Religiosity and Attitudes: A Study of Indonesian Islamic Primary School Students

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ABSTRACT

The integration of religious learning significantly shapes students' educational experiences and character development. This study explores specific dimensions of religiosity in the attitudes of Islamic primary school students in Indonesia, focusing on awareness, initiative, and altruism. Using a qualitative design with a grounded theory approach, the research was conducted in 64 classes from grades 1 to 6, involving 1,920 students. Instruments included a guidebook of students' daily worship activities and teacher observations. Data were analyzed using NVivo 14 and Crosstab analysis. The findings reveal that students' external religiosity, influenced by their environment and personal motivation, leads to internal religiosity characterized by conscientiousness, initiative, and altruism. Conscientiousness reflects adherence to religious norms, initiative is shown through disciplined and pious actions, and altruism manifests in helping others based on religious teachings. The study concludes that the development of students' religiosity dimensions results from disciplined and continuous training supported by teachers and parents. The findings highlight the importance of ongoing attention and guidance in fostering altruistic attitudes. These insights have implications for educators, policymakers, and parents, emphasizing the need for comprehensive religious education that promotes ethical behavior and social responsibility. Future research should explore the long-term effects of religious education on moral and social development, its impact across diverse backgrounds, and the role of digital platforms in enhancing religious education.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Religious education has long been recognized globally as a fundamental component in the holistic development of students' character. It provides a moral framework that can guide behavior, promote empathy, and foster social harmony. Across various cultures and religions, the integration of religious principles in education has proven to cultivate virtues such as integrity, compassion, and self-discipline,

which are essential for personal and societal well-being. In the context of Islamic education, character development is deeply intertwined with Islamic ethics education, emphasizing values like love, integrity, compassion, and self-discipline (Ismail, 2016). Teachers, particularly those teaching religious subjects, are pivotal in nurturing students' understanding of religious diversity, tolerance, and character development (M. Amin, Ritonga, & Nasrul, 2021). As conveyors of knowledge, professional teachers are expected to embody and promote these religious dimensions, serving as role models in both behavior and speech. Religiosity dimensions, which include belief, religious practice, appreciation, religious knowledge, experience, and consequences, are integral to understanding how religious education shapes student character.

Character education programs in primary schools often integrate religious values, such as including prayer before learning activities, to improve students' character (Veronika & Dafit, 2022). Religious learning helps students meet academic challenges and should be tailored to meet individual needs through appropriate teaching materials, methods, and ongoing support (Paulus, Raihan, & Sutarjo, 2022). Beliefs and appreciation of religion ultimately converge on a dimension. Dimensions measure various aspects of a phenomenon (Kryanev, Pavlova, & Kvon, 2021). The meaning of dimensions of religiosity include belief, religious practice, appreciation, religious knowledge, as well as experience, and consequences (Villani, Sorgente, Iannello, & Antonietti, 2019). These five dimensions are a unity that is interrelated with each other in understanding religiosity.

In recent years, there has been growing interest in developing religious learning studies to shape students' educational experiences and character development (Haryani, Astriyani, & Devana, 2021). These studies highlight the importance of integrating religious education into the curriculum to foster holistic growth among students (Rinaldi Putra, Riki Saputra, & Ritonga, 2022). By incorporating religious teachings into the educational framework, schools can equip students with a strong moral compass and ethical foundation (A. Amin et al., 2022). Such an approach enhances students' academic knowledge and contributes significantly to their personal and social development.

Planting the dimensions of religiosity in elementary schools is also important to strengthen students' prophetic spirit (Ismail, 2016). The dimensions of religiosity instilled in primary schools include the values of discipline, honesty, responsibility, sincerity, tolerance, mutual respect, and environmental care. The cultivation of religious values is integrated into all subjects, school culture, and extracurricular activities (Wati & Arif, 2017). The religiosity dimension can be applied through religious and ethical education materials in schools. In this context, the spiritual dimension is defined as attitudes and behaviors that are obedient in carrying out the teachings of the religion that is adopted, tolerant of the implementation of other religious worship, and the attitude of living in harmony with adherents of different religions (Maharani, Zulela, & Nadiroh, 2019). This dimension affects one's personal and social attitudes; therefore, the inculcation of this dimension in education can help shape students' character.

The importance of religious learning in shaping the educational experience and character development of primary school students cannot be underestimated. Research shows that early exposure to religious teachings can have a major impact on students' values, beliefs, and behavior (Suryantari, 2022). By instilling religious values early on, schools can help students develop a sense of purpose, empathy, and social responsibility (Munawaroh, 2023). In addition, religious education promotes tolerance, respect for diversity, and peaceful co-existence among students from different backgrounds (Kesi, 2023). In short, religious learning in primary schools not only provides knowledge about faith but also contributes significantly to character development by promoting values such as tolerance, compassion, and integrity.

Despite extensive research on religious education, there is a paucity of studies concretely defining religiosity in the context of primary school students' religious activities. The first research that revealed the study of religiosity was conducted by Alport and Ross (1967). Alport and Ross (1967) with the title "Personal Religious Orientation and Predujice" which is published in the Journal of Personality and Social Psychology. This study distinguishes between intrinsic religious orientation, where individuals embrace religion as a primary goal in their lives, and extrinsic orientation, where religion is more of a means to

achieve other goals such as social status or personal comfort. Various studies emphasize the importance of religious education in schools, particularly in improving grades, character development, and social interaction among students (Ansori, Husarida, & Hasirah, 2022; Fathinnaufal & Hidayati, 2020; Paulus et al., 2022). Studies highlight that religious education should be inclusive, taking into account the unique needs of students and providing continuous attention and motivation (Paulus et al., 2022). In addition, the classroom environment is also a supportive aspect in improving the dimensions of student religiosity (Eom et al., 2021).

Given the significant role of religious education in character development, this study aims to explore the specific dimensions of religiosity that shape the attitudes of Islamic primary school students in Indonesia. Specifically, the research seeks to answer: What are the forms of religiosity dimensions exhibited by these students, and how do these dimensions influence their character and behavior?

2. METHODS

This research employs a qualitative approach using grounded theory to explore religious learning among Islamic primary school students. By using this method, researchers can capture the nuances of religious learning experiences and their influence on students' character-building (Gulab, 2023).

This research was conducted in 64 Islamic primary school classrooms in Sidoarjo, involving a total of 1,920 students from grades 1 to 6. Each Islamic primary school class was selected based on diverse characteristics in terms of management, financing, care, facilities, and learning outcomes, ensuring a comprehensive representation of the varied educational environments within the region. The schools were chosen to reflect different pedagogical approaches and socio-economic backgrounds to provide a robust understanding of the dimensions of religiosity in student attitudes (Villani 2019). This research is unique in its approach to exploring the theory of religiosity dimensions, as it takes into account the diverse educational settings and the specific context of Islamic primary education in Sidoarjo.

The data collection techniques in this study included in-depth interviews to gather detailed information about students' actions related to the dimensions of religiosity at school. The interview process involved several stages: (1) determining the focus of the interview, (2) selecting and determining the informants, (3) setting the location for the interview, (4) preparing the interview tools, (5) setting up electronic recording devices, (6) assembling the interview team, and (7) scheduling the interview time (Spradley, 2016).

To ensure the reliability and validity of the interviews, several measures were implemented. We conducted pilot interviews to refine our questions and process, trained interviewers to maintain consistency, and used triangulation by cross-referencing interview data with observations and other sources. Additionally, we performed member checks by sharing summaries of the interviews with participants to confirm the accuracy of the information collected.

Data were analyzed using NVivo 14, following the attribute analysis steps in the case study approach (Houghton, Murphy, Shaw, & Casey, 2015), and adapting the grounded theory techniques of Anselm Strauss and Juliet Corbin (1997), which consist of three stages: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding.

NVivo 14 was utilized to manage and analyze qualitative data systematically. During the open coding stage, NVivo was used to identify and label concepts and categories within the interview transcripts. This stage involved breaking down the data into discrete parts and examining them for similarities and differences. In the axial coding stage, NVivo facilitated the process of relating codes (categories and subcategories) to each other by reassembling data in new ways to identify patterns and relationships. Finally, in the selective coding stage, NVivo assisted in integrating and refining categories to form a coherent theoretical framework that explains the dimensions of religiosity in students' attitudes.

Triangulation was conducted using the internal reliability test method (Edwards-Jones, 2014) to ensure the reliability and validity of the findings. This process involved cross-referencing data from multiple sources, including interviews, observations, and students' daily worship activities recorded in guidebooks. By comparing these different data sources, we were able to corroborate findings and

minimize biases. Additionally, member checking was employed, where summaries of the findings were shared with participants to verify the accuracy and credibility of the interpretations.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Findings

From the results of NVivo selective coding processing, four general forms were obtained, namely normative self-assessment views of students, different religious views due to differences in context, different views caused by factors, and different religious views due to differences in achievement (Figure 1).
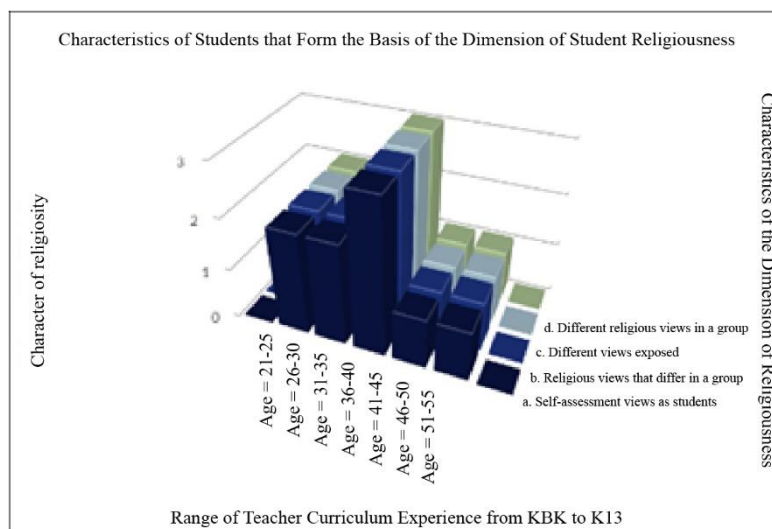

Figure 1. Student Characteristics Diagram

Normative Self-Assessment: This form refers to the internal evaluation and reflection that students engage in regarding their religious beliefs and practices. Students assess their adherence to religious norms and values, which influences their internalization of religiosity. This self-assessment is a critical component of the dimension of religious knowledge and personal belief, as it reflects the depth of students' understanding and commitment to their faith.

Views Shaped by Different Religious Contexts: This form highlights how students' attitudes towards religiosity are influenced by the diverse religious environments they are exposed to. Differences in family practices, community involvement, and school religious activities contribute to varied religious experiences. This form is closely related to the dimension of religious practice, as it encompasses the external manifestations of religiosity shaped by contextual factors.

Influences of Various Factors: This form encompasses the external factors that impact students' religiosity, such as socio-economic status, parental involvement, and peer interactions. These factors play a significant role in shaping students' religious attitudes and behaviors. This form ties into the dimension of religious appreciation, as it reflects how external influences enhance or hinder students' religious experiences and values.

Perspectives Influenced by Achievement Differences: This form addresses how differences in academic and extracurricular achievements influence students' views on religiosity. Students who excel in these areas may develop a sense of responsibility and altruism that is reflected in their religious attitudes. This form is linked to the dimension of religious experience and consequence, illustrating how achievements and recognition impact students' religious development and actions.

Figure 2 illustrates the distribution and prevalence of these dimensions across different teaching places. The chart shows variations in the manifestation of these religious dimensions, highlighting the diverse ways in which students internalize and express their religiosity within the school environment.

The four religious views manifest in the concrete behavior of students' attitudes, which become seven implementations of students' religious dimensions in their daily behavior at school, namely auto-religion, always feeling God's presence, awareness of religious tolerance, piety, discipline, awareness, and responsiveness.
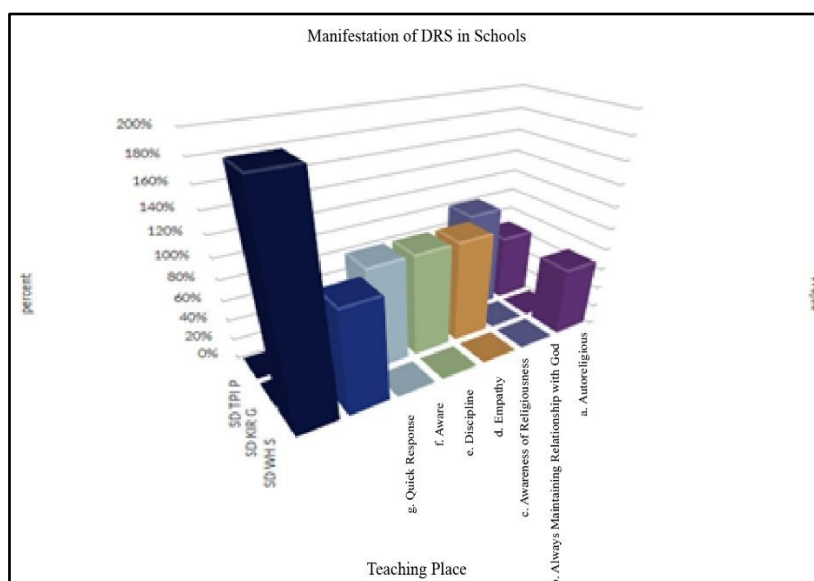

Figure 2. Diagram of DRS Forms in Schools

Auto-religion represents students' internal and external religious practices that become part of their daily routine, reflecting their automatic engagement in religious activities influenced by both internal motivation and external encouragement. Always feeling God's presence highlights the students' continuous sense of being in the presence of God, influencing their behavior to align with religious teachings and fostering a consistent awareness of their spiritual obligations. Awareness of religious tolerance pertains to students' understanding and acceptance of religious diversity, emphasizing respect for others' beliefs and practices and promoting harmonious interactions among students of different faiths.

Piety is demonstrated through students' devotion to religious duties and rituals, including regular prayer, participation in religious ceremonies, and adherence to moral and ethical guidelines prescribed by their faith. Discipline reflects the self-control and orderliness that students exhibit in their religious and secular activities, cultivated through consistent practice and adherence to religious principles that promote disciplined behavior. Awareness encompasses the students' conscious recognition of their religious identity and responsibilities, involving a deep understanding of their faith and its implications for their daily conduct. Responsiveness is the students' quick and proactive reaction to religious and moral calls to action, including helping others, participating in charitable activities, and responding to situations with empathy and compassion.

From the seven manifestations of the dimensions of religiosity of students' attitudes, in-depth interviews were then conducted to be classified into the essence of religious character, so that three findings were obtained, namely awareness, initiative and altruism (Figure 3).
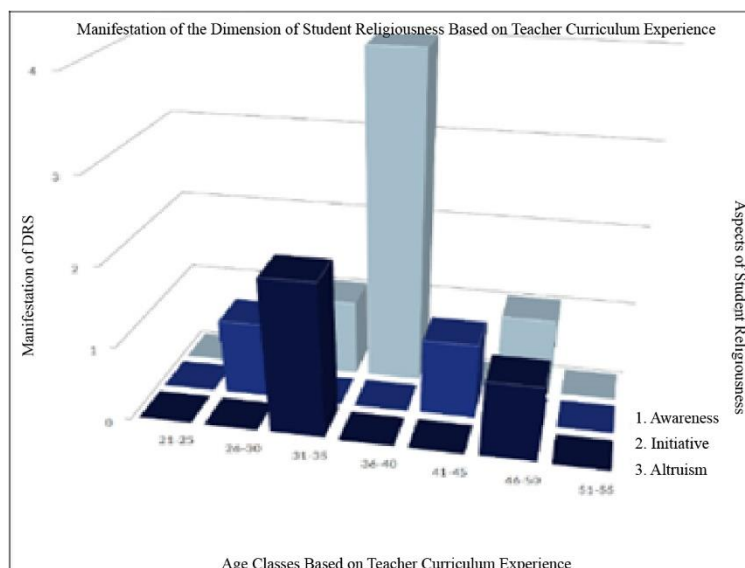
Figure 3. diagram of the manifestation of students' religious dimensions

More detailed forms of the religiosity dimension of student attitudes at school in the aspects of awareness, initiative, and altruism are described as follows.

3.1.1 Awareness

Awareness is the core of every action that has consequences. Awareness forms an attitude as a form of consequence as in the exposure found auto-religious awareness, awareness of always feeling the presence of God, and awareness of religious tolerance. More detailed data exposure is as follows.

a. Auto-religious Awareness

Auto-religion is formed through social encouragement, causing students to participate in religious activities either willingly or through external pressure. This results in two findings: independence and reflex toyibah. More details are presented as follows:

Two informants identified auto-religious awareness as a major premise of the general characteristics of DRS. From one informant, the following statements were presented:

"*At school, students engage in religious activities in a relaxed manner without being monitored by the teacher" (SD A1).*

"*Reflexively saying salam and bowing when meeting teachers" (SD C1).*

b. Consciousness always Feels God's Presence

The awareness of always feeling God's presence is developed through the habituation of worship activities conducted in social settings, so students consciously feel this presence, whether willingly or forced. The results include independence and reflex toyibah. Two informants stated that they always feel God's presence as a major premise of the general characteristics of DRS. From one informant, the following statements were presented:

"*Engaging in religious activities at school in a relaxed manner" (SD A1).*

"*Saying toyibah sentences when surprised, sneezing, or falling" (SD A1).*

c. Awareness of religious tolerance

Two informants identified awareness of religious tolerance as a major premise of the general characteristics of DRS. From one informant, the following statements were presented:

> *"Respecting religious differences in practicing religious beliefs within the community" (SD B1).*

> *"Awareness of religious differences as a foundational characteristic of DRS" (SD B1).*

3.1.2 Initiative

Initiative is a self-reaction to awareness. The data revealed initiatives based on piety and discipline. Detailed data are as follows:

a. Initiative based on Piety

One informant identified piety as the major premise of the general characteristics of DRS. From one informant, the following statements were presented:

> *"By performing acts of worship such as obligatory prayers and the sunnah dhuha prayer, not stealing, and not lying" (SD B2).*

b. Initiative to Discipline

One informant identified discipline as the major premise of the general characteristics of DRS. From one informant, the following statement was presented:

> *"By orderly following religious activities at school, for example, performing the dhuha prayer before studying" (SD B3).*

3.1.3 Altruism

Altruism is the willingness to sacrifice oneself for religious and social causes. Altruism is a fixed reaction, initiated many times. Detailed data are as follows:

a. Altruism Towards Religious Commandments

One informant stated that awareness was the major premise of the general characteristics of DRS. From one interviewee, the following statement was presented:

> *"Being aware of the prayer command, so they always remind others when it is time to pray" (SD C2).*

b. Quick Response Altruism

One interviewee stated that responsiveness was a major premise of the general characteristics of DRS. From one informant, the following statement was presented:

> *"Religious students interpret that godliness lies in the speed in carrying out tasks to completion from the teacher" (SD C3).*

3.2 Discussion

A more comprehensive analysis of the religious dimension of students in school, particularly in terms of their awareness, initiative, and altruism, is outlined below. These aspects are crucial in shaping students' moral and ethical development, fostering a deeper sense of responsibility toward themselves and others. By understanding these dimensions, educators can better support students in cultivating

values that align with both personal growth and the broader goals of societal well-being. Furthermore, the discussion highlights how these traits contribute to a more cohesive and compassionate school environment, promoting a culture of mutual respect and cooperation.

Awareness is central to every action with consequences (Christhilf, 2022). In this study, awareness is manifested through three key forms: auto-religious awareness, a constant feeling of God's presence, and an understanding of religious tolerance. Auto-religious awareness refers to the natural or internal inclination of religious students to internalize and express their beliefs personally (Miller et al., 2022). This includes engaging in personal religious practices and reflecting on their spiritual beliefs without external prompts, such as participating in religious activities at school in a relaxed manner or greeting teachers with religious salutations. These actions become an integral part of their identity, illustrating their deep connection to the tenets of their faith.

A heightened sense of God's presence, as experienced by religious students, is also significant. This is often shaped by consistent religious practices like prayer, meditation, and spiritual reflection, which fortify their relationship with God (Ipgrave & Bertram-Troost, 2008; Shakeshaft et al., 2014). The teachings they receive within their religious communities further reinforce the importance of this personal connection to God. However, it is critical to recognize that the feeling of closeness to God does not automatically equate to a deep understanding of moral values or ethical behavior (Schuchardt & Schunn, 2016). While spiritual experiences can inspire ethical actions, a comprehensive moral education is essential to help students critically assess the ethical implications of their choices. This involves learning about universally accepted moral values such as honesty, empathy, and compassion, and understanding how these principles interact with religious beliefs (Ismail, 2016). Consequently, fostering an awareness of ethical conduct alongside spiritual experiences is necessary for holistic moral development.

Awareness of religious tolerance, another vital component, involves recognizing and accepting religious diversity. Although students may have a strong understanding of their religious teachings, they must also apply the moral principles of their faith in daily life (Khuwaja & Ezzani, 2022). Respecting religious differences and fostering harmonious interactions with peers of different faiths promotes a more inclusive and respectful school environment. Such awareness encourages students to engage positively with religious diversity, enhancing mutual respect and collaboration within the community.

Initiative, defined as a self-driven response to awareness (Zimmerman & Martínez-Pons, 2012), is another key aspect revealed in this study, especially when rooted in piety and discipline. Initiative based on piety emerges from a strong belief in and devotion to religious principles (Benoit, 2021). Students who take the initiative in practicing religious rituals, upholding moral values, and reflecting on their spirituality are motivated by their sense of piety. Acts such as performing obligatory prayers, participating in the sunnah dhuha prayer, and maintaining integrity by avoiding lying or stealing illustrate their commitment to living out their religious teachings. However, true piety extends beyond mere participation in rituals and includes the development of moral integrity and character (Van Aardt, 2014).

Similarly, initiative to maintain discipline, particularly in the context of religious practices, is crucial for students' personal development. Religious teachings often emphasize discipline, whether in adhering to schedules for prayer or avoiding actions that conflict with religious values, such as dishonesty (Van Aardt, 2014). For example, students who orderly follow religious activities, such as performing dhuha prayer before study sessions, demonstrate discipline that is not only beneficial for their spiritual growth but also for their overall character development (Gardner, 2021). Thus, integrating disciplined behavior rooted in ethical values is essential for fostering a strong moral foundation in students.

Altruism, characterized by the willingness to sacrifice for religious and social causes, represents another key dimension of moral development. This form of altruism is evident in students' dedication to religious commands and their quick responses to help others in need. Altruism towards religious

commands is encouraged through acts of charity and participation in religious programs aimed at helping others (Holt, 2022). Students who regularly engage in these activities, such as sharing food during religious celebrations or raising donations for charitable causes, develop a strong sense of empathy and social responsibility (Andrei, 2023). Such experiences instill the values of kindness, generosity, and a sense of duty to the community, which are critical to their ethical development.

Quick response altruism, which refers to students' immediate reactions to others in need, reflects their empathy and concern for their peers. For example, when a student helps a friend who has fallen or shares school supplies, these spontaneous actions demonstrate the core of altruistic behavior—concern for the well-being of others. Such proactive attitudes, often modeled by teachers and parents, contribute to creating a supportive and caring school environment where students feel secure and valued (SD C3).

The implications of these findings for educational practices and policies are significant. Integrating religious education into the broader curriculum can foster students' holistic development by promoting awareness, initiative, and altruism. Educators and policymakers should recognize the importance of these traits in shaping students' moral character and social responsibility. Programs that encourage personal religious reflection, ethical decision-making, and empathy toward others can greatly enhance students' overall development. Additionally, promoting religious tolerance and respect for diversity is essential for building inclusive and harmonious school communities. By addressing these dimensions, educators can better support the moral, social, and spiritual growth of their students, contributing to their well-being and success in life.

4. CONCLUSION

The study concluded that the dimensions of religiosity in student attitudes are shaped by a combination of strong personal motivation and environmental factors, particularly the influence of teachers and parents, and that these dimensions can evolve over time. Awareness, a key dimension, emerges from repeated religious practices and is reinforced through social interactions within the school environment. Students develop auto-religious awareness by consistently engaging in religious activities, such as prayers and ceremonies, which also foster a sense of God's presence and promote ethical behavior. Exposure to diverse religious perspectives in school nurtures awareness of religious tolerance, encouraging respect for different beliefs. Initiative, another dimension, arises from the disciplined practice of religious teachings, with students demonstrating piety and self-regulation through regular worship and moral actions. This initiative is further strengthened by structured guidance from teachers and parents. Altruism is cultivated through the pleasure students derive from engaging in religious practices, leading them to participate in charitable acts and help others, reflecting their internalized values of empathy and compassion.

The study's findings have practical implications for educators, policymakers, and parents. For educators, incorporating religious education into the broader curriculum can significantly enhance students' moral and social development. Creating an inclusive environment that respects religious diversity and promotes tolerance is essential for fostering positive student interactions. Policymakers should develop initiatives that support religious education and character-building programs, while parents play a vital role in reinforcing religious practices and values at home, complementing school efforts. However, the research has limitations, as it primarily focuses on short-term effects and does not explore how religiosity evolves over a student's lifetime.

Future research could address these limitations by examining the long-term impact of religious education on students' moral and social development. Additionally, exploring how various religious practices shape specific aspects of character would provide valuable insights. Studies on the effects of religious education on students from diverse cultural and socio-economic backgrounds could further enrich understanding of its broader relevance. Finally, the potential of digital platforms to enhance religious education, particularly in the context of remote learning, is another area for future exploration. These findings highlight the importance of personal motivation and environmental influences in

shaping religiosity, with significant implications for improving educational practices and promoting an inclusive and empathetic society.

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