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Moral Awareness and Religiosity in Predicting Spiritual Character among Indonesian Madrasah Students

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Abstract

The development of students' spiritual character has become a key concern in moral education amid rapid social change, digital transformation, and the growing complexity of adolescent life. Within Islamic educational settings, moral awareness and religiosity represent important dimensions that may contribute to students' character development. However, limited empirical evidence has examined the simultaneous predictive role of moral awareness and religiosity in explaining spiritual character among Indonesian madrasah students. This study examines the predictive contributions of moral awareness and religiosity to students' spiritual character. A quantitative, cross-sectional correlational survey design was used with 278 students at a State Islamic Senior High School (Madrasah Aliyah Negeri/MAN) in Probolinggo City, Indonesia. Researchers collected data using validated instruments measuring moral awareness, religiosity, and spiritual character. We conducted multiple linear regression analysis to examine the predictive relationships among the variables. The findings demonstrate that both moral awareness and religiosity significantly predict students' spiritual character. Moral awareness made a positive contribution, while religiosity showed a stronger predictive effect. Together, both variables explained 64.8% of the variance in students' spiritual character. These findings indicate that spiritual character development is associated with both students' ethical awareness and their internalisation of religious values. The study contributes to moral and Islamic education research by integrating moral awareness and religiosity within a single predictive framework. The findings suggest that strengthening spiritual character among Indonesian madrasah students requires educational approaches that combine religious internalisation with opportunities for moral reflection and application of values in daily life.

Keywords: *Moral Awareness, Religiosity, Spiritual Character, Moral Education. Madrasah Students.*



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1. Introduction

Moral education has become an increasingly important concern in contemporary educational discourse in response to social change, advances in digital technology, value diversity, and the growing complexity of adolescents' social interactions. These developments require education to extend beyond academic achievement by supporting students' ability to recognise moral issues, evaluate ethical considerations, and make decisions that are consistent with their values. The digital environment has further increased these challenges as adolescents encounter situations involving peer pressure, cyberbullying, and moral disengagement (Yang et al., 2022). Previous research has shown that moral disengagement is associated with cyberbullying behaviour and may explain why awareness of right and wrong does not always translate into consistent moral action (Yang et al., 2022). Similarly, systematic evidence has indicated an association between moral disengagement and bullying among children and adolescents, highlighting the importance of developing internal capacities that support moral decision-making (Thornberg et al., 2023). From a broader educational perspective, these challenges emphasise the importance of developing not only moral knowledge but also moral awareness and spiritual orientation as foundations for responsibility, meaning, and value-based behaviour (Mayseless & Kizel, 2022).

Adolescents' moral development is shaped by interactions among psychological, social, and religious dimensions. Within the moral domain, previous studies have shown that moral disengagement is associated with negative behavioural tendencies, while empathy may function as a protective factor in adolescents' social interactions (Liu et al., 2023). These findings highlight the importance of internal capacities that enable individuals to recognise and evaluate the moral dimensions of situations before responding to them. Within the religious domain, research among Muslim adolescents has demonstrated that religious socialisation within families is associated with civic engagement through the development of religious identity, suggesting that religious values may become morally meaningful when they are internalised as part of personal orientation (Balkaya-Ince et al., 2024). Other research has similarly indicated that religious experiences and socialisation during adolescence are related to the development of value and moral orientations (Smith, 2023). Together, these findings suggest that moral awareness and religiosity represent two related but distinct internal resources in character development. Moral awareness reflects ethical-reflective sensitivity, whereas religiosity represents an orientation toward religious values, meaning, and beliefs that may guide individual behaviour.

Within educational contexts, spiritual character represents an important dimension of character development because it concerns the integration of values, meaning, responsibility, and concern for others. Previous research has examined moral dimensions through constructs such as moral sensitivity, moral disengagement, ethical recognition,



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and specific forms of behaviour; however, spiritual character has been less frequently examined as an outcome variable within empirical models of moral education (Rahmani et al., 2023; Thornberg et al., 2023). Similarly, studies on religiosity have primarily focused on religious identity, moral orientation, and social behaviour, while empirical evidence regarding its contribution to students' spiritual character within madrasah education remains limited (Balkaya-Ince et al., 2024; Smith, 2023). This indicates the need for further examination of how moral awareness and religiosity are associated with spiritual character when considered within a single predictive framework.

Conceptually, moral awareness and religiosity may contribute to spiritual character through different but complementary pathways. Moral awareness can be understood as an ethical-reflective capacity that enables individuals to recognise moral dimensions and consider their implications, while religiosity provides a value-based orientation derived from religious beliefs, understanding, and practices. These conceptual relationships provide a theoretical basis for examining the predictive contribution of both constructs; however, the present study does not examine these intermediate processes as mediating mechanisms. Instead, it focuses on the extent to which moral awareness and religiosity statistically predict variations in students' spiritual character (Sholihat et al., 2026).

In response to this gap, the present study integrates moral awareness and religiosity within a single predictive model of spiritual character among madrasah students. Moral awareness is conceptualised as the capacity to recognise the presence and relevance of moral dimensions within situations, whereas religiosity refers to engagement with religious beliefs, understanding, values, and practices that are internalised in everyday life (Rahmani et al., 2023). Spiritual character is understood as a quality of character associated with moral integrity, orientation toward values and meaning, responsibility, and concern for others (Mayseless & Kizel, 2022). Unlike studies that have examined moral disengagement, cyberbullying, or other specific social behaviours as outcomes, this study positions spiritual character as the criterion variable within a predictive model. The Madrasah Aliyah context provides a relevant setting for this investigation because academic and religious education are integrated within the same educational environment. Nevertheless, this study does not assume that a religious educational context automatically produces spiritual character; rather, it examines whether differences in students' moral awareness and religiosity are associated with differences in their spiritual character.

Based on this framework, the present study aims to analyse the predictive contributions of moral awareness and religiosity to the spiritual character of students at a State Islamic Senior High School (Madrasah Aliyah Negeri/MAN) in Probolinggo City, Indonesia. Specifically, this study examines the extent to which moral awareness predicts spiritual character and the extent to which religiosity predicts spiritual character. Consistent with the cross-sectional correlational design, the term "predictive contribution" refers to statistical association within the regression model rather than



causal influence or character development over time. Accordingly, this study addresses two research questions: RQ1: To what extent does moral awareness contribute to predicting the spiritual character of MAN students in Probolinggo City? RQ2: To what extent does religiosity contribute to predicting the spiritual character of MAN students in Probolinggo City? Based on the conceptual framework, the study proposes two hypotheses: moral awareness positively and significantly predicts students' spiritual character (H1), and religiosity positively and significantly predicts students' spiritual character (H2).

2. Research Method

This study employed a quantitative approach using a cross-sectional correlational survey design. This design was used to examine the predictive contributions of moral awareness (X_1) and religiosity (X_2) to spiritual character (Y), both independently and simultaneously. All variables were measured during a single period of data collection without any experimental intervention being administered to the respondents. Accordingly, the relationships among the variables were interpreted as statistical and predictive associations rather than causal relationships. A quantitative approach was considered appropriate because it enables relationships among variables to be examined systematically using numerical data and statistical procedures (Mohajan, 2020).

The study population comprised all 912 students enrolled at a State Islamic Senior High School (Madrasah Aliyah Negeri/MAN) in Probolinggo City, Indonesia, during the 2025/2026 academic year, including students in Grades X, XI, and XII. The sample size was determined using Slovin's formula with a 5% margin of error, resulting in a sample of 278 students. Stratified random sampling based on grade level was employed to ensure representation from Grades X, XI, and XII. The final sample comprised 80 Grade X students (28.8%), 63 Grade XI students (22.7%), and 135 Grade XII students (48.6%). Respondents within each stratum were randomly selected in accordance with the sampling procedure employed in the study.

The study included two predictor variables and one criterion variable. Moral awareness (X_1) was operationalised as students' capacity to recognise the moral dimensions of everyday situations, particularly those involving judgements of right and wrong, good and bad, and justice. Religiosity (X_2) was operationalised as the extent to which students internalised and engaged with religious values and teachings, represented through religious beliefs, religious understanding, and religious practices. Spiritual character (Y) was operationalised as a quality of character reflecting moral and spiritual orientations through moral integrity, empathy, and social concern. The three constructs were measured using indicators derived from their respective operational definitions.



Data were collected using a structured, closed-ended questionnaire comprising 72 items, including 24 items measuring moral awareness, 24 measuring religiosity, and 24 measuring spiritual character. The moral awareness instrument was developed around indicators concerning awareness of right and wrong, good and bad, and justice. The religiosity instrument encompassed indicators of religious belief, religious understanding, and religious practices, whilst the spiritual character instrument included indicators of moral integrity, empathy, and social concern. All items were rated on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Negatively worded items were reverse-scored before composite scores for each construct were calculated.

Instrument quality was evaluated by examining item validity and internal consistency prior to hypothesis testing (Aziz, 2024). Empirical item validity was assessed using Pearson item-total correlations, with coefficients of $r > 0.30$ and $p < 0.05$ regarded as meeting the validity criterion. Internal consistency reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha, with $\alpha > 0.70$ considered acceptable. These analyses were conducted separately for the moral awareness, religiosity, and spiritual character instruments. The empirical results of the validity and reliability analyses are reported in the Results section (Ramdan, 2019).

Data collection was undertaken after permission had been obtained from the participating MAN in Probolinggo City. Prior to completing the questionnaire, respondents were informed about the purpose of the study, the data-collection procedures, the voluntary nature of their participation, and the intended use of the data for research purposes. The study adhered to ethical principles including informed consent, voluntary participation, anonymity, and confidentiality. All data were analysed and reported in aggregate form so that individual students could not be identified in the publication of the findings.

Data analysis involved both descriptive and inferential statistics. Descriptive statistics were used to summarise the distributions of moral awareness, religiosity, and spiritual character scores in terms of the mean, standard deviation, minimum, and maximum values. Multiple linear regression analysis was subsequently employed to examine the predictive contributions of moral awareness and religiosity to spiritual character. The unique contribution of each predictor was evaluated using regression coefficients and t-tests, whilst the statistical significance of the overall model was assessed using an F-test. The coefficient of determination (R^2) was used to estimate the proportion of variance in spiritual character jointly explained by the two predictors, whilst standardised beta coefficients (β) were used to compare their relative predictive contributions. All statistical tests were conducted at a significance level of $\alpha = 0.05$.

Before interpreting the regression model, its assumptions were examined, including residual normality, linearity, multicollinearity, and homoscedasticity. Residual normality was assessed by examining the distribution of the regression residuals. Multicollinearity

was evaluated using Tolerance and Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) values, whilst homoscedasticity was examined through the distribution of residuals in a scatterplot. Linearity was assessed to determine whether the relationships between each predictor and spiritual character were adequately represented by a linear model. The results of these diagnostic tests are reported in the Results section and were considered when interpreting the regression estimates. All data processing and statistical analyses were performed using IBM SPSS Statistics version 31.0.

3. Result

3.1 Preliminary Assessment of the Regression Model

The results showed that all items across the three instruments met the predetermined validity criteria. The 24 items measuring *moral awareness* yielded item-total correlation coefficients ranging from 0.544 to 0.744, the 24 religiosity items ranged from 0.551 to 0.828, and the 24 spiritual character items ranged from 0.652 to 0.791. Accordingly, all items were retained for subsequent analyses. The reliability analysis also demonstrated very high internal consistency, with Cronbach's alpha coefficients of $\alpha = 0.938$ for *moral awareness*, $\alpha = 0.964$ for religiosity, and $\alpha = 0.958$ for spiritual character. These findings indicate that all three instruments demonstrated adequate internal consistency for use in the subsequent analyses.

Table 1. Validity and Reliability of the Research Instrumentsr Value

Construct	Number of Items	Item-Total Correlation Range	Cronbach's Alpha (α)	Interpretation
Moral Awareness	24	0.544-0.744	0.938	Valid and reliable
Religiosity	24	0.551-0.828	0.964	Valid and reliable
Spiritual Character	24	0.652-0.791	0.958	Valid and reliable

As shown in Table 1, all constructs yielded item-total correlation coefficients above the criterion of 0.30. Cronbach's alpha coefficients ranged from 0.938 to 0.964, indicating very high internal consistency. Consequently, all 72 items were retained for subsequent analyses.

Prior to hypothesis testing, diagnostic checks were conducted to assess the assumptions underlying the regression model. The multicollinearity assessment showed that both *moral awareness* and religiosity had a Tolerance value of 0.404 and a Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) of 2.474. These values indicated no problematic multicollinearity



that would substantially affect the estimation of the regression coefficients for the two predictors.

The linearity assessment yielded a Deviation from Linearity value of $p = 0.013$. As this value was below the significance threshold of 0.05, the result indicated a statistically significant deviation from linearity in the relationship examined. Accordingly, the findings from the linear regression model were interpreted with caution, and the indication of non-linearity was considered as a limitation when interpreting the model.

Table 2. Results of Regression Assumption Tests

Assumption Test	Variable/Indicator	Result	Interpretation
Multicollinearity	<i>Moral Awareness – Tolerance</i>	0.404	No problematic multicollinearity detected
Multicollinearity	<i>Moral Awareness – VIF</i>	2.474	No problematic multicollinearity detected
Multicollinearity	<i>Religiosity – Tolerance</i>	0.404	No problematic multicollinearity detected
Multicollinearity	<i>Religiosity – VIF</i>	2.474	No problematic multicollinearity detected
Linearity	<i>Deviation from Linearity</i>	$p = 0.013$	Evidence of deviation from linearity

3.2 Predictive Contributions of Moral Awareness and Religiosity to Spiritual Character

Table 3. Contributions of Moral Awareness and Religiosity to Spiritual Character

Predictor	B	SE	β	t	p	Decision
Moral Awareness (X_1)	0.358	0.038	0.347	9.457	< 0.001	H1 supported
Religiosity (X_2)	0.597	0.035	0.628	17.132	< 0.001	H2 supported

Multiple linear regression showed that moral awareness positively and significantly predicted spiritual character after religiosity was statistically controlled ($B = 0.358$; $SE = 0.038$; $\beta = 0.347$; $t = 9.457$; $p < 0.001$). The positive coefficient indicates that a one-unit increase in moral awareness was associated with a 0.358-unit increase in spiritual character when religiosity was held constant. Thus, H1 was supported and RQ1 was answered: moral

awareness made a positive and significant predictive contribution to the spiritual character of MAN students in Probolinggo City.

Religiosity positively and significantly predicted spiritual character after moral awareness was statistically controlled ($B = 0.597$; $SE = 0.035$; $\beta = 0.628$; $t = 17.132$; $p < 0.001$). A one-unit increase in religiosity was associated with a 0.597-unit increase in spiritual character when moral awareness was held constant. The standardised beta coefficient for religiosity ($\beta = 0.628$) was larger than that for moral awareness ($\beta = 0.347$), indicating that religiosity made the stronger relative contribution within the tested model. Thus, H2 was supported and RQ2 was answered.

3.3 Overall Model Contribution

Table 4. Summary of the Spiritual Character Prediction Model

R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	Standard Error of Estimate	F	df	p
0.922	0.851	0.850	6.093	783.157	(2, 275)	< 0.001

Simultaneously, the model including moral awareness and religiosity as predictors of spiritual character was statistically significant, $F(2,275) = 783.157$, $p < 0.001$. The model yielded $R = 0.922$, $R^2 = 0.851$, adjusted $R^2 = 0.850$, and a standard error of the estimate of 6.093. The R^2 value indicates that the two predictors jointly explained 85.1% of the variance in spiritual character within the study sample, whilst the remaining 14.9% was not explained by the model. The resulting regression equation was: $\hat{Y} = 4.195 + 0.358X_1 + 0.597X_2$, where X_1 represents moral awareness and X_2 represents religiosity. Overall, the findings provided empirical support for both research questions, with religiosity demonstrating the larger relative contribution based on its standardised beta coefficient.

4. Discussion

4.1 Moral Awareness and Spiritual Character

The findings provide support for RQ1 by demonstrating that moral awareness is a positive and significant predictor of madrasah students' spiritual character. This suggests that students' ability to recognise the moral dimensions of a situation is associated with qualities of character reflected in integrity, empathy, and social concern. From the perspective of moral education, recognising that a situation contains an ethical issue is an important capacity that precedes consideration of the consequences of one's actions and the selection of a response consistent with one's values. Moral awareness may



therefore be understood as an ethical-reflective capacity that helps students connect moral knowledge with issues encountered in everyday life.

This interpretation is consistent with van den (Thornberg, 2023), who showed that moral values are relevant to behaviour, although the relationship is not always straightforward. General moral values may be relatively weak predictors of concrete behaviour when there is a distance between an individual's abstract values and the specific characteristics of the situation encountered. This perspective is important for interpreting the present findings because moral awareness should not be positioned merely as knowledge of right and wrong. Rather, it concerns the capacity to recognise the moral relevance of a situation and to consider its ethical implications before acting.

The findings also have implications for the way moral education is organised in madrasahs. Moral education that focuses solely on transmitting norms and knowledge about permitted or prohibited behaviour may be insufficient to develop spiritual character. Students need opportunities to encounter, discuss, and reflect upon contextual moral problems. In this way, they do not merely learn a value but also learn to recognise when and how that value becomes relevant to decision-making.

Nevertheless, the contribution of moral awareness cannot be interpreted as evidence that moral awareness directly causes spiritual character. The cross-sectional design permits the identification of predictive associations at a single point in time only. Consequently, the conceptual pathway moral awareness → moral recognition/judgement → moral behaviour → spiritual character remains a theoretical explanation requiring further examination through longitudinal designs or mediation models.

4.2 Religiosity and Spiritual Character

The findings relating to RQ2 indicate that religiosity is a positive and significant predictor of madrasah students' spiritual character. Moreover, religiosity made a relatively stronger contribution than moral awareness within the tested model. This suggests that religious orientation is particularly relevant to students' spiritual character within the madrasah educational context, where religious values and practices form an integral part of students' educational experience.

This relationship, however, should not be interpreted to mean that more frequent ritual activity necessarily produces stronger spiritual character (Kerasha et al., 2024). demonstrated that religiosity is a multidimensional construct and that its different dimensions may relate differently to regulatory virtues, including self-control and patience among Muslim adolescents. The contribution of religiosity in the present study is therefore better understood in terms of the internalisation of beliefs, religious understanding, values, and orientation rather than merely the frequency of ritual participation.



Evidence from the Indonesian context further supports this interpretation. found that religiosity was associated with cyberbullying behaviour among Indonesian adolescents, including through the role of self-control (Bukhori et al., 2024). This finding indicates that religiosity may be relevant to how individuals regulate their behaviour in social situations rather than being limited to internal belief. In relation to spiritual character, the internalisation of religious values may therefore provide a normative framework through which students evaluate their behaviour and relationships with others.

Nevertheless, the relationship between religiosity and positive character is not necessarily uniform (Balkaya-Ince, 2023). found that religious experiences during Ramadan among Muslim-American adolescents were associated with changes in several regulatory virtues, including inhibitory self-control, initiatory self-control, and patience, but these changes were not consistent across all dimensions and did not all persist after Ramadan. This cautions against treating religiosity as a mechanism that automatically produces positive character. The quality of religious internalisation, dimensions of religiosity, social context, and religious experience are likely to shape how religiosity is associated with spiritual character.

4.3 Integrating Moral Awareness and Religiosity in Spiritual Character

A key contribution of this study lies in examining moral awareness and religiosity simultaneously in explaining madrasah students' spiritual character. The two constructs can be understood as distinct but complementary internal resources. Moral awareness provides an ethical-reflective capacity: the ability to recognise that a situation contains a moral dimension requiring ethical consideration. Religiosity, by contrast, provides an orientation towards values, meaning, and a transcendental framework that may serve as a reference point for evaluating choices and behaviour.

This integrative perspective extends understandings of spiritual character that focus solely on religiosity. The findings show that moral awareness retains a unique contribution when religiosity is included in the model. This suggests that religious orientation does not eliminate the need for the capacity to recognise and reflect upon moral issues. Conversely, the stronger relative contribution of religiosity also indicates that sensitivity to moral issues alone does not fully account for spiritual character within the madrasah context.

This interpretation, who showed that religiosity and spirituality are associated with dimensions of meaning in life among adolescents, although such associations are not necessarily uniform across all indicators of psychological development (Krok, 2015). Spiritual character should therefore not be understood as the product of a single psychological or religious dimension in isolation, but as a construct associated with



interactions among sources of value, moral reflection, meaning, and transcendental orientation.

On this basis, the principal theoretical contribution of the study lies in positioning moral awareness as an ethical-reflective capacity and religiosity as a religious-transcendental value orientation within a single predictive framework of spiritual character. The model offers the perspective that developing spiritual character in Islamic education requires more than mastery of moral norms or participation in religious practices; both must be internalised and connected with students' capacity to understand the moral meaning of concrete experiences.

4.4 Implications for Moral Education in Madrasahs

The findings have practical implications for the integration of moral and religious education in madrasahs. Religious education may become more meaningful when religious values are connected with students' capacity to recognise and address moral issues encountered in everyday life. Teaching should therefore extend beyond normative knowledge and ritual habituation to include the development of moral reflection.

In classroom practice, teachers may employ moral dilemma discussions, case-based learning, ethical reflection, role modelling, social service activities, and reflection on the religious meaning of actions. Students may, for example, be presented with cases involving academic honesty, bullying, social media use, concern for peers, justice, or social responsibility. Such cases can then be examined not only in terms of right and wrong, but also in relation to religious values, consequences of action, the interests of others, and personal responsibility.

This approach enables moral awareness and religiosity to be developed in a more integrated manner. Moral awareness helps students recognise ethical issues, whilst religiosity can provide a framework of values and meaning for considering appropriate responses. Spiritual character education in madrasahs can thereby move beyond formal compliance towards the internalisation of values and their reflective application in social life.

4.5 Limitations and Directions for Future Research

The findings should be understood in light of several limitations. First, the cross-sectional design limits the ability to establish causal relationships or to explain changes in moral awareness, religiosity, and spiritual character over time. Secondly, all constructs were measured using self-report instruments, meaning that responses may have been influenced by social desirability, particularly because morality and religiosity concern characteristics that are socially valued.

Thirdly, measuring all constructs using the same method and respondent source creates the possibility of common method bias or shared method variance. This issue warrants particular



attention because the model demonstrated very high predictive power. Such strength may reflect substantive relationships among the constructs, but the possibility of conceptual proximity among moral awareness, religiosity, and spiritual character should also be examined. Fourthly, the study was conducted within the context of a MAN in Probolinggo City; therefore, generalisation to all madrasah students in Indonesia should be undertaken cautiously.

Future research should employ longitudinal designs to evaluate changes in the constructs over time and extend sampling to multiple madrasahs and regions with different socio-cultural characteristics. Mixed-methods approaches may also help explain how students internalise moral and religious values in lived experience. In addition, CFA/SEM may be used to test discriminant validity among the constructs and structural relationships more comprehensively. Future studies may also examine moral judgement, moral identity, internalisation of religious values, self-control, or ethical orientation as mediators or moderators in order to clarify the mechanisms linking moral awareness and religiosity with spiritual character.

5. Conclusion

This study concludes that moral awareness and religiosity are two important predictors of the spiritual character of MAN students in Probolinggo City. Moral awareness indicates that students' capacity to recognise, consider, and respond to moral dimensions in everyday life is significantly associated with the quality of their spiritual character. At the same time, religiosity makes a relatively stronger predictive contribution, underscoring the importance of the internalisation of religious beliefs, understanding, and practices within students' moral-spiritual orientation. The novelty of the study lies in integrating moral awareness as an ethical-reflective capacity and religiosity as a transcendental value orientation within a single predictive framework for explaining madrasah students' spiritual character.

Theoretically, the findings extend scholarship on moral education by demonstrating that spiritual character should not be understood solely as a consequence of religiosity or religious practice, but is also associated with students' capacity to recognise and reflect upon moral dimensions in decision-making. Practically, the findings suggest that madrasah education should integrate religious habituation with moral reflection, ethical dilemma discussions, role modelling, and social experiences that enable religious values to be translated into actual behaviour. Nevertheless, the cross-sectional design, reliance on self-report instruments, and focus on a single madrasah context limit causal inference and the generalisability of the findings. Future research should employ longitudinal or mixed-methods designs, include madrasahs with more diverse characteristics, and test mediating or moderating mechanisms to explain more fully how moral awareness and religiosity develop and interact in the formation of spiritual character.



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