

(Research Article)

Dynamics of Self-Awareness and Transcendental Experience in High School Students: A Phenomenological Study from the Perspective of the Psychology of Religion

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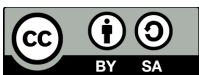
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Abstract: This study aims to understand the dynamics of self-awareness and transcendental experiences in high school students from the perspective of the psychology of religion. Adolescence is a developmental phase characterized by the search for identity, self-reflection, and increased spiritual awareness. This study used a qualitative approach with phenomenological methods to explore students' subjective experiences related to self-awareness and spiritual experiences. The study participants consisted of two high school students aged 15–18, selected using a purposive sampling technique. Data collection was conducted through in-depth semi-structured interviews supported by field notes. The data were analyzed using phenomenological analysis through the stages of phenomenological reduction, identification of key statements, grouping themes, and essential descriptions of experiences. The results indicate that spiritual experiences in worship practices foster a sense of closeness to God, encourage self-reflection, help students cope with stress, and foster awareness to improve behavior. These findings suggest that transcendental experiences play a significant role in the development of self-awareness and character formation in adolescents.

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1. Introduction

Education plays a crucial role in shaping the quality of human resources, not only in cognitive aspects but also in developing self-awareness, moral values, and the spiritual dimension of students. In the context of adolescent development, education serves as a means to help individuals understand themselves, build identity, and find meaning in life (Cahyani et al., 2026). Adolescence is a phase characterized by emotional dynamics, the search for identity, and increased reflection on life experiences and spiritual values (Fatimah &

Azzahra, 2024; Mazrur, 2020) . Therefore, developing self-awareness is a crucial aspect in supporting adolescent psychological development (Hakimah, 2024; Tarwiyah, 2022) .

Theoretically, self-awareness is an individual's ability to recognize and understand their thoughts, emotions, and behavior. Self-awareness allows individuals to reflect on experiences, thereby developing self-control and developing positive character (Suhartanto, 2024) . In an educational context, self-awareness plays a role in helping students understand their potential, life values, and the direction of their personal development. Research shows that self-awareness influences character development and students' ability to manage emotions adaptively (Hidayat, 2025; Rokayah & Hodijah, 2025) . Furthermore, religiosity plays a role in shaping self-awareness because spiritual values help individuals understand the meaning of their existence more deeply (Levina, 2025; Risnawati, 2023) .

From a religious psychology perspective, the development of self-awareness is closely related to spiritual or transcendental experiences. Transcendental experiences refer to experiences that transcend the rational dimension, such as feelings of closeness to God, spiritual reflection, and existential meaning. Spirituality functions not only as an internal identity but also as a means of establishing meaning in life and self-integrity (Paridah & Muhlas, 2025) . Transpersonal psychology studies also show that spiritual experiences contribute to the development of self-awareness and an understanding of individual existence (Ruhandi, 2026) .

The phenomenological approach is used to deeply understand an individual's subjective experiences. Edmund Husserl emphasized that experience must be understood through the individual's awareness of the phenomena they experience. Through the concept of intentionality of consciousness, every experience has a meaning that is recognized by the individual, making this approach relevant for exploring the meaning of students' spiritual experiences and self-awareness more comprehensively (Bernet, 2005) .

Empirically, research shows that religiosity and spiritual practices have a positive relationship with self-awareness. Religious practices such as prayer can help individuals engage in self-reflection, manage stress, and cope with psychological pressure more adaptively (Caenovea & Massari, 2025; Pajar et al., 2025; Levina, 2025) . Furthermore, spiritual experiences can also help adolescents understand identity crises and strengthen their sense of meaning in life (Marselina, 2024; Anggraini, 2025) .

However, most of this research still uses a quantitative approach that focuses on the relationships between variables. Research specifically exploring students' subjective experiences of self-awareness and transcendental experiences is still limited, particularly in the context of the psychology of religion in high school students. Yet, spiritual experiences are personal and complex, requiring a phenomenological approach to understand their meaning more deeply.

Based on this, there is a research gap in the study of the dynamics of self-awareness and transcendental experiences in high school students, which have not been widely studied through a phenomenological approach. Therefore, this study aims to analyze the dynamics of self-awareness and transcendental experiences in high school students through Edmund Husserl's phenomenological approach to understand the meaning of spiritual experiences experienced by students and their contribution to the development of their self-awareness.

2. Research Method

This study uses a qualitative approach with a phenomenological method to understand subjective experiences related to the dynamics of self-awareness and transcendental experiences in high school students (Sugiono, 2013). This research is exploratory and was conducted in a high school environment involving two students aged 15–18 years who were selected through a purposive sampling technique. The researcher acted as the main instrument in data collection. The phenomenological approach was chosen because it is able to explore the meaning of individuals' direct experiences and how they interpret spiritual experiences in everyday life (Bernet, 2005).

Data collection was conducted through in-depth semi-structured interviews and field notes. Data analysis employed phenomenological stages: phenomenological reduction, identification of key statements, grouping of themes, and essential descriptions of experiences. Data validity was tested through member checking and source triangulation. This research is also based on the perspective of developmental psychology of religion, which explains that adolescent spiritual development is related to the formation of self-identity and the meaning of life (Mazrur, 2020).

3. Results and Discussion

Based on the results of interviews with four high school student respondents, namely AD, ZH, (AF), and (LO), an initial picture was obtained regarding how they interpret spiritual experiences and self-awareness in everyday life. These findings indicate that the experiences they expressed are not singular, but rather layered and interconnected, reflecting the dynamics of self-awareness that develops through the subjective experiences of each individual. In line with the phenomenological approach proposed by Edmund Husserl, understanding these experiences needs to be done by emphasizing the meaning directly felt by the subject (lived experience), not simply the relationship between variables. This is important considering that studies on transcendental experiences in high school students are still limited, especially those that delve deeply into their subjective perspectives. Therefore, to gain a more systematic understanding, the results of this study were then classified into several main aspects that represent the forms of spiritual experiences and self-awareness experienced by the respondents.

Spiritual Experiences and Feelings of Closeness to God

Interview results showed that all respondents had experienced spiritual experiences that provided feelings of calm, relief, and closeness to God. Respondent AD revealed that the experience occurred during the Tahajud prayer, bringing tears to her eyes and a feeling of deep calm. ZH also shared a similar sentiment, noting that she felt relief after the Istikharah prayer when she was in doubt.

Meanwhile, additional respondent AF stated that a spiritual experience emerged when he was able to suppress negative thoughts and focus on prayer, resulting in an unusual calm and a sense of relief after facing a problem. Similarly, LO also revealed a powerful spiritual experience during night prayers, where he felt a profound sense of calm, cried for no apparent reason, and felt God's emotional presence.

These findings suggest that spiritual experiences in adolescents not only emerge during stressful situations but can also occur spontaneously when individuals are in a reflective state.

From a psychological perspective, these experiences are considered transcendental experiences, providing existential meaning and strengthening an individual's relationship with God (Pargament et al., 2020). This reflective state typically occurs when adolescents have space for reflection, such as during prayer, solitude, or when facing events that trigger self-awareness. During this developmental phase, adolescents tend to search for identity and meaning in life, making spiritual experiences an important part of this process. Furthermore, transcendental experiences also play a role in fostering inner peace, reducing anxiety, and increasing self-control. This suggests that spirituality is not merely a response to stress but also a natural potential that can develop through self-awareness, a supportive environment, and consistent religious practice in daily life (Emmons, 2025).

Self-Reflection and Moral Awareness

The second theme that emerged was self-reflection, which fosters moral awareness. AD stated that spiritual experiences made him more aware of his own faults and a desire to draw closer to God. ZH also recognized his shortcomings in religious discipline after comparing himself with his peers.

Among the additional respondents, AF revealed that spiritual experiences calmed him and made him think before acting. He also assessed that life experiences, including conflict and stress, fostered resilience and a clearer future direction. Meanwhile, LO experienced a significant shift in his self-perception, from feeling inadequate to becoming more self-accepting and realizing his worth.

This suggests that spiritual experiences play a crucial role in triggering *self-reflection*, which then develops into *self-awareness*. This self-awareness relates not only to one's relationship with God but also to how individuals understand themselves, their emotions, and their values (Khairi & Surawan, 2025). Through this in-depth reflection process, individuals begin to recognize their current thought patterns, attitudes, and behaviors, including their strengths and weaknesses. This process enables adolescents to evaluate themselves more honestly and openly, thus fostering a more emotionally and spiritually mature personality. Furthermore, *the self-awareness* that develops from spiritual experiences also helps individuals make wiser decisions that align with moral and religious values. Thus, spiritual experiences are not merely temporary but have a long-term impact on shaping character, improving the quality of social relationships, and strengthening self-identity in everyday life (Fowler, 2021).

Spirituality as a Way to Deal with Stress and Problems

The next theme was the role of spirituality as a strategy for coping with life's pressures. AD stated that he uses religious practices such as the Tahajjud prayer to find peace when facing problems. ZH also revealed that recalling spiritual experiences helps him reduce anxiety, especially when facing exams.

AF added that when facing problems, he chooses to pray to God as a form of self-soothing. Meanwhile, LO explained that his spiritual experiences have become a "natural brake" on his emotions, allowing him to better restrain himself and avoid impulsive actions.

These findings suggest that religious practices such as prayer and worship have a psychological function as a *coping mechanism* that helps individuals manage stress, anxiety, and life pressures (Zahavi, 2024). This aligns with the theory that religiousness can be a source of psychological resilience in facing various life challenges. Through religious activities, individuals gain a sense of calm, hope, and confidence that every problem has meaning and a

solution. (Pargament et al., 2020). Furthermore, involvement in religious services provides structure and routine that help stabilize emotional states. Religious practices often foster feelings of closeness to God, which in turn increases feelings of security and reduces feelings of loneliness. This is particularly important in the context of adolescents, as they are vulnerable to social and emotional stress. Therefore, religiosity serves not only as a spiritual aspect but also as an effective adaptive strategy for maintaining mental health and psychological balance (Koenig, 2022).

Awareness to Change Behavior

The final theme was the emergence of an awareness to improve behavior after a spiritual experience. AD admitted that he began to recognize his behavioral errors, such as skipping school, and attempted to change. ZH also demonstrated caution in his actions after seeing the consequences of others' transgressions.

AF revealed that his spiritual experiences have made him more grateful and strive to be a better person. He also emphasized the importance of saying "Alhamdulillah" as a form of inner peace. Meanwhile, LO demonstrated deeper changes in how he treats himself, becoming more accepting, less harsh on himself, and having a more meaningful purpose in life.

Thus, spiritual experiences are not limited to the emotional aspect but also impact behavioral changes and character development. This awareness encourages individuals to improve themselves, enhance the quality of their worship, and build more positive social relationships (Koenig, 2022).

Overall, the four respondents demonstrated a consistent pattern that spiritual experiences play a significant role in shaping *self-awareness*. These experiences trigger self-reflection, help individuals manage emotions, and encourage more positive behavioral changes (Hafizhah et al., 2023). Variations in experiences across respondents indicate that transcendent experiences are subjective, yet share a common essence: providing serenity, meaning in life, and self-awareness. These differences are influenced by individual background, level of religiosity, and life experiences. Nevertheless, all respondents felt a significant positive impact on their psychological well-being. Spiritual experiences also serve as a means of internalizing religious values that shape character and attitudes in daily life. With greater self-awareness, individuals tend to be able to control their behavior, increase empathy, and establish more harmonious social relationships. This confirms that spirituality plays a significant role in the overall psychological development of adolescents (Holder et al., 2020).

These findings reinforce studies in the psychology of religion, which suggest that transcendent experiences significantly contribute to the development of self-awareness and character formation in adolescents. Therefore, integrating spiritual values into education is crucial to support the holistic psychological and moral development of students (King & Boyatzis, 2025). The application of spiritual values in the learning process can be achieved through the practice of worship, self-reflection, and the instilling of empathy, honesty, and responsibility. A supportive educational environment also plays a crucial role in fostering students' spiritual awareness, both through teacher role models and positive social interactions (Sergiovanni, 2022). Furthermore, this integration helps students face life's challenges with a wiser attitude and based on moral values. Therefore, education focuses not only on cognitive aspects but also on the formation of balanced character and personality,

thus producing individuals who are intellectually, emotionally, and spiritually mature (Gardner, 2021).

4. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that the dynamics of self-awareness in high school students are closely related to the spiritual experiences and religious reflections they experience in their daily lives. Through worship experiences such as tahajjud prayer, istikharah, and prayer, students experience inner peace and closeness to God, which then encourages the emergence of self-reflection. This reflection process gives rise to awareness of personal shortcomings, moral awareness, and the urge to improve behavior and enhance the quality of worship. Furthermore, spirituality also plays a role as a coping strategy in dealing with academic pressures and personal problems. Using a phenomenological approach, this study demonstrates that subjective spiritual experiences play a significant role in shaping self-awareness, behavioral control, and the meaning of life in adolescents. Therefore, the development of spiritual values in education can be an important tool in supporting the development of students' character and self-identity.

Based on the research findings, it is recommended that educational institutions, particularly secondary schools, provide greater space for the development of students' spirituality through religious activities, self-reflection, and ongoing character development. Teachers, particularly in religious education, are expected to emphasize not only cognitive aspects but also facilitate students' spiritual reflection, thereby enhancing their self-awareness and sense of meaning in life. Furthermore, future researchers are advised to examine the dynamics of self-awareness and transcendental experiences with a larger number of participants and employ a more in-depth phenomenological approach to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the relationship between spiritual experiences and the development of self-awareness in adolescents.

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