakthrough in Islamic philosophy. *Journal of Islamic Thought and Civilization (JITC)* 12(1): 81–97.
- Iner, Derya & Cufurovic Mirela. 2022. Moving beyond Binary Discourses: Islamic Universalism from an Islamic Revivalist Movement's Point of View. *Religions*. 13 (9): 821.
- Küng, H. 1991. *Global Responsibility: In Search of a New World Ethic*. n.l : Crossroad.
- Michel, T. 2003. "Fethullah Gülen as Educator." In, Yavuz, M. H. & Esposito, J. L. (Eds.), *Turkish Islam and the Secular State: The Gülen Movement*. (pp. 69–84). Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press.
- Neval, Emine. 2024. Sohbet: Revitalization of the Hizmet/ Gülen Movement in Finland through Sıpiritual Gatherings. *Approaching Religion*. 14 (2): 93-112.
- Nicholson, R.A. 1926. *The Mathnawı of Jalalüddin Rûmı*. E.J.W. Gibb Memorial Series.
- Sertkaya, S. 2023. Sırah Philosophy: A Modern Trajectory for Sırah Studies. *Religions*. 14(11): 1440.
- Suraya Sintang, Azizan Baharuddin & Khadijah Mohd Khambali@Hambali. 2012. Dialogue of Life and Its Significance in Inter-Religious Relation in Malaysia. *International Journal of Islamic Thought*. 2 (Dec): 69-79

- Ünal, A., & Williams, A. (Eds.). 2000. *Advocate of Dialogue: Fethullah Gülen*. Fairfax, VA: The Fountain.
- Yavuz, M. H. 2003. *Islamic Political Identity in Turkey*. London: Oxford University Press.
- Yavuz, M. H., & Esposito, J. L. 2003. *Turkish Islam and the Secular State: The Gülen Movement*. Syracuse: Syracuse University Press.
- Yucel, Salih. 2010. Fethullah Gülen Spiritual Leader in a Global Islamic Context. *Journal of Religion and Society*. 12: 1-19.
- Yucel, Salih & Albayrak, Ismail. 2014. *The Art of Coexistence: Pioneering Role of Fethullah Gülen and the Hizmet Movement*. New Jersey: Tughra Books.