

Nafs al-Lawwāmah as a Moral-Spiritual Awareness Framework in Islamic Religious Education

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ABSTRACT

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This study aims to construct the Nafs al-Lawwāmah Moral-Spiritual Awareness Model as a conceptual framework for strengthening moral-spiritual awareness in Islamic Religious Education. Although guilt, self-regulation, and repentance have been studied extensively in moral psychology and Islamic education, these constructs have rarely been integrated into a single Qur'anic-based pedagogical model grounded in Qur'an 75:2, leaving a gap between exegetical scholarship on nafs al-lawwāmah and its classroom application. To address this gap, an integrative qualitative conceptual design was employed, supported by empirical evidence from 25 undergraduate students selected through purposive sampling. Primary data were derived from Qur'an 75:2 and Tafsir Ibn Kathir, while secondary data were drawn from contemporary literature on Islamic education, Islamic psychology, and moral psychology. Empirical data, collected through an online questionnaire combining Likert-scale and open-ended items, were analysed using thematic content analysis, thematic synthesis, descriptive statistics, coding, and conceptual mapping. The findings identified five interconnected dimensions of moral-spiritual awareness, namely spiritual guilt, self-reflection (muhasabah), repentance (taubah), accountability before Allah, and behavioural improvement, supported by six overarching qualitative themes describing moral awareness as a dynamic process of spiritual transformation. Based on this integration, the study proposes the Nafs al-Lawwāmah Moral-Spiritual Awareness Model, a novel contribution repositioning nafs al-lawwāmah from a purely theological concept into an operational pedagogical framework linking Islamic psychology, moral psychology, and Qur'anic education. Practically, the model provides a concrete foundation for reflective learning strategies, such as guided muhasabah, structured repentance

activities, and reflective assessment, to help students internalize Islamic values and develop morally responsible, spiritually conscious character.

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Introduction

Moral failure is not always followed by the same inner response. Some individuals feel spiritually disturbed after doing something wrong; they experience guilt, regret, and an urge to repair their conduct. Others, however, may repeatedly violate moral or religious values without feeling any meaningful discomfort. This difference indicates that moral problems cannot be reduced to the cognitive ability to distinguish right from wrong. Guilt itself has been described as a moral emotion that emerges when individuals recognize that their actions violate moral standards or harm others (Stewart et al., 2023). In youth studies, moral disengagement has also been linked to transgressive behavior because it allows individuals to act against moral standards without remorse (Luo & Bussey, 2023). More recent evidence further shows that guilt can moderate the relationship between moral literacy and harmful behavior, suggesting that moral emotion plays an important role in restraining wrongdoing (Sun et al., 2025). Therefore, the absence of guilt is not merely an emotional condition; it may reflect a weakening of moral-spiritual sensitivity.

This issue is highly relevant to Islamic Education because the purpose of religious education is not only to transmit religious knowledge, but also to cultivate inner awareness, ethical responsibility, and spiritual self-regulation. In practice, Islamic Religious Education often faces the risk of becoming overly cognitive when learning is centered on memorization, legal knowledge, or doctrinal explanation without sufficient attention to students' inner moral formation. Reflective digital pedagogy in Islamic Religious Education has been proposed to address the gap between lecture-based instruction and reflective learning that supports religious character formation (Siliwangi, 2026). Similarly, studies on digital modernity in Islamic pedagogy warn that technology-based learning may become merely technocratic if it is not guided by value-oriented pedagogy and moral-spiritual formation (Affandi et al., 2025). Marbun (2025) also argues that Islamic Religious Education needs to reconstruct spiritual awareness so that students do not only become ritually obedient, but also reflective, socially sensitive, and morally responsive.

The Qur'anic concept of *nafs al-lawwāmah* in Qur'an 75:2 offers an important foundation for understanding this inner moral mechanism. The verse states, *wa lā uqsimu bi al-nafs al-lawwāmah*, referring to the self-reproaching soul. In Tafsir Ibn Kathir, this concept is associated with the soul that reproaches itself, especially in relation to human accountability before God (Ibn Kathir, 2000). Contemporary Islamic psychological studies interpret *nafs al-lawwāmah* as a regulatory stage of the soul that enables self-evaluation, moral correction, and the movement from negligence toward spiritual improvement (Hidayat, 2026). In a related discussion of *nafs* within Islamic psychology, Rahmanto et al. (2024) explain that human spiritual states may move between lower impulses, self-reproach, and tranquility. Thus, *nafs al-lawwāmah* can be read not simply as a theological term, but as a Qur'anic basis for moral-spiritual awareness.

Within this framework, spiritual guilt should not be understood as destructive self-condemnation. Rather, it may function as a constructive signal that awakens the individual

to moral failure and encourages a return to God. Islah (2025) argues that repentance in Islamic psychology involves a psychospiritual process of returning to one's primordial nature through divine forgiveness, moral repair, and relational restoration. Psychological research on divine forgiveness also suggests that seeking forgiveness from God can be associated with self-control and psychological well-being among believers (Maranges & Fincham, 2024). At the same time, moral psychology shows that guilt after misconduct can influence emotional exhaustion and behavioral performance, indicating that guilt has both affective and regulatory dimensions (Ogunfowora et al., 2023). Therefore, this study does not treat guilt as an end in itself, but as a moral-spiritual gateway toward self-reflection, repentance, and behavioral transformation.

The opposite condition is moral numbness, in which repeated wrongdoing no longer produces inner resistance. In moral psychology, this condition can be approached through the concept of moral disengagement, a cognitive process by which individuals justify harmful behavior, reduce personal responsibility, or distort the consequences of their actions (Concha-Salgado et al., 2022). Sun et al. (2025) show that moral disengagement can mediate harmful online behavior, while guilt may reduce the tendency toward such behavior when moral literacy is present. In the Islamic educational context, this weakening of inner accountability can be connected to *ghaflah*, the loss of *muraqabah*, and the normalization of sin. Setiawan and Suhendi (2026) emphasize the importance of digital-religious character and *muraqabah* in Islamic Religious Education, especially in contexts where students face ethical challenges in digital life. This strengthens the urgency of developing an Islamic Education model that does not only teach moral rules, but also nurtures the inner sensitivity to feel disturbed by wrongdoing.

Previous studies have provided valuable foundations for this discussion, but they remain scattered across several fields. Qur'anic-based educational studies have developed models of *tadabbur* to enhance students' character and spiritual awareness through reflection on Qur'anic values (Aulia et al., 2025). Empirical work on contemplative pedagogy in Islamic primary education has also demonstrated that reflective and contemplative learning can strengthen God-conscious awareness, moral self-regulation, and commitment to value-based action (Sariroh et al., 2026). In addition, multiliteracy-based Islamic Religious Education using the TPACK approach has been proposed to increase students' spiritual awareness through technology-supported learning (Afriyanto & Sukiman, 2026). Reflective practice among Islamic Religious Education teachers has also been shown to contribute to pedagogical professionalism and self-reflection (Purwanto et al., 2023). However, these studies have not specifically constructed *nafs al-lawwāmah* as a pedagogical model for moral-spiritual awareness.

Other recent studies have expanded Islamic Education through spiritual, ecological, and interdisciplinary frameworks. Affandi et al. (2025), for instance, propose spiritual taxonomies in Islamic Education, showing that spirituality can be conceptualized in structured educational terms. Firdaus et al. (2025) connects Qur'anic moral-spiritual education in Surah Luqmān with neurospiritual theory, while Sapitri et al. (2025) demonstrate how ecotheological values in Islamic Religious Education can support students' spiritual, social, and cognitive character development. Research on digital technology in Islamic Religious Education also highlights the need to integrate technology with teacher competence, implementation models, and Islamic values (Mintasih et al., 2024). Meanwhile, Supriyanto and Al-Aqsha (2026) identify the scarcity of moral dilemmas in Islamic social ethics materials, suggesting that Islamic Education still requires more reflective moral learning. These studies show a growing concern with moral-spiritual formation, yet limited attention has been given to the inner mechanism of self-reproach as a Qur'anic foundation for moral awareness.

Based on this gap, the present study aims to construct *nafs al-lawwāmah* as a moral-spiritual awareness model in Islamic Education through a thematic-conceptual study of Qur'an 75:2, supported by a mini survey among Islamic Education students. The novelty of this study lies in transforming *nafs al-lawwāmah* from an exegetical concept into a pedagogical model that integrates spiritual guilt, self-reflection, repentance, and moral-spiritual sensitivity. Project-based learning for spiritual competence has shown that reflection can be systematically mapped into spiritual formation when guided by explicit ethical orientation (Cahyono et al., 2026). In line with this, the present article argues that Islamic Education requires a heart-based model that enables students to recognize moral failure, experience constructive spiritual guilt, perform self-evaluation, and move toward repentance and behavioral improvement. Therefore, this study contributes theoretically to Qur'anic-based Islamic Education and practically to the development of reflective, transformative, and morally responsive pedagogy.

Method

This study employed an integrative qualitative conceptual design, situated within an interpretive-hermeneutic paradigm and embedded with a supplementary descriptive survey component, to construct a moral-spiritual awareness model based on *nafs al-lawwāmah* for Islamic Religious Education. Rather than examining causal relationships or producing statistically generalizable findings, the study sought to integrate Qur'anic teachings, Islamic educational perspectives, and students' reflective experiences into a coherent pedagogical framework. The primary data consisted of Qur'an 75:2 and its interpretation in Tafsir Ibn Kathir, while the secondary data comprised peer-reviewed journal articles and scholarly books addressing Islamic Religious Education, Islamic psychology, moral psychology, spiritual awareness, muhasabah, repentance, and moral responsibility. The literature search was conducted through academic databases such as Google Scholar, Scopus, and SINTA-indexed journals, using keyword combinations including "nafs al-lawwāmah", "guilt", "moral disengagement", "Islamic psychology", "muhasabah", "tawbah", and "Islamic Religious Education". The inclusion criteria prioritized peer-reviewed publications published between 2020 and 2026, while classical tafsir literature was retained regardless of publication date because of its theological authority in interpreting Qur'anic concepts; sources without peer review, non-scholarly opinion pieces, and publications unrelated to guilt, repentance, moral responsibility, or spiritual awareness were excluded from the analysis.

To support the conceptual development, preliminary empirical data were collected through an online questionnaire administered to 25 undergraduate students enrolled in the Islamic Religious Education program using purposive sampling. The participants were selected because they had completed foundational learning in Islamic studies and were therefore considered capable of providing reflective perspectives on moral and spiritual awareness. The questionnaire was developed from a conceptual blueprint derived through the thematic synthesis of Qur'anic interpretation and contemporary scholarly literature (see Table 1). Prior to distribution, the instrument underwent a formal content validity process through an expert review by an academic specialist in Islamic Educational Psychology. The expert evaluated the items for construct relevance, theoretical alignment, and clarity. Based on this expert feedback, minor wording adjustments were made to the Likert-scale statements to ensure precision and avoid leading questions. The questionnaire was then distributed online, and all 25 invited participants completed the instrument in full, yielding a 100% response rate. It consisted of Likert-scale statements exploring spiritual guilt, self-reflection (muhasabah), repentance (tawbah), moral responsibility, and behavioural improvement, followed by open-ended questions that encouraged participants to describe

their responses after recognizing moral or religious mistakes. Rather than serving as the principal source of evidence, these empirical data were intended to strengthen the conceptual construction by illustrating how the Qur'anic concept of *nafs al-lawwāmah* is reflected in students' lived experiences within Islamic Religious Education.

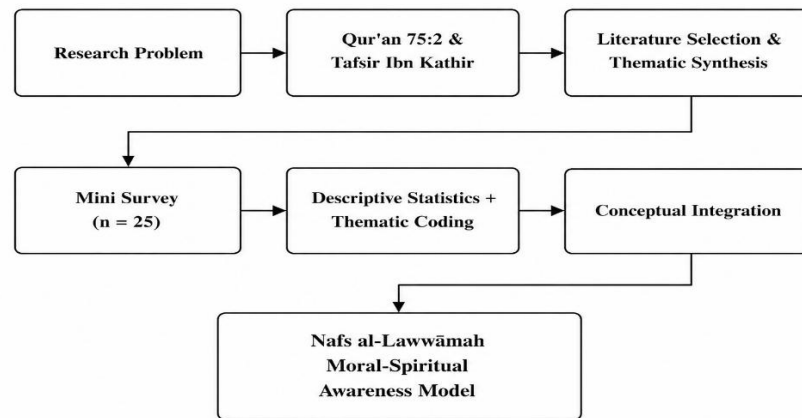
Table1 Conceptual Blueprint for Questionnaire Development Based on *Nafs al-Lawwāmah*

Conceptual Component	Conceptual Meaning	Theoretical Basis	Operational Indicator	Questionnaire Focus
Spiritual Guilt	Inner awareness that one has committed moral or religious wrongdoing	Qur'an 75:2; Stewart et al. (2023); Ogunfowora et al. (2023)	Feeling guilty, inner discomfort, awareness of wrongdoing	Experiences of guilt after committing mistakes
Self-Reflection (<i>Muhasabah</i>)	Continuous evaluation of one's thoughts and behaviour after recognizing mistakes	Tafsir Ibn Kathir; Hidayat (2026)	Self-evaluation, recognizing weaknesses, personal reflection	Frequency and depth of self-reflection
Repentance (<i>Tawbah</i>)	Returning to Allah through sincere repentance and commitment to self-improvement	Islah (2025); Maranges & Fincham (2024)	Seeking forgiveness, intention to change, spiritual restoration	Responses after realizing mistakes
Moral Responsibility	Awareness of accountability before Allah that guides moral decision-making	Rahmanto et al. (2024); Islamic Religious Education literature	Responsibility, accountability, moral commitment	Perceived responsibility for one's behaviour
Behavioural Improvement	Positive behavioural transformation resulting from reflection and repentance	Sun et al. (2025); Affandi et al. (2025)	Behavioural change, consistency of improvement, moral growth	Changes in behaviour after reflection

Table 1 presents the conceptual blueprint used to develop the questionnaire. The five conceptual domains were identified through the thematic synthesis of Qur'anic interpretation and contemporary literature. Rather than functioning as latent variables for

statistical hypothesis testing, these domains served as conceptual lenses for exploring students' moral-spiritual experiences related to nafs al-lawwāmah and for supporting the construction of the proposed pedagogical model.

Figure 1 Research Workflow of the Integrative Conceptual Study



The study followed an integrative analytical procedure consisting of four interconnected stages. First, Qur'an 75:2 and its exegetical interpretation were examined through thematic content analysis to identify the essential characteristics of nafs al-lawwāmah. Second, the selected literature was synthesised thematically to integrate perspectives from Islamic education, Islamic psychology, and moral psychology into a coherent conceptual framework. Third, responses obtained from the questionnaire were analysed descriptively using frequencies, percentages, and mean scores, whereas participants' narrative responses were analysed through thematic coding to identify recurring patterns of moral-spiritual experience. Finally, findings from all analytical stages were integrated through conceptual mapping to formulate the proposed Nafs al-Lawwāmah Moral-Spiritual Awareness Model.

The trustworthiness of the findings was addressed through the four criteria commonly used in qualitative research: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Lincoln, 1985). Credibility was established through the triangulation of three independent sources of evidence, namely Qur'anic exegesis, scholarly literature, and empirical student responses, together with consistency checks between the quantitative descriptive results and the qualitative thematic findings. Transferability was supported by providing a detailed description of the research context, participant characteristics, and instrument development process, enabling readers to judge the applicability of the findings to comparable Islamic Religious Education settings. Dependability was maintained by documenting each stage of the analytical procedure, from thematic content analysis of Qur'an 75:2, through literature synthesis and descriptive-thematic analysis of survey data, to conceptual mapping, so that the analytic trail could be traced. Confirmability was pursued by grounding every thematic category directly in participants' original statements and by cross-referencing emergent themes against the conceptual blueprint in Table 1, thereby reducing the influence of researcher subjectivity on the interpretation of findings.

With regard to research ethics, this study observed standard ethical principles for research involving human participants. The procedure began with an electronic informed

consent form presented on the landing page of the survey. Participation was entirely voluntary, and prospective respondents were informed in advance about the purpose, procedures, and academic use of the study before checking a mandatory agreement box to provide their consent. Respondents retained the right to withdraw at any point without consequence, and no personally identifying information (such as names or student IDs) was collected; all responses were recorded anonymously and used exclusively for academic research purposes. As the questionnaire addressed reflective spiritual and moral experiences rather than sensitive personal, medical, or legally protected data, it was considered to pose no more than minimal risk to participants.

Results

1. Descriptive Statistics of Moral-Spiritual Awareness

The preliminary survey involving 25 undergraduate students of the Islamic Religious Education program was conducted to explore students' perceptions regarding the role of *nafs al-lawwāmah* in shaping moral-spiritual awareness. Five conceptual constructs were measured using a five-point Likert scale, namely Spiritual Guilt, Self-Reflection (*Muhasabah*), Repentance (*Tawbah*), Moral Responsibility, and Behavioural Improvement. Rather than functioning as variables for hypothesis testing, these constructs were designed to provide empirical support for the conceptual model developed through Qur'anic and literature analysis.

Table 1 Descriptive Statistics of Moral-Spiritual Awareness Constructs

Construct	Mean	SD	Interpretation
Spiritual Guilt	4.21	0.72	High
Self-Reflection (<i>Muhasabah</i>)	3.92	0.89	High
Repentance (<i>Tawbah</i>)	3.89	0.78	High
Moral Responsibility	4.28	0.67	Very High
Behavioural Improvement	3.76	0.92	High

The descriptive findings demonstrate that all five constructs obtained relatively high mean scores, indicating that moral-spiritual awareness is widely recognized among the participants. Among the five constructs, Moral Responsibility obtained the highest mean score ($M = 4.28$; $SD = 0.67$), suggesting that students strongly perceive accountability before Allah as the primary foundation of moral behaviour. This finding implies that respondents generally understand ethical conduct not merely as social compliance but as a form of spiritual accountability grounded in Islamic teachings.

The second highest construct was Spiritual Guilt ($M = 4.21$; $SD = 0.72$), indicating that feelings of guilt after committing moral or religious mistakes remain an active psychological experience among most participants. This result reflects the continuing function of *nafs al-lawwāmah* as an internal moral awareness that alerts individuals when they deviate from religious values.

Similarly, Self-Reflection (*Muhasabah*) demonstrated a high level ($M = 3.92$; $SD = 0.89$), suggesting that many respondents regularly evaluate their actions after recognizing mistakes. Repentance (*Tawbah*) also obtained a high mean ($M = 3.89$; $SD = 0.78$), indicating that awareness of wrongdoing is commonly followed by intentions to seek forgiveness and improve behaviour. Although Behavioural Improvement recorded the lowest mean among the five constructs ($M = 3.76$; $SD = 0.92$), its score remained within the high category. This

suggests that translating moral awareness into consistent behavioural change is perceived as the most challenging aspect of students' spiritual development.

Overall, the descriptive findings indicate that students possess relatively strong moral awareness, emotional sensitivity toward wrongdoing, and a commitment to self-improvement. Nevertheless, the lower score for behavioural improvement suggests that sustaining long-term behavioural transformation remains a significant challenge despite high levels of moral consciousness.

2. Thematic Findings of Students' Moral-Spiritual Awareness

To complement the descriptive findings, responses to the five open-ended questions were analysed using thematic analysis. The coding process generated 242 coding references, which were subsequently organized into six interrelated themes representing students' understanding of *nafs al-lawwāmah* as a model of moral-spiritual awareness.

Table 3 Theme Frequency of Qualitative Findings

Theme	Description	Coding References	Percentage
Theme 1	Spiritual Guilt as Divine Warning	36	14.9%
Theme 2	Muhasabah as Self-Regulation	44	18.2%
Theme 3	Repentance as Moral Recovery	48	19.8%
Theme 4	Accountability before Allah	29	12.0%
Theme 5	Barriers to Moral Transformation	28	11.6%
Theme 6	Educational Expectations	57	23.6%
Total		242	100%

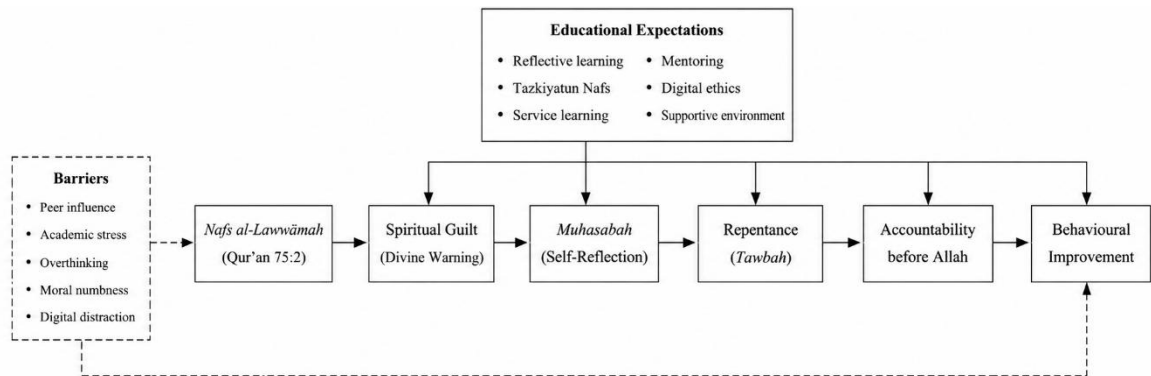
The thematic analysis revealed that Educational Expectations emerged as the most dominant theme (57 coding references; 23.6%). This indicates that participants did not merely describe their personal moral experiences but also expressed substantial expectations regarding how Islamic Religious Education should facilitate spiritual formation. The second most frequent theme was Repentance as Moral Recovery (48 coding references; 19.8%), followed closely by Muhasabah as Self-Regulation (44 coding references; 18.2%). Together, these findings suggest that respondents perceive moral awareness as a dynamic process beginning with self-recognition, continuing through reflective evaluation, and culminating in behavioural restoration.

Meanwhile, Spiritual Guilt as Divine Warning accounted for 36 coding references (14.9%), demonstrating that feelings of guilt remain an important psychological indicator of moral awareness. Participants consistently interpreted guilt not as psychological punishment but as an inner reminder from Allah that encourages repentance and moral improvement. Accountability before Allah contributed 29 coding references (12.0%), emphasizing students' awareness that every action will ultimately be accountable before God. Finally, Barriers to Moral Transformation represented 28 coding references (11.6%), highlighting various obstacles that prevent individuals from translating moral awareness into consistent behavioural change, including negative peer influence, spiritual numbness, excessive self-blame, overthinking, and academic stress.

Taken together, these six themes demonstrate that *nafs al-lawwāmah* is understood by participants not simply as an emotional experience of guilt but as a comprehensive moral-spiritual process involving self-awareness, reflection, repentance, accountability, behavioural transformation, and educational support. The thematic relationships also indicate that moral-spiritual awareness develops through interconnected psychological, spiritual, and educational dimensions rather than through isolated religious knowledge

alone.

Figure 2 Thematic Structure of the Nafs al-Lawwāmah Moral-Spiritual Awareness Model



The thematic structure illustrates that Spiritual Guilt functions as the initial trigger of moral awareness, followed by Muhasabah as a process of self-regulation. This reflective process subsequently encourages Repentance and strengthens Moral Responsibility before Allah, eventually leading to Behavioural Improvement. Throughout this process, various internal and external barriers may hinder transformation, while educational interventions are expected to facilitate and strengthen each stage of moral-spiritual development.

Discussion

1. Spiritual Guilt as the Beginning of Moral-Spiritual Awareness

The findings of this study indicate that spiritual guilt serves as the initial stage of moral-spiritual awareness within the proposed Nafs al-Lawwāmah model. Participants consistently interpreted feelings of guilt not merely as negative emotions but as an inner awareness that signals moral deviation and encourages self-correction. Expressions such as “alarm otomatis dari Allah,” “cubitan sayang Allah,” and “teguran agar tidak lalai” illustrate that respondents perceived guilt as a form of divine guidance rather than psychological punishment. This finding suggests that nafs al-lawwāmah functions as an internal moral compass that awakens individuals whenever they violate religious values and motivates them to begin the process of spiritual transformation.

These findings extend previous studies in moral psychology, which generally describe guilt as a self-conscious moral emotion arising after the violation of personal or social standards (Stewart et al., 2023). Recent international systematic reviews reinforce this characterization, showing that guilt functions as a behaviour-specific, corrective emotion that differs from the more global and often maladaptive experience of shame, and that how individuals regulate such moral emotions substantially shapes their psychological outcomes (Singh & Bhushan, 2025; Wang, 2025). The present findings converge with this literature in confirming guilt's corrective, behaviour-specific character, yet they also extend it in an important direction: rather than being interpreted through a purely psychological lens, Islamic Religious Education students understood guilt through a theological perspective grounded in Qur'an 75:2 and its interpretation in Tafsir Ibn Kathir, where al-nafs al-lawwāmah is portrayed as the self-reproaching soul that continuously evaluates human actions before Allah. Nevertheless, consistent with recent findings that poorly regulated guilt can undermine psychological wellbeing (Wang, 2025), several participants in the present study also reported excessive self-blame and feelings of unworthiness,

indicating that guilt may become maladaptive when separated from hope, repentance, and trust in Allah's mercy. Therefore, the findings highlight the importance of distinguishing constructive spiritual guilt from destructive self-condemnation, and suggest that the Islamic theological resources of *khawf* (fear) and *rajā'* (hope) may offer a culturally distinctive regulatory mechanism that has not yet been well theorised in the largely secular moral-emotion literature.

From the perspective of Islamic Religious Education, these findings imply that moral education should cultivate students' inner moral sensitivity rather than merely transmit religious knowledge and legal rulings. The study proposes that spiritual guilt functions as the entry point of moral-spiritual transformation, initiating a sequential process that develops into *muhasabah*, repentance, accountability before Allah, and ultimately behavioural improvement. This conceptualization represents the primary theoretical contribution of the study by repositioning *nafs al-lawwāmah* not simply as an exegetical concept but as the foundational mechanism of a Qur'an-based model for developing moral-spiritual awareness in Islamic Religious Education.

2. *Muhasabah* as Self-Regulation

The findings indicate that *muhasabah* functions as the central mechanism through which *nafs al-lawwāmah* transforms moral awareness into conscious self-regulation. After recognizing moral or religious mistakes, participants described *muhasabah* as a process of evaluating their actions, identifying the causes of their behaviour, and planning concrete improvements. Many respondents associated this practice with reflective journaling, analysing the root causes of mistakes, and conducting daily self-evaluation before sleeping. These responses suggest that *muhasabah* is not merely an emotional reaction to guilt but an intentional process of regulating thoughts, emotions, and behaviour toward moral improvement.

This finding is consistent with contemporary theories of self-regulation, which emphasize self-monitoring, self-evaluation, and behavioural adjustment as essential components of personal development (Carver & Scheier, 2001; Zimmerman, 2000). This general pattern has also been confirmed internationally within religious contexts: a recent study among Muslim-American adolescents found that stronger religious belief and belonging were significantly associated with greater self-control and patience (Kerasha et al., 2024), lending cross-cultural support to the link between religiosity and regulatory capacity observed in the present study. However, the present study reveals an important distinction beyond this convergence. While self-regulation in contemporary psychology, including this recent religiosity research, is typically measured as a broad, trait-level disposition, participants in this study consistently understood *muhasabah* as a specific, structured practice of spiritual self-regulation, deliberately triggered by the recognition of a particular moral failure and oriented toward Allah, rather than as a generalized trait measured independently of any triggering event. Their reflections were motivated not only by the desire to become better individuals but also by the awareness of *muraqabah*, dependence on Allah's mercy, and the pursuit of spiritual integrity. This finding demonstrates that *muhasabah* integrates cognitive reflection with spiritual consciousness, making it fundamentally different from value-neutral models of self-regulation.

From the perspective of Islamic Religious Education, these findings suggest that *muhasabah* should be systematically integrated into teaching and learning activities through reflective journals, guided contemplation, Qur'anic reflection, ethical case discussions, and structured self-evaluation. Such approaches encourage students not only to understand Islamic values cognitively but also to internalize them through continuous self-reflection. The present study therefore proposes that *muhasabah* represents a form of spiritual self-regulation that bridges spiritual guilt and repentance within the *Nafs al-Lawwāmah* Moral-

Spiritual Awareness Model, providing a conceptual contribution to the development of reflective and transformative Islamic Religious Education.

3. Repentance as Moral Recovery

The findings of this study demonstrate that repentance (*tawbah*) functions as the primary mechanism through which moral awareness is translated into behavioural recovery. Participants consistently described repentance as more than a religious obligation performed after committing sin. Instead, they viewed it as an active process involving *istighfar*, *ṣalāt al-tawbah*, Qur'anic recitation, charity, apologizing to others, and making concrete commitments to avoid repeating the same mistakes. These responses indicate that repentance is understood as a multidimensional process combining emotional awareness, spiritual devotion, and behavioural commitment, allowing individuals to restore both their relationship with Allah and their moral conduct.

This finding extends previous studies in moral psychology, which generally explain guilt as a moral emotion that motivates reparative behaviour after wrongdoing, such as confession, apology, and amends toward the person who was harmed (Tangney et al., 2007). The present findings are consistent with this well-established reparative function of guilt, since participants likewise described concrete corrective actions after recognizing their mistakes. Where the present study departs from this largely secular and interpersonally-focused literature is in the object of repair: while contemporary psychological perspectives primarily emphasize repairing interpersonal relationships, the present study reveals that repentance within the Islamic perspective encompasses a broader process of spiritual reconciliation that is oriented toward Allah first and toward other people second. Participants perceived *tawbah* not only as correcting relationships with others but also as returning to Allah through sincere remorse, worship, and renewed moral commitment. Moreover, the findings show that repentance was motivated not only by fear of divine punishment but also by hope in Allah's mercy, gratitude for His guidance, and the desire to attain His pleasure, reflecting the balance between *khauf* (fear) and *rajā'* (hope) emphasized in Islamic spirituality.

From the perspective of Islamic Religious Education, these findings suggest that repentance should be taught as a continuous process of moral recovery rather than merely as a theological concept or legal obligation. Learning activities that encourage guided reflection, spiritual mentoring, community service, and opportunities for behavioural commitment may help students transform moral awareness into consistent ethical action. Accordingly, this study proposes that repentance serves as the mediating mechanism within the Nafs al-Lawwāmah Moral-Spiritual Awareness Model, linking *muhasabah* with sustained behavioural improvement. This conceptual contribution highlights that lasting moral transformation is achieved not simply through feelings of guilt but through an intentional process of repentance that integrates spiritual, emotional, and behavioural dimensions.

4. Accountability before Allah

The findings of this study indicate that accountability before Allah represents the ultimate moral orientation within the proposed *Nafs al-Lawwāmah Moral-Spiritual Awareness Model*. Participants consistently associated moral responsibility with concepts such as *hisāb* (divine accountability), *amānah* (trustworthiness), *murāqabah* (awareness of Allah's constant observation), and *riḍā Allāh* (seeking Allah's pleasure). Rather than perceiving moral behaviour as compliance with social expectations, respondents viewed ethical conduct as an expression of their responsibility before Allah. This finding suggests that moral responsibility is internalized through faith, encouraging individuals to maintain integrity even in situations where their actions remain unseen by others.

This finding extends contemporary discussions on moral responsibility, which

commonly emphasize accountability toward society, institutions, or interpersonal relationships. In contrast, the present study demonstrates that Islamic Religious Education students ground their moral responsibility in transcendental accountability. This construct has recently begun to receive international empirical attention outside the Islamic context: a large national survey of American adults found that perceived accountability to God was associated with greater happiness and lower depressive symptoms, an association that was strengthened by frequent prayer and regular religious attendance (Upenieks & Orfanidis, 2024). The present qualitative findings converge with this international evidence in suggesting that accountability to a transcendent authority functions as a psychologically stabilizing force rather than a source of oppressive fear. However, the two studies diverge methodologically and conceptually whereas Upenieks and Orfanidis (2024) measured accountability to God as a predictor of general wellbeing outcomes in a Christian population using a quantitative national dataset, the present study, situated in a Muslim educational context, traces how the same construct is experientially internalized and translated into concrete pedagogical practice. Participants repeatedly described awareness of Allah's observation as a source of self-control that strengthened honesty, sincerity, and consistency in fulfilling religious and social obligations. Furthermore, their responses indicate that accountability before Allah is motivated not only by fear of divine judgment but also by hope for Allah's pleasure and the aspiration to live as trustworthy servants and responsible *khulafā'* (vicegerents) on earth. These findings illustrate that moral responsibility in the Islamic perspective integrates ethical behaviour with spiritual consciousness.

From the perspective of Islamic Religious Education, these findings imply that moral education should cultivate *murāqabah*, *ikhhlās*, and *amānah* through reflective and experiential learning rather than relying solely on the transmission of religious knowledge. Learning activities such as Qur'anic reflection, ethical case discussions, service-learning, and structured self-evaluation can help students internalize accountability as a lifelong spiritual commitment. Accordingly, this study proposes that accountability before Allah functions as the sustaining foundation of the Nafs al-Lawwāmah Moral-Spiritual Awareness Model, ensuring that spiritual guilt, *muhasabah*, and repentance develop into consistent behavioural improvement. This conceptual contribution distinguishes the proposed model from conventional approaches to moral education by positioning transcendental accountability as the enduring basis of moral-spiritual transformation.

5. Educational Implications and Proposed *Nafs al-Lawwāmah* Moral-Spiritual Awareness Model

The findings of this study have important implications for the development of Islamic Religious Education. The qualitative responses consistently indicate that students expect learning experiences that extend beyond the transmission of religious knowledge toward the cultivation of moral-spiritual awareness. Participants emphasized the importance of reflective learning, guided *muhasabah*, spiritual mentoring, *tazkiyat al-nafs*, digital ethics, service-learning, and structured self-evaluation as educational strategies that can strengthen moral consciousness. These findings suggest that Islamic Religious Education should facilitate students' internal transformation by integrating cognitive understanding, spiritual reflection, emotional development, and behavioural practice within a holistic learning process.

Based on the integration of Qur'anic interpretation, thematic findings, and preliminary empirical evidence, this study proposes the Nafs al-Lawwāmah Moral-Spiritual Awareness Model as a conceptual framework for Islamic Religious Education (Figure 2). The proposed model conceptualizes moral-spiritual awareness as a sequential process initiated by

spiritual guilt, which awakens awareness of moral failure and encourages muhasabah as reflective self-regulation. This reflective process subsequently develops into repentance (*tawbah*), strengthens accountability before Allah, and ultimately leads to behavioural improvement. The model also recognizes that moral transformation may be hindered by internal and external barriers, including moral numbness, peer influence, academic stress, overthinking, and digital distraction, while educational interventions function as facilitating factors that reinforce each stage of the transformation process.

Theoretical contribution

Theoretically, this study contributes to the literature by repositioning *nafs al-lawwāmah* from a predominantly exegetical concept into a pedagogical framework for cultivating moral-spiritual awareness in Islamic Religious Education. Unlike previous studies that discuss guilt, reflection, repentance, or character education as separate constructs, the present study integrates these dimensions into a coherent model explaining how moral awareness develops through interconnected spiritual, psychological, and educational processes. This contribution can also be situated relative to established secular frameworks of moral cognition: Bandura (2014) theory of moral disengagement explains how individuals rationalize wrongdoing and suppress self-sanctions, whereas the present findings point to a complementary mechanism of moral re-engagement, in which *nafs al-lawwāmah* actively reactivates self-sanctioning through spiritual guilt rather than allowing it to be silenced. In this sense, the proposed model does not simply relabel secular constructs in Islamic terms; it proposes a theologically grounded pathway back toward moral engagement after a lapse, a pathway that has received comparatively little theoretical attention in the mainstream moral-disengagement literature (Concha-Salgado et al., 2022; Nakata et al., 2021).

Practical implications

Practically, the proposed model offers several concrete directions for Islamic Religious Education. First, teachers could embed structured *muhasabah* practices, such as brief end-of-week reflective journals or guided post-mistake self-evaluation prompts, directly into existing subjects rather than treating spiritual reflection as an extracurricular add-on. Second, repentance (*tawbah*) could be modelled not only as a private ritual act but as a classroom-based practice of acknowledging mistakes, making amends, and articulating a concrete behavioural commitment, for example through guided reflection sessions or spiritual mentoring circles. Third, because Educational Expectations emerged as the most frequently coded theme in the present data (23.6% of references), curriculum developers and teacher-training programs should treat students' expressed need for reflective, values-based pedagogy as a design requirement rather than an incidental finding. Finally, assessment practices could be adapted to include reflective portfolios or structured self-evaluation rubrics that capture growth in spiritual guilt-awareness, *muhasabah*, repentance, and accountability, rather than relying solely on cognitive-knowledge examinations of Islamic law and theology. Accordingly, Islamic Religious Education is expected to move beyond knowledge transmission toward fostering transformative learning that develops morally responsible and spiritually conscious individuals.

Limitations and directions for future research

Despite these contributions, several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the empirical component involved a small, purposively sampled group of 25 undergraduate students from a single Islamic Religious Education program; this supports the conceptual construction of the model but limits the transferability of the specific descriptive and

thematic findings to other institutions, regions, or educational levels. Second, the study is cross-sectional and conceptual-qualitative in nature, meaning that the proposed sequential progression from spiritual guilt through *muhasabah*, repentance, and accountability to behavioural improvement is theoretically and empirically suggestive rather than causally confirmed; longitudinal or intervention-based designs would be required to test whether strengthening one stage actually produces measurable change in a later stage. Third, as with all self-report data on morally and religiously sensitive experiences, participants' responses may be subject to social desirability bias, particularly given the strong normative expectation within the sampled population to express guilt, repentance, and accountability in religiously approved ways. Fourth, because participants' open-ended responses were originally expressed in Indonesian and subsequently translated into English for reporting, some theological and emotional nuance may not be fully captured in translation. Future research should therefore pursue larger, multi-site samples across different cultural and educational contexts; develop and psychometrically validate a dedicated Nafs al-Lawwamah Moral-Spiritual Awareness Scale; and employ longitudinal or quasi-experimental designs to test the proposed model's sequential and causal assumptions empirically.

Conclusion

This study proposed the Nafs al-Lawwamah Moral-Spiritual Awareness Model as a conceptual framework for understanding and developing moral-spiritual awareness within Islamic Religious Education. By integrating the Qur'anic interpretation of Qur'an 75:2, contemporary literature, and empirical evidence from undergraduate Islamic Religious Education students, the study demonstrates that moral-spiritual transformation develops through five interconnected stages: spiritual guilt, self-reflection (*muhasabah*), repentance (*tawbah*), accountability before Allah, and behavioural improvement. The findings indicate that nafs al-lawwamah should not be understood merely as a theological concept describing the self-reproaching soul, but as an educational mechanism that initiates continuous moral awareness, reflective self-regulation, and sustainable ethical behaviour.

The study contributes both theoretically and practically to the field of Islamic Religious Education. Theoretically, it repositions nafs al-lawwamah from a predominantly exegetical concept into an integrated pedagogical model that connects Islamic psychology, moral psychology, and Qur'an-based education within a single framework, and, read alongside secular accounts of moral disengagement, offers a theologically grounded account of how moral engagement is restored after a lapse rather than merely explaining how it is avoided. Practically, the proposed model offers a foundation for designing reflective learning strategies, including guided *muhasabah*, reflective journaling, spiritual mentoring, ethical case discussions, and service-learning activities that support students' moral and spiritual development. These findings suggest that Islamic Religious Education should move beyond the transmission of religious knowledge toward facilitating transformative learning that nurtures morally responsible and spiritually conscious individuals.

As discussed in greater detail above, this study is limited by its small, purposively sampled group of participants from a single Islamic Religious Education context and its cross-sectional, conceptual-qualitative design; the proposed model should therefore be regarded as an initial conceptual framework rather than a universally validated educational

model. Future studies involving larger and more diverse samples, psychometric scale development, and longitudinal or quasi-experimental designs are needed to test and refine the model's sequential and causal assumptions. Such investigations would help establish the Nafs al-Lawwāmah Moral-Spiritual Awareness Model as a validated and practically applicable framework for strengthening moral-spiritual education in contemporary Islamic learning environments.

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