



## Culturally Embedded Education: Investigating Moral Intelligence and Self-Awareness in Teachers from Islamic Schools in Jakarta

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**Abstract** The purpose of this culturally embedded research was to investigate the relationship between moral intelligence and self-awareness of a group of teachers. The statistical population of this research included 240 teachers working in Islamic schools in Jakarta, Indonesia. A pair of questionnaires was used to collect the required data. In order to analyze the data, Pearson's correlation coefficient, multiple regression analysis, and independent samples t-test were used. The findings showed that there is a significant relationship between the teachers' moral intelligence and self-awareness. Moreover, it was revealed that moral intelligence is a positive predictor of teachers' self-awareness. Also, the results reported that female teachers' moral intelligence is higher while their self-awareness is lower than their male counterparts. Overall, it was concluded that, based on the approach of Islamic education and within the rich tapestry of culture and society, moral intelligence and self-awareness are two of the psychological variables that affect teachers' personality and behavior and can improve their inter-personal relations with students.

**Keywords:** Moral intelligence, Self-awareness, Education, Religious schools, Gender analysis

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**Received:** November 2023

**Revised:** January 2024

**Accepted:** January 2024

**Published:** February 2024

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and Jumintono.

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### 1. Introduction

Consciousness means being aware of oneself. It means knowing oneself with as much detail as possible and becoming aware of oneself. In other words, achieving self-awareness means having a clear perception of one's personality, weaknesses, strengths, beliefs, thoughts, emotions, and communication style. Many people say and think that they know themselves. However, once they are on the self-awareness path, they realize that they know nothing about themselves. More interestingly, the further they go, the more they realize their lack of understanding of themselves. In addition, self-awareness is the practice of being present in the moment since knowing oneself requires awareness, and we need to be in the present time to be conscious. In fact, self-awareness is the first matter emphasized

<https://doi.org/10.22034/ijscel.2024.2008412.3120>

by all mystical schools (Terneusen et al., 2022). Moreover, self-awareness contributes to the strengthening of spirituality. From another perspective, self-awareness is acquiring endless knowledge of oneself through the five senses. People with efficient self-awareness skills are aware of their physical symptoms (Kreibich et al., 2022). In addition, they attain information from issues received by the five senses throughout the day and use the information to learn more about themselves. It's the importance of self-awareness is revealed by the fact that it shapes the basis for personal and professional development.

A person without self-awareness tends to project their motives and goals to others without the ability to distinguish between their perceptions and reality (Topuz & Arasan, 2014). In a study, Sungur (2015) concluded that the lack or absence of self-awareness prevents the person from differentiating between their own boundaries and those of others. This complicates the acceptance of others' thoughts, beliefs, and emotions that are different from the person's thoughts and feelings. On the other hand, without self-knowledge, change, success, or perfection does not lead to desirable outcomes such as high moral intelligence, self-actualization, and optimal performance.

In the modern era, the education systems need teachers who are highly self-aware (Karamad et al., 2020). This seems more significant in Islamic education-based schools as their goal is to realize the good life, global justice society, and Islamic civilization (Khaki & Sadeghi Habibabad, 2021; Tanjung, 2021). Their more important objective is to train knowledgeable, committed, and faithful individuals adorned with perfections and moral virtues. This can be possible by using authentic teachers who are not only self-aware but also morally intelligent (Muzakkir et al., 2022).

Moral Intelligence is a new concept in the field of science. People's mental capacity is important for determining how to apply these principles of human universality in values, goals, and activities in life. In addition, it helps apply ethical principles to personal goals, values, and actions. Moral intelligence is detected by having strong moral beliefs and the ability to act on them in a way that the person behaves respectfully and correctly. Moral intelligence involves a person's values and beliefs that give them dignity and character. Clearly, these values are different from person to person, group to group, and even from time to time (Alhadabi et al., 2019). Gardner (2000) defines moral intelligence as the capacity and ability to understand right from wrong, have moral beliefs, perform them, and behave correctly. It includes four principles of integrity (right and honest deeds), responsibility (admitting actions and their consequences), compassion (actively caring about others), and forgiveness (awareness of defects and mistakes and letting go of one's own and others' mistakes) (Eskandari et al., 2019). With this background in mind, the present study tries to answer the following questions:

1. Is there a relationship between moral intelligence and self-awareness of teachers in Islamic education-based schools?
2. Can teachers' moral intelligence predict their self-awareness?
3. Is there a significant difference between male and female teachers' moral intelligence and self-awareness?

## **2. Theoretical Framework**

### **2.1. Moral Intelligence**

Moral intelligence involves a combination of knowledge, desire, and willpower. It involves the way we think, feel, and act. The knowledge of right and wrong alone may not change our feelings, skills, or will to act (Jeffery & Shackelford, 2018). Hartshorne and May (1930) found that many children who knew the right kinds of behavior in hypothetical situations failed to practice this behavior in real life and that children who went to Sunday school or belonged to the Boy and Girls Scouts were just as dishonest as children who were not exposed to similar ethical instruction.

Even when right and wrong is clear, the valuing, internal controls, and moral commitment may not be sufficient to translate that knowledge into action. When it comes to moral education, the affective and conative domains must be considered along with the cognitive, as these are necessary aspects of moral intelligence. The ASCD panel (1988) also suggested that if moral education is to be effective and meaningful; it must also address the affective and behavioral domains in addition to the cognitive. By

viewing moral education and intelligence through the lens of the cognitive, affective, and conative domains and their respective taxonomies, we may gain some insight. The taxonomy of the cognitive domain can be used to better understand and develop moral intelligence. For example, we could teach knowing right from wrong, understanding why people do wrong, applying virtues to real problems, analyzing differences among values, evaluating alternative solutions to problems, and creating novel approaches that honor moral principles. The guiding moral standard for cognitive development is truth. Helping students to investigate truth independently, courageously, and openly using various approaches and methods is fundamental to the cognitive development of moral intelligence.

The affective domain taxonomy of five hierarchical levels can be used as a lens to develop moral intelligence through such things as sensing when moral situations arise, responding in an appropriate manner, valuing good, developing an evolving value system, and behaving consistently with virtues. The affective domain centers on the principle of love which is the motive force behind the basic emotions. Happiness, sadness, anger, fear, and disgust can all be understood as feelings generated by respectively having the loved one or object near, far, unjustly treated, threatened, or violated. Sternberg's (1988) three elements of love—passion, intimacy, and commitment—can also be considered in looking at moral intelligence in the affective domain.

Conative capacity is the enduring disposition to strive which involves the qualities of enterprise, energy, determination, decisiveness, persistence, patience, and organization and the skills of self-discipline, decision-making, goal setting, planning, reflection, and evaluation. The taxonomy of the conative domain's five cyclical stages applied to moral intelligence could include recognizing problems, setting goals, deciding what is the right thing to do, taking action, and persevering. Justice is a motivating and guiding principle in developing and using volition. Though one may have the knowledge and feelings to act morally, one must ultimately put those capacities into action using conative capacities.

According to Aybek et al. (2015), people with high moral intelligence try to do their work according to moral principles. In addition, moral responsibility plays an important role in healthcare provision. Several studies have shown the prominent role of moral intelligence and its components in the improvement of mental and physical health and self-awareness (Cox et al., 2012). Accordingly, moral intelligence refers to the fact that we are not born ethical or unethical, inherently; rather, we learn how to be good. Learning to be good includes communication, feedback, sociability, and training that never ends. In fact, moral intelligence is what we need to do everything right, and through using it, we learn to act intellectually and achieve the best practice. In every part of life, attempts are made to reach the best available information, minimize risks, and be optimistic about the consequences (Toprak & Karakuş, 2018a, 2018b).

## 2.2. Self-Awareness

Psychologists and educators usually use the concept of self-awareness in order to describe one's ability to think about, talk about, and define feelings, thoughts, and/or actions. Although many researchers, psychologists, and other social scientists have studied the role of the self-awareness and focused on its cognitive, affective, and behavioral implications (e.g., Caldwell, 2009), they have not reached any consensus regarding a unified definition of the 'self'. They differ widely in how they believe the self should be defined and measured. These differences in definitions become very important when discussing questions such as who defines the 'self', what the purpose of the definition is, and, moreover, who should be studied according to these definitions. Both the definition of self-awareness and the studies on self-awareness are influenced by the complexity and the mix of theories in this field. Thus, almost any study that relates to the 'self' from almost any point of view can be justified. Most studies have focused on how age, race, gender, or culture relate to the process of self-development (e.g., Mashudi et al., 2022; Soodmand Afshar & Moradifar, 2021). Presently, the term 'self-awareness' is used to describe an overall concept that includes many sub-concepts, such as self-esteem, self-concept, self-description, self-control, self-evaluation, self-image, self-perception, self-presentation, self-reflection, self-knowledge, and self-understanding. These concepts may be used separately or in conjunction with one another.

They may also be used as synonyms for self-awareness or in order to emphasize specific views that relate to the self. A point that researchers do agree on is that, throughout life, self-awareness develops along a continuum, along which researchers define four major periods as critical: infancy (the first 24 months of life); early childhood (from 24 months until age 5); middle childhood (age 5 to age 11); and adolescence (from age 11 on). From one experience to another, people increase their awareness of themselves and their ability to become aware. Each experience affects the subsequent one, as well as how one's awareness continues to increase (Morin, 2004). Tat-Heung (2014) claims that the ways children understand themselves through learning processes in school lead them through life and influence their choices in the future. Accordingly, developing learner identity is one of the goals teachers should achieve in schools. Moreover, one's linguistic skills influence the level of self-awareness. The study of self-awareness originates from psychologists' claims that the well-rounded self is of fundamental importance to one's growth. Clearly, then, children need to develop self-awareness early in their childhood in order to be more successful in school and later in their lives. Everyone has different abilities and limits that construct the self and, by developing awareness of these components and of the environment one lives in, one achieves fulfillment of the self (Morin, 2004).

In a study, Cadwell (2009) showed that the development of moral intelligence successfully improved interpersonal relationships, achieving meaning in life, motivation, commitment, responsibility, self-awareness, team spirit, as well as stress and time management of human resources. In another research, Cadwell (2009) concluded that in addition to the moral situation of students, their moral characteristics must be assessed by the higher education system at all levels in order to increase their self-awareness. In general, school and university students acquire socialization skills and enter the community based on the experiences gained in formal and informal education and social systems of educational centers. Therefore, most of the time, society's expectations from the educational system are more related to their moral development and self-awareness than to their professional development. In another study, Aybek et al. (2015) evaluated the moral judgment and level of emotional intelligence of 243 students of different faculties and colleges of Eskisehir Osmangazi University using the correlational research model. According to their results, while no significant relationship was observed between moral judgment and gender, a significant association was found between parents' level of education and moral judgment.

In another study, Nucci (2016) assessed the role of reasoning in moral education to achieve self-awareness in adolescents. According to the results, the gradual implementation of moral programs for adolescents increased their self-awareness, and only by using reasoning, one can hope to create moral views, correct immorality in social systems or predict and respond to unforeseen moral issues. Nucci (2016) selected 400 nurses from hospitals of Kerman University of Medical Sciences using a stratified sampling method to assess the effect of authentic leadership on moral intelligence. In the end, the results were indicative of a positive significant relationship between all components of authentic leadership (i.e., self-awareness, internalized moral view, relationship clarity, and balanced processing) and moral intelligence. Ultimately, in a study, Rouzi et al. (2021) attempted to present text studies as a solution to the current cultural and religious diversity. The results demonstrated that collective awareness in the frame of religiosity needs to be in Islamic education for the benefit of the people in a country with a high level of diversity.

### 3. Methodology

#### 3.1. Participants

A group of 240 teachers from Islamic schools in Jakarta, Indonesia, participated in this study. Table 1 shows the characteristics of the participants. The teachers were ensured that the questionnaires of this academic research would be filled out anonymously.

**Table 1**  
*Characteristics of the Sample*

Total Number of Teachers	Age Range			Gender (n)	
	Min	Max	Mean	Male	Female
240	25	40	29.7	110	130

### 3.2. Instruments

#### 3.2.1. The Moral Intelligence Questionnaire

The moral intelligence questionnaire was developed by Delbari et al. (2020) encompassing 51 items scored based on a five-point Likert scale. The questionnaire includes 6 dimensions: honesty (7 items), responsibility (9 items), forgiveness (7 items), compassion (7 items), moral values (11 items), and communication skills (10 items). The overall reliability of the tool was approved at a Cronbach's alpha of 0.85.

#### 3.2.2. The Self-Awareness Questionnaire

The self-awareness questionnaire was developed by Delbari et al. (2020) including 39 items scored based on a five-point Likert scale. The tool includes 7 dimensions: general self-awareness (6 items), private self-awareness (10 items), emotional intelligence (5 items), openness (5 items), recognition of attitudes (4 items), personality and behavioral characteristics (4 items) and emotional self-awareness (5 items). The overall reliability of the tool was approved at a Cronbach's alpha of 0.81.

### 3.3. Procedure

#### 3.3.1. Data Collection

The research was conducted using the survey methodology whereby two questionnaires were adapted from existing ones to address specific study goals. These modified questionnaires were handed out to teachers who had been provided with enough time and opportunity to complete the surveys. This process involved notifying teachers about the study and discussing data collection procedures in detail as well as ensuring strict confidentiality with regard to collected information. Furthermore, a pilot testing of the questionnaires was done in order to ensure their readability and completeness for successful data gathering.

#### 3.3.2. Data Analysis

The collected data was entered into SPSS 23. In the first step, the normality of the data was verified using Kolmogorov-Smirnov test. The Pearson product-moment correlation was used to examine the correlations between the variables. Multiple regression analysis was employed to check the power of moral intelligence in predicting teachers' self-awareness. T-test was also used to find the differences between males and females in terms of their moral intelligence and self-awareness.

## 4. Results

In order to investigate the relationship between teachers' moral intelligence and their self-awareness, Pearson product-moment correlation was used. Table 2 reports the results.

**Table 2**  
*Correlation between the Variables*

Variables	Moral Intelligence	Self-Awareness
Moral Intelligence	1	.64**
Self-Awareness	.64**	1

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

The results show that there is a significant relationship between moral intelligence and self-awareness ( $r = 0.64$ ,  $p < .01$ ). In particular, based on the approach of Islamic education, moral intelligence, and self-awareness are psychological variables that affect teachers' personality and behavior and can improve their interpersonal relations with students.

In order to examine the extent to which moral intelligence is able to predict self-awareness, multiple regression analysis was used. Based on Table 3, moral intelligence can account for almost 5% of the variance in teachers' self-awareness ( $R^2 = 0.056$ ).

**Table 3***Multiple Regression Analysis for Self-Awareness*

Model	Predictor	R	R <sup>2</sup>	Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	F	P
1	Moral Intelligence	0.237	0.056	0.05	5.33	0.02

In order to check if there are significant differences between male and female teachers in terms of their moral intelligence and self-awareness, two independent sample t-tests were run. Table 4 reports the results.

**Table 4***Independent Samples T-Test for the Differences between Male and Female Teachers in their Moral Intelligence and Self-Awareness*

	Gender	N	Mean	SD	df	t	Sig. (2-tailed)
Moral Intelligence	Male	110	58.225	15.856	238	3.707	0.01
	Female	130	148.534	15.678			
Self-Awareness	Male	110	159.9	6.988	238	2.564	0.01
	Female	130	148.9	7.896			

As Table 4 shows, there are significant differences between men and women in terms of their moral intelligence and self-awareness. In particular, the results report that female teachers enjoy higher levels of moral intelligence compared to their male counterparts. Yet, female teachers have lower levels of self-awareness. Overall, it is concluded that females' moral intelligence is higher while their self-awareness is lower than that of the male teachers.

## 5. Discussion

This culturally embedded study aimed to evaluate the relationship between moral intelligence and self-awareness of teachers in Islamic education-based schools. The modern era is the era of challenges that in addition to making fundamental changes in humans, have caused a certain dynamism in various aspects of their life. Crises have penetrated even the most stable existential dimensions of mankind and have caused a deep transformation. These changes have led to education about the material and spiritual aspects of human life, the re-emergence of spiritual orientation, and seeking a clearer understanding of religion and its use. In line with religious training and in order to assess the relationship between religion and spirituality, a group of scholars has attempted to introduce new concepts in this area by explaining their data and observations. For instance, the concepts of spiritual health, spiritual transformation, and spiritual well-being have been added to the academic literature of psychology on the threshold of the third millennium. However, one of these concepts is the construct of moral intelligence, which has been developed because of the global attention and interest of psychologists in religion and spirituality. Nonetheless, no systematic research has been conducted to identify the features and components of this type of intelligence. Basically, developing people's intelligence is within the scope of biological knowledge and information, but moral intelligence includes abstract and transcendental thoughts. Moral intelligence has a religious meaning and is nurtured through spiritual knowledge and rules found in the world and is expressed in religious literature. It could be expressed that moral intelligence makes a person whole and gives them integrity and unity, which are the most important objectives of the religious training of humans. On the other hand, it is the most self-centered part of the human psyche that is constantly considered the basis of optimal performance of personality. Self-awareness, as an important structure in personality, plays a fundamental role in a person's behavior and actions. In fact, each person's behavior is caused by their emotions, thoughts, attitudes, perceptions, and beliefs, as well as their level of self-confidence and self-esteem. Self-awareness is one of the most important parts of the Islamic training of humans. In addition to the fact that it is related to the intellectual, behavioral, and emotional areas of man, it also directs other areas of human awareness and cognition (Millar et al., 2019).

The article revealed significant relationships between moral intelligence and self-awareness in the field of Islamic education and how they can potentially improve teacher effectiveness in working with students, and facilitate positive and supportive learning environments. Moreover, further results showed that moral intelligence can predict self-awareness to some degree. According to previous research, Lapsley and Narvaez (2006) noted that a person needs moral virtue to do what he knows he should do. However, as humans, we are born with strong moral virtues, which must be developed through interactions that enable us to channel our emotions and thereby develop our characters. The stated purpose of developing the moral character of a nation is to educate its young generation and prepare them for a better life. Proper education is not only about teaching school subjects, but must also include understanding the child's feelings. Emotional intelligence is as important as learning any other subject. The ability to control impulses is the basis of personality. According to Campbell (2003), the teacher plays the main role in character development by instilling self-discipline and empathy in learners. Berkowitz and Beer (2004) point out that moral character is a set of psychological characteristics of an individual that influence an individual's ability and willingness to act ethically. In this same perspective, Damon (1988) identifies six ways that social scientists have defined ethics: (1) a value orientation that distinguishes good from bad and prescribes the good, (2) a sense of commitment to the standards of a social group, (3) a sense of responsibility to act out of concern for others, (4) considering the rights of others, (5) commitment to honesty in interpersonal relationships, and (6) a state of mind that causes negative emotional reactions to immoral actions. These are the full characteristics of a healthy moral citizen of a society.

This article also addressed a potential reason for the gender gap in moral intelligence and self-regulation. This article states that, unlike women, men are often socialized to focus on external factors, such as material success or status, which is indicative of their higher self-awareness, and in contrast, women are more likely to be morally good than men. A deeper examination reveals some interesting points. First, the gender gap in moral intelligence may be a reflection of the way men and women are socialized differently in Indonesian society. Second, the fact that men are more self-aware than women, indicates that they have a greater ability to recognize the nuances of social interactions.

In sum, grounded in the tenets of Islamic education and within the rich tapestry of culture and society, moral intelligence and self-awareness can affect teachers' personality and behavior and can improve their interpersonal relations with students. Having ethical factors such as responsibility, forgiveness, compassion, emotional intelligence, fairness, justice, moral intelligence, and self-awareness improve the moral capacity of teachers and instill in students the feeling that they can take moral responsibility for their choices and actions. This results in the institutionalization of moral competencies in teachers and the penetration of moral principles in their intellectual frameworks. Without a doubt, paying attention to moral issues and self-awareness in school will have countless benefits, for students, higher education systems, and society.

### Disclosure Statement

The authors claim no conflict of interest.

### Funding

The research did not receive any specific grants from funding agencies.

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