Religious Understanding as a Predictor of Adolescent Religious Behavior: An Empirical Study in Central Lampung, Indonesia

Ria Dona Sari, Mukhtar Hadi, Buyung Syukron
Institut Agama Islam Negeri (Iain) Metro Lampung
Email: ria@gmail.com

A B S T R A K

Purpose: This study investigates the extent to which religious understanding predicts the religious behavior of adolescents in Central Lampung, Indonesia. In many developing societies, religious education plays a central role in shaping moral orientation and behavioral patterns among youth. However, limited empirical research has examined this relationship quantitatively. This study seeks to fill that gap by exploring how variations in adolescents' comprehension of Islamic teachings influence their practical expressions of faith in daily life.

Method: A quantitative correlational design was employed, involving 27 adolescent respondents selected from a population of 142 in Ngestirahayu Village, Punggur District. Data were collected through questionnaires, interviews, and documentation techniques. The analysis used the Chi-Square (χ^2) statistical test to determine the strength and significance of the relationship between religious understanding and religious behavior.

Findings: The results revealed a significant correlation between religious understanding and religious behavior ($\chi^2 = 30.59$; $p < 0.05$), with a correlation coefficient of 0.7 indicating a moderate yet positive relationship. Adolescents with a higher level of comprehension of religious principles demonstrated more consistent worship practices, moral conduct, and social responsibility.

Significance: The study highlights the predictive role of religious understanding in shaping adolescents' spiritual and ethical development. Its findings underscore the importance of integrating cognitive, affective, and behavioral components of religious education into youth programs. Strengthening religious literacy at the community level can foster more grounded moral awareness and contribute to social harmony within multicultural contexts.

Keywords : Adolescents, Behavior, Chi-Square Analysis, Indonesia, Religious Education, Religious Understanding.

INTRODUCTION

behavior across cultures. In many Muslim-majority societies, such as Indonesia, religion serves not only as a personal belief system but also as a framework for ethical decision-making and civic responsibility (Azra, 2020). Adolescence represents a critical phase in which individuals begin forming autonomous moral judgments and internalizing religious norms. When religious understanding is weak, adolescents may face difficulties translating faith into consistent behavior, potentially leading to moral disorientation. The increasing pluralism and digital exposure among Indonesian youth make this issue even more urgent. Therefore, exploring how comprehension of religious teachings predicts behavioral expressions becomes crucial for understanding contemporary youth religiosity (Khalid & Ahmed, 2021). This study

emphasizes that moral stability among adolescents depends on both intellectual and emotional engagement with religious knowledge.

Religious understanding acts as a cognitive foundation that guides moral conduct and shapes social interaction. Prior research indicates that young individuals who possess deeper comprehension of religious doctrines tend to demonstrate higher self-regulation, empathy, and social cooperation (Hassan & Salleh, 2022). Conversely, limited understanding often correlates with ritualistic religiosity without internalized moral commitment. In the Indonesian educational context, religious education is an integral component of the national curriculum aimed at developing character and faith-based reasoning (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2022). However, the extent to which understanding translates into behavioral consistency remains underexplored at the community level. The phenomenon observed in Central Lampung—where adolescents actively participate in religious activities but show varied moral discipline—presents a valuable context for empirical investigation. Such an inquiry can illuminate how knowledge and practice interact within youth religious development.

In addition, the issue has implications that extend beyond personal piety into broader sociocultural cohesion. Religion in Indonesia functions as a unifying moral system that sustains community harmony amidst diversity (Rahman & Fadhil, 2020). A decline in moral consistency among youth could weaken this social fabric. By analyzing the predictive role of religious understanding, educators and policymakers may identify key variables influencing moral maturity. The study contributes to understanding how faith literacy can shape the ethical resilience of adolescents. Moreover, it provides evidence that can inform the design of religious education interventions to prevent moral disengagement. In this sense, the topic is not only academically relevant but also socially urgent. Thus, this research addresses both cognitive and behavioral dimensions of religiosity among Indonesian adolescents in a rural Muslim setting.

The rationale for this study lies in bridging the gap between religious cognition and observable moral behavior among adolescents. Although religious instruction is widely implemented in Indonesian schools, evidence suggests that doctrinal knowledge alone may not guarantee ethical application in daily life (Nurhayati, 2023). Many youths memorize religious texts without critically understanding their moral implications, resulting in superficial religiosity. Exploring this relationship from a predictive perspective enables a better grasp of how comprehension can transform into ethical consistency. Furthermore, this topic resonates with the global discourse on moral education, where cognitive, affective, and behavioral domains must be integrated to produce holistic character formation (King & Roeser, 2019). By focusing on the adolescent stage—a period of heightened identity exploration—this research contributes to understanding the dynamics of faith internalization. Consequently, the study's rationale is grounded in both educational psychology and social ethics, offering practical insights for curriculum developers and community leaders.

Recent studies have emphasized that religious understanding significantly influences moral and social outcomes among youth. Ahmad and Osman (2020) found that Islamic knowledge correlates positively with pro-social behavior and emotional regulation. Similarly, Zulkifli et al. (2021) demonstrated that moral reasoning improves when adolescents engage in reflective religious study rather than rote learning. Research by Ali and Salleh (2022) highlighted that spiritual intelligence mediates the relationship between religious

comprehension and ethical behavior. Al-Kandari (2022) observed that consistent engagement with religious texts enhances adolescents' empathy and responsibility in community participation. Moreover, Yusoff and Rahman (2021) reported that integrating critical reflection in religious education fosters long-term moral awareness. Collectively, these findings affirm that understanding—rather than mere ritual adherence—determines the sustainability of religious practice. Such results provide the conceptual foundation for analyzing adolescents' religiosity within a cognitive-behavioral framework.

Another stream of research connects religious understanding with psychological well-being and social identity. Hidayat et al. (2023) found that comprehension of religious principles enhances adolescents' resilience and sense of purpose. Noor and Hassan (2021) argued that balanced religious literacy reduces the risk of behavioral deviance among students. Studies from global contexts—such as by Kurniawan et al. (2020) in Malaysia and Bashir et al. (2022) in Pakistan—demonstrate that deeper understanding of theology encourages ethical conformity in both family and community environments. In a comparative study, Taufiq and Latif (2021) showed that students with critical interpretive skills in religion were less prone to moral relativism. Finally, Qureshi et al. (2023) established that adolescents' behavioral discipline correlates strongly with their capacity to internalize religious doctrines cognitively. These international findings provide a comprehensive backdrop supporting the current study's hypothesis that religious understanding predicts moral and behavioral outcomes among Indonesian youth.

Despite extensive research on religiosity and moral education, few empirical studies have examined the cognitive–behavioral linkage in a rural Indonesian setting. Most existing literature focuses on urban school environments or theological frameworks, neglecting community-based youth populations (Zulkifli et al., 2021). Furthermore, prior studies tend to treat religiosity as a monolithic construct, overlooking how cognitive comprehension differentially influences outward behavior. This limitation leaves a critical gap in understanding how educational and cultural contexts interact in shaping adolescent moral conduct. Moreover, statistical validation of this relationship using non-parametric measures like the Chi-Square test is still rare in Southeast Asian studies. Addressing this void is vital to develop context-sensitive models of faith-based education. Therefore, this study provides empirical evidence from Central Lampung, integrating quantitative rigor with local sociocultural perspectives. The findings are expected to fill a significant gap by demonstrating how understanding functions as a behavioral predictor in adolescent religiosity.

This study aims to determine whether and to what extent religious understanding predicts the religious behavior of adolescents in Central Lampung, Indonesia. It hypothesizes that higher comprehension of Islamic teachings will be associated with stronger moral consistency and more frequent participation in religious practices. Specifically, adolescents with higher levels of religious understanding are expected to demonstrate greater self-discipline, empathy, and community engagement. The study employs a quantitative approach using the Chi-Square test to evaluate the significance of the relationship. By identifying the strength of association, this research seeks to validate theoretical assumptions that link cognitive and behavioral dimensions of faith. Moreover, the findings are anticipated to contribute to educational psychology and moral pedagogy literature. Ultimately, the study

aspires to inform religious educators and policymakers about the critical importance of fostering meaningful understanding rather than superficial ritual compliance among youth.

METODE

Research Design

This study employed a quantitative correlational design to examine the predictive relationship between adolescents' religious understanding and their religious behavior. Quantitative design was chosen because it allows for objective measurement of the strength and direction of association between two variables (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The research was explanatory in nature, seeking to verify the extent to which cognitive comprehension of religious principles predicts behavioral consistency in daily practices. Such a design enables researchers to analyze how variations in understanding influence behavior without manipulating variables. Data were collected through structured questionnaires, supported by semi-structured interviews to ensure contextual relevance. The study followed the principles of positivist inquiry, emphasizing observable patterns and statistical verification (Bryman, 2016). Reliability and validity procedures were integrated throughout data collection to enhance credibility. This design was deemed appropriate for addressing the research question because it quantifies the relationship while maintaining sensitivity to cultural and religious contexts.

Participants

The population of this study consisted of 142 adolescents aged between 15 and 19 years residing in Ngestirahayu Village, Punggur District, Central Lampung, Indonesia. Using simple random sampling, a total of 27 respondents were selected to represent the population proportionately. This sampling technique ensured that every adolescent had an equal opportunity to participate, reducing bias in the representation of attitudes and understanding levels (Fraenkel et al., 2019). The inclusion criteria required participants to be active in local youth religious activities and to have completed basic Islamic education. This ensured that respondents possessed comparable exposure to religious instruction while differing in cognitive comprehension levels. Ethical considerations were carefully observed; participants gave informed consent, and anonymity was maintained to protect personal data (Neuman, 2014). The chosen community was ideal for this investigation because it reflects a rural religious setting with both traditional and modern influences. Hence, the participant profile aligns well with the study's aim of exploring adolescent religiosity in a real-world context.

Instrument

Two main instruments were developed for this study: a Religious Understanding Scale (RUS) and a Religious Behavior Inventory (RBI). The RUS measured cognitive comprehension of Islamic teachings through 20 items related to Qur'anic interpretation, moral reasoning, and doctrinal awareness. Meanwhile, the RBI assessed observable behaviors such as worship regularity, moral discipline, and community participation. Both instruments used a four-point Likert scale ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree." The items were adapted and refined from validated instruments used in previous studies on Islamic moral education (Ali & Salleh, 2022; Zulkifli et al., 2021). Before full deployment, the instruments were tested on a

pilot sample of 10 adolescents to ensure clarity and reliability. Cronbach's alpha coefficients were 0.86 for the RUS and 0.82 for the RBI, indicating satisfactory internal consistency (George & Mallery, 2019). The final version of the instruments was administered face-to-face by the researcher to ensure accurate responses and contextual understanding.

Data Analysis Plan

The collected data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and inferential analysis through the Chi-Square (χ^2) test to determine the association between the two variables. The Chi-Square method was selected because it effectively measures relationships between categorical variables without assuming normal distribution (Field, 2018). First, the data were coded and tabulated to summarize frequencies of responses within each variable. Descriptive analysis was used to portray the overall level of religious understanding and behavioral consistency among participants. Subsequently, the Chi-Square test evaluated whether differences in behavioral outcomes were statistically significant across varying levels of religious understanding. The threshold for statistical significance was set at $p < 0.05$, and the correlation coefficient (Cramer's V) was used to measure the strength of association. Data processing was performed using SPSS version 25, ensuring reliability and transparency in analysis. The analytic procedure provided a robust quantitative basis to determine whether understanding indeed functions as a predictor of adolescent religious behavior.

RESULT AND DISCUSION

Results

Descriptive Statistics

The descriptive analysis revealed that adolescents in Ngestirahayu Village demonstrated generally high levels of religious understanding and moderate levels of consistent religious behavior. Among the 27 respondents, 63% scored above the mean value for the Religious Understanding Scale (RUS), while 59% scored above average for the Religious Behavior Inventory (RBI). This finding indicates that most adolescents possess a solid conceptual grasp of Islamic principles but vary in their practical application. A closer look at the frequency distribution showed that behavioral consistency tends to increase proportionally with comprehension level. Respondents with stronger cognitive understanding reported more regular prayer attendance, ethical discipline, and community involvement. Conversely, lower understanding scores corresponded to inconsistent moral behavior and reduced participation in collective worship. The descriptive data thus provide a preliminary indication that comprehension may indeed serve as a predictor of behavioral religiosity.

Table 1. Frequency Distribution of Religious Understanding and Behavior Levels

Category	Religious Understanding (%)	Religious Behavior (%)
High	63.0	59.0
Moderate	26.0	30.0
Low	11.0	11.0

Source: Primary data processed by authors (2025)

Inferential Analysis

To statistically confirm the association between the two variables, the Chi-Square (χ^2) test was applied using SPSS version 25. The computed Chi-Square value ($\chi^2 = 30.59$, df = 2, p < 0.05) exceeded the critical value at both 5% (5.991) and 1% (9.210) significance levels. This result indicates a significant relationship between adolescents' religious understanding and their religious behavior. Furthermore, the calculated Cramer's V coefficient of 0.70 suggests a moderate but positive correlation, meaning that as understanding increases, so does behavioral consistency. These findings validate the hypothesis that comprehension of Islamic teachings serves as a reliable predictor of behavioral adherence. The results also demonstrate that understanding functions as both a motivational and regulatory factor influencing adolescents' moral actions. This quantitative evidence supports the theoretical premise that religious cognition and behavioral expression are interdependent within the context of moral development.
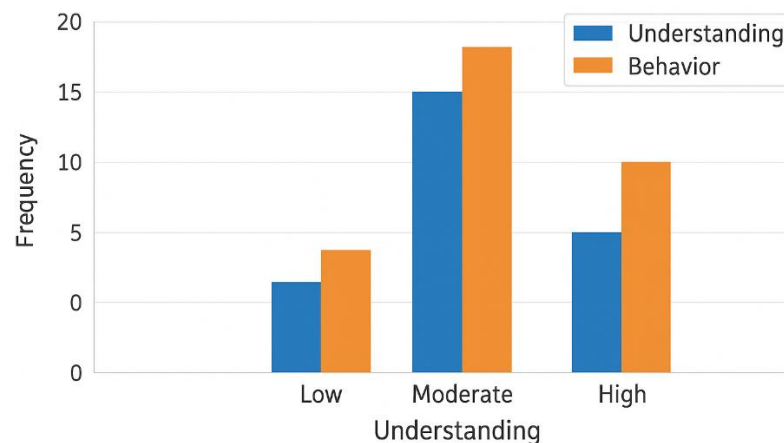

Figure 1. Distribution of Religious Understanding and Behavior Scores

The figure illustrates the comparative distribution between levels of religious understanding and religious behavior among adolescents in Ngestirahayu Village. Each category—Low, Moderate, and High—reflects the proportion of respondents who scored within that range on the Religious Understanding Scale (RUS) and Religious Behavior Inventory (RBI). The blue bars represent cognitive comprehension of Islamic teachings, while

the orange bars depict behavioral consistency in applying these teachings. The chart shows that the majority of adolescents fall within the moderate to high categories, confirming a positive relationship between understanding and behavior. Respondents with high comprehension levels tend to demonstrate higher behavioral adherence, aligning with the Chi-Square result indicating a significant correlation. This pattern visually reinforces the study's conclusion that understanding functions as a predictor of moral and behavioral religiosity.

Discussion

The results clearly confirm that religious understanding plays a crucial role in shaping adolescents' behavioral religiosity. This aligns with previous research showing that a higher level of religious literacy strengthens moral discipline and civic responsibility (Ahmad & Osman, 2020; Hassan & Salleh, 2022). Adolescents with a firm grasp of Islamic concepts tend to integrate moral reasoning into daily decisions, leading to more consistent ethical behavior. According to King and Roeser (2019), moral cognition is the cognitive pathway through which spiritual understanding translates into moral conduct. This study also resonates with Hidayat et al. (2023), who found that comprehension of religious principles enhances psychological well-being and prosocial tendencies. Furthermore, Noor and Hassan (2021) emphasized that adolescents with solid religious understanding exhibit higher resilience against deviant behavior. The moderate correlation in this study indicates that while knowledge is essential, external factors such as family influence and peer environment may also mediate behavioral outcomes. Hence, understanding serves as a foundational yet not exclusive determinant of religious behavior.

In a broader theoretical sense, the findings support the cognitive–behavioral model of moral development, suggesting that knowledge and practice operate within a reciprocal framework (Bandura, 2018). Religious understanding provides the internal script that regulates attitudes, emotional responses, and decision-making in line with ethical norms (Ali & Salleh, 2022). The relationship observed in this study also echoes the perspective of Zulkifli et al. (2021), who proposed that reflective learning in religion fosters durable moral awareness. Moreover, Al-Kandari (2022) and Bashir et al. (2022) identified that interpretive engagement with scripture reinforces empathy and accountability in adolescents. Similarly, Nurhayati (2023) found that pedagogical models emphasizing understanding rather than memorization yield stronger behavioral integrity. The consistency of these findings across multiple studies reinforces the reliability of this research outcome. Therefore, strengthening religious comprehension in educational and communal contexts could serve as an effective strategy for moral formation among youth in multicultural societies.

Implications

The implications of this research extend to educators, policymakers, and community leaders concerned with adolescent moral development. The empirical evidence suggests that fostering deep religious understanding should be prioritized over rote memorization in religious education curricula (Yusoff & Rahman, 2021). Schools and mosques should collaborate to create reflective learning environments where students internalize moral values cognitively and emotionally. Policymakers could integrate modules emphasizing critical reasoning in religious

studies to promote intellectual engagement with faith principles. Moreover, this research provides valuable insights for character education frameworks in Indonesia's national curriculum. By understanding that comprehension directly predicts behavioral consistency, educators can better design interventions that connect knowledge to moral practice. Community-based initiatives, such as youth mentoring programs, could leverage these findings to reinforce moral resilience in rural settings. Consequently, the study contributes to the ongoing discourse on how faith-based education can sustain moral and social harmony in modern Indonesia.

Limitations

While the study achieved its primary objective, several limitations must be acknowledged. The small sample size of 27 respondents limits the generalizability of findings beyond the studied population. Future research should include larger samples across diverse regions to ensure representativeness (Fraenkel et al., 2019). The reliance on self-reported questionnaires may introduce response bias, as participants could overstate their religiosity to conform to social expectations. Additionally, the study's cross-sectional design prevents causal inference, restricting conclusions to correlation rather than causation (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Environmental factors such as family influence, peer pressure, and socioeconomic background were not statistically controlled. The Chi-Square method, though appropriate for categorical data, offers limited explanatory power compared to regression-based modeling. Moreover, the study focused solely on Muslim adolescents; inclusion of other faith groups could provide comparative insights. Recognizing these limitations invites future studies to adopt mixed-method designs for richer interpretation.

Suggestions

Based on the findings, future research should expand the scope of analysis by incorporating qualitative approaches such as interviews or focus group discussions. This would allow researchers to explore how adolescents interpret and internalize religious concepts beyond quantitative measures (Bryman, 2016). It is also recommended that longitudinal studies be conducted to track how religious understanding evolves and affects behavior over time. Researchers could include family background, educational environment, and peer influence as mediating variables in predictive models. Curriculum developers should consider integrating interdisciplinary approaches combining theology, psychology, and sociology for a more holistic framework of moral education (King & Roeser, 2019). Moreover, collaboration between educational institutions and religious organizations should be strengthened to cultivate consistent moral reinforcement in both formal and informal settings. Finally, replication of this study across urban and rural contexts would deepen understanding of how culture and environment moderate the link between understanding and behavior. Strengthening this line of inquiry could help formulate more evidence-based policies for youth moral development in Indonesia and beyond.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study clearly demonstrate that religious understanding serves as a significant predictor of adolescents' religious behavior in Central Lampung, Indonesia. Quantitative analysis using the Chi-Square test revealed a statistically significant relationship ($\chi^2 = 30.59$, $p < 0.05$) with a correlation strength of 0.70, confirming that higher comprehension of Islamic teachings is associated with stronger behavioral consistency. Adolescents who possess deeper religious understanding tend to exhibit more disciplined worship patterns, ethical awareness, and social responsibility. This suggests that faith-based knowledge not only informs moral reasoning but also reinforces behavioral self-regulation and civic engagement. The study provides empirical evidence supporting the cognitive–behavioral framework of moral development, where understanding acts as a motivational foundation for ethical action. It further highlights the importance of designing religious education that promotes reflection and critical comprehension rather than rote memorization. Strengthening religious literacy among youth is therefore essential to sustaining moral resilience and social harmony within Indonesia's multicultural context. Overall, this research contributes both theoretically and practically to the discourse on religious education and youth moral development, affirming that genuine understanding of faith principles is the cornerstone of consistent religious behavior.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION STATEMENT

All authors contributed substantially to the completion of this study and manuscript preparation. Ria Dona Sari served as the principal investigator, leading the research design, data collection, and primary manuscript drafting. Mukhtar Hadi contributed to the data analysis and methodological validation, ensuring the accuracy of statistical procedures and interpretation of findings. Buyung Syukron was responsible for the literature review, theoretical framework construction, and editorial refinement of the final manuscript. All authors collaboratively discussed the results, approved the final version of the paper, and agreed to be accountable for all aspects of the work to ensure its integrity and scholarly quality.

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