

The Framework of Morality in Islam: A Case Study of Selected Secondary School Students in South-West Nigeria

By

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Abstract

Islam is both a comprehensive belief system and a complete way of life. It provides guidance for individuals and the entire community in a balanced and rational manner, ensuring that the rights and welfare of every member of society are duly upheld. Furthermore, Islam articulates a comprehensive system of personal moral codes that delineates explicit and exemplary guidelines for ethical conduct. Adherence to these moral prescriptions is expected of every individual throughout the span of their lives. Consequently, deviation from the doctrines enshrined in the Glorious Qur'an is understood to result into moral and spiritual misguidance. Accordingly, the present study seeks to investigate whether statistically significant differences exist across gender, school type, and level of study among the respondents with respect to their morality. A cross-sectional research design was adopted to address the research objectives. A sample of 365 respondents was randomly selected from the target population and completed a researcher-developed questionnaire. The findings revealed statistically significant differences based on school type and level of study. However, gender did not exhibit a statistically significant influence on students' morality scale. These results underscore the critical roles of parents in inculcating Islamic moral values in their children, as such early socialisation processes substantially shape behavioural outcomes later in life.

Keywords: Islam; Morality; Students; Quran and value

Introduction

The central objective of the educational system in Islam is the development of individuals and communities guided by moral consciousness, social responsibility, and devotion to Allah. Islamic education seeks to cultivate understanding, compassion, honesty, tolerance, respect, and responsibility towards oneself and others in society (Shah et al., 2021; Muhammed-Lawal & Abdulahi, 2021; Oyedele et al., 2025). Within contemporary contexts, scholars argue that the marginalisation of religion at personal and societal levels may contribute to moral instability and ethical decline, as the absence of a spiritual framework can weaken moral accountability and social cohesion (Yusuf & Adeleke, 2023; Ikhwanuddin et al., 2025).

According to Shah et al., (2021) and Oyedele, (2025), Islam (Dīn al-Islām) places strong emphasis on moral refinement, regarding sound character (*akhlaq*) as an essential dimension of faith. Islam presents itself not only as a belief system but as a comprehensive way of life that integrates moral, social, and spiritual principles (Bello, 2020; AbdulRahman & Yusuf 2021; Hafiz et al., 2025). Its teachings aim to cultivate virtuous conduct and ethical responsibility across all areas of human interaction towards Allah, oneself, and others. The Qur'an in Surah Al-Mā'idah (5:15–16) describes divine guidance as a source of illumination leading to "paths of peace," reinforcing the ethical orientation of Islamic teachings.

"Indeed, there has come to you from Allah a light and a clear Book. Through it,

Allah guides those who seek His pleasure to the paths of peace; He brings them out of darkness into light by His will and guides them to the Straight Path (Islamic Monotheism).

Islamic moral instruction also extends to community development and social regulation. It promotes compassion, justice, and accountability while discouraging behaviours that undermine social harmony, such as dishonesty, intolerance, and corruption (AbdulRahman & Yusuf 2021; Yusuf & Adeleke, 2023; Muhammed-Lawal, 2026). Within the educational sphere, Islam advocates a holistic model that nurtures spiritual, intellectual, and emotional growth. Core religious practices including ṣalāh, ṣawm, zakāt, and ḥajj are understood not only as acts of worship but also as mechanisms for cultivating self-discipline and ethical awareness. For example, Surah Al-‘Ankabūt (29:45) links prayer to moral restraint; “Indeed, prayer restrains one from shameful and unjust deeds”. While Surah Al-A‘rāf (7:156) associates divine mercy with piety and social responsibility.

“My mercy encompasses all things; I shall decree it for those who are mindful (*muttaqūn*), give zakāt, and believe in Our signs.”

Scholars further emphasise that Islamic teachings derived from the Qur’an and the Sunnah prioritise moral formation from early childhood (Bello, 2020; Shah et al., 2021; Raza et al., 2022; Oyedeji et al., 2025). Allah affirms in *Surah Al-An‘ām* (6:38):

“We have neglected nothing in the Book,”

Indicating that the Qur’an provides guidance for all aspects of human life and offers direction for addressing personal and societal challenges. Young Muslims are socialised into values such as obedience, integrity, and social responsibility. The prophetic tradition, as reported by Imam Ahmad (r.a.), highlights social benefit as a defining quality of moral excellence (Muhammed-Lawal & Adnan 2018; Muhammed-Lawal & Abdulahi, 2021; Ali & Ali, 2022; Muhammed-Lawal, 2026). Similarly, Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim (Vol. 4, No. 198) defines virtue as good character and vice as conduct that troubles one’s conscience, indicating an internalised ethical standard. The Holy Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) saying:

“Virtue is good moral character, whereas vice is that which troubles your conscience and which you dislike people to discover.”

Islamic moral principles encompass both *al-adab* (etiquette) and *al-akḥlaq* (character), grounded in scriptural sources (Muhammed-Lawal & Abdulahi, 2021; Hafiz et al., 2025). The Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him) is presented in Islamic tradition as a model of ethical conduct, whose teachings and practices were preserved through Hadith literature (Ali & Ali, 2022; Ikhwanuddin, 2025). These sources collectively articulate moral expectations that include honesty, justice, humility, patience, and fulfilment of obligations. Acts such as theft, extortion, deceit, and other forms of injustice are explicitly condemned (AbdulRahman & Yusuf, 2022; Oyedeji, 2025). The Qur’an reinforces the value of steadfastness and moral discipline, as reflected in *Surah Āl ‘Imrān* (3:146)

In view of these perspectives, this study examines the moral guidance articulated in the Qur’an and the Sunnah and evaluates its practical implications within an educational context. Specifically, it investigates whether statistically significant differences exist in adherence to Islamic moral guidance among secondary school students in southwestern Nigeria, with respect to gender, school type, and level of study.

Research Questions

1. Does students’ gender significantly influence their adherence to Islamic moral guidance?
2. Does students’ type of school significantly influence their adherence to Islamic moral guidance?
3. Does students’ level of study significantly influence their adherence to Islamic moral guidance?

Research Hypotheses

H₀₁: There is no statistically significant difference in students' adherence towards Islamic moral guidance based on gender.

H₀₂: There is no statistically significant difference in students' adherence towards Islamic moral guidance based on types of school.

H₀₃: There is no statistically significant difference in students' adherence towards Islamic moral guidance based on level of study.

Research Methodology

The research design employed in this study was a survey. The design was adopted because the study involves the use of a representative sample from a population and the drawing of conclusion based on the analysis of available data. Thus, the reason for employing across-sectional survey was to gain current data from the sample across different types of school, gender and levels of study. This kind of survey enabled the study to capture prevalent data that were representative of the target population as they were collected from the different schools concurrently (Ary, Jacobs, Razavied & Sorensen, 2006; Frankel & Wallen, 2009; Adamu et al., 2015). Total respondents were 365 students, containing 55 (15.1%) private school and 310 (84.9%) public school. 185 (50.7%) boys' and 180 (49.3%) girls, Students from junior and senior classes 198 (54.2%), 167(45.8%) respectfully. Hence, the study containing a self-constructed questionnaire consisted of sixteen items about student adherence practice of the Islamic moral guidance. Face validation of the instrument was presented to check grammar, sentences not too short and not too long. Also, the content validity was certified by the five experts in field of Islamic Studies and Statistics methodology. Those experts vetted the items in terms of sentence structure and adequacy of the instruments was modified to suit the study.

However, instrument reliability established using Cronbach's alpha coefficient was .873, with the total number of sixteen (16) items, using Statistical Package for the Social Science (SPSS) version 24 software. Items of questionnaire required the students to respond to 5 point Likert scale, Never, Rarely, Sometimes, often and frequently, was adopted for the responses on the questionnaire. The information concerning this questionnaire was constructed based on previous literature review (Ebrahim, 2022; Yusuf, & Adeleke, 2023).

Population

The population of the study comprised of students from selected secondary schools (Islamic Colleges across south-west, Nigeria), Junior Secondary School 1 to Senior Secondary School 3 constituted the population of the study.

Sample and Sampling Techniques.

Three hundred and sixty five (365) students from selected secondary schools in south-west, Nigeria were used for the study. Six (6) secondary school purposive random sampling was used to draw from south-west, Nigeria. In order to balance gender representation in the sample each of the school both male and female represents from each selected school, the students were stratified according to classes – SS 1 to SS 111.

Table 1: The demographic characteristics of the Respondents

Type	N	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Types of School	365		
Private		55	15.1
Public		310	84.9
Gender	365		
Male		185	50.7
Female		180	49.3
Level of Study	365		
Junior Students		198	54.2
Senior Students		167	45.8

Results and Discussion

The collected data was converted into tables. Findings and conclusions were drawn in the light of these tables by the researchers for better understanding.

Research Hypothesis One

H0₁: There is no statistically significant difference in students adherence towards Islamic moral guidance based on types of school.

To test this hypothesis, t-test analysis was used to test the difference in private and public secondary school students' towards their adherence to Islamic moral guidance. The table 2 also displays the mean scores of students' adherence based on types of school. For private school is $M = 4.71$; $SD = .351$, and the mean score for public school is $M = 4.77$; $SD = .280$, $t(363) 1.41$, 363 , $p = .005$. ($P\text{-value} = .05 < \alpha = .05$). The results therefore suggest that there is statically significant difference between private and public students in terms of their perception adherence towards Islamic moral guidance items. Therefore, the result of the study rejects the null hypothesis.

Research Hypothesis Two

H0₂: There is no statistically significant difference in students adherence towards Islamic moral guidance based on gender.

To test this hypothesis, t-test analysis was used to test the difference in male and female secondary school students' towards their adherence to Islamic moral guidance. The table 2 below shows the mean scores of students' adherence based on gender (male and female). For male students is $M = 4.76$; $SD = .277$, and the mean score for female students is $M = 4.76$; $SD = .307$, $t(363) = -0.167$, $p = .983$. ($P\text{-value} = 0.983 > \alpha = .05$). The results therefore suggest that there is no statically significant difference between male and female students in terms of their perception adherence to Islamic moral guidance items. Therefore, the study failed to reject the null hypothesis.

Research Hypothesis Three

H0₃: There is no statistically significant difference in students adherence towards Islamic moral guidance based on level of study.

To test this hypothesis, t-test analysis was used to test the difference in junior and senior secondary school students' towards their adherence to Islamic moral guidance. The table 2 below demonstrates the mean scores of students' adherence based on level of study (junior students and senior students). For the junior students is $M = 4.77$; $SD = .261$, and the mean score for senior students is $M = 4.74$; $SD = .324$, $t(363) = 0.1016$, $p = .021$. ($P\text{-value} = .021 < \alpha = .05$). The results therefore suggest that there is statically significant difference between private and public students in terms of their perception adherence towards Islamic moral guidance items. Therefore, the study rejects the null hypothesis.

Table 2

Summary of Independent Sample t-Test Results

Dimension	N	Df	M	SD	t	P – Value
Decision						
IG			4.71	.351	-1.408	.005
Private	55	363	4.77	.280		(Significant)
Public	310					
IG			4.76	.277	-.167	.983
Male	185	363	4.76	.307		(Not Significant)
Female	180					
IG			4.77	.261	.1016	.021
Junior	198	363	4.74	.324		(Significant)
Senior	167					

***Significant; α at < 0.05**

Islam is both a comprehensive belief system and a complete way of life, wherein morality

constitutes one of its fundamental pillars. The strength and stability of any nation are deeply rooted in moral principles, while moral decay and widespread immorality often serve as major contributors to a nation's decline. Islam establishes essential rights for all humanity, prescribing that these rights must be upheld under all circumstances. To ensure their protection, Islam provides not only a framework of legal safeguards but also clear and effective moral guidelines. Consequently, any action that promotes the welfare of the individual or society without contradicting the principles of Islamic teachings is considered morally commendable. Conversely, any action that causes harm is deemed morally reprehensible.

The findings of this study revealed a statistically significant difference based on the respondents' school type and level of study regarding their adherence to Islamic moral teachings in their behavior. This result aligns with the study conducted by Fitri et al., (2025); Ahmad Al-Mazyad & Adel Al-Shddy (n.d), who also identified significant differences in students' performance in Islamic Education among secondary school students. Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected. The findings indicate that students' exposure to Islamic Education is significantly related to improve learning outcomes.

Similarly, the present results are consistent with the conclusions of AbdulRahman & Yusuf, (2021) & Muhammed-Lawal (2026), who reported notable differences in students' moral behavior when addressing problems. However, the study conducted by Muhammed-Lawal et al., (2018) & Raza et al., (2022). Reported no significant difference between male and female respondents regarding teachers' skills and personality traits. This was supported by the mean scores for both genders, which were found to be nearly identical.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Parents play a vital role in shaping their children's moral character by organizing beneficial activities such as Islamic lectures and ensuring regular prayer. Islamic moral education remains essential, as it guides behavior and shapes future conduct. The Glorious Qur'an serves as a fundamental source of guidance, reminding believers of their purpose, accountability, and responsibility for every deed, good or bad. The core aim of Islamic teaching is to develop individuals with noble character who contribute positively to society. These principles apply across all areas of life: social, domestic, commercial, and personal. This study emphasizes the value of Islamic moral guidance and hopes to contribute to a better understanding of morality among Muslims. Although many studies exist in Nigeria, limited research has focused specifically on the south-western region regarding students' adherence to Islamic moral guidance.

Recommendations

Expand Research Scope: Future studies should include more areas within south-western Nigeria to better understand students' adherence to Islamic moral guidance.

Strengthen Parental Involvement: Parents should adopt structured methods to teach and reinforce Islamic moral values at home.

Enhance School Programs: Schools should integrate Qur'anic teachings with character-building activities to support moral development.

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