RELIGIOUS PERSONALITY: A CONCEPTUAL COMPARISON BETWEEN ISLAM AND THE WEST

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Abstract: *This conceptual paper aims to explore and compare understandings of religious personality from Islamic and Western perspectives and propose a conceptual framework for forming Muslim religious personality based on Islamic teachings. Religious personality results from a person's manifestation of values, attitudes, and behaviors centered on religious beliefs and practices. In Islam, a spiritual personality is formed on three main elements: aqidah, ibadah, and akhlak. It is reinforced by the practice of tazkiyah al-nafs, such as mujahadah al-nafs and riyadah al-nafs, outlined by Imam al-Ghazali. On the other hand, the Western perspective sees religiosity in two dimensions, personal and social, emphasizing rituals and expressions of belief without absolute attachment to aspects of life as a whole. This study uses a qualitative approach through document analysis and literature review of major works related to religious personality from both perspectives. Data is analyzed thematically to identify similarities, differences, and common ground between the two frameworks of thought. The results are expected to produce a conceptual model of the formation of Muslim religious personality that is holistic and practical, considering the role of individual spiritual, social, and personal relationships. The findings from this study can potentially be utilized in developing educational modules, mentoring training, and personality interventions among Muslim students and youth. The study's implications also contribute to the discourse of integrating spiritual values in a more balanced and religiously based approach to human development.*

Keywords: *Islamic Perspective, Religious Personality, Spiritual Personality, Tazkiyyah al-Nafs, Western Perspective*

Introduction

Religious personality is an important aspect of human development because it reflects religious beliefs, practices, and values in an individual's life (Zheng, 2023). Due to the challenges of modern society, developing a personality based on religious values has become increasingly significant in addressing moral decay, loss of identity, and identity crisis, especially among the younger generation. Therefore, a clear and profound understanding of religious personality is essential in building a balanced society that encompasses physical, emotional, spiritual, and intellectual aspects.

From an Islamic perspective, religious personality is the result of appreciation of the three main pillars of Islamic teachings, namely Aqidah (faith), Ibadah (worship), and Akhlak (morality), and supplemented by the practice of *tazkiyah al-nafs* as described by Imam al-Ghazali (Aisyah Humairak et al., 2023). This process not only forms individuals who obey the sharia but also produces prosperous individuals in their relationship with Allah SWT, fellow humans, and the environment. On the other hand, the Western perspective sees religiosity as a more ritualistic and personal element, and does not necessarily encompass all aspects of life (Sana Akhtar et al., 2023).

However, Western researchers know the importance of spiritual elements in self-development, especially in education and mentoring (Buzzanell & Rhodes, 2024). This study indicates a space for dialogue between the two perspectives that can be utilized to build a comprehensive and practical conceptual framework for forming Muslim personalities. It aims to compare the two views and propose a holistic model of Muslim personality formation, with implications for developing educational modules and personality training for contemporary Muslim students.

Methodology

This study uses a qualitative approach, conceptual research, and document analysis to explore the understanding of religious personality from Islamic and Western perspectives. This method allowed the researcher to examine, compare, and synthesize major theories related to religiosity, spirituality, and personality formation based on scholarly sources.

Data were collected from various secondary documents, including academic journals, scholarly books, classical Islamic manuscripts such as the works of al-Ghazali, as well as contemporary studies (2022–2025) related to religiosity, education, and psychology (Sana Akhtar et al., 2023; Chalmers & Delaney, 2023).

Information was analyzed thematically, identifying main themes such as the relationship with Allah SWT, the self, humans, and the process of *tazkiyah al-nafs*. The analysis's results allow the formation of a comprehensive and practical conceptual framework.

The sources were selected carefully to ensure credibility and included triangulation between traditional and contemporary views (Bennett & Hughes, 2023). This methodology also meets the characteristics of exploratory research in constructing initial theories for reference in contemporary Islamic education and personality development.

Result and Discussion

Religious Personality

Religious personality refers to how a person applies their beliefs and practices. It includes attitudes, beliefs, motivations, values , and actions that result from one's religious beliefs (Krauss et al., 2005). Moreover, it can vary and change with changing times and life experiences (Annalakshmi & Abeer, 2011; Paloutzian et al., 1999). Every religion in the world has its perspective on religious personality, and various studies highlight findings related to the formation of religious personality in their respective beliefs (Zheng, 2023).

In the Islamic perspective, the development of religious personality is closely related to an individual's appreciation and understanding of the three scopes of Islamic teachings: Aqidah (faith), Ibadah (worship), and Akhlak (morality). Aqidah is the catalyst for developing a good religious personality because it is related to belief in the pillars of faith, which leads to the development of noble morality (Sarinah et al., 2019).

Akhlak is synonymous with personality, where, according to Fariza et al. (2013), personality development in Islam also refers to the development of 'personality' or 'akhlak' found in an individual. It coincides with Krauss et al. (2005), who said that religious personality in Islam encompasses attitudes, behaviors, emotions, and motivations found in an individual due to the appreciation of Islamic teachings and obedience to the commands of Allah SWT.

Similarly, the scope of worship includes specific worship, which reflects a direct relationship with Allah SWT, and general worship, which reflects daily transactions among humans, and between humans with other creatures created by Allah SWT. All of these form a Muslim's personal qualities or religious personality (Krauss et al., 2005). Therefore, aqidah, ibadah, and akhlak are related to forming a Muslim's religious personality.

Religious Personality from a Western Perspective

Religion is a set of beliefs related to aspects of divinity. A religious individual believes in a particular religion, such as Islam, Christianity, Hinduism, etc. Religious life or religiosity refers to a system of beliefs and practices that, if adhered to, will increase spirituality (Marsha, 2003). According to Higginbotham et al. (2007), religiosity is a system of beliefs or behaviors related to something unseen or of high value.

There are two dimensions of religious life in Western society, namely the personal dimension and the public dimension. The personal dimension is religious beliefs or behaviors that occur privately without being seen or known by others, such as reading the holy book and praying. The public dimension is religious practices known by others or done with others, such as praying together and various other religious activities (Higginbotham et al., 2007). Based on this definition, religious life from a Western perspective revolves around individual experience and the practice of religious rituals, but often lacks comprehensive integration into the entirety of life. In this regard, the formation of religious personality is also often limited to behaviors observed within those ritual and moral boundaries (Sana Akhtar et al., 2023).

However, several recent studies have expanded this scope by linking religiosity with various dimensions of human development. For example, a study by Chalmers and Delaney (2023) explores the intersection of religiosity and identity formation among LGBTQ+ communities in Western societies. Similarly, Morgan and Ellis (2022) highlight the importance of incorporating

spiritual literacy into curriculum design to foster emotional intelligence and ethical awareness in students. Moreover, Thompson and Rivera (2024) examine how religious belief influences aggression management and conflict resolution in at-risk youth, indicating religion's role in behavioral outcomes.

Recent research also underscores the role of mentoring in developing spiritual and religious aspects. Studies by Bennett and Hughes (2023) and Jamison and Clarke (2022) show that emphasizing spiritual themes within mentoring relationships enhances mentees' trust, reflection, and socio-emotional development. These findings are consistent with earlier arguments that mentoring grounded in spiritual values promotes positive human development and community resilience. As such, Bennett and Hughes (2023) recommend further development of spiritually-informed mentoring models to foster well-rounded youth character formation and sustainable societal growth. This emphasis on religion and spirituality indirectly supports the cultivation of stronger religious personalities and reinforces spiritual belief systems in contemporary Western contexts.
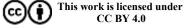
However, according to Abdul Kadir et al. (2014), a secular Western culture says that it is not necessary to believe in god to shape an individual's character or personality. It is because god is considered an external entity that prohibits enjoyable activities and punishes those who engage in them. This cultural position contradicts the findings of a study conducted by Unterrainer et al. (2010), which shows that spiritual well-being and religion influence an individual's psychological well-being and personality. This belief in god, religion, and spirituality has been proven to help improve the quality of human personality. Religion teaches its followers to adhere to good deeds and avoid destructive behavior as part of their responsibilities in daily life (Abdul Kadir et al., 2014).

Religious Personality from an Islamic Perspective

Religious personality in Islam is closely related to the concept of religiosity or religious life for a Muslim, where religiosity is an appreciation of religion that has a significant impact on a person's behavior (Jamiah et.al., 2013; Akhmad et al., 2022). Therefore, religious life in Islam requires its followers to appreciate Islam as a way of life (al-din), obliging every believer to appreciate and practice its teachings comprehensively (Nazneen et al., 2019). Here, in the Islamic perspective, individuals with a religious personality refer to individuals who have a personality or behavior that results from the significant influence of religious life on their lives as Muslims. It is different from the Western perspective, where religious life focuses a lot on religious beliefs and practices that are not directly related to activities in daily life.

According to Zulkiple and Nor Salimah (2006), Islam as *al-din* includes aspects of aqidah, akhlak, ibadah, and syariah. A perfect appreciation of these four aspects will positively affect a person's religious and spiritual life. However, measurements of religiosity from an Islamic perspective cannot be made on spiritual aspects such as piety or faith. However, they can only be seen from the aspect of outward practices. A Muslim's overall appreciation of religion can be identified through the knowledge and understanding of religion, thought, practice, morality, personality, and culture of life (Jamiah et al., 2013). Therefore, in the study of religious personality according to Islam, researchers see these aspects of aqidah, akhlak, ibadah, and syariah in various aspects, constructs, or variables that can be measured and seen.

The primary basis for the formation of religious personality in Islam, according to Krauss et al. (2005), is the aspect of appreciating aqidah, ibadah, and akhlak in three forms of relationships,

namely the relationship with Allah SWT, the relationship with oneself, and the relationship between humans and nature. In addition, it also focuses on the element of *tazkiyah al-nafs* (*mujahadah al-nafs* and *riyadah al-nafs*), which is expressed by Imam al-Ghazali (1988) as an additional element in forming a Muslim's religious personality.

It coincides with the study of Aisyah Humairak et al. (2022) and Cintami Farmawati and Nur Hidayati (2018), which explains spiritual development as a complement to physical (social) development in forming Muslim identity and personality. Similarly, the study of Moh. Toriqul and Sukatin (2022) state that humans were created by Allah SWT, consisting of physical and spiritual elements, and by nature, humans are always aware of the existence of God. With this awareness, humans consider all vertical relationships with Allah SWT and horizontal relationships with fellow humans and nature. The discussion regarding the five principles in the formation of religious personality in Islam is as follows:

Relationship with Allah SWT

According to Krauss et al. (2005), the relationship with Allah SWT is the first construct of religious personality in ibadah. It is also explained in the study of Mustafa and Nik Ahmad (2016), where belief in Allah SWT and the Messenger of Allah SAW is a manifestation of monotheism from the *shahadah*, which is the central pillar in the formation of religious personality. The command to maintain a relationship or faith in Allah SWT and the Messenger of Allah SAW requires abandoning all forms of worship or exaltation other than Him.

In maintaining this relationship with Allah SWT, every Muslim needs to understand and appreciate religion as *al-din* that comes from Allah SWT to regulate all human life (Hilman, 2020). Similarly, obedience and love for Allah SWT and the Messenger of Allah SAW must also be placed before love for other creatures. Performing worship as a sign of devotion and abandoning all prohibitions of Allah SWT is a manifestation of true love for Allah SWT and the Messenger of Allah SAW (Akilah, 2017). Likewise, with self-reflection and sincere repentance when making mistakes or sins. The life of a Muslim who always repents and maintains a good relationship with Allah SWT will always be pleasing and end with the blessing of heaven by Allah SWT (Hilman, 2020). The word of Allah SWT, which means:
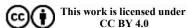
> *"They will be afflicted with humiliation wherever they are, except by a rope from Allah (relationship with Allah) and a rope from mankind (relationship between humans)..."*

(Surah Ali Imran: 112)

Relationships with Humans and Nature

Allah SWT created humans naturally inclined to establish social relationships and interact. Therefore, in addition to maintaining relationships with Allah SWT, humans must also maintain relationships with other humans to form a good religious personality (Krauss, 2005; Nuriman and Syahrial Razali, 2020). A good Muslim will always maintain morals in socializing, strengthen brotherhood among Muslims, and protect themselves from doing things that can sever kinship ties (Hilman, 2020). Among the relationships that need to be maintained are relationships with parents, family relationships, relationships with friends, relationships with teachers, and relationships with neighbors or community members.

Every Muslim also needs to always be together in a group of community members or righteous friends, who constantly remind themselves of their religious responsibilities as the caliph of

Allah SWT (Asdelima, 2021). It is to ensure that Muslim lives are not neglected and further away from obedience to Allah SWT. Therefore, doing what is right and forbidding what is wrong in human relationships is also necessary. Implementing enjoining what is right and forbidding what is wrong will ensure that human lives are more prosperous and in the mercy and pleasure of Allah SWT (Muh Gufron, 2020). The word of Allah SWT, which means:

> *"Worship Allah and do not associate anything with Him, and do good to parents, relatives, orphans, the needy, the near and distant neighbors, the companion, the wayfarer, and your slave. Indeed, Allah does not like the arrogant and boastful."*
>
> (Surah An-Nisa: 36)

Apart from humans, the universe is also a creation of Allah SWT, endowed with various privileges. Allah SWT created the universe and life, consisting of various plants and animals, which is not in vain, but instead has numerous benefits that help and facilitate humans in living life as servants of Allah SWT and vicegerents of Allah SWT on earth. Everything brings signs of the greatness and majesty of Allah SWT for humans always to be grateful and self-aware, and it is the responsibility of humans as vicegerents of Allah SWT to always maintain a relationship with the universe in the best way (Titis Rosowulan, 2019). The word of Allah SWT, which means:

> *"And do not make mischief on the earth after (Allah) has set it in order, and call upon Him with fear (not to be accepted) and hope (to be granted). Indeed, the mercy of Allah is very near to those who do good."*
>
> (Surah Al-A`raf: 56)

Relationship with Self

Every Muslim must maintain a relationship with themselves, which requires a deep understanding of where humans come from, why humans are in this world, and the direction or goal of human life (Abizal, 2018). Every Muslim also needs to ensure that their spiritual, physical, emotional, and intellectual well-being is protected from doing things that are beyond the limits of obedience to Allah SWT and His Messenger. Therefore, everything done must align with the purpose for which humans were created: to worship Allah SWT and be His caliph on earth (Abizal, 2018). Humans will be unjust to themselves if they do something against that purpose, because Allah SWT will hold all human deeds accountable.

Human awareness to maintain a relationship with themselves by managing by the will of Allah SWT will not only bring well-being and peace to oneself, but it is also a manifestation in maintaining a good relationship with Allah SWT and also good relationships between humans and nature (Ira Suryani & Wahyu Sakban, 2022). It also fulfils the responsibility of humans as caliphs and servants of Allah SWT in bringing peace and prosperity to the world (Abizal, 2018). The word of Allah SWT, which means:

> *"O you who believe, protect yourselves and your families from the Fire of Hell"*
>
> (Surah At-Tahrim: 6)

Practices of *Mujahadah al-Nafs* and *Riyadah al-Nafs*

According to al-Ghazali (1988), *mujahadah al-nafs* and *riyadah al-nafs* are two forms of practice that must be implemented in the process of *tazkiyah al-nafs* (purification of the soul). This method of *tazkiyah al-nafs* is closely related to personal development and behavior. Bad

behavior results from the soul's impurity, while good behavior results from a clean and pure soul. According to Mohamad Faisal et al. (2020), *mujahadah al-nafs* is an effort to empty oneself of reprehensible traits, while riyadah al-nafs is to adorn oneself with praiseworthy values and qualities.

In addition, *mujahadah* means being diligent or always motivated to achieve a specific goal without being distracted by the urge of lust or the influence of the environment (Mardzelah et al., 2013; Mohamad Faisal et al., 2020). *Riyadah al-nafs* also means training the soul, which improves morals and purifies the heart of impurities, making the soul clean from vile things. This heart disease can cause accidents in life in this world and also in the hereafter. Therefore, it is more dangerous than physical disease (al-Ghazali, 1988).

According to Fariza et al. (2013) and Faizatul Najihah and Faudzinaim (2016), the two practices of *tazkiyah al-nafs*, namely *mujahadah al-nafs* and *riyadah al-nafs*, are methodologies for forming religious personalities that Imam al-Ghazali strongly emphasizes. This process is also known as *takhalli*, which involves an effort to cleanse the soul from *mazmumah* matters, followed by *tahalli*, which aims to adorn the soul with *mahmudah* matters. *Mujahadah* is an effort to combat lust and eradicate negative human qualities, such as love of the world, greed, envy, and pride. *Riyadah al-nafs* is also a challenging form of soul training, but the habit of practicing it will cultivate a soul consistent with Islam (Nur Ashidah & Fariza, 2020).

This analysis aims to compare the framework for forming religious personality from two main perspectives: the Islamic and the Western perspectives. This comparison is based on the main themes derived from the analysis of previous literature, namely the basic concepts of personality, spiritual relationships, social influences, and approaches to self-development. This analysis also identifies points of convergence that have the potential to create a balanced and inclusive conceptual framework.

Similarities between Islamic and Western Perspectives

Islamic and Western perspectives recognize the importance of spiritual values and beliefs in forming individual personality. In Islam, the element of faith is the basis that guides a Muslim's behavior and thinking. Similarly, in Western thought, especially in humanistic and existentialist psychological approaches, spirituality is an important dimension in a person's psychological well-being (Sana Akhtar et al., 2023).

In addition, both approaches recognize that religious personality forms internal motivation, namely the influence of beliefs on moral, social, and behavioral choices. In Allport's theory (1950), intrinsic religiosity explains how individuals who live their religion will form stable and moral self-values. It aligns with the Islamic principle that a true believer will display praiseworthy morals due to a comprehensive appreciation of religion (Zulkiple & Nor Salimah, 2006).

Differences between Islamic and Western Perspectives

Although there are some fundamental similarities, there are also significant differences between the two approaches. The Islamic perspective emphasizes that religion is a comprehensive system of life (syumul) that encompasses all aspects of life – spiritual, physical, social, economic, and political (Nazneen et al., 2019). Religious personality is not limited to rituals, but also to relationships with Allah, humans, nature, and oneself. Islam also emphasizes the

process of soul purification (*tazkiyah al-nafs*) as a key transformative process in forming personality (Aisyah Humairak et al., 2023).

In contrast, the Western approach views religiosity as an individual or collective experience, but tends to separate the spiritual aspect from general life, especially in secular societies. The personal and social dimensions of religiosity are unrelated to the overall life system. Furthermore, there is a tendency to evaluate spirituality without relying on religion or belief in God (Abdul Kadir et al., 2014).

Conceptual Model of Muslim Religious Personality

The findings of this study have produced a model of Muslim religious personality that integrates spiritual elements and outward practices that a Muslim must have. This model provides a holistic, balanced, and revelation-based approach to shaping superior religious personalities. It emphasizes a relationship with God, self-awareness, social responsibility, and environmental stewardship. The aspect of soul purification becomes a catalyst for the holistic transformation of individual Muslims in the challenging modern world.
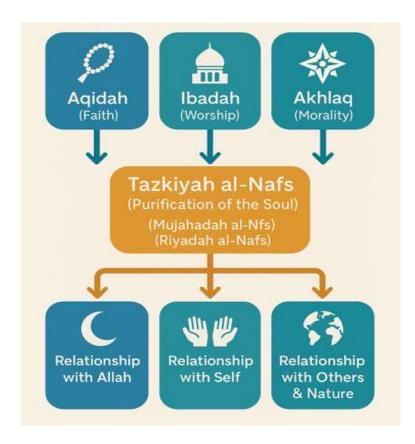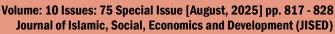

Figure 1: Conceptual Model of Muslim Personality

Conclusion

This study has highlighted a critical comparison between the concept of religious personality according to Islamic and Western perspectives. It was found that religious personality in Islam is rooted in a comprehensive appreciation of aqidah, ibadah, and akhlak. The practice of soul purification or *tazkiyah al-nafs* strengthens it. It offers a holistic and comprehensive approach because it encompasses all aspects of human life, including spiritual, social, and personal dimensions.

On the other hand, the Western perspective tends to focus on individuals' ritual aspects and spiritual experiences separately from social life and daily routines. However, Western studies have begun to recognize the importance of spirituality in character development and human psychological well-being. This opens up space for discourse and integration between Western and Islamic approaches to the issue of personality formation.
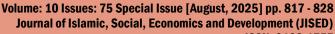
Overall, the Islamic approach to forming religious personality is more comprehensive and centered on revelation, while the Western approach is contextual, empirical, and open to various definitions. Although the Western approach contributes to psychological and social well-being, the Islamic approach emphasizes the continuity between religion, spirituality, and all dimensions of human life.

This summary becomes the basis for building a conceptual model of Muslim personality formation that features the main elements of Islam, such as holistic relationships, *tazkiyah al-nafs*, and universal values that can be integrated in human development. This model can be applied in developing educational modules, mentoring training, and intervention programs for Muslim students. It emphasizes the balance between relationships with God, self, humans, and nature and the importance of soul cleansing practices in facing today's spiritual challenges.

The impact of this study is believed to contribute to the empowerment of religious values in the development of the character of Muslim students and youth and to stimulate academic discourse on human development based on divine and spiritual values.

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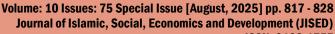
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