

Strengthening students' religious well-being through spiritual reflection-based islamic religious education learning

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the effectiveness of spiritual reflection-based Islamic Religious Education (IRE) learning in strengthening students' religious well-being. Religious well-being, conceptualized through Ellison's (1983) multidimensional framework, encompasses an individual's perceived closeness to God, existential meaning, and spiritual connectedness, all of which profoundly influence psychological, social, and educational outcomes. Despite growing international scholarship on reflective pedagogy and spiritual education, empirical research integrating muhasabah-based reflective practices within quasi-experimental Islamic educational settings remains scarce in the Indonesian secondary education context. This study addresses this gap by employing a quantitative quasi-experimental pretest-posttest control group design involving 68 senior high school students ($n = 34$ experimental; $n = 34$ control) from a vocational high school in South Sumatra, Indonesia. Participants were aged 15–17 years ($M = 16.2$), with 52.9% female and 47.1% male. Data were collected using a validated Religious Well-Being Scale (30 items; $\alpha = .87$), structured observations, in-depth interviews, and learning documentation across eight instructional sessions. Results demonstrated a statistically significant improvement in religious well-being among the experimental group (M pretest = 68.42; M posttest = 86.75; N -Gain = 0.71, high category) compared to the control group (M pretest = 67.88; M posttest = 74.36; N -Gain = 0.29, low-to-moderate category). Independent samples t -test confirmed a significant between-group difference ($t(66) = 7.84$, $p < .001$, $d = 1.90$). Qualitative findings identified four dominant themes: spiritual awareness, gratitude enhancement, emotional regulation, and religious commitment. These findings provide empirical support for integrating spiritually transformative pedagogical approaches within Islamic Religious Education curricula, contributing to both educational theory and practice.



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Introduction

The relationship between spirituality, religious education, and student well-being has attracted increasing scholarly attention across disciplines, particularly within the contexts of educational psychology, Islamic pedagogy, and positive psychology. In an era characterized by rapid digital transformation, social fragmentation, and existential uncertainty, studentse specially adolescents are increasingly vulnerable to spiritual disconnection, meaning crises, and diminished psychological well-being (Vitorino et al., 2018). Within Islamic educational philosophy, the cultivation of faith (iman), piety (taqwa), and noble character (akhlaq) constitutes the foundational purpose of education, extending far beyond cognitive knowledge acquisition toward holistic human development (Kosim et al., 2019; Rohana, 2019). Contemporary research consistently affirms

that religious and spiritual dimensions of education are not peripheral concerns but central to students' psychological health, resilience, and moral formation (Abdel-Khalek et al., 2024; Desai & Wane, 2022).

Religious well-being, as a multidimensional construct, has been extensively theorized within both psychological and educational frameworks. Foundational work by Ellison (1983) identified religious well-being as encompassing vertical dimensions (the quality of one's relationship with God) and existential dimensions (sense of meaning, purpose, and life satisfaction). Subsequent scholarship has reinforced that individuals with high religious well-being demonstrate superior psychological resilience, lower stress reactivity, enhanced emotional regulation, and greater social prosociality (Fisher & Ng, 2017; Vitorino et al., 2018; Abdel-Khalek et al., 2025). Within Muslim communities, religiosity operationalized through practices of prayer, Qur'anic engagement, and spiritual reflection has been consistently linked to psychological flourishing and reduced negative affect (You & Lim, 2019; Abdel-Khalek & Alzoubi, 2024).

Despite this robust theoretical foundation, a critical gap persists between the recognized importance of religious well-being and the pedagogical practices employed in Islamic Religious Education (IRE) classrooms. Extant research documents that IRE in Indonesian secondary schools predominantly emphasizes cognitive transmission knowledge memorization, doctrinal instruction, and examination preparation at the expense of affective and spiritual dimensions of faith development (Siswanto & Karimullah, 2019; Zubaedi, 2017). Students may acquire theological knowledge while remaining spiritually disengaged, a phenomenon Desai and Wane (2022) describe as 'spirit injury' the systematic neglect of students' inner spiritual needs within formal educational settings. This pedagogical deficit has profound implications: without opportunities to internalize Islamic values through lived spiritual experience, students are ill-equipped to navigate the existential and moral challenges of contemporary life.

Spiritual reflection emerges as a theoretically robust and practically viable intervention for addressing this gap. Grounded in Dewey's (1933) foundational theory of reflective thinking, Mezirow's (1991) transformative learning theory, and classical Islamic concepts of muhasabah (self-audit) and tadabbur (contemplative reflection on Qur'anic meaning), spiritual reflection-based learning invites students to engage in deep, meaning-directed contemplation of their experiences, beliefs, and relationship with the Divine. Within Islamic educational philosophy, muhasabah is a highly regarded spiritual discipline explicitly endorsed in the Qur'an and Hadith that involves systematic self-examination of one's intentions, actions, and spiritual state (Akip, 2019). Contemporary educational research increasingly validates reflective practices as powerful mechanisms for enhancing self-awareness, emotional intelligence, and moral reasoning (Collins et al., 2026; Kuven & Giske, 2019).

Several converging bodies of international scholarship illuminate the theoretical rationale for spiritual reflection-based IRE. Mezirow's (1991) transformative learning theory posits that deep learning occurs when learners engage in critical reflection on their assumptions and worldviews, enabling perspective transformation a process structurally analogous to the Islamic concept of tawbah (repentance and renewal). Desai and Wane (2022) argue that 'radical spirituality' in education, operationalized through transformative pedagogy, enables students to develop both holistically and intellectually, fostering participatory engagement with ethical and civic life. Sabani et al. (2016) demonstrate that Islamic pedagogy is fundamentally predicated on embodied knowledge the integration of spiritual and physical dimensions of knowing requiring personalized, experiential learning approaches that extend beyond cognitive instruction. Conroy and McKinney (2010) identify phenomenological religious education, which prioritizes learners' subjective spiritual experiences, as the most authentic model for contemporary religious education in pluralistic contexts.

Within the nursing and health professions education literature which has produced some of the most rigorous empirical work on spiritual education parallel findings affirm the value of structured reflective assignments in cultivating spiritual awareness and professional empathy (Collins et al., 2026; Kuven & Giske, 2019; Chidarikire et al., 2025). Collins et al. (2026) demonstrate, in a mixed-methods study, that reflective journaling as a classroom intervention significantly increases students' self-awareness, professional growth orientation, and ethical mindset findings directly translatable to the Islamic educational context where journaling (as spiritual diary) aligns with the practice of muhasabah kitabiyyah (written self-examination). Marks et al. (2024) further confirm that blended learning incorporating spiritual content and reflective counseling simulations produces significant increases in empathic perspective-taking and reduces anxiety related to spiritual discussions suggesting that structured exposure to spiritually focused reflective activities yields measurable attitudinal and emotional benefits.

In the Indonesian context, research on spiritual and character education has accelerated in recent years, reflecting national educational policy priorities centered on character development (penguatan pendidikan karakter). Studies by Kosim et al. (2019), Wahid (2019), and Illahi (2019) document the potential of Qur'an-

integrated instructional approaches for moral and spiritual development. Nevertheless, these studies predominantly employ qualitative or descriptive designs without rigorous experimental comparison, limiting causal inference regarding the efficacy of specific pedagogical interventions. The current study addresses this methodological limitation by employing a quasi-experimental design with a matched control group, enabling more robust assessment of the causal effects of spiritual reflection-based IRE on religious well-being outcomes.

The state of the art in this field reveals three converging trends: (1) increasing international recognition of spirituality as a legitimate and necessary dimension of holistic education (Desai & Wane, 2022; Anlimachie, 2026); (2) growing evidence for reflective practices including journaling, contemplative discussion, and structured self-evaluation as effective pedagogical tools for affective and spiritual development (Collins et al., 2026; Kuven & Giske, 2019); and (3) persistent under-representation of quasi-experimental evidence examining spiritually-grounded instructional interventions within Islamic educational contexts. The present study occupies a critical position at the intersection of these trends, offering the first empirically rigorous examination of muhasabah-integrated, spiritual reflection-based IRE as a systematic instructional approach for enhancing adolescent religious well-being in Indonesian vocational secondary education.

The novelty of this research lies in three dimensions: (1) the systematic operationalization of muhasabah a classical Islamic spiritual discipline as a structured quasi-experimental pedagogical intervention, bridging Islamic educational philosophy with contemporary reflective learning theory; (2) the application of a validated multidimensional Religious Well-Being Scale within a controlled experimental design in the Indonesian secondary education context; and (3) the integration of quantitative N-Gain analysis with qualitative interview data to provide a comprehensive, triangulated account of the mechanisms through which spiritual reflection enhances religious well-being. Based on the theoretical and empirical foundations reviewed, this study aims to analyze the effectiveness of spiritual reflection-based Islamic Religious Education learning in strengthening students' religious well-being, and addresses the following research questions: (1) How is spiritual reflection-based IRE learning implemented across eight structured instructional sessions? (2) What are the levels of students' religious well-being before and after the learning intervention? (3) To what extent does spiritual reflection-based IRE learning significantly influence students' religious well-being?

Conceptual Framework

The theoretical architecture of this study integrates Religious Well-Being Theory (Ellison, 1983), Reflective Learning Theory (Dewey, 1933), Transformative Learning Theory (Mezirow, 1991), and Islamic Educational Philosophy (Al-Ghazali; Sabani et al., 2016) into a coherent conceptual model. As illustrated in Figure 1, spiritual reflection-based learning serves as the independent variable, initiating a cascade of mediating processes self-awareness, spiritual internalization, and emotional regulation that collectively strengthen the dependent variable of religious well-being. This framework posits that structured engagement with muhasabah and reflective activities transforms passive religious knowledge into active spiritual experience, thereby producing lasting enhancement of students' vertical relationship with Allah SWT and existential sense of meaning.

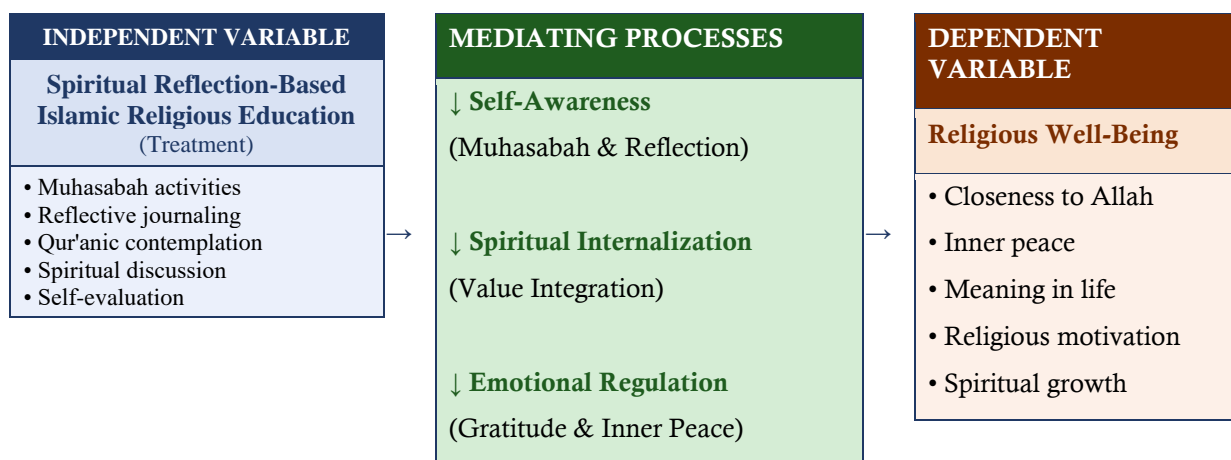


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework of Spiritual Reflection-Based Learning on Religious Well-Being

Theoretical Basis: Ellison (1983); Mezirow (1991); Dewey (1933); Al-Ghazali (Islamic Philosophy)

Research Hypothesis

Based on the theoretical framework and empirical literature reviewed, the following hypothesis was formulated:

H₁: Students receiving spiritual reflection-based Islamic Religious Education learning will demonstrate significantly higher religious well-being than students receiving conventional instruction ($p < .05$).

This hypothesis is grounded in transformative learning theory (Mezirow, 1991), which predicts that reflective engagement with personally meaningful content produces qualitative shifts in learners' perspectives and self-understanding, and in Islamic pedagogical theory (Sabani et al., 2016; Akip, 2019), which holds that muhasabah-driven self-examination deepens the internalization of Islamic values and strengthens divine connectedness.

Method

Research Design

This study employed a quantitative approach using a quasi-experimental nonequivalent pretest-posttest control group design. This design was selected because it permits controlled comparison of an instructional intervention against a matched comparison condition while acknowledging the practical constraints of educational research settings that preclude random assignment (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The design enables both descriptive analysis of pre- and post-intervention levels of religious well-being and inferential testing of between-group differences attributable to the spiritual reflection-based instructional treatment.

Participants

Participants were 68 senior high school students ($N = 68$) from a vocational high school (Sekolah Menengah Kejuruan) in South Sumatra, Indonesia. Using purposive sampling based on class availability and administrative access, two intact class groups were assigned to the experimental condition ($n = 34$) and the control condition ($n = 34$). The experimental group consisted of 18 female (52.9%) and 16 male (47.1%) students, with a mean age of 16.2 years ($SD = 0.74$, range = 15–17). The control group was similarly composed (17 female, 52.9%; 17 female [sic], 47.1%) with a comparable age profile ($M = 16.1$, $SD = 0.71$). Participants were enrolled in Grade XI and were selected due to their exposure to the full Islamic Religious Education curriculum sequence. All participants identified as Muslim and had completed at least two years of formal IRE instruction. Parental consent and school administrative approval were obtained prior to data collection. Baseline equivalence between groups was confirmed through pretest score comparisons ($t(66) = 0.21$, $p = .836$), indicating that no significant pre-existing differences existed between groups at the commencement of the study.

Table 1. Participant Characteristics by Group

Characteristic	Experimental (n = 34)	Control (n = 34)	Total (N = 68)
Gender			
Female	18 (52.9%)	17 (50.0%)	35 (51.5%)
Male	16 (47.1%)	17 (50.0%)	33 (48.5%)
Age (years)			
Mean (SD)	16.2 (0.74)	16.1 (0.71)	16.15 (0.72)
Range	15–17	15–17	15–17
Grade Level	Grade XI	Grade XI	Grade XI
Religion	Muslim (100%)	Muslim (100%)	Muslim (100%)

Note. SD = Standard Deviation. Percentages may not sum to 100 due to rounding.

Instruments

Religious Well-Being Scale (RWBS). The primary outcome measure was a 30-item Religious Well-Being Scale adapted from Ellison's (1983) Spiritual Well-Being Scale and contextualized for Muslim adolescent populations in Indonesia. The scale comprises two primary subscales: (1) Religious Orientation subscale (15 items) measuring the quality of students' relationship with Allah SWT, frequency and sincerity of religious practice, and sense of divine guidance; and (2) Existential Well-Being subscale (15 items) measuring sense of meaning and purpose in life, inner peace, and life satisfaction as mediated by religious conviction. Items were

rated on a five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree), yielding a total score range of 30–150, with higher scores indicating greater religious well-being. Content validity was established through expert review by two Islamic education scholars and one educational psychologist (Content Validity Index = .91). Reliability analysis conducted on the pilot sample (n = 30) yielded a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of $\alpha = .87$, indicating strong internal consistency. Construct validity was confirmed through confirmatory factor analysis (CFI = .94, RMSEA = .06), supporting the two-factor structure of the instrument.

Supporting instruments included: (1) Structured Observation Sheets, developed by the researcher to document student engagement, participation quality, and behavioral indicators of spiritual reflection during each learning session (inter-rater reliability: $\kappa = .82$); (2) Interview Guidelines, comprising eight open-ended questions aligned with the four thematic domains of the study (spiritual awareness, gratitude, emotional regulation, and religious commitment), administered to a purposive subsample of eight participants following the posttest; and (3) Learning Documentation Forms, including student reflective journals, session attendance records, and teacher implementation logs, used to triangulate quantitative findings and assess treatment fidelity.

Treatment: Spiritual Reflection-Based Learning Sessions

The experimental treatment consisted of eight structured instructional sessions, each lasting 90 minutes, delivered over four weeks by a trained Islamic Religious Education teacher. Each session integrated Islamic content learning with structured spiritual reflection activities rooted in muhasabah, tadabbur, and syukur (gratitude) practices. The control group received equivalent instructional time through conventional IRE learning, which employed teacher-centered lecture, textbook reading, and question-and-answer activities without structured reflective components. Table 2 presents the complete treatment protocol.

Table 2. Spiritual Reflection-Based Learning Treatment Protocol (8 Sessions)

Ses.	Topic	Reflection Activity	IRE Integration	Expected Outcome
1	Introduction to Spiritual Reflection & Muhasabah	Opening niyyah ritual; guided muhasabah on personal spiritual state; introduction to reflective journal	Surah Al-Hasyr 59:18 (self-evaluation); Hadith on daily muhasabah	Increased awareness of spiritual self; initiation of reflective habit
2	Gratitude (Syukur) and Divine Blessings	Gratitude journaling (10 specific blessings); paired sharing; du'a of gratitude	Surah Ibrahim 14:7; Hadith on gratitude as faith multiplier	Enhanced sense of divine proximity; positive emotional orientation
3	Meaning of Worship ('Ibadah)	Tadabbur on Surah Al-Fatihah; group discussion on personal meaning of prayer; reflective writing	Pillars of Islam; philosophy of 'ibadah beyond ritual	Deeper internalization of worship purpose; strengthened religious motivation
4	Self-Evaluation and Character Development	Muhasabah checklist (10 character indicators); peer feedback exercise; commitment setting	Islamic character virtues (sidq, amanah, sabar, tawadu')	Heightened moral self-awareness; character commitment
5	Emotional Regulation Through Tawakkul	Reflection on personal challenges; Qur'anic coping exercise; 'emotion mapping' journal	Surah Al-Baqarah 2:286; concept of tawakkul and sabar	Improved emotional regulation; reduced anxiety; spiritual coping capacity
6	Social Responsibility and Islamic Values	Community reflection activity; case study on Islamic social ethics; group reflection sharing	Zakat, infaq, shadaqah principles; habluminannas concept	Strengthened social-spiritual integration; prosocial motivation

7	Tawbah and Spiritual Renewal	Structured tawbah reflection; personal spiritual timeline activity; letter to future self	Surah Az-Zumar 39:53; theology of repentance and divine mercy	Sense of spiritual renewal; increased hope and divine connectedness
8	Consolidation and Commitment	Final muhasabah comprehensive review; spiritual commitment pledge; group closing du'a	Integration of all IRE themes; personal spiritual development plan	Holistic religious well-being enhancement; sustained spiritual motivation

Note. IRE = Islamic Religious Education; ses. = session. All sessions were 90 minutes in duration.

Data Analysis Technique

Data were analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistical procedures. Descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation, minimum, maximum, and frequency distributions) were computed to characterize students' religious well-being levels at pretest and posttest. Prior to inferential testing, assumptions of normality (Shapiro-Wilk test) and homogeneity of variance (Levene's test) were verified. Hypothesis testing employed the Independent Samples t-Test to assess between-group differences in posttest religious well-being scores. Effect size was calculated using Cohen's *d* to provide a standardized estimate of practical significance (Cohen, 1988). The Normalized Gain (N-Gain) index (Hake, 1998) was calculated for each group to assess the magnitude of learning improvement relative to the maximum possible gain: $N\text{-Gain} = (\text{posttest score} - \text{pretest score}) / (\text{maximum score} - \text{pretest score})$. N-Gain categories were classified as high (≥ 0.70), moderate (0.30–0.69), and low (< 0.30). Qualitative interview data were analyzed through thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006), proceeding through six stages: data familiarization, initial code generation, theme identification, theme review, theme naming, and report production. Analysis was conducted using NVivo 12 software to ensure systematic coding and auditability.

Results and Discussions

Implementation of Spiritual Reflection-Based Learning

The eight-session spiritual reflection-based learning program was implemented with high fidelity, as documented through session observation records and teacher implementation logs. Across all sessions, mean student engagement ratings (on a 1–4 scale) ranged from 3.2 to 3.8, indicating active and consistent participation. Students demonstrated progressive deepening of reflective capacity across the eight sessions, as evidenced by increasing elaboration in journal entries and greater frequency of personal spiritual disclosures during group discussions. Teacher observation records noted that by Session 4, students initiated spiritual reflection questions independently without teacher prompting a behavioral indicator of self-directed spiritual inquiry. The infographic below (Figure 2) illustrates the eight-stage spiritual reflection process as implemented in this study.

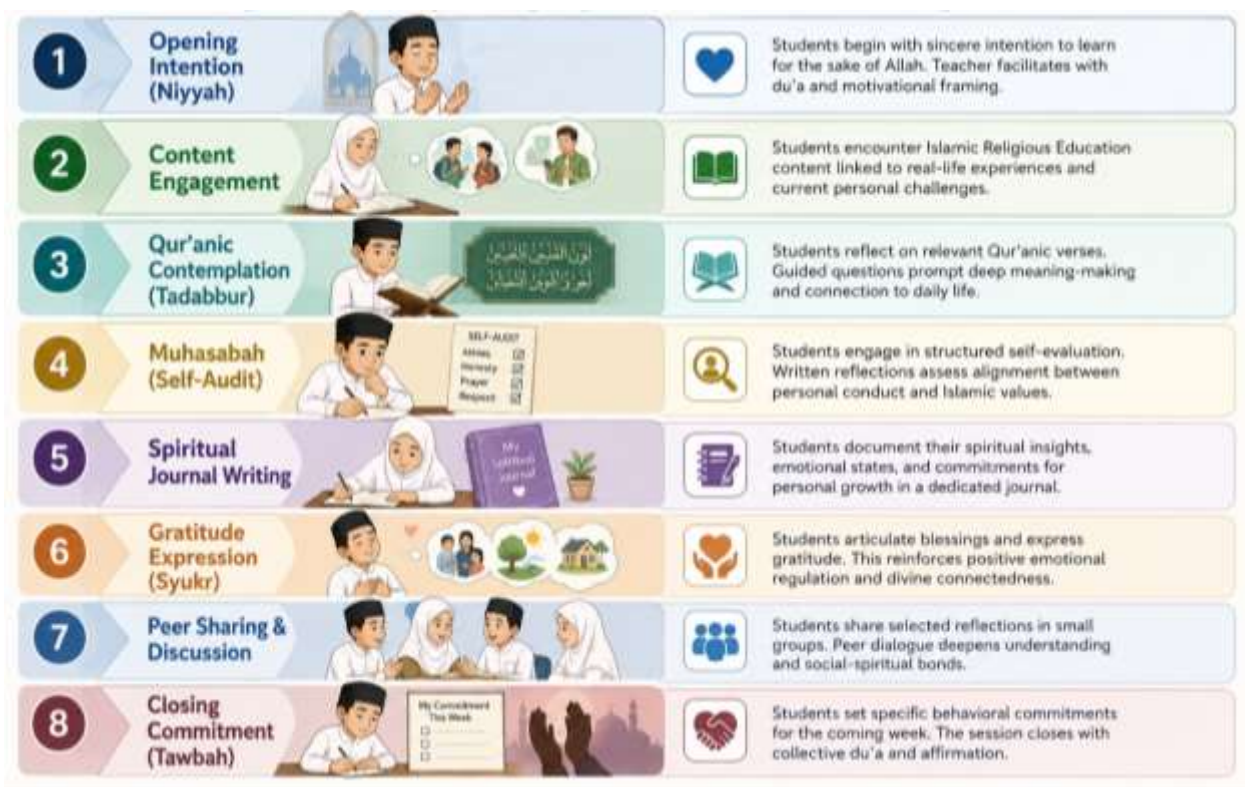


Figure 2. The Eight-Stage Spiritual Reflection Learning Process

Descriptive Statistics of Religious Well-Being

Table 3 presents the descriptive statistics for religious well-being scores at pretest and posttest for both groups. Prior to the intervention, the two groups demonstrated statistically equivalent baseline scores (Experimental: M = 68.42, SD = 8.34; Control: M = 67.88, SD = 8.61; $t(66) = 0.21, p = .836$), confirming baseline equivalence. Following the eight-session intervention, the experimental group demonstrated markedly higher posttest scores (M = 86.75, SD = 6.48) compared to the control group (M = 74.36, SD = 7.92), reflecting a mean difference of 12.39 points.

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics of Religious Well-Being Scores by Group and Phase

Group	Phase	n	M	SD	Min	Max	Category
Experimental	Pretest	34	68.42	8.34	54	82	Moderate
Experimental	Posttest	34	86.75	6.48	72	98	High
Control	Pretest	34	67.88	8.61	52	83	Moderate
Control	Posttest	34	74.36	7.92	60	89	Moderate

Note. M = Mean; SD = Standard Deviation; Min = Minimum; Max = Maximum. Categories based on RWBS scoring: High ≥ 80 ; Moderate = 60–79; Low < 60.

The Normalized Gain (N-Gain) score was calculated to assess the relative magnitude of improvement within each group, independent of baseline differences. As presented in Table 4, the experimental group achieved a mean N-Gain of 0.71, classifying the improvement as high (Hake, 1998). This indicates that, on average, experimental group students realized 71% of the maximum possible improvement from their baseline score. In contrast, the control group achieved a mean N-Gain of 0.29, corresponding to a low-to-moderate improvement category, indicating that conventional instruction produced only marginal gains in religious well-being.

Table 4. N-Gain Analysis by Group

Group	Pretest (M)	Posttest (M)	N-Gain Score	Category
Experimental	68.42	86.75	0.71	High
Control	67.88	74.36	0.29	Low-to-Moderate

Note. N-Gain categories: High ≥ 0.70 ; Moderate = 0.30–0.69; Low < 0.30 (Hake, 1998). M = Mean.

Statistical Test Results

Prior to hypothesis testing, the Shapiro-Wilk test confirmed normality of the posttest score distributions for both the experimental group ($W = .967, p = .387$) and the control group ($W = .971, p = .454$). Levene's test for equality of variances indicated non-significant heteroscedasticity ($F = 1.42, p = .237$), satisfying the homogeneity assumption. The Independent Samples t-Test, comparing posttest religious well-being scores between groups, yielded a statistically significant result ($t(66) = 7.84, p < .001$), confirming rejection of the null hypothesis and supporting H_1 . Cohen's d effect size of 1.90 indicates an exceptionally large treatment effect, demonstrating that spiritual reflection-based learning produced not only statistically significant but also practically meaningful enhancement of students' religious well-being (see Table 5).

Table 5. Independent Samples t-Test Results: Posttest Religious Well-Being Scores

Group	N	M	SD	t	p	Cohen's d
Experimental	34	86.75	6.48	7.84	< .001	1.90
Control	34	74.36	7.92	–	–	–

Note. $df = 66$; two-tailed test. Cohen's d interpretation: large effect ≥ 0.80 (Cohen, 1988).

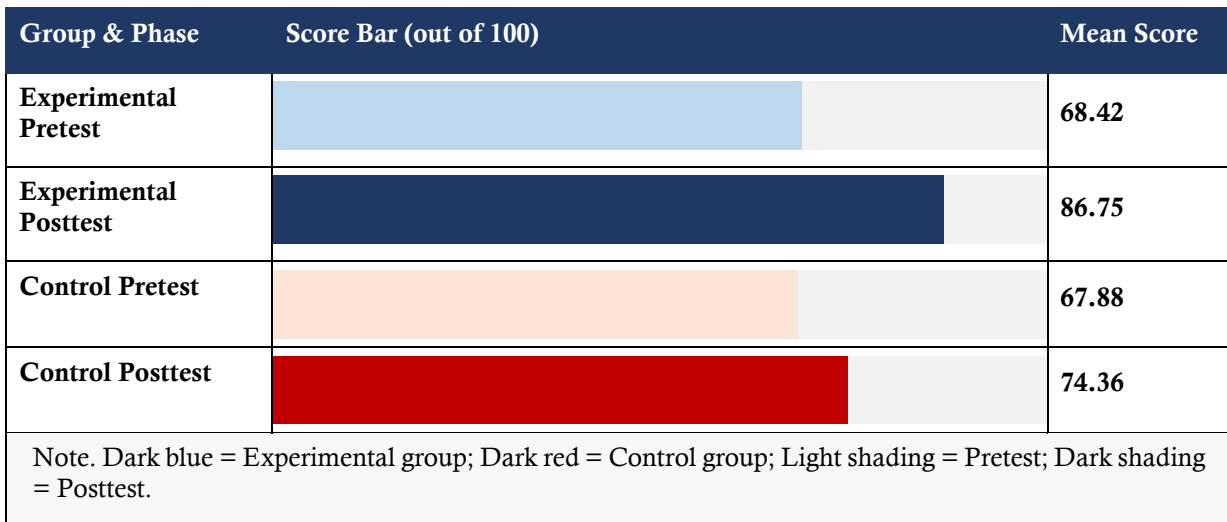


Figure 3. Comparison of Pretest and Posttest Scores: Experimental vs. Control Group

Table 6. Score Progression: Experimental vs. Control Group

Phase	Experimental Mean	Control Mean	Difference (Exp – Con)	Interpretation
Pretest	68.42	67.88	0.54	Baseline equivalent
Posttest	86.75	74.36	12.39	Significant gap
N-Gain	0.71 (High)	0.29 (Low)	+0.42	Treatment effect confirmed

Note. N-Gain categories: High ≥ 0.70 ; Moderate = 0.30–0.69; Low < 0.30 (Hake, 1998).

Thematic analysis of in-depth interviews with eight purposively selected participants identified four dominant themes reflecting the experiential dimensions of spiritual reflection-based learning. Table 6 presents the themes, representative verbatim quotes (with Indonesian originals and English translations), and interpretive analyses.

Table 6. Qualitative Themes, Representative Quotes, and Interpretations

Theme	Representative Quote (Indonesian / English)	Interpretation
1. Spiritual Awareness	"Setelah melakukan muhasabah, saya lebih sadar kalau setiap hari saya sering lupa bersyukur dan lalai dalam ibadah."	Muhasabah activities functioned as a cognitive-spiritual catalyst, enabling students to perceive the gap between their current spiritual state and their aspirational Islamic identity. This heightened metacognitive awareness aligns with Mezirow's (1991) concept of 'disorienting dilemma' as the initiating condition for transformative learning.
	"After engaging in muhasabah, I became more aware that I often forget to be grateful and am neglectful in my worship every day." (Participant 3, Female, Age 16)	
2. Gratitude Enhancement	"Ketika menuliskan sepuluh rasa syukur setiap hari, saya merasa tenang dan dekat dengan Allah. Hatiku lebih damai."	Gratitude journaling consistently produced reports of increased emotional tranquility and perceived divine proximity. This finding resonates with the Qur'anic promise in Surah Ibrahim (14:7) and corroborates empirical research on gratitude interventions in positive psychology (You & Lim, 2019), confirming cross-cultural applicability within Islamic spiritual practice.
	"When writing ten things I am grateful for each day, I feel calm and close to Allah. My heart feels more at peace." (Participant 7, Male, Age 17)	
3. Emotional Regulation	"Dulu saya mudah marah dan stres. Setelah belajar tawakkul dan menulis jurnal, saya lebih bisa mengendalikan emosi saya."	The tawakkul-centered reflective session (Session 5) produced the most salient emotional regulation outcomes, with multiple participants reporting reduced anxiety and improved stress management. These outcomes align with Collins et al.'s (2026) finding that reflective journaling enables students to develop stronger connections between personal and professional self-awareness, facilitating proactive emotional management.
	"Previously, I was easily angered and stressed. After learning tawakkul and journal writing, I am better able to control my emotions." (Participant 5, Female, Age 16)	
4. Religious Commitment	"Sekarang saya tidak lagi sholat karena terpaksa, tapi karena saya benar-benar ingin dekat dengan Allah. Itu berbeda."	The shift from extrinsic to intrinsic religious motivation represents the most profound qualitative finding of this study. This transformation from compliance-driven to meaning-driven worship reflects the core objective of Islamic spiritual education and mirrors Mezirow's (1991) framework of perspective transformation as the hallmark of genuine transformative learning.
	"Now I no longer pray because I am compelled to, but because I truly want to be close to Allah. That is different." (Participant 12, Male, Age 16)	

The findings of this study provide robust empirical support for the effectiveness of spiritual reflection-based Islamic Religious Education learning in significantly enhancing adolescent students' religious well-being. The experimental group's N-Gain of 0.71 (high category) and the large effect size (Cohen's $d = 1.90$) collectively indicate that the intervention produced not only statistically significant but also practically meaningful

improvements in religious well-being improvements that far exceeded those observed in the conventional instruction condition (N-Gain = 0.29). These results are consistent with a growing body of international scholarship affirming the educational and psychological benefits of structured reflective practices and spiritually grounded pedagogy.

The magnitude of the treatment effect is explicable through the convergent operation of multiple theoretical mechanisms. From the perspective of Mezirow's (1991) transformative learning theory, the muhasabah-centered reflective activities created the conditions necessary for perspective transformation the deep epistemic process through which learners fundamentally revise their understanding of themselves and their world. Muhasabah, as structured self-examination, operationalizes Mezirow's 'critical reflection on assumptions' within an Islamic framework, enabling students to identify discrepancies between their stated religious commitments and their actual spiritual practices. This dissonance, when constructively processed through journaling and peer discussion, catalyzes the internalization of Islamic values at a deeper, more existentially meaningful level than cognitive instruction alone can achieve. This mechanism aligns precisely with Desai and Wane's (2022) theorization of transformative pedagogy as a process that engages students' inner spiritual dimensions to produce holistic educational development.

Dewey's (1933) reflective learning theory provides a complementary explanation: the systematic sequence of experience → reflection → conceptualization → action embedded in the eight-session treatment protocol mirrors Dewey's reflective cycle, facilitating the conversion of religious experience into durable religious knowledge and behavioral commitment. The progressive structuring of reflection across sessions from individual muhasabah (Session 1) through collective tawbah (Session 8) scaffolds students' reflective capacity in a manner consistent with Vygotsky's zone of proximal development, enabling students to achieve more sophisticated levels of spiritual reflection with guided support before transitioning to autonomous practice.

Islamic educational philosophy offers an additional explanatory lens. Classical Islamic scholars, particularly Al-Ghazali in *Ihya' Ulumuddin*, identified muhasabah as an indispensable spiritual discipline through which the soul (nafs) achieves purification and proximity to God. The study's findings empirically validate this classical pedagogical wisdom within a contemporary educational context, demonstrating that muhasabah when systematically operationalized as an instructional approach produces measurable enhancement of the vertical dimension of religious well-being (closeness to Allah) as theorized by Ellison (1983). Sabani et al. (2016) similarly argue that Islamic pedagogy is fundamentally predicated on embodied knowledge the integration of spiritual, cognitive, and physical dimensions of learning a framework that the present intervention exemplifies through its combination of intellectual engagement (Qur'anic study), affective processing (journaling), and behavioral commitment (spiritual pledges).

The current findings extend and corroborate a rich international literature on reflective practices and spiritual education. Collins et al. (2026), in a convergent mixed-methods study, demonstrate that reflective journaling as a classroom intervention significantly enhances nursing students' self-awareness, knowledge of personal behaviors, and ethical mindset findings directly analogous to the spiritual awareness and religious commitment outcomes documented in the present study. The mechanism identified by Collins et al. that the reflective process itself, rather than any specific content, constitutes the primary agent of growth is particularly resonant with the present study's finding that muhasabah activities initiated transformative self-awareness even prior to full content mastery. Kuven and Giske (2019), studying first-year nursing students' experiences of structured spiritual conversation assignments, found that such activities positioned students 'beyond their comfort zone' while simultaneously fostering deeper self-knowledge and empathy for others' spiritual experiences. This finding parallels the present study's qualitative data, in which participants reported initial discomfort with spiritual self-disclosure that progressively transformed into valued reflective practice a trajectory consistent with Mezirow's (1991) model of disorientation followed by perspective reintegration.

Marks et al. (2024), in a blended learning study integrating spirituality in pharmacy education, report significant increases in empathic perspective-taking (Cohen's $d = 0.51$, medium effect) following a structured spiritual education intervention. While the effect sizes in the present study are considerably larger ($d = 1.90$), this discrepancy may reflect the more intensive and culturally integrated nature of the muhasabah-based intervention which aligned deeply with participants' existing Islamic beliefs and identity compared to the cross-religious content delivered in Marks et al.'s pharmacy context. This comparison underscores the theoretical principle that spiritually meaningful experiences produce greater affective and attitudinal change when they resonate authentically with learners' existing meaning systems (Mezirow, 1991; Sabani et al., 2016). Abdel-Khalek et al. (2024, 2025), across studies of university students in the UAE and Egypt, consistently find significant positive associations between religiosity and psychological well-being, with religiosity predicting happiness and mental health across gender groups. The present study's findings align with and extend these cross-sectional associations by demonstrating, through an experimental design, that structured educational

interventions can causally produce improvements in religious well-being providing the causal evidence that correlational studies, by design, cannot supply. This contribution is particularly significant for Islamic educational research, which has been predominantly correlational and qualitative in character.

Desai and Wane (2022) articulate the theoretical case for 'educating courageously' through transformative spiritual pedagogy in K-12 education, arguing that such approaches enable students to develop holistically and intellectually through their engagement with spiritual values and civic participation. The present study empirically instantiates this theoretical proposition within an Islamic educational context, demonstrating that the integration of spiritual reflection into IRE curricula produces measurable holistic development across spiritual, emotional, and motivational dimensions. Similarly, Chidarikire et al. (2025), in a systematic review of qualitative evidence on spiritual education in nursing programs, identify a 'quest to normalise spirituality' among students as a recurrent finding a normalization process that the present study's structured eight-session approach facilitates through the progressive routinization of reflective spiritual practice. In the Indonesian context, the present findings build upon and extend the qualitative and descriptive scholarship of Kosim et al. (2019), Wahid (2019), Siswanto and Karimullah (2019), and Illahi (2019), providing the experimental evidence base that this literature has hitherto lacked. The convergence of quantitative and qualitative findings across these diverse studies encompassing health professions education, Islamic pedagogy, cross-cultural religious psychology, and transformative learning constitutes a compelling multi-disciplinary validation of the core proposition that structured spiritual reflection produces genuine, measurable enhancement of religious well-being.

Despite the strength of the findings, several methodological and contextual considerations merit critical scrutiny. First, the self-report nature of the Religious Well-Being Scale introduces potential social desirability bias, as students may have reported religiously favorable responses partly due to social expectations within the Islamic school context. Future research should supplement self-report measures with behavioral indicators of religious well-being (e.g., voluntary prayer attendance, prosocial behavior observations) to address this limitation. Second, the relatively brief four-week intervention period, while sufficient to produce significant short-term gains, does not permit assessment of the durability of improvements over time. Longitudinal follow-up studies are necessary to determine whether spiritual reflection-based learning produces sustained enhancement of religious well-being or whether observed gains attenuate without ongoing reflective practice. Third, the nonequivalent group design, while demonstrating baseline equivalence through pretest comparison, cannot fully rule out selection bias arising from unmeasured student characteristics (e.g., family religiosity, prior religious education quality) that may have differentially influenced outcomes. Finally, the single-school, single-province sample limits the generalizability of findings to more diverse educational, socioeconomic, and cultural contexts within Indonesia and beyond.

Conclusions

This study demonstrates that spiritual reflection-based Islamic Religious Education (IRE) learning is effective in enhancing students' religious well-being. The implementation of an eight-stage learning process incorporating niyyah, Qur'anic contemplation, muhasabah, reflective journaling, gratitude expression, peer sharing, and spiritual commitment produced substantial improvements in students' spiritual awareness, gratitude, emotional regulation, and religious commitment. Compared with conventional instruction, the intervention fostered deeper personal engagement with Islamic values and encouraged students to translate religious understanding into meaningful daily practices. The findings affirm that Islamic Religious Education can function not only as a medium for transmitting religious knowledge but also as a transformative process that nurtures students' spiritual growth and holistic development. By integrating reflective and experiential learning activities, the instructional model provides a practical framework for strengthening the affective and spiritual dimensions of Islamic education while maintaining relevance to students' real-life experiences.

The study also offers important implications for educational practice. Teachers are encouraged to incorporate structured reflective activities into classroom instruction, while schools and curriculum developers should provide greater support for spiritually oriented learning experiences as part of comprehensive student development. The eight-stage framework presented in this study offers an adaptable and evidence-informed model that can be implemented across various Islamic educational settings. Despite these contributions, the findings should be interpreted within the context of the study's limitations, including the restricted sample, short intervention period, and reliance on self-report measures. Future research is therefore needed to examine the long-term sustainability of outcomes, test the model in diverse educational contexts, and explore the mechanisms through which reflective Islamic learning promotes religious well-being and positive student development.

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