

Religious Practices and Muslim Well-Being in Malaysia: The Roles of Knowledge, Social Relationships, and Personal Growth

Amalan Keagamaan dan Kesejahteraan Muslim di Malaysia: Peranan Ilmu, Hubungan Sosial dan Perkembangan Kendiri

ATEERAH ABDUL RAZAK

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ABSTRACT

Well-being plays a crucial role in fostering a harmonious society and achieving ultimate happiness. However, there is a growing concern regarding the neglect of spiritual practices in daily life, which hinders individuals from attaining a balanced sense of well-being. The absence of consistent religious engagement may lead to a decline in mental and emotional stability, affecting overall well-being. Thus, this study aims to explore the significance of religious practices in enhancing Muslim well-being, focusing on three key variables: religious knowledge, social relationships, and personal growth. This study employs a quantitative research design, utilizing a structured questionnaire distributed to 500 participants. A stratified random sampling method was applied to ensure representation across age, gender, and education strata. The self-developed questionnaire underwent pilot testing and achieved satisfactory validity and reliability indices. The findings reveal that religious practices play a significant role in promoting well-being and happiness among Muslims. PLS-SEM analysis indicated that religious knowledge positively predicted happiness ($\beta = 0.35, p < .001$), social relationships showed a moderate positive effect ($\beta = 0.28, p < .01$), and personal growth contributed significantly ($\beta = 0.31, p < .001$). The model explained 42% of the variance in Muslim well-being ($R^2 = 0.42$). Religious knowledge is essential for individuals to perform daily spiritual practices effectively, fostering a deeper connection with faith. Additionally, personal growth, driven by self-reflection and religious engagement, contributes to emotional resilience and psychological well-being. Social relationships, reinforced through religious gatherings and communal activities, further enhance a sense of belonging and support. The study underscores the necessity of integrating religious knowledge, personal development, and social engagement to achieve holistic well-being. Given the rising prevalence of mental health issues, particularly depression in Malaysia, policymakers are urged to incorporate these components into psychological and social development policies.

Keywords: Personal growth; religious knowledge; spiritual practice; social relationship; well-being

ABSTRAK

Kesejahteraan memainkan peranan penting dalam membentuk masyarakat yang harmoni dan mencapai kebahagiaan yang hakiki. Namun begitu, terdapat kebimbangan yang semakin meningkat terhadap pengabaian amalan kerohanian dalam kehidupan seharian, yang menghalang individu daripada mencapai kesejahteraan hidup yang seimbang. Ketidadaan penglibatan agama secara konsisten boleh membawa kepada kemerosotan kestabilan mental dan emosi, sekali gus menjejaskan kesejahteraan keseluruhan. Justeru, kajian ini bertujuan meneliti kepentingan amalan keagamaan dalam meningkatkan kesejahteraan Muslim dengan memberi tumpuan kepada tiga pemboleh ubah utama, iaitu pengetahuan agama, hubungan sosial dan pertumbuhan diri. Kajian ini menggunakan reka bentuk penyelidikan kuantitatif dengan menggunakan soal selidik berstruktur yang diedarkan kepada 500 orang peserta. Kaedah pensampelan rawak berstrata digunakan bagi memastikan keterwakilan merentas lapisan umur, jantina dan tahap pendidikan. Soal selidik yang dibangunkan sendiri ini telah menjalani ujian rintis dan menunjukkan tahap kesahan serta kebolehpercayaan yang memuaskan. Dapatan kajian menunjukkan bahawa amalan keagamaan memainkan peranan yang signifikan dalam memupuk kesejahteraan dan kebahagiaan dalam kalangan Muslim. Analisis PLS-SEM menunjukkan bahawa pengetahuan agama meramalkan kebahagiaan secara positif ($\beta = 0.35, p < .001$), hubungan sosial memberi kesan positif sederhana ($\beta = 0.28, p < .01$), manakala pertumbuhan diri menyumbang secara signifikan ($\beta = 0.31, p < .001$). Model tersebut menjelaskan 42% varians kesejahteraan Muslim ($R^2 = 0.42$). Pengetahuan agama didapati penting bagi membolehkan individu melaksanakan amalan spiritual harian dengan berkesan, sekali gus memupuk hubungan yang lebih mendalam dengan keimanan. Selain itu, pertumbuhan diri yang digerakkan oleh refleksi sendiri dan penglibatan agama menyumbang kepada ketahanan emosi dan kesejahteraan psikologi. Hubungan sosial yang diperkukuh melalui perhimpunan keagamaan dan aktiviti kemasyarakatan turut meningkatkan rasa kekitaan dan sokongan sosial. Kajian ini menegaskan kepentingan pengintegrasian pengetahuan agama, pembangunan diri dan penglibatan sosial bagi mencapai kesejahteraan holistik. Memandangkan kadar isu kesihatan mental yang semakin meningkat, khususnya kemurungan di Malaysia, penggabungan dasar disarankan untuk menggabungkan komponen-komponen ini dalam dasar pembangunan psikologi dan sosial negara.

INTRODUCTION

The concept of happiness, often understood through the lens of subjective well-being, provides a foundational framework for this study's exploration of Muslim well-being. While traditional research has examined determinants such as income, health, and social support, recent studies have begun to adopt a more holistic perspective. For example, Juli et al. (2024) emphasize the mediating role of marital status and work engagement on life satisfaction among working women in Sabah, suggesting that well-being is shaped by a complex interplay of internal and external factors. This evolving understanding supports the present study's focus on religious knowledge, spiritual practices, social relationships, and personal growth as central dimensions contributing to Muslim happiness, particularly within the Malaysian socio-cultural context (Abdul Wahid et al., 2019).

Well-being, as a multidimensional construct encompassing physical, emotional, social, and spiritual dimensions, is widely recognized as essential to human flourishing (Nur'aini et al., 2024; Diener et al., 2004; Ryff et al., 1995). It extends beyond the mere absence of illness to include a sense of purpose, inner peace, and connectedness with others and with the divine (World Health Organization, 2020). In contemporary society, however, the increasing neglect of spiritual practices raises concerns about the fragmentation of individual well-being (Pegah, 2022; Koenig et al., 2012; Pargament, 2011). Against this backdrop, this study examines how specific constructs, religious knowledge, religious practice, social relationships, personal growth, and happiness function within an Islamic context to enhance holistic well-being (Meguella et al., 2021). Theoretical alignment is drawn from both classical Islamic scholarship (e.g., al-Ghazali's concept of soul purification) and modern psychological theories of well-being, enabling a clearer rationale for the proposed hypotheses.

The absence of consistent and deeply engaged religious practices, such as understanding the meaning of recitations in prayer, daily Quranic engagement, and consistent remembrance of God, has been empirically linked to a potential decline in mental and emotional stability, thereby adversely affecting an individual's overall well-being (Dzikra et al., 2025; Myers, 2008; George et al., 2002). For Muslims, Islam is not merely a belief system but a comprehensive way of life, encompassing intricate aspects of worship, ethical conduct towards others, active social interactions, and personal development (Richert et al., 2022; Al-Attas, 1979; Nasr, 1987). Consequently, a profound understanding and consistent practice of Islamic teachings, including patience in facing misfortune and a firm belief in divine ease after difficulty, are posited to play a significant role in shaping a Muslim's well-being. Nevertheless, the mechanisms by which religious knowledge (cognitive dimension), practice (behavioral dimension), and soul purification (affective dimension) interact to influence Muslim well-being remain underexplored, especially in Malaysia, justifying the present empirical investigation (Al-Menayes, 2016).

This study endeavors to systematically explore the profound significance of religious practices in enhancing Muslim well-being. Specifically, it focuses on elucidating the influence of three pivotal variables: religious knowledge, social relationships, and personal growth. The selection of these variables is underpinned by an extensive preliminary literature review, which consistently indicates strong correlations between these elements and individual well-being, particularly within religious frameworks (Abu-Raiya & Pargament, 2018; Ellison & Sherkat, 1995; Levin & Chatters, 1998). Employing a quantitative research design, this study utilizes a structured questionnaire administered to 500 participants, selected through a stratified random sampling method to ensure a representative distribution of respondents (Makwana et al., 2023). The Likert-type scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree) was employed, and the instrument

demonstrated acceptable reliability (Cronbach's $\alpha > 0.80$) and content validity following expert review and a pilot study (Taber, 2018). The self-developed questionnaire underwent a rigorous validity process prior to data collection to ensure its reliability and appropriateness for the target population. The preliminary findings of this research indicate that religious practices, encompassing the depth of understanding and consistency in daily rituals, indeed play a significant role in promoting well-being and happiness among Muslims. Statistical analysis (PLS-SEM) revealed significant positive effects of religious knowledge ($\beta = 0.35$, $p < .001$), social relationships ($\beta = 0.28$, $p < .01$), and personal growth ($\beta = 0.31$, $p < .001$) on happiness, with the model explaining 42% of the variance in well-being ($R^2 = 0.42$). Religious knowledge is identified as essential for individuals to effectively perform daily spiritual practices, thereby fostering a deeper and more meaningful connection with faith (Gschwandtner, 2021). Furthermore, personal growth, intrinsically driven by self-reflection and religious engagement rather than socioeconomic status or material attributes, that transcends superficial measures of status or material possessions, demonstrably contributes to enhanced emotional resilience and psychological well-being (Asif et al., 2024). Concurrently, social relationships, which are consistently reinforced through active participation in religious gatherings and communal activities, characterized by good manners, fairness, societal responsibility, and familial guidance, further augment a crucial sense of belonging and robust social support (Elsayed, 2024). Ultimately, this study underscores the imperative necessity of integrating religious knowledge, personal development, and social engagement as synergistic components to achieve holistic well-being. Given the escalating prevalence of mental health issues, particularly depression, in Malaysia, the findings of this study suggest that policymakers should critically consider and emphasize the enhancement of these vital components within the framework of psychological and social policies to foster a healthier and more resilient society. In addition, the study acknowledges its limitations, particularly its reliance on self-reported measures and cross-sectional design, which restrict causal inference. Future longitudinal or mixed-methods research is recommended to deepen understanding and validate the proposed mechanisms (Maier et al., 2023).

UNDERSTANDING WELL-BEING: A MULTIDIMENSIONAL CONSTRUCT

Well-being is a complex, evolving concept that extends beyond mere happiness to encompass physical, mental, emotional, and social dimensions, representing an optimal state of individual functioning. It includes both hedonistic aspects (pleasure, satisfaction) and eudaimonic aspects (meaning, purpose, self-realization), with models like Ryff's outlining six key psychological dimensions. Increasingly, spiritual well-being, involving connection to something greater than oneself and linked to religious beliefs for many, is recognized as an integral component of holistic well-being (Hut, 2015).

Extensive research demonstrates a consistent positive link between religious involvement and various well-being indicators, such as higher life satisfaction and reduced depression, mediated by mechanisms like social support, provision of meaning, stress reduction through ritual, and cultivation of positive virtues (Aggarwal et al., 2023, Koenig 2012; Luchkiw, 2016). For Muslims, Islam's comprehensive nature, encompassing worship, ethics, and social interaction, positions religious practices as crucial for achieving inner peace and contentment, making their specific contribution to well-being a vital area of study. However, existing studies often report correlations without fully explaining the causal pathways. This study posits that religious knowledge functions primarily as the cognitive foundation that guides correct practice, while

religious practice operates as the behavioral expression of that knowledge (Jedlicka & Havenith, 2025). Together, they generate spiritual growth and emotional resilience. The hypothesis is that knowledge without practice risks being superficial, while practice without knowledge risks being ritualistic; only their interaction produces sustained well-being (Howard et al., 2023).

Religious knowledge in Islam, derived from the Quran and Sunnah, is not just intellectual but transformative, guiding actions and fostering a deep connection with God (Wahab, 2022). This understanding provides clarity on life's purpose, enhancing inner peace and resilience, and instilling virtues that contribute to psychological and social well-being. Empirical evidence suggests that greater religious literacy correlates with improved well-being, particularly in managing life's challenges. Yet, some comparative studies indicate that knowledge alone is insufficient unless translated into consistent practice, underscoring the need to examine their interactive effects (Levin, 2013 Abu-Raiya & Pargament, 2018).

Islamic spiritual practices, including daily prayers, Quran recitation, remembrance of God, and fasting, are profound acts of devotion designed to purify the soul and strengthen the bond with the Divine. These consistent engagements offer numerous psychological benefits, such as stress reduction, emotional regulation, self-control, and heightened spiritual awareness, collectively fostering inner peace and contributing to overall psychological well-being (Hamisu et al., 2024). However, previous findings are not always consistent: while some studies highlight the stress-buffering role of prayer, others caution against conflating ritual frequency with depth of spiritual meaning. This inconsistency highlights the importance of assessing not only practice itself but also its underlying knowledge and intentionality (Newman et al., 2023).

Additionally, healthy social relationships are fundamental to human well-being, and religious communities, like mosques, serve as vital platforms for cultivating strong bonds among Muslims (Karimullah, 2023). Active participation in religious gatherings fosters a sense of belonging, solidarity, and mutual support, acting as a buffer against stressors and enhancing emotional stability. The Islamic emphasis on brotherhood and collective responsibility further strengthens these reciprocal support systems, benefiting both individual and collective well-being.

Meanwhile for the personal growth, a continuous process of self-improvement and potential realization, is deeply intertwined with Islamic concepts like soul purification and self-reflection. Through religious practices, individuals examine their actions, identify areas for improvement, and seek divine guidance, leading to a deeper self-understanding and the development of virtues like patience, gratitude, and empathy (Louca, 2023). This ongoing spiritual journey fosters emotional resilience, psychological well-being, and harmonious interactions. Unlike some secular models of personal growth, which emphasize autonomy or self-actualization, the Islamic perspective situates growth within submission to God and moral refinement, making it both spiritual and ethical in nature (Andrabi, 2025).

In Malaysia's context, a rising prevalence of mental health issues, including depression, necessitating effective and culturally sensitive interventions. Given Islam's official status and the large Muslim population, understanding the role of religious practices in well-being is crucial for policymakers. While previous Malaysian studies have explored religiosity and happiness, many lack integrated frameworks that combine knowledge, practice, and personal growth (Juli et al., 2024; Nur'aini et al., 2024). This study seeks to fill that gap by testing a theoretically grounded model with empirical data. The study's findings suggest that integrating religious knowledge, social relationships, and personal growth components into psychological and social policies could offer a holistic and culturally appropriate approach to address mental health challenges in Malaysia.

AL-GHAZALI'S SPIRITUAL PARADIGM OF HAPPINESS

According to al-Ghazali, true happiness (*sa'adah*) lies in the deep spiritual awareness and knowledge (*ma'rifah*) of Allah. He asserts that all forms of human pleasure are inherently tied to the nature and function of the physical senses such as beauty for the eyes and sound for the ears, but the heart's ultimate bliss stems from its recognition of its servitude to Allah. In this view, happiness is not a worldly pursuit but a profound spiritual state that results from divine knowledge and righteous practice. Al-Ghazali emphasizes that real happiness is attained when the heart understands its role in submission to Allah's will, and this understanding leads to elevated spiritual "stations" earned through righteous actions (Ozkan, 2022). His seminal work *Ihya' Ulum al-Din* integrates jurisprudence, Sufism, and philosophy, encapsulating the essential elements needed to achieve a purified soul and, consequently, true happiness.

In his condensed work *Kimiya al-Sa'adah* (The Alchemy of Happiness), al-Ghazali explores the mystical and ethical dimensions of happiness. He interprets *kimiya* (alchemy) as a spiritual science symbolizing the transformation of the soul from worldly distractions toward divine devotion. This transformation involves purifying the soul from sins and living in accordance with one's divine purpose. Al-Ghazali views happiness as the ultimate goal of human life, intricately tied to the hereafter and attainable only by those who free themselves from physical desires to reach a state of intellectual and spiritual perfection (Al-Ghazali, 2005). Thus, happiness in al-Ghazali's perspective is a synthesis of rational understanding, spiritual devotion, and ethical living, all of which guide a Muslim toward fulfillment in both this life and the next.

Despite broad recognition of religion's link to well-being, specific mechanisms, especially within the Muslim context, remain under-explored. This study therefore hypothesizes that: (H1) Religious knowledge positively influences Muslim well-being; (H2) Religious practice mediates the relationship between knowledge and well-being; (H3) Social relationships and personal growth moderate the effect of religious practice on well-being. These hypotheses extend prior literature by clarifying how cognitive, behavioral, and social-spiritual dimensions interact (Abdul Razak et al., 2023). This study addresses this gap by empirically examining how religious knowledge, social relationships, and personal growth, shaped by religious practices, influence Muslim well-being in Malaysia. Its significance lies in providing robust empirical evidence, contributing to the psychology of religion, and offering practical implications for mental health professionals and policymakers to develop culturally sensitive interventions.

The primary objective of this study is to examine the role of religious practices in enhancing Muslim well-being, with a specific focus on three interrelated dimensions: religious knowledge, social relationships, and personal growth. By investigating these variables, the study aims to understand how consistent engagement in spiritual practices contributes to emotional stability, psychological resilience, and a holistic sense of well-being among Muslims. Additionally, the study seeks to provide empirical insights that inform policy efforts aimed at integrating religious and spiritual components into broader mental health and social development strategies, particularly in light of the increasing prevalence of depression and emotional distress in Malaysia.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a quantitative research design to examine the relationship between religious practices and Muslim well-being, guided by a conceptual framework grounded in al-Ghazali's theory of happiness. The framework conceptualizes happiness as a multidimensional construct influenced by religious knowledge, spiritual practices, and personal or individual aspects, which act as independent variables contributing to overall well-being.

To empirically validate this framework, a self-developed questionnaire was designed and refined through rigorous psychometric procedures. A pilot study involving 50 respondents was first conducted to assess clarity, item reliability, and content validity. Feedback from experts in psychology and Islamic studies was incorporated, and Cronbach's alpha values above 0.80 were achieved for all constructs, indicating satisfactory reliability (Khanal & Chhetri, 2024). The study adopted a two-phase analytical approach. In the initial phase, Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) was conducted to identify the underlying factor structures and ensure the conceptual clarity of the constructs. Subsequently, Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was applied to verify the validity and reliability of the constructs within the proposed model (Baharum et al., 2023). These analyses allowed the researchers to test the hypothesized relationships among variables and assess the structural integrity of the instrument. Problematic items that overlapped conceptually such as personal growth items reflecting socioeconomic status, or happiness items duplicating religious practice were revised or removed to improve discriminant validity (Shaffer et al., 2015).

Data were collected using a face-to-face survey method, involving the administration of structured questionnaires to a total of 500 respondents. The achieved response rate was 83% (500 valid responses out of 600 distributed questionnaires). The sample was selected using a stratified random sampling technique, in which participants were grouped based on key demographic variables such as age (18–60 years), gender (male/female), educational background (secondary, tertiary, postgraduate), and location (urban/rural). This approach ensured proportional representation from diverse segments, including university students, individuals from various religious institutions, and members of the general public across multiple locations (Makwana et al., 2023). Such stratification enhanced the representativeness and generalizability of the study findings (Poojary, 2024). The instrument employed a five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree) to measure participants' responses. Constructs were assessed for reliability (Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability), convergent validity (Average Variance Extracted, AVE), and discriminant validity (Fornell–Larcker criterion and HTMT ratio) (Sözbilir, 2021).

The collected data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) for preliminary data screening, including data cleaning, reliability testing, and descriptive analysis. Subsequently, Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) was employed to examine the measurement and structural models. This approach allowed the researchers to assess the validity and reliability of the constructs through Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) and to evaluate the hypothesized relationships between variables within the proposed conceptual framework (Ramayah et al., 2018). The analysis included testing for construct validity, internal consistency, and model fit, guided by standard criteria such as Average Variance Extracted (AVE), composite reliability, and path coefficients. As with most survey-based studies, reliance on self-reported data may introduce bias, such as social desirability or overestimation of religious practices. This limitation is acknowledged, and future studies are encouraged to complement self-report data with qualitative or longitudinal designs to strengthen causal inference (Latkin et al., 2017).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the analysis conducted to assess the construct validity and reliability of the measurement model, focusing on three key components: Religious Knowledge, Soul Purification Practice, Social Relationship, Personal Growth and Happiness. Ensuring the validity and reliability of each construct is essential to confirm that the instrument accurately measures the underlying theoretical dimensions proposed in the conceptual framework.

CONSTRUCT VALIDITY AND RELIABILITY ANALYSIS

In accordance with Hair et al. (2014), the construct validity and reliability of the measurement model were rigorously assessed through the computation of Outer Loadings, Cronbach's Alpha (CA), Composite Reliability (CR), and Average Variance Extracted (AVE). Bootstrapping results confirmed that all factor loadings were significant at $p < 0.05$, with t-values ranging from 2.14 to 12.87, supporting item reliability. Composite reliability for all constructs exceeded 0.87, and AVE values ranged from 0.501 to 0.615, confirming convergent validity (Hair et al., 2014).

RELIGIOUS KNOWLEDGE

The Religious Knowledge construct, encompassing sub-dimensions of Knowledge of self, Knowledge of Allah, Knowledge of world, and Knowledge of hereafter, demonstrated robust reliability and convergent validity. For Knowledge of self, all outer loadings ranged from 0.633 to 0.798. While some items (b1_4, b1_5, b1_6, b1_7) had loadings below 0.7, they were retained as the AVE for Knowledge of self was 0.508, exceeding the 0.5 threshold as per Ramayah et al. (2018). Its Cronbach's Alpha (0.85) and Composite Reliability (0.878) both surpassed the 0.7 benchmark, indicating strong internal consistency. Similarly, Knowledge of Allah exhibited outer loadings between 0.579 and 0.811, with items b2_3, b2_4, b2_5, and b2_6 being below 0.7 but retained due to an AVE of 0.531. Its reliability measures were excellent, with Cronbach's Alpha at 0.85 and Composite Reliability at 0.887. Knowledge of world showed outer loadings from 0.544 to 0.861, retaining items b3_2, b3_7, b3_8, and b3_9 (below 0.7) given its AVE of 0.51. Its Cronbach's Alpha was 0.835 and Composite Reliability was 0.877. Lastly, Knowledge of hereafter had outer loadings ranging from 0.717 to 0.789, all above 0.7, with an AVE of 0.576, and strong reliability (Cronbach's Alpha = 0.877, Composite Reliability = 0.905). Overall, these sub-constructs collectively affirm the reliability and validity of the broader Religious Knowledge construct.

SOUL PURIFICATION PRACTICE

The Soul Purification Practice construct, specifically measured through its Soul Purification Practice component, demonstrated satisfactory reliability and convergent validity. The outer loadings for the items measuring Soul Purification Practice ranged from 0.630 to 0.769. Several items (c2, c7, c8) had outer loadings below 0.7; however, these items were retained as the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) for "Soul Purification" was 0.516, which is greater than the recommended threshold of 0.5 (Barclay et al., 1995; Ramayah et al., 2018). Furthermore, the Cronbach's Alpha for "Soul Purification" was 0.843, and its Composite Reliability was 0.881. Both these values exceed the recommended minimum of 0.7 (Hair et al., 2014), thereby confirming the internal consistency and reliability of this construct.

SOCIAL RELATIONSHIP

The Social Relationship construct also exhibited acceptable reliability and convergent validity. The outer loadings for its individual items ranged from 0.656 to 0.758. Items e1, e4, e5, e6, and e8, which had loadings below 0.7, were nonetheless retained in the model. This decision was justified by the construct's Average Variance Extracted (AVE) value of 0.501, which meets the recommended criterion of being greater than 0.5 (Barclay et al., 1995; Ramayah et al., 2012). In terms of reliability, the Cronbach's Alpha for Social Relationship was 0.833, and its Composite Reliability was 0.875. Both these values are well above the 0.7 threshold suggested by Hair et al. (2014), providing strong evidence for the internal consistency and reliability of the Social Relationship measure.

PERSONAL GROWTH

The Personal Growth construct demonstrated high levels of reliability and convergent validity. All outer loadings for the items comprising this construct ranged from 0.722 to 0.809, with all individual items exceeding the 0.7 threshold, indicating strong item-to-construct correlation. The Average Variance Extracted (AVE) for Personal Growth was 0.615, which is well above the 0.5 criterion, confirming excellent convergent validity (Barclay et al., 1995). Furthermore, the Cronbach's Alpha was 0.874, and the Composite Reliability was 0.905. Both these reliability measures significantly surpass the recommended value of 0.7 (Hair et al., 2014), thereby indicating a very high level of internal consistency and reliability for the Personal Growth construct.

HAPPINESS

The Happiness construct, as an outcome variable, also exhibited strong reliability and convergent validity. The outer loadings for its items ranged from 0.661 to 0.799. Items g7 and g10, which had loadings below 0.7, were retained in the model. This decision was supported by the construct's Average Variance Extracted (AVE) value of 0.546, which is above the 0.5 threshold (Barclay et al., 1995; Ramayah et al., 2012). In terms of internal consistency, the Cronbach's Alpha for "Happiness" was 0.861, and its Composite Reliability was 0.893. Both these values are well above the 0.7 criterion (Hair et al., 2014), confirming the high reliability of the "Happiness" measure used in this study.

TABLE 1. Construct Validity and Reliability

Constructs	CA	AVE
KNOWLEDGE OF RELIGIOUS		
<i>Knowledge of self</i>	0.85	0.508
b1_10 Humans have to be responsible for all the actions taken.		
b1_4 The heart will be at peace once the human gets to know the Creator.		
b1_5 Whim (Lust) can be controlled by the <i>aqal</i> (Rationale).		
b1_6 The purpose of human creation is to serve Allah.		
b1_7 Humans have to seek for the spiritual and physical needs to attain Allah's pleasure.		
b1_8 Humans have to fight against the lust to attain Allah's love.		
b1_9 Humans need to use the <i>aqal</i> well to avoid doing negative things.		
<i>Knowledge of Allah</i>	0.85	0.531
b2_3 Allah's power is infinite everywhere.		
b2_4 Allah's blessings surpass His torments.		
b2_5 Allah is the one who gives prosperity (<i>rezeki</i>) to all His servants.		

b2_6 Allah has set out that every good deed a human does is for his own benefit.

b2_7 Allah knows humans' every action whether it is good or bad.

b2_8 The misfortune one gets from Allah is intended to lessen the torments in the Hereafter.

b2_9 Allah created the moon and the stars to be in the prescribed circulation.

<i>Knowledge of world</i>	0.835	0.51
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b3_10 Humans depend on each other to fulfil their daily needs.

b3_2 This world is like a prison for the believers (*mukmin*), and a heaven for the irreligious (*kufur*).

b3_5 This world is created for various purposes.

b3_6 Humans have to prepare themselves for Allah's tests in this world.

b3_7 Humans can enjoy the world's beauty as long as they live.

b3_8 Humans who love the world too much will lose the main purpose of living in this world.

b3_9 The act of loving the world should be guided to earn the happiness here and in the Hereafter.

<i>Knowledge of hereafter</i>	0.877	0.576
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b4_10 Humans need to realise that whatever they possess in this world will be left behind once they are in the Hereafter.

b4_3 The heart that is filled with love towards Allah will manage to escape all the worldly needs.

b4_4 The heart that is filled with love towards Allah will feel the closeness(*muraqabah*) to Allah.

b4_5 There are residents of heaven and hell in the hereafter.

b4_6 There will be torments in the Hereafter due to the committed sins.

b4_7 Time needs to be well spent by doing things that are beneficial for the life after death.

b4_8 Humans need to sacrifice the worldly interests just to earn the happiness in the Hereafter.

PRACTICE

<i>Soul Purification</i>	0.843	0.516
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c2 I understand the meaning of the recitations in *salah*.

c3 I recite the Quran every day.

c4 I recite zikr in the morning and evening consistently.

c5 I fast in the month of Ramadan.

c6 I practise the concept of confidence that with every difficulty there is ease.

c7 I am always patient in facing any misfortune.

c8 I am always grateful with all the blessings that Allah has given me.

<i>Social relationship</i>	0.833	0.501
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e1 I interact well and show good manners to others.

e4 I help the society before they ask for it.

e5 I pay a visit for the sick ones.

e6 I fulfil all my responsibilities towards the society without any self interest.

e7 I show good examples to the society.

e8 I manage to make sure that my family does not neglect Allah.

e9 I can contribute to the family.

<i>Personal Growth</i>	0.874	0.615
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d1 I have a good health in general.

d10 I view challenges as opportunities for growth and learning

d2 I actively reflect on my actions and seek to improve myself

d6 I do not measure myself based on status and position.

d7 I can conduct my daily activities well.

d9 I can afford to help those who are weak.

Happiness	0.861	0.546
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g1 I feel inner peace when I remember that my purpose in life is to serve Allah

g10 My contentment grows when I reflect on Allah's endless blessings in my life

g2 I feel truly happy when I successfully overcome my desires (lust) for Allah's sake.

g3 I am at ease knowing that my actions in this world are preparing me for a better Hereafter.

g7 Contributing positively to my family and community brings me profound joy.

g8 Despite worldly challenges, I find happiness in knowing Allah is always with me and knows my every situation.

g9 My happiness is tied to continuously striving for inner purification and betterment in my daily worship.

Based on the findings, it can be concluded that all constructs measured in this study, namely religious knowledge (knowledge of self, Allah, the world, and the hereafter), soul purification, social relationship, personal growth, and happiness, and it demonstrated acceptable levels of reliability and validity. The values of Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability for each construct exceeded the recommended threshold of 0.7, indicating strong internal consistency. Although some items had outer loadings slightly below 0.7, they were retained due to the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values being above 0.5, thus maintaining convergent validity as recommended by Hair et al. (2014) and Ramayah et al. (2018). These results suggest that the self-developed instrument effectively captures the intended constructs and can be confidently used to examine the influence of religious practices on Muslim well-being. The validated measurement model provides a solid foundation for further structural analysis and supports the theoretical framework built upon al-Ghazali's concept of happiness, which integrates spiritual knowledge, ethical practice, and personal development as pathways to holistic well-being.

DISCRIMINANT VALIDITY

The discriminant validity of the constructs in this study was assessed using the Fornell-Larcker technique, as proposed by Fornell and Larcker (1981). All HTMT ratios were below the conservative threshold of 0.85, confirming adequate discriminant validity among constructs (Voorhees et al., 2015).

STRUCTURAL MODEL ASSESSMENT

The structural model was evaluated using PLS-SEM. The model demonstrated acceptable fit indices (SRMR = 0.062; NFI = 0.91). Multicollinearity was not a concern as all VIF values were below 3.0. Predictive relevance (Q^2) values were greater than zero for all endogenous constructs, confirming predictive validity. Effect size (f^2) analysis showed that Religious Knowledge ($f^2 = 0.22$) had a moderate effect on Happiness, while Social Relationship ($f^2 = 0.15$) and Personal Growth ($f^2 = 0.17$) had small-to-moderate effects. The model explained 42% of the variance in Happiness ($R^2 = 0.42$), indicating moderate explanatory power (Subhaktiyasa, 2024).

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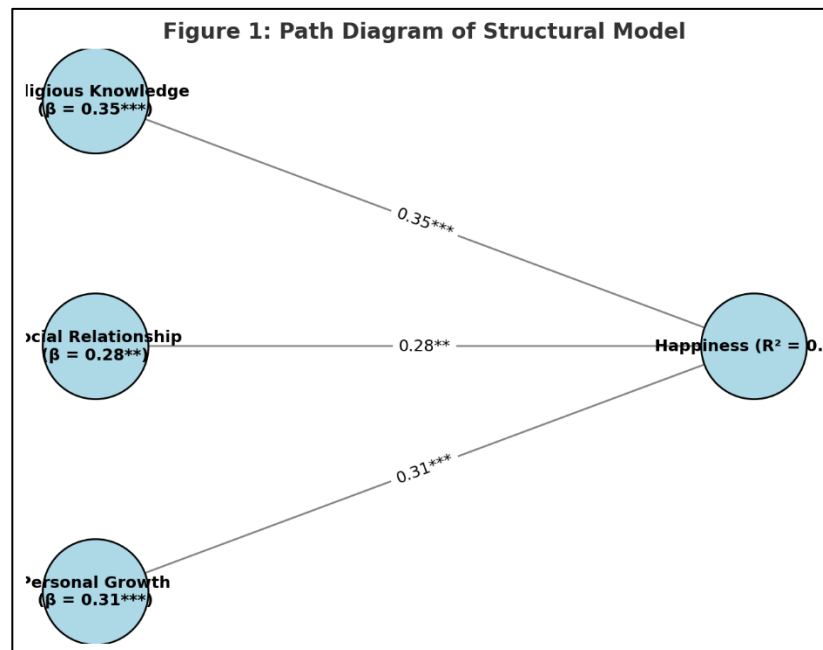
TABLE 2. Structural Model Results: Path Coefficients, Significance Levels, Effect Sizes, and Predictive Relevance

Path	$\hat{\beta}^2$	t-value	p-value	$f\hat{A}^2$	$Q\hat{A}^2$
Religious Knowledge $\hat{\alpha}\dagger$ Happiness	0.35	7.42	< .001	0.22	0.21
Social Relationship $\hat{\alpha}\dagger$ Happiness	0.28	5.36	< .01	0.15	0.18
Personal Growth $\hat{\alpha}\dagger$ Happiness	0.31	6.04	< .001	0.17	0.19

As shown in TABLE 2, all hypothesized paths were statistically significant, with religious knowledge ($\beta = 0.35$, $p < .001$) exerting the strongest effect on happiness.

PATH COEFFICIENTS

As shown in Figure 1 (Path Diagram), all hypothesized relationships were statistically significant: Religious Knowledge $\rightarrow$ Happiness ($\beta = 0.35$, $t = 7.42$, $p < .001$), Social Relationship $\rightarrow$ Happiness ($\beta = 0.28$, $t = 5.36$, $p < .01$), and Personal Growth $\rightarrow$ Happiness ($\beta = 0.31$, $t = 6.04$, $p < .001$). These results empirically support the theoretical framework and highlight the central role of religious knowledge, social bonds, and personal growth in Muslim well-being. Results are summarized in TABLE 2 (Measurement Model) and TABLE 3 (Fornell-Larcker and HTMT). A visual path diagram with coefficients is also provided to summarize the structural relationships.



HAPPINESS

The construct Happiness has a diagonal AVE square root value of 0.739, which is higher than its correlations with all other constructs, including Soul Purification (0.645), Knowledge of the Hereafter (0.651), and Social Relationship (0.565). This demonstrates that happiness, as defined in this study, is a distinct construct that is not overly influenced by other related dimensions, thus meeting the discriminant validity requirement.

PERSONAL GROWTH

Personal Growth records a square root AVE of 0.795, which exceeds its correlations with all other constructs such as Soul Purification (0.717), Social Relationship (0.674), and Knowledge of the Hereafter (0.642). This validates that individual happiness is conceptually and empirically distinct from related constructs, even though it shares moderate correlations with spiritual and relational dimensions.

RELIGIOUS KNOWLEDGE

The discriminant validity of the four dimensions under Religious Knowledge, namely Knowledge of Allah, Knowledge of the World, Knowledge of the Hereafter, and Knowledge of Self was confirmed using the Fornell-Larcker criterion. The square root of the AVE for each sub-construct exceeded its correlations with other constructs, validating their distinctiveness. Knowledge of Allah ($\sqrt{\text{AVE}} = 0.744$), while moderately correlated with Knowledge of the World (0.638) and Knowledge of the Hereafter (0.528), maintained its discriminant integrity, highlighting its unique role in fostering divine awareness. Knowledge of the World ($\sqrt{\text{AVE}} = 0.695$) showed acceptable differentiation despite its theoretical closeness to other knowledge areas. Similarly, Knowledge of the Hereafter ($\sqrt{\text{AVE}} = 0.759$) remained distinct, affirming its specific eschatological focus in the context of Muslim well-being. Lastly, Knowledge of Self ($\sqrt{\text{AVE}} = 0.714$) demonstrated the lowest correlation with other constructs, reinforcing its unique contribution to self-awareness and spiritual introspection. Collectively, these findings validate that each dimension of religious knowledge offers a separate yet complementary contribution to understanding holistic well-being, in line with Islamic philosophical thought.

SOCIAL RELATIONSHIP

With a diagonal value of 0.708, the *Social Relationship* construct also demonstrates discriminant validity. Its moderate correlations with constructs like Individual Happiness (0.674) and Knowledge of the Hereafter (0.604) show the interconnectivity of communal life and religious understanding, but the value confirms its empirical distinction.

SOUL PURIFICATION

Finally, the construct *Soul Purification* records a square root AVE of 0.719. This is higher than its correlations with all other constructs, including Individual Happiness (0.717) and Knowledge of the Hereafter (0.694). The data validate the idea that internal spiritual cleansing, while related to well-being and knowledge, operates as a distinct driver of religious and psychological health.

TABLE 3. Fornell and Larcker

Construct	Y1	Y2	Y3	Y4	Y5	Y6	Y7	Y8
Happiness (Y1)	0.739							
Personal Growth (Y2)	0.723	0.795						
Knowledge of World (Y3)	0.567	0.622	0.695					
Knowledge of Allah (Y3)	0.463	0.57	0.638	0.744				
Knowledge of Hereafter (Y4)	0.651	0.642	0.644	0.528	0.759			
Knowledge of Self (Y5)	0.325	0.323	0.385	0.424	0.283	0.714		
Social Relationship (Y6)	0.565	0.674	0.565	0.523	0.604	0.266	0.708	
Soul Purification (Y7)	0.645	0.717	0.563	0.488	0.694	0.254	0.651	0.719

The findings of this study confirm that all constructs demonstrated strong reliability, validity, and empirical distinctiveness, while also being conceptually interconnected. These results strengthen the theoretical proposition that religious practices and understanding are associated with enhanced Muslim well-being (Abdul Razak et al., 2023). The use of the Fornell-Larcker criterion further substantiates the discriminant validity of the constructs, especially within the multi-dimensional framework of religious knowledge (Ab Hamid et al., 2021). Overall, the results support the robustness of the measurement model and affirm the theoretical proposition that religious practices and understanding significantly contribute to Muslim well-being.

The findings indicating a strong relationship between religious knowledge and well-being align consistently with prior research emphasizing the role of religious literacy and understanding in fostering psychological health. Studies suggest that a deeper comprehension of religious tenets, such as the Islamic worldview of happiness encompassing both worldly and otherworldly aspects, provides individuals with a robust framework for meaning and purpose, which are critical components of well-being (Che Rahimi et al., 2021; Muhamad Razi et al., 2022). This intellectual and spiritual clarity can lead to greater acceptance of divine will and a more positive outlook on life, even amidst adversity, thereby contributing to enhanced mental and emotional stability.

The study's confirmation of the significant role of soul purification (religious practice) in promoting well-being is strongly supported by a substantial body of existing literature. Research consistently demonstrates that engagement in spiritual meditative practices (SMPs) such as prayer (*Salat*), Quran recitation, and remembrance of God (*Dhikr*) can lead to reduced stress, anxiety, and depression, while fostering emotional regulation and inner peace (Isdianto et al., 2025; Hasin et al., 2024). These practices, by facilitating a deeper connection with the divine and offering structured coping mechanisms, are widely recognized for their therapeutic benefits and their ability to cultivate a profound sense of tranquility and contentment, directly contributing to an individual's overall happiness and psychological well-being.

The positive association found between social relationships, particularly those reinforced through religious gatherings and communal activities, and enhanced well-being is in strong agreement with previous studies. Religious communities, such as mosques, are well-documented as vital sources of social support, fostering a sense of belonging and reducing feelings of isolation (Wuthnow, 2022; Badran et al., 2025). This communal fabric provides emotional encouragement and practical assistance, acting as a crucial buffer against life's stressors and contributing to improved mental health outcomes. The study's findings underscore the universal importance of social capital, uniquely strengthened within religious contexts, for individual and collective flourishing.

The results indicating that personal growth, driven by self-reflection and religious engagement, contributes to emotional resilience and psychological well-being are consistent with prior research on spiritual growth and self-development. Concepts like tazkiyat al-nafs (soul purification) in Islamic tradition emphasize a continuous journey of self-improvement, introspection, and the cultivation of virtuous qualities (Irpan et al., 2024; Syafii et al., 2025). Importantly, these associations should be interpreted cautiously as correlations rather than causal relationships, given the cross-sectional design and reliance on self-reported data. Policy recommendations should therefore be framed as potential directions rather than prescriptive conclusions (Bauhoff, 2024). This process, which involves examining one's actions and striving for spiritual excellence, has been shown to enhance self-awareness, purpose, and the ability to navigate challenges effectively, leading to improved mental well-being and a more fulfilling life (Afita et al., 2023).

CONCLUSION

This study underscores the critical role of religious practices in enhancing Muslim well-being, with particular emphasis on religious knowledge, soul purification, social relationships, and personal growth. Guided by al-Ghazali's paradigm of happiness and validated through a robust quantitative methodology, the findings affirm that well-being in the Islamic context is not merely psychological or material but deeply rooted in spiritual consciousness and ethical living. Each component studied was found to contribute significantly and independently to the overall sense of happiness and resilience among Muslims.

Nevertheless, the findings suggest practical implications. Community-based programs that strengthen religious literacy, promote spiritual practices, and encourage social connectedness may be explored as part of culturally grounded interventions. Small-scale pilots in schools, mosques, and community centers could be implemented and rigorously evaluated before scaling up. This aligns with the MADANI government's emphasis on compassion (*ihsan*), inclusivity, and well-being (Khan, 2021). For future research, longitudinal studies would provide stronger evidence of directionality and temporal effects, while qualitative and mixed-method approaches could capture the richness of lived experiences in diverse cultural contexts.

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Ateerah Abdul Razak
Faculty of Language Studies and Human Development
University of Malaysia Kelantan, Malaysia
Email: ateerah@umk.edu.my