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Students' Rational Interpretation Of Social Morality At An Islamic Senior High School: Perspectives From Fazlur Rahman And Émile Durkheim

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Abstract

This study is grounded in the importance of examining students' social morality not merely as obedience to religious teachings and school rules, but as a rational process of meaning -making shaped by the interaction between moral awareness, social experience, and the institutional structure of the madrasa. This study aims to analyze students' rational interpretation of social morality at State Islamic Senior High School (MAN) Salatiga through the perspectives of Fazlur Rahman and Emile Durkheim. The research employed a qualitative descriptive-analytical approach. Data were collected through in- depth interviews, observation, and documentation of school regulations, religious activities, and moral development programs. The data were analyzed through data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing, while data validity was strengthened through source and technique triangulation. The findings reveal that students' rational interpretation of social morality is constructed through six main aspects: moral awareness, regulatory pressure, social habituation, peer influence, teacher authority, and contextual religious understanding. These findings affirm that students' social morality is a moral construction shaped religiously, socially, and institutionally within madrasa life.

Keywords: Social Morals, Émile Durkheim, Fazlur Rahman, Moral Education, Rational Meaning.

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INTRODUCTION

Secondary school education plays a strategic role in shaping individuals who are not only academically competent but also morally and socially mature (Muhalli et al., 2026). In school life, students face various ethical demands, such as respecting teachers, appreciating peers, being honest, being responsible, obeying rules, cooperating, and avoiding actions that harm others (Aningsih et al., 2022; Wangi et al., 2025). These values in Islamic education can be understood as part of social morality, namely moral behavior that regulates human relationships with others in communal life (Maulidah, 2022). However, the important issue that arises is not simply whether students know social moral values, but rather how they understand, reason about, and justify those values.

Studies on moral education show that schools are social spaces that significantly influence the formation of student behavior (Jamil et al., 2023). Research on school climate, disciplinary structures, bullying, and moral disengagement shows that student aggressive behavior is related to the way schools establish rules, teacher-student relationships, and social norms among students (Ivaniushina & Alexandrov, 2022). These findings reinforce the view that social morality cannot be understood solely as an individual issue, but also as a result of the interaction between students' moral awareness and the school's social environment (Ivaniushina & Alexandrov, 2022). Thus, moral education needs to be viewed more broadly, not only as providing advice or normative teaching, but also as a process of forming moral reasoning in students' real lives (Syakir et al., 2025).

In the context of Islamic religious education, morality is often taught through evidence, teacher advice, habituation, and school rules (Putri et al., 2026). This approach is important because it provides a normative basis for students to distinguish between good and bad behavior. However, an approach that overemphasizes obedience can leave problems if students only perform good behavior out of fear of punishment, desire for praise, or simply follow custom (Husain et al., 2025). Recent research on religious character education shows that religious education can help shape students' morals, discipline, and responsibility, but its effectiveness still requires the ongoing involvement of the school, family, and social environment (Fajri & Kamilah, 2025; Kholifah & Nugraha, 2026). This means that moral education does not stop at conveying values, but needs to be directed at developing students' awareness and rational understanding (Wahyuni, 2021).

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This is where Fazlur Rahman's thoughts become relevant. Rahman emphasizes the importance of understanding Islamic teachings morally, historically, and contextually (Nurjanah et al., 2025). In *Islam and Modernity,* Rahman offers the idea of transforming Islamic intellectual traditions, including in the fields of ethics, theology, philosophy, and Islamic law (Hafith et al., 2025; Rahman, 1965). For this study, Rahman's thoughts provide the basis that religious values should not be understood only as textual commands, but need to be captured by their moral messages and connected to the reality of human life (Putra et al., 2025). With this perspective, students' social morals can be studied as a process of meaning about whether students understand the values of respect, honesty, care, discipline, and responsibility as formal obligations, or as values that are reasonable and relevant to life together at school.

On the other hand, Émile Durkheim's thought provided a sociological foundation for understanding schools as institutions that shape collective morality (Almuarif et al., 2024). Durkheim viewed moral education as a process of developing discipline, social group attachment, and moral autonomy (Durkheim, 1973). In this view, students do not develop morality separately from their social environment. They learn to understand rules, obligations, and responsibilities through relationships with teachers, peers, school culture, and the prevailing reward and sanction system (Darmawan & Wijayanti, 2026; Durkheim, 1973; Ritonga et al., 2026). Therefore, students' understanding of social morality can be understood as the result of the intersection of religious values, social experiences, and the school's moral structure.

However, there are differing emphases in the study of moral education. Some approaches emphasize the importance of discipline, rules, and habituation as the basis for students' moral formation (Virgianti, 2023). This view is close to Durkheim's perspective, which views morality as an individual's attachment to collective life (Rosita et al., 2023). However, other approaches emphasize the importance of autonomy, awareness, and critical reasoning so that students do not simply obey mechanically. In fact, studies of Durkheim also show criticism that his theory tends to view children as passive recipients of social norms and overemphasizes obedience and punishment (Bulgaru, 2013; Peterson, 1974). This distinction is important because research on students' social morality needs to balance two aspects: moral formation through the social environment and students' ability to understand values rationally (Peterson, 1974) .

Previous studies on moral education, character education, and religious education generally discuss strategies for moral development, the role of teachers, school culture, and the prevention of deviant behavior such as bullying (Afroo et al., 2025; Darwin et al., 2024; Nafsiyah & Wardan, 2024). Research on moral education and bullying by Darwin et al. (2024), for example,

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emphasizes that a systematic and collaborative approach between schools, families, and communities is necessary to reduce negative student behavior. However, there is still a research area that has not been widely explored, namely how students themselves interpret social morals rationally. In other words, it is not yet sufficiently known whether students practice social morals due to moral awareness, regulatory pressure, social customs, peer influence, teacher authority, or contextual religious understanding.

This gap forms the crucial basis for this research. While previous studies have focused more on moral development or the effectiveness of character education, this study attempts to delve deeper into students' rational interpretations of social morality. Rational interpretation, in this study, refers to how students explain the reasons, benefits, relevance, and moral considerations behind their social behavior at school. With this focus, this research not only assesses whether students have good morals but also examines how students understand why certain behaviors are considered good, important, and worthy.

The research was conducted at the State Islamic Senior High School (MAN) in Salatiga because it represents a secondary educational institution with Islamic characteristics that is relevant to the study of students' social morals. In the context of this research, the madrasah is understood not merely as a place for formal learning, but as a space for moral formation where religious values, discipline, teacher role models, and relationships between students are present in everyday life. This situation allows the researcher to examine social morals not merely as a normative concept, but as a social experience lived, understood, and interpreted by students.

The selection of MAN Salatiga was also based on the research need to obtain an empirical context that would allow for analysis of the relationship between students' moral awareness and the school's social structure. Through the madrasah environment, researchers can examine how students justify their respect for teachers, respect for peers, adherence to rules, and social responsibility within school life. Therefore, MAN Salatiga is seen as an appropriate location to examine whether students' social morality is formed through rational understanding, institutional habituation, social pressure, or a combination of these factors.

Based on the description, this research is directed to answer several questions about how students interpret social morals towards teachers, peers, and school rules, then what rational reasons students use in explaining social moral behavior in the school environment, how religious values and the school's social environment shape students' rational interpretation of social morals and how Fazlur Rahman and Émile Durkheim’s thought can be used to read the process of meaning making.

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The aim of this study is to analyze students' rational interpretation of social morals in secondary schools using the perspectives of Fazlur Rahman and Émile. Durkheim. Conceptually, this study argues that students' social morality cannot be understood simply as adherence to religious teachings or school rules, but rather as the result of moral reasoning formed through the interaction between religious values, social experiences, and the moral structure of the school. Thus, the main contribution of this study is to offer a more integrative reading of moral education, namely by connecting Fazlur Rahman's religious-contextual dimension with Émile's socio-institutional dimension. Durkheim to understand how students reason about moral values in everyday school life.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Fazlur Rahman's Double Movement Theory

Fazlur Rahman's Double Movement Theory explains that Islamic teachings should be understood not only from their textual meaning but also from the moral objectives underlying the teachings and their relevance to contemporary social realities (Rahman, 1965; Zaprulkhan, 2017). The first movement involves understanding the historical context and moral values behind a teaching, while the second movement applies these general moral principles to current situations. Through this approach, religious values are interpreted as dynamic moral guidance rather than merely formal obligations (Putra et al., 2025; Rahim, 2022).

In this study, Rahman's perspective is used to analyze how students interpret Islamic moral values in social relationships at school. The theory helps explain whether students understand values such as respect, honesty, responsibility, and empathy only as religious commands or as moral principles that have social benefits in everyday life (Nurjanah et al., 2025). Thus, students' social morality is examined as a process of meaning-making in which religious teachings are connected with students' experiences and social interactions within the madrasah environment (Pramesti et al., 2025).

Émile Durkheim's Theory of Moral Education

Émile Durkheim views morality as a social phenomenon formed through discipline, attachment to social groups, and moral autonomy (Durkheim, 1973). According to Durkheim, educational institutions function as moral environments because they introduce individuals to rules, collective values, and social responsibilities (Arif, 2020). Through school culture, teacher authority, discipline practices, and social interactions, students gradually learn to understand their

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obligations toward others and the community (Virgianti, 2023).

In this research, Durkheim's theory is used to understand how school regulations, social habits, peer relationships, and teacher roles contribute to students' moral formation. Rules and sanctions are not viewed only as mechanisms of control but also as instruments that can develop awareness when students understand their social purposes (Peterson, 1974). Therefore, students' morality is understood as a process that develops from external compliance toward conscious moral understanding through participation in collective life (Darmawan & Wijayanti, 2026).

RESEARCH METHODS

This This study employed a qualitative descriptive design to examine students' rational interpretations of social morality. This design was selected because the study focused on how students understand and justify moral behaviour rather than on numerical measurements or behavioural levels. The study was conducted at the State Islamic Senior High School (MAN) in Salatiga, an Islamic secondary education institution that provides a relevant context for examining the relationships among religious values, school regulations, social interactions, and students' moral development. The participants consisted of eight students as primary informants and one of Islamic Religious Education teachers, homeroom teachers, and school officials as supporting informants. They were selected through purposive sampling based on their involvement in students' learning and moral-development activities.

Data were collected through in-depth interviews, observations of students' social interactions at school, and documentation concerning school discipline, religious activities, and moral-development programmes. The data were analysed through data reduction, coding and categorisation, data display, and conclusion drawing. The analysis focused on how students justified respect for teachers and peers, compliance with school rules, honesty, responsibility, and concern for the school's social environment. Fazlur Rahman's perspective was used to interpret the religious-contextual dimension, particularly how religious teachings were understood as moral messages relevant to students' lives. Meanwhile, Émile Durkheim's perspective was used to examine the socio-institutional roles of school regulations, discipline, madrasah culture, teacher authority, and social relationships in shaping students' moral awareness. The credibility of the findings was strengthened through source and technique triangulation by comparing data from different informants, observations, and relevant documents. Institutional permission was obtained from the school, and participants' identities were protected through the use of anonymous codes.

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RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of this study indicate that students' rational understanding of social morality is not formed from a single source, but through the intersection of moral awareness, school rules, social customs, peer influence, teacher authority, and contextual religious understanding. These six aspects expand on the initial research findings, which grouped the findings into moral awareness, rule pressure, social customs, peer influence, teacher authority, and contextual religious understanding.

Table 1. Synthesis of Findings on Students' Rational Interpretation of Social Morality

ASPECT	KEY FINDINGS	EMPIRICAL INDICATORS	DIRECTION OF DISCUSSION
Moral awareness	Students begin to understand social morals as behavior that arises from self-awareness.	Good behavior is still considered necessary even if there is no teacher supervision.	Demonstrates a shift from external compliance to moral awareness and self-control.
Regulatory pressure	School rules are understood as a means of maintaining order and forming character.	Students consider rules important for creating a conducive, peaceful atmosphere and fostering positive behavior.	Rules function as the moral structure of the school, but they need to be explained so that they do not simply engender formal compliance.
Social customs	Social morals are formed through madrasa routines and culture.	Congregational prayer, discipline, ceremonies, class activities, and daily interactions are considered to shape character.	Madrasahs act as collective moral spaces that shape morals through repeated social practices.
Peer influence	Peers influence the formation and consistency of students' morals.	Students show solidarity, empathy, and courage to reprimand actions that harm friends.	Peer groups can be positive moral agents, but they also have the potential to weaken

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ASPECT	KEY FINDINGS	EMPIRICAL INDICATORS	DIRECTION OF DISCUSSION
			morals if they bring negative trends.
Teacher authority	Teachers are understood as sources of knowledge, moral guides, and role models.	Students respect teachers because of the blessing of knowledge and awareness as students, not only because of formal authority.	The teacher's authority is moral and religious, not merely structural.
Contextual understanding of religion	Religious values are understood to have moral reasons and social benefits.	Students associate Islamic teachings with honesty, responsibility, empathy, respect, and the supervision of Allah.	Shows the relevance of Fazlur Rahman that religious teachings need to be understood through moral messages and the context of life.

Based on Table 1, the social morals of students at MAN Salatiga can be understood not only as a result of religious instruction in the classroom, but also as a result of the social life of the madrasah. The data shows that students are not simply aware of good behavior but are beginning to justify why such behavior is important for themselves, others, and their shared life at school.

Students' Moral Awareness in Understanding Social Morals

The research results show that students understand social ethics as good manners and behavior when interacting with the school community. One student stated:

> *"In my opinion, social morals in the school environment are an attitude or etiquette in behaving well and politely which is applied in interacting with all school residents, such as teachers, friends, security guards, and others."*

This quote demonstrates that social ethics are understood as values that govern relationships with all members of the school community. Students don't limit their ethics to relationships with teachers or friends, but also with other members of the school community. This demonstrates that students are beginning to understand school as a social space that demands

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shared ethics.

A more reflective understanding is seen in the answers of other students who interpret social morals as unwritten rules:

> *"Social etiquette at school is like an unwritten 'rule of the game' to ensure we all feel comfortable when studying or working in groups. It's not about obeying teachers for fear of punishment, but rather about how we treat each other, both students and teachers."*

This quote demonstrates the development of moral reasoning. Students understand social etiquette not only as an obligation, but also as a foundation for comfort and order in communal life. The sentence "it's not about obeying the teacher for fear of punishment" shows that students are beginning to distinguish between external obedience and moral awareness.

From Fazlur Rahman's perspective, this interpretation demonstrates that moral values do not cease to be formal norms, but are understood as principles with social goals (Putra et al., 2025; Rahim, 2022). Teachings about manners, respect, honesty, and caring are not understood merely as commands, but as values that maintain interpersonal relationships (Pramesti et al., 2025). This is in line with Rahman's idea that Islamic teachings need to be understood through their moral messages and linked to the realities of human life (Zaprulkhan, 2017).

Meanwhile, from Émile's Durkheim perspective that students' moral awareness does not emerge in a vacuum. Morality is formed through collective life, discipline, and individual attachment to social groups (Arif, 2020; Virgianti, 2023). MAN Salatiga's findings show that students are beginning to recognize the relationship between personal behavior and collective well-being. Social morality is understood as a way to maintain a peaceful, orderly, and conducive life together (Virgianti, 2023).

When compared to research on religious character education in secondary schools, these findings are similar to those that suggest a religious school culture can shape students' moral awareness. However, the uniqueness of MAN Salatiga's findings lies in students' ability to provide rational reasons for social morality. While some character education studies generally emphasize school programs, habitual worship, or teacher role models, this study demonstrates how students themselves reason about these values as social needs (Darmawan & Wijayanti, 2026; Fajri & Kamilah, 2025; Jamil et al., 2023; Kholifah & Nugraha, 2026). Thus, students are not only objects of moral development but also subjects capable of explaining the moral meaning of good behavior.

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The Pressure of School Rules and the Shift from Compliance to Understanding

The research results show that students understand school rules as a means of maintaining order and shaping behavior. One student explained that schools need to have rules:

"to create a conducive and peaceful school environment."

Another student stated that rules help shape positive behavior:

"because it can make students accustomed to positive things and can shape students' character."

This quote demonstrates that rules are not merely understood as prohibitions, but as a means of fostering habits. Students view rules as a means of creating an orderly environment and building character. However, the reasons for obeying rules vary. Some students state they obey rules "because they understand the benefits," while others still see the importance of sanctions to prevent rules from being taken lightly:

"Students who violate the rules should receive sanctions so that they do not trivialize the applicable rules."

These findings indicate that student compliance falls on a spectrum. Some students have complied with rules because they understand their benefits, while others still associate rules with sanctions. Thus, school rules serve as an initial stage in moral formation, but they do not necessarily directly lead to moral awareness.

From Durkheim's perspective, rules and sanctions are part of moral education because they foster discipline and commitment to collective life. Schools serve to teach students that individual behavior has social consequences (Virgianti, 2023). However, Durkheim also emphasized that moral education should not stop at external discipline; its ultimate goal is the formation of moral autonomy (Arif, 2020). The findings from MAN Salatiga demonstrate this process. Students are no longer simply afraid of sanctions but are beginning to understand the role of rules in communal life.

When compared with similar research on discipline and character development in secondary schools, these findings reinforce the view that school rules are a crucial instrument in shaping behavior. However, the MAN Salatiga study reveals a more complex nuance. Rules do not always operate as pressure to subdue students, but can serve as a bridge to moral understanding when accompanied by habituation and explanation of their meaning. This is a strength of the MAN

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Salatiga findings: students are not simply presented as those who obey or violate, but as subjects who can understand the social benefits of rules.

However, these findings also reveal an anomaly that warrants careful attention. On the one hand, students were able to explain that rules foster peace and character. On the other hand, the existence of sanctions was still considered essential to prevent students from disregarding the rules. This indicates that moral awareness has not completely replaced external control. Moral development at MAN Salatiga is still in the transition process from rule-based compliance to understanding-based awareness.

Madrasah Social and Cultural Customs as a Form of Morals

The research results show that students perceive the madrasah environment as an important factor in shaping their behavior. One student stated:

"A good environment will make us good individuals, because environmental influences can easily lead us astray."

This quote demonstrates that students are aware of the influence of their social environment on them. Morality is not merely understood as a personal matter, but as something influenced by habits and the surrounding environment. Students also stated that teachers and school rules shape character:

"because the teachers and school rules that students usually follow will shape the character of the students."

School activities such as congregational prayer, discipline training, ceremonies, and classroom activities are also considered to help shape morals. One student stated:

"Because if these activities are carried out with discipline by students, they can build character in the students."

These findings demonstrate that social morals are formed through repeated routines. In this context, madrasas serve not only as a place to deliver learning materials but also as a space for moral development. Values of discipline, responsibility, and togetherness are formed through daily social practices.

From Durkheim's perspective, these findings are highly relevant. Schools are moral institutions that shape individuals through discipline, group attachment, and collective habits

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(Arif, 2020; Virgianti, 2023). Madrasah routines such as congregational prayer, ceremonies, school duty, and the practice of discipline serve as social mechanisms that instill moral values. Morality is not only taught but also experienced through students' involvement in collective life (Virgianti, 2023).

When compared with research on religious character education in other secondary education institutions, these findings align with studies that emphasize the importance of school culture, habitual worship, and role models in character formation. However, MAN Salatiga's findings place a particular emphasis on students' awareness of environmental influences. Students not only follow routines but also recognize that a positive environment can shape good personalities. This means that the habituation at MAN Salatiga is not entirely mechanical; some students are beginning to understand the reasons behind these habits.

However, habituation still carries risks if not accompanied by reflection. Religious activities and discipline can become mere formal routines. This is where Fazlur Rahman's perspective becomes crucial. Religious habituation needs to be linked to its moral message (Fauzi & Winarto, 2025). Congregational prayer, for example, should not be understood merely as a ritual obligation, but as an exercise in discipline, togetherness, and self-control. In this way, social habituation in madrasas can transform into a deeper moral awareness.

The Influence of Peers on the Formation and Consistency of Morals

The research results show that peers influence students' behavior. When asked whether peers influence students' attitudes, one informant answered briefly:

"Yes".

These answers should be read in conjunction with other data showing that peers are an important part of students' social lives. Students understand that respecting friends is necessary:

"to create a comfortable and peaceful environment, and to maintain good relations between friends."

Students also explain how to respect friends:

"respecting their opinions even if they differ from ours, not forcing our will on friends, respecting the differences and uniqueness of friends."

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This quote demonstrates that good manners toward peers extend beyond politeness and respect for differences. Students are beginning to understand the importance of not imposing their will and appreciating their peers' uniqueness. This demonstrates a relatively reflective social awareness. The most prominent aspect of the data is students' sensitivity to teasing, exclusion, and unfair treatment. One student stated:

"Yes. In my opinion, this should not be considered normal or just a joke, because it does not demonstrate humane treatment."

This quote demonstrates that students don't normalize verbal bullying or exclusion as mere banter. They view it as an act that goes against human values. When they witness a friend engaging in behavior that harms others, they also state:

"I reprimanded him, because that is not good behavior."

From Durkheim's perspective, peers are a social group that can shape collective norms (Virgianti, 2023). Friendship groups can strengthen morals by fostering a culture of mutual respect, but they can also weaken morals if negative behavior is considered normal (Arif, 2020). MAN Salatiga's findings demonstrate both possibilities. Students are aware of the influence of their peers but also demonstrate the ability to assess and reprimand their peers for their misbehavior.

When compared with research on school climate, moral disengagement, and bullying in secondary education, these findings demonstrate a commonality: peer relationships significantly influence students' moral behavior. However, MAN Salatiga's uniqueness is evident in the emergence of moral language from the students themselves. Students not only describe bullying as a violation of the rules, but also refer to it as an act that "does not demonstrate humane treatment." This demonstrates a strong moral sensitivity to the dignity of their peers.

This uniqueness is important because in many studies on bullying, students are often positioned as perpetrators, victims, or witnesses who need guidance from the school. In this study, students emerge as moral subjects capable of making ethical judgments about the social actions around them. Thus, moral education at MAN Salatiga not only fosters obedience but also has the potential to develop moral courage to reject actions that harm others.

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The Teacher's Authority as a Role Model and Moral Guide

The research results show that teachers play a crucial role in shaping students' social morals. Students respect teachers not only because they hold a position or formal authority, but also because they are understood as sources of knowledge and mentors. One student stated:

> *"Students must respect their teachers so that they can receive blessings of knowledge from their teachers and so that a good relationship can be established between students and teachers."*

This statement demonstrates two dimensions to respect for teachers. First, the religious dimension, namely the belief in the blessings of knowledge. Second, the social dimension, namely the importance of a good relationship between students and teachers. This understanding is reinforced by the following quote:

> *"respecting teachers is not merely because the teacher has authority, but respecting teachers is a student's awareness and morals towards their teacher."*

This quote is a significant finding because it demonstrates that students don't interpret respect for teachers as merely structural obedience. Respect for teachers is understood as a student's moral awareness. This form of respect is concretely manifested in school life:

> *"greeting and saying hello when passing the teacher, paying attention when the teacher is explaining the lesson, using polite language when speaking to the teacher, etc."*

Durkheim's perspective, teachers represent the school's moral authority. Teachers not only impart knowledge but also convey collective values that they wish to pass on to students (Virgianti, 2023). However, findings at MAN Salatiga show that teachers' authority is effective not only because of their structural position, but also because students interpret it morally and religiously. Thus, teacher authority at MAN Salatiga is more accurately understood as moral authority, rather than merely administrative authority.

The Aqidah Akhlak teacher also emphasized that students' moral development is assessed through real behavior:

> *"I assess them through direct, daily observations at school, not just paper test scores. I pay attention to how they talk to teachers, how they treat their classmates, whether they're willing to share, and how responsible they are during group work. This is where we see real moral development."*

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This quote demonstrates that teachers don't judge morality solely on a student's ability to understand theory. Morality is seen in how students speak, treat friends, share, and act responsibly. This aligns with research on moral development in other madrasas, which emphasizes teacher role models, habituation, and behavioral supervision as crucial aspects of character formation.

However, MAN Salatiga's findings are particularly compelling because they examine the teacher-student relationship not only from the perspective of teacher strategies but also from the perspective of student understanding. Students are not only "guided" by teachers, but also give meaning to the teacher's position as a moral guide and source of knowledge. Thus, this study demonstrates the reciprocal relationship between teacher authority and student awareness.

Contextual Understanding of Religion from Fazlur Rahman's Perspective

The research results show that students understand the close relationship between Islamic teachings and social morality. One student stated:

"Both have a close relationship because Islam teaches good morals as human beings."

This statement suggests that religion is understood as a moral basis for social behavior. However, a stronger finding emerged when students explained that religious values extend beyond commands and prohibitions:

"not only in the form of commands and prohibitions but also has reasons and benefits for social life."

This quote is significant because it demonstrates that students are beginning to understand religion rationally and contextually. Religious values are not merely accepted as doctrine, but are understood to have social rationale and benefits. This is the point most closely aligned with Fazlur Rahman's thinking. In Rahman's framework, Islamic teachings must be understood through their moral messages and then connected to the realities of human life. MAN Salatiga's findings indicate that this process is not solely carried out by teachers but is beginning to emerge in students' thinking.

The Aqidah Akhlak teacher also uses a contextual approach in learning. The teacher states:

"I usually explain morals through the realities of teenagers' daily lives. In 11th grade, I often use concrete examples, such as how they interact on social media, the importance of respecting differences of opinion with friends, and caring for others in need. So, social

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morals are how to maintain good relationships with others."

The teacher also explains the main values emphasized in learning:
"The values most frequently emphasized are tasamuh (compassion), ta'awun (compassion), musawah (equality), and responsibility. These values are central to social life."

In addition, the teacher connects moral material with real cases:
"I connect it by bringing case studies or current events from the school environment or social media into the classroom. For example, when discussing the dangers of slander or backbiting, I relate it to the phenomenon of spreading rumors (gossip) or leaving negative comments in the class WhatsApp group."

These findings align with studies of contextual religious learning in secondary education institutions, which emphasize the importance of connecting religious values to students' realities. However, the MAN Salatiga study uniquely demonstrates that contextualization is evident not only in teacher strategies but also in how students understand morality as a value with social benefits. This distinguishes MAN Salatiga's findings from studies that focus solely on teacher learning methods.

The teacher also emphasized that religious learning does not stop at memorizing the text or getting exam scores:

"Yes, of course. In class, I always emphasize that studying religion isn't just about memorizing religious texts or getting good grades on exams. The main goal is for children to understand the moral messages and then put them into practice. For example, prayer is meant to prevent us from doing evil, and fasting trains us to develop empathy and honesty."

This quote demonstrates that moral learning is directed at understanding moral messages. Thus, the teaching of Akidah Akhlak at MAN Salatiga closely aligns with Rahman's idea of the importance of grasping the moral purpose of Islamic teachings. Religious values are not simply taught as normative material but need to be read as moral guidelines relevant to students' lives (Putra et al., 2025).

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When compared with research on double Fazlur Rahman's movement in learning the Qur'an and Hadith at other Islamic Senior High Schools (Madrasah Aliyah), MAN Salatiga's findings are closely related to the contextualization of values. However, this research does not focus on constructing a learning model for religious texts, but rather on students' rational interpretation of social morals. Thus, MAN Salatiga's research contribution lies in reading students' experiences: how they grasp religious values, provide moral reasons, and connect them to social relations at school.

The Challenge of Moral Consistency: The Gap between Knowledge and Practice

Although students demonstrated a relatively good understanding of morality, teacher interviews revealed that the main challenge lies in consistency of practice. The teacher stated:

> *"I think it's pretty good, around 70-80%. Eleventh-grade students actually already know what's right and wrong according to religion. They understand that cheating or being hostile towards friends is a sin and not good. The challenge is simply how consistently they practice it, as sometimes they're still easily swayed by the flow of their friends' social life."*

This quote demonstrates the gap between moral knowledge and moral action. Students essentially know that behaviors like cheating, being hostile toward friends, or being rude are wrong. However, this knowledge doesn't always guarantee consistent behavior. The influence of atmosphere, peers, social trends, and social media can prevent students from always upholding their learned values.

These findings reveal an interesting anomaly at MAN Salatiga. On the one hand, students are able to provide quite reflective moral reasoning. For example, one student stated:

> *"Because if we are not honest, we can disappoint our friends or teachers, and we can lose other people's trust in us."*

Students also gave rational reasons for the prohibition of cheating:

> *"Because doing the questions is an activity to measure a student's ability, so it's best not to cheat."*

On the other hand, teachers continue to see consistency in practice as a challenge. This means that students do not lack moral knowledge, but rather require a social environment that helps them maintain moral behavior. The dialogue between Fazlur Rahman and Durkheim

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provides a more comprehensive explanation of this issue. Rahman emphasizes the need for a rational and contextual understanding of religious morality, while Durkheim emphasizes the importance of social structure, customs, and collective discipline (Putra et al., 2025; Virgianti, 2023). MAN Salatiga's findings suggest that the two must go hand in hand.

When compared with research on religious character education in other secondary schools, the gap between knowledge and practice also frequently arises. Many studies show that students can understand religious values, but their practice depends on teacher role models, family support, school culture, and peer influence (Elmontadzery et al., 2024; Lubis et al., 2023). The findings from MAN Salatiga reinforce this notion but also add evidence that students do possess the reflective capacity to reason morally. The challenge is not only to instill values, but also to create a social ecosystem that allows for consistent implementation of these values.

Thus, moral development at MAN Salatiga needs to move beyond moral lectures. It should encompass ethical dialogue, consistent practice, teacher role models, reinforcement of positive peer culture, and support against the influence of social media. Moral education is not simply about instilling truth in students; it must also help them adhere to that truth amidst social pressures.

CONCLUSION

Based on the overall findings, this study shows that students' rational understanding of social morality at MAN Salatiga is in the process of moving from obedience to moral awareness. In the initial stage, students learn about morality through rules, habits, and religious teachings. In the next stage, students begin to provide moral reasons for good behavior, such as respecting teachers because of the blessing of knowledge, not cheating because exams measure ability, respecting friends because they protect humanity, and obeying rules because they create a conducive atmosphere.

Theoretically, this finding shows that the perspectives of Fazlur Rahman and Émile Durkheim and Rahman complement each other. Rahman helps explain how students understand religious values as moral messages relevant to social life. Durkheim helps explain how schools, rules, teachers, peers, and madrasah culture shape students' morality through discipline and collective habituation. Thus, students' social morality can be explained not only as a result of religious understanding but also as a result of the madrasah's social environment.

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The contribution of this research, students are understood not only as recipients of norms, but as subjects capable of giving meaning to social morality. Moral education at MAN Salatiga demonstrates that the success of moral development depends not only on rules, habits, and religious lectures, but also on the school's ability to build spaces for dialogue, role models, and a social culture that enable students to understand and practice moral values in their daily lives.

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