

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MORAL EDUCATION UNDERSTANDING AND HONEST BEHAVIOR AMONG FIFTH-GRADE STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT

Character education is a primary objective of Indonesia's national education system, particularly in fostering students' moral values and integrity, including honesty. This study aimed to examine the relationship between students' understanding of moral education materials in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) and the honest behaviour of fifth-grade students at SDN Bekasi Jaya IX. The study employed a quantitative approach with a correlational research design. The population comprised all fifth-grade students, with 65 students selected through saturated sampling. Data were collected using questionnaires measuring students' understanding of moral education materials and honest behaviour. Moral education understanding was assessed through students' abilities to remember, understand, and apply moral values, while honest behaviour included telling the truth, refraining from cheating, admitting mistakes, respecting others' belongings, and taking responsibility for words and actions. Data were analysed using descriptive statistics, the Shapiro–Wilk normality test, Spearman's rank correlation, and the coefficient of determination. The findings revealed a positive and statistically significant relationship between moral education understanding and honest behaviour, with a Spearman correlation coefficient of 0.5966 and $p < 0.001$. The coefficient of determination was 35.59%. These findings indicate that higher moral education understanding was associated with higher honest behaviour among students, while not establishing a causal relationship between the variables.

Keywords: Character Education, Islamic Religious Education, Moral Education, Understanding, Honest behavior

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INTRODUCTION

Education is an essential process in shaping students' personalities and character. It not only functions to develop cognitive abilities but also to cultivate moral values and ethical principles that serve as the foundation of social life. According to (Undang-Undang Republik Indonesia, 2003) concerning the National Education System, Article 3, education aims to develop individuals who are faithful, pious, and possess noble character. Therefore, character education has become an integral part of the implementation of education in Indonesia (Fuadhah, 2024).

One of the subjects that plays a strategic role in character development is Islamic Religious Education (PAI). Islamic Religious Education is not only oriented toward students' mastery of religious knowledge but also emphasizes the introduction and internalization of moral values in daily life, such as responsibility, discipline, social awareness, and honesty (Hapsari et al., 2025). Through this learning process, students are introduced to Islamic values that may become one of the foundations for their moral understanding and behavior. However, the application of these values in daily life may also be influenced by factors beyond classroom learning.

Honesty is one of the most fundamental moral values in both individual and social life. In Islam, honesty (*ṣidq*) is regarded as an essential characteristic that every Muslim should possess because it reflects the quality of one's faith (Aldiansyah & Badrudin, 2025). However, various forms of dishonest behaviour, such as cheating on examinations, lying to teachers or parents, and avoiding responsibility for completing assignments, are still frequently found in school environments. Previous studies have shown that cheating remains one of the most common forms of academic dishonesty among students (Auliyah et al., 2023) (Agistiani et al., 2024) (Fitriani et al., 2024). However, students' honest behavior cannot be

understood solely from their knowledge of moral values, because the practice of honesty may also be shaped by social, environmental, and developmental factors.

Based on an interview conducted with the Islamic Religious Education teacher at SDN Bekasi Jaya IX on 11 June 2026, moral education for fifth-grade students is delivered continuously through various instructional methods, including lectures, storytelling, demonstrations, practical activities, and audiovisual media. The learning materials emphasize the development of good behaviour, politeness, tolerance, and honesty. According to the teacher, most students have understood the moral education materials and are able to apply them in their daily lives. However, several students still require further guidance in practicing honest behaviour. The teacher also explained that moral education contributes to the development of students' honesty through school habituation programs, Qur'an Reading and Writing (BTQ) activities, co-curricular programs, and collaboration among the school, families, and the surrounding community. These findings indicate the importance of examining the relationship between students' understanding of moral education materials in Islamic Religious Education and their honest behaviour.

Several previous studies have demonstrated that moral education and character education can contribute to the development of students' moral values and honest behavior. Research on elementary school character education has highlighted the importance of teacher modeling, habituation, school climate, classroom learning, and extracurricular activities in character development (Aningsih et al., 2022). Research specifically examining honesty among elementary school students has also identified the importance of deliberate educational practices in developing honest behavior (Korwatana & Khuvasanond, 2021). Furthermore, cross-cultural research has demonstrated a relationship between children's moral standards of honesty and their actual lie-telling behavior, while also showing that cultural context can influence this relationship

Several previous studies have demonstrated that Islamic Religious Education plays an important role in developing students' honesty. (Hidayat, 2024) found that Islamic Religious Education contributes to the development of honest character through the integration of religious values. Similarly, (Saharani, 2025) emphasized

the important role of Islamic Religious Education teachers in fostering honesty through role modelling and habituation. In addition, studies conducted by (Permata & Saputra, 2024) (Khoriyah, 2024) (Nurbela & Munawaroh, 2022) revealed that instructional strategies and teachers' exemplary behaviour significantly influence students' moral development.

Nevertheless, most previous studies have primarily focused on the roles of teachers, instructional strategies, or the implementation of character education in general. Nevertheless, previous studies have primarily examined the role of teachers, instructional strategies, role modeling, habituation, or character education programs in developing students' moral and honest behavior (Permata & Saputra, 2024). These studies provide important evidence regarding the broader relationship between Islamic Religious Education and character development. However, comparatively less attention has been given to students' understanding of moral education materials as a specific and measurable variable that can be examined in relation to honest behavior. Therefore, the present study does not assume that moral education understanding directly determines students' honesty. Instead, it examines whether students' measured understanding of moral education materials is statistically associated with their reported honest behavior.

Based on the above background, the novelty of this study lies in the specific empirical operationalization of students' understanding of moral education materials as a measurable variable and its examination in relation to honest behavior among elementary school students. This focus distinguishes the present study from previous studies that have mainly emphasized teachers' roles, instructional strategies, habituation, or character education programs. Therefore, this study aims to determine whether there is a statistically significant relationship between students' understanding of moral education materials in Islamic Religious Education and the honest behavior of fifth-grade students at SDN Bekasi Jaya IX.

METHOD

This study employed a quantitative approach using a correlational research design. The quantitative approach was used because the study aimed to measure students' understanding of moral education materials and their honest behavior using numerical data and statistical analysis (Aida et al., 2025). A correlational design was selected to examine the statistical relationship between the two variables without manipulating or intervening in the participants' learning conditions (Rangkuti & Albina, 2025). Because both variables were obtained from the same student respondents through questionnaire-based measures, the study also considered the possibility of common-method bias and socially desirable responding. These issues were addressed procedurally by administering the questionnaires individually, explaining that responses were confidential and would not affect students' academic grades, and instructing students to answer each item according to their actual experiences and understanding.

The population of this study consisted of all fifth-grade students at SDN Bekasi Jaya IX. The sampling technique employed was saturated sampling, in which all members of the population were included as research participants. A total of 65 fifth-grade students participated in the study. Saturated sampling was selected because the entire population was accessible and could be included as respondents. Therefore, the sample represented the fifth-grade student population at the research site.

The research instruments consisted of two questionnaires designed to measure the two variables examined in this study: students' understanding of moral education materials and honest behavior. The instruments were developed by the researchers from indicators relevant to each variable. The understanding instrument covered three cognitive indicators: remembering, understanding, and applying moral values. The honest behavior instrument covered five behavioral indicators: telling the truth, refraining from cheating, admitting mistakes, not taking other people's belongings without permission, and being responsible for one's words and actions. The items were written in language appropriate for fifth-grade students and were reviewed for their relevance to the intended indicators.

The instruments consisted of 10 items for the understanding of moral education materials variable and 10 items for the honest behavior variable. Item validity was evaluated using Pearson's product-moment correlation, and all 20 items met the validity criterion because their calculated correlation coefficients exceeded the critical value. Reliability testing produced coefficients of 0.80 for the understanding instrument and 0.82 for the honest behavior instrument, indicating acceptable internal consistency. These procedures were used to strengthen the measurement quality of both instruments before the instruments were used for the main data collection.

Data were collected using a four-point Likert scale consisting of Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D), and Strongly Disagree (SD). For favorable items, the scoring procedure assigned 4 points to Strongly Agree, 3 points to Agree, 2 points to Disagree, and 1 point to Strongly Disagree. For unfavorable items, the scoring was reversed, with 1 point assigned to Strongly Agree, 2 points to Agree, 3 points to Disagree, and 4 points to Strongly Disagree. The scores were then summed to obtain the total score for each variable. To reduce socially desirable responding, respondents were reminded that there were no right or wrong answers for the behavior-related statements and that their individual responses would be treated confidentially.

The collected data were analyzed using JASP statistical software. Descriptive statistics were first used to summarize the scores of the two variables, including the mean, standard deviation, minimum, and maximum values. The Shapiro–Wilk test was then conducted to assess the normality of the data distribution. Because the data were not normally distributed, Spearman's rank-order correlation was used to examine the statistical association between students measured understanding of moral education materials and their reported honest behavior. The magnitude of the correlation was interpreted using the criteria of Schober et al. (2018), in which coefficients of 0.40–0.69 are described as moderate associations. A 95% confidence interval for the observed correlation was also estimated using the Fisher z transformation as an approximate interval based on the reported correlation coefficient and sample size. The coefficient of determination (r^2) was calculated to describe

the proportion of variance statistically associated with the two variables. This value was not interpreted as evidence that students' understanding caused changes in their honest behavior.

In addition, supplementary interview information from the Islamic Religious Education teacher, parents, and local shopkeepers was used descriptively to contextualize the quantitative findings. The interview information was not included in the calculation of the correlation coefficient and was used only to help explain possible contextual factors related to students' honest behavior.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

RESULT

The study involved 65 fifth-grade students at SDN Bekasi Jaya IX. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize the scores obtained for students' understanding of moral education materials and their honest behavior. The results showed that the understanding of moral education materials had a mean score of 32.86 (SD = 2.968), with scores ranging from 24 to 38. Meanwhile, the honest behavior variable had a mean score of 31.94 (SD = 3.811), with scores ranging from 21 to 38. These descriptive statistics provide an overview of the scores obtained by the respondents. The mean scores are reported without assigning qualitative categories such as "good" or "high" because such classifications require explicitly defined score intervals or predetermined categorization criteria.

Table. 1
Descriptive Statistics

Variable	N	Mean	SD	Minimum	Maximum
Understanding of Moral Education Materials	65	32,86	2,968	24	38
Honest Behavior	65	31,94	3,811	21	38

Source: JASP

The Shapiro–Wilk test was conducted to assess the normality of the data distribution. The results showed a significance value of $p < 0.001$ for both the understanding of moral education materials variable and the honest behavior variable. These results indicate that the data were not normally distributed. Therefore, Spearman's rank-order correlation was used to examine the statistical association between the two variables.

Table. 2
 Spearman's Rank Correlation Analysis

Variables	Correlation Coefficient (r)	N	Approx. 95% CI	Significance (p)
Understanding of Moral Education Materials and Honest Behavior	0,5966	65	0.413 – 0.734	<0,001

Source: JASP

Spearman's rank-order correlation analysis was conducted to examine the statistical association between students' measured understanding of moral education materials and their reported honest behaviour. The analysis involved 65 fifth-grade students and produced a correlation coefficient of $r = 0.5966$ with a significance value of $p < 0.001$. The positive coefficient indicates that students with higher scores on the measured understanding variable tended to have higher scores on the reported honest behavior variable. Based on the interpretation framework proposed by Schober et al. (2018), a coefficient in the range of 0.40–0.69 represents a moderate association; therefore, $r = 0.5966$ was interpreted as a moderate positive association. The approximate 95% confidence interval for the observed coefficient was 0.413–0.734. The interval should be regarded as approximate because it was estimated from the reported coefficient and sample size rather than from a bootstrap procedure using the paired raw scores. The statistical significance ($p < 0.001$) indicates that the observed association is statistically significant at the

0.05 level. However, the result should be interpreted as evidence of association rather than a causal effect because the study employed a correlational design.

The findings indicate that the moral education materials taught in Islamic Religious Education are statistically associated with students reported honest behavior in the sample studied. This association is consistent with the view that moral understanding may constitute one relevant component of students' moral development, but it does not establish that understanding alone produces honest behavior. These findings are consistent with (Yohamintin & Widiansyah, 2024), who argued that elementary education plays a significant role in instilling character values that prepare students for social life. The results also support (Kamal, 2023), who emphasized that moral education serves as the foundation for students' character development. Furthermore, the findings reinforce previous studies by (Hidayat, 2024) and (Amaliah et al., 2024), which concluded that Islamic Religious Education contributes to the development of honest character through the internalization of religious values.

Table. 3 Coefficient of Determination

Variables	Correlation Coefficient (r)	Coefficient of Determination (r ²)	Contribution (%)
Understanding of Moral Education Materials toward Honest Behavior	0,5966	0,3559	35,59

Source: JASP

The coefficient of determination was calculated by squaring the Spearman correlation coefficient (r^2). Based on the correlation coefficient of 0.5966, the coefficient of determination was 0.3559, equivalent to 35.59%. In this correlational study, the value of 35.59% should be interpreted as the proportion of variance statistically associated with the relationship between the two measured variables. It should not be interpreted as evidence that students' understanding

of moral education materials caused or directly determined 35.59% of their honest behaviour. The remaining 64.41% represents variance that was not accounted for by the measured understanding variable and may be associated with other factors not examined in this study.

The teacher explained that the development of honest behaviour is carried out through moral education integrated with teachers' role modelling, habituation practices, and various school activities. The parents stated that encouraging children to tell the truth and providing positive examples at home help reinforce the moral values learned at school. Meanwhile, the local shopkeepers observed that most students demonstrated honest behaviour, such as paying the correct amount, returning excess change, and behaving politely during interactions.

The interview findings further clarify that students' honest behaviour is influenced not only by their understanding of moral education materials but also by family environment, teachers' role modelling, school culture, and the surrounding social environment. These findings are consistent with previous studies by (Saharani, 2025);(Permata & Saputra, 2024)(Khoriyah, 2024)(Nurbela & Munawaroh, 2022), which emphasize that character development results from the synergy between school learning, exemplary behaviour, habituation, and environmental support. Therefore, moral education serves as an essential foundation for developing honest character; however, its effectiveness can be enhanced when supported by families, schools, and communities that consistently reinforce the values of honesty.

The interview results also strengthen the quantitative findings by demonstrating that the development of honest behaviour cannot rely solely on students' understanding of moral education in the classroom. Although students may understand the concept of honesty, the implementation of these values requires continuous reinforcement through teachers' role modelling, habituation within the family environment, and positive social interactions. Consequently, the findings of this study indicate that moral education provides the foundation for developing honest character, while the school, family, and community environments function as

complementary supporting factors that help students internalize these values and apply them consistently in their daily lives.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study demonstrate a positive and statistically significant association between students measured understanding of moral education materials in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) and their reported honest behavior. The Spearman correlation coefficient of $r = 0.5966$ ($p < 0.001$; approximate 95% CI = 0.413–0.734) indicates a moderate positive association. Following Schober et al. (2018), coefficients between 0.40 and 0.69 may be described as moderate, although correlation cutoffs should be interpreted cautiously and in relation to the research context. The finding means that students who obtained higher scores on the understanding measure tended to report higher levels of honest behavior. It does not demonstrate that understanding of moral education materials directly causes students to behave honestly because the correlational design does not establish causal direction.

An important distinction should be made between moral knowledge or understanding and actual moral behaviour. Students may understand that honesty is a desirable moral value without necessarily practicing honesty consistently in every situation. Moral understanding involves students' ability to recognize and comprehend moral values, whereas moral behaviour involves the application of those values in actual situations. Between understanding and behaviour, other processes such as moral reasoning, moral attitudes, self-regulation, social expectations, and situational judgment may also play a role. Therefore, a student's ability to identify honesty as a good value does not automatically guarantee that the student will always tell the truth, avoid cheating, admit mistakes, or respect other people's belongings. The moderate correlation found in this study is consistent with this distinction because the relationship is positive but does not indicate a complete correspondence between moral understanding and honest behaviour.

The coefficient of determination of 35.59% further indicates that the measured understanding variable does not account for all of the variation in reported honest behaviour. In other words, a

substantial proportion of variance remains outside the statistical association examined in this study. his finding supports the view that honest behavior is a multidimensional outcome that may be related to factors beyond students' understanding of moral education materials. Possible factors include family environment, peer interaction, school culture, teacher role modeling, social norms, habituation, self-regulation, and students' personal moral development. For example, students may receive similar moral instruction at school but demonstrate different levels of honesty because they experience different forms of guidance, modeling, expectations, and social interactions in their everyday environments. These factors were not directly tested in the present correlational analysis and therefore should be considered possible explanations rather than established determinants of honest behavior.

The interview findings with the Islamic Religious Education teacher, parents, and local shopkeepers reinforce the quantitative results. The teacher explained that honest behaviour is developed through classroom instruction, teachers' role modelling, habituation practices, Qur'an Reading and Writing (BTQ) activities, and co-curricular programs. Parents emphasized the importance of providing positive examples at home and encouraging children to tell the truth in everyday situations. Similarly, local shopkeepers observed that many students demonstrated honest behaviour, such as paying the correct amount, returning excess change, and interacting politely. These findings indicate that the successful development of honest behaviour depends on collaboration among schools, families, and the surrounding community.

The present finding is broadly consistent with previous studies emphasizing the role of Islamic Religious Education, teacher modeling, habituation, and character education in supporting students' moral development. However, the present study differs in its focus on students measured understanding of moral education materials as a variable examined statistically in relation to honest behavior. The finding therefore adds a specific empirical perspective to previous research by examining the association between students measured moral understanding and their reported honesty at the elementary school level.

Overall, the findings suggest that understanding of moral education materials is a relevant component associated with students' honest behavior, but it should not be regarded as a sufficient explanation of that behavior. The moderate strength of the relationship indicates that students' understanding may be related to the practice of honesty while other individual, social, and environmental factors may also be involved. Further research using larger and more diverse samples, objective measures of moral understanding, and behavioral or multi-informant measures of honesty would help provide a more comprehensive understanding of how moral understanding relates to students' actual moral behavior.

CONCLUSION

This study found a statistically significant positive relationship between students' understanding of moral education materials in Islamic Religious Education and their honest behavior among the fifth-grade students at SDN Bekasi Jaya IX. The Spearman correlation coefficient of $r = 0.5966$ ($p < 0.001$) indicates a moderate positive association between the two variables. This finding suggests that higher scores on the measured understanding of moral education materials were associated with higher scores on reported honest behavior among the students studied.

However, the findings do not demonstrate that students' understanding of moral education materials directly causes or determines their honest behavior. The findings are context-specific to the fifth-grade students at SDN Bekasi Jaya IX and should not be automatically generalized to all elementary school students. Honest behavior may also be associated with individual, family, peer, school, and social factors that were not directly examined in this study. Further research involving larger and more diverse samples, objective or multi-informant measures of moral understanding and actual behavior, and stronger designs for examining change over time would be useful to provide broader evidence regarding the relationship between moral understanding and students' honesty.

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