
Building Self-Awareness as a Creation, Servant, and Caliph Entrusted with Divine Trust

Bayu Teguh Prakoso

(bteguhprakoso@gmail.com)

Yayasan Makrifatullah Sedunia (YAMAS) Indonesia

Muhamad Jaffar Bin Taib

(ajjjeff@gmail.com)

Yayasan Makrifatullah Sedunia (YAMAS) Malaysia

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Abstract

Self-awareness as a creation, servant, and caliph is a fundamental aspect in shaping human character and spirituality as bearers of divine trust. This study aims to examine in depth how this self-awareness is formed and functions within the context of religious and social life. The research method used is qualitative with a case study approach, through in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and document analysis. The results reveal that self-awareness as a creation teaches human limitations and dependence on God, as a servant emphasizes the importance of obedience and devotion, and as a caliph motivates moral and social responsibility in managing the trust of the world. The implications of this study highlight the need to integrate these three aspects of awareness in religious education and guidance to develop complete and responsible individuals. This research provides a unique contribution by combining theological and practical perspectives in building both spiritual and social awareness. These findings can serve as an important reference for developing religious education curricula and character-building strategies in various religious institutions.

Keywords: *Self-awareness, creation, servant, caliph, divine trust.*

INTRODUCTION

The spiritual and moral crisis in modern human life is an urgent issue that cannot be ignored (R.- Saputra, 2016, p. 136). Amid rapid technological advancement and materialism, human existential awareness of themselves as created beings, servants of God (Kelly, 2015, p. 3), and bearers of the trust of the caliphate has experienced significant degradation (Said et al., 2022, p. 69). Many individuals live without understanding their ontological position and role within the Islamic cosmic structure, resulting in a void of meaning, spiritual alienation, and social decay (Sukring et al., 2016, p. 113).

While much of the literature discusses theological or sociological aspects of the human relationship with God, such as Salamuddin's study *God, Nature, and Man in the Thought of Sayyid Hussein Nasr* (Salamuddin, 2017), and Jeff Wheeldon's research *Theology as Sociology, Sociology as Theology* (Wheeldon, 2016, p. 6). there remains a gap in an integrative approach that views humans holistically as creation (makhluq), servant ('abd), and caliph (khalifah) within a comprehensive self-awareness. Classical Islamic studies, such as the works of Imam al-Ghazali (Yiangou, 2022) have emphasized the importance of inner enlightenment through existential awareness (Abu Hamid al-Ghazali, n.d.). However, the conceptual and Sufi renewal of this concept in a contemporary context remains minimal.

This study aims to reconstruct the foundation of human self-awareness in three fundamental positions according to Islam: as Allah's limited creation, as a servant obligated to worship, and as a caliph entrusted with divine responsibility on earth. This goal stems from the urgency to restore the meaning of human life based on the values of tawhid and Qur'anic spirituality (Sukring et al., 2016). By realizing these three aspects, humans are expected to be able to arrange the direction of their lives more clearly, responsibly, and meaningfully.

Theoretically, this article refers to the theological-sufi framework of Ustadz Hj. Hussien Bin Abdul Latiff Singapore (Tiyono & Putra, 2023a, p. 68). In Islam, humans are not merely biological entities but spiritual beings tasked with recognizing, worshiping, and wisely managing Allah's creation (Musrifah, 2024, p. 149). This perspective provides a philosophical and sufistic foundation that self-awareness is the path to spiritual closeness (*ma'rifatullah*) and social responsibility (*mas'uliyah*) (Tiyono & Putra, 2023a, p. 73).

This research is important in a broader context as it can contribute to the discourse on character building, spiritual education, and Islamic-based moral reform (Putra, 2013). In an era filled with individualism, hedonism, and secularism, instilling existential awareness becomes a key asset in building a civilized society oriented towards divine values (Said Aqil Siradj, 2006).

Relevant literature shows that figures such as al-Ghazali emphasized that awareness of being a servant ('abd) is the key to attaining a tranquil soul (*nafs al-muthma'innah*) (Rahmatiah, 2017). In the context of the caliphate (khalifah), Fazlur Rahman (Fazlur Rahman, 1970) and Seyyed Hossein Nasr (Nasr., 1972), underline the importance of ecological awareness and social responsibility as manifestations of the trust (*amanah*) of the caliphate.

This study employs a qualitative conceptual approach, utilizing library research and thematic analysis of Qur'anic verses as well as works of prominent Sufi figures (Denzin, Norman K. & Lincoln, 1990). This method is chosen because it allows for an in-depth exploration of the philosophical and spiritual meanings of the concepts of creation, servitude, and caliphate (Sukring et al., 2016).

The conceptual hypothesis proposed in this article is that the moral and spiritual crisis of modern humans is caused by the loss of a holistic self-awareness as creatures, servants, and caliphs, and that the reconstruction of this awareness can restore humans to their spiritual nature (*fitrah*) (Subhi, 2016).

The scope of this study is limited to a normative and Sufistic approach to Islamic texts (Riyanto, 2014), particularly the Qur'an and the Sufi thought of the Prophetic Path from the perspective of Hussien bin Abdul Latiff Singapore (Tiyono & Putra, 2023), supported by empirical or field data (Moleong, 2017). The main focus is directed at the reflective and conceptual dimensions aimed at constructing a framework of Islamic self-awareness in a contemporary context.

This research methodology is designed to directly support the study's objective, namely to develop self-awareness as creation, servant, and vicegerent entrusted with a divine mandate, through a deep understanding within the context of Islamic religious education. The study employs a qualitative approach with a case study design to gain a comprehensive understanding of the participants' experiences and perceptions regarding self-awareness in this context (Suwandi, 2008).

The unit of analysis in this study is the individual, particularly participants of classroom seminars and instructors (*wakalah*) who are actively involved in character development and learning activities in seminar classes held in four regions on the island of Java: Bandung, Pati, Solo, and Surabaya. Subjects were selected using purposive sampling, in which informants were chosen based on specific criteria—namely, having reflective spiritual experience and active participation in classroom seminar activities organized by the *Yayasan Makrifatullah Sedunia* (YAMAS) Indonesia in various cities, particularly across Java, during the two-year period from 2022 to 2024, and whose experiences are relevant to the research theme (Moleong, 2017).

Data were collected using in-depth interview techniques aimed at exploring participants' understanding, experiences, and awareness of themselves as creations, servants, and stewards (*khalifah*) of God. In addition, participatory observation was conducted to

directly observe the learning processes and interactions that support the development of self-awareness. Document analysis was also employed by collecting and examining teaching materials, curricula, and relevant literature related to the research theme as secondary data (Denzin, Norman K. & Lincoln, 1990).

The primary instrument used was a semi-structured interview guide, developed based on a review of relevant literature and adapted flexibly during the fieldwork to explore emerging aspects. This instrument enabled the researcher to obtain rich and in-depth information while allowing questions to be adjusted according to participants' responses (Hamid, 2013).

This study was conducted with strict adherence to research ethics. All informants were provided with comprehensive explanations regarding the research objectives, data usage, and assurances of confidentiality of their identities. Informants were also given the freedom to consent to or decline participation and to withdraw at any time without any consequences (Sugiyono, 2015).

The data sources used in this study consist of primary data obtained from interviews and direct observations of informants, as well as secondary data derived from official documents, learning materials, and relevant literature related to the theme of self-awareness from an Islamic perspective. The utilization of both primary and secondary data aims to provide a comprehensive overview and strengthen the validity of the research findings (Sutopo, 2006).

The selection of a qualitative method with a case study design is highly relevant, as the research focuses on an in-depth understanding of the subjective and contextual aspects of self-awareness that cannot be measured quantitatively. A case study allows for detailed and rich exploration of the cultural and spiritual contexts surrounding the subjects (Smith, 1994).

The data collection and analysis processes were conducted transparently, with systematic and structured documentation, allowing for replication of the study by other researchers in similar contexts or regions. Data triangulation techniques, incorporating interviews, observations, and documentation, were also applied to ensure the validity and reliability of the research findings (Denzin, Norman K. & Lincoln, 1990).

Overall, this method is designed to produce a holistic and in-depth understanding aligned with the research objectives, while ensuring that the research process is accountable

and contributes meaningfully to the advancement of knowledge and the practice of cultivating self-awareness within the context of Islamic religious education.

DISCUSSIONS

Integrated Self-Awareness in Islamic Education

Self-awareness as a creation, servant, and caliph is a fundamental concept in Islamic religious education that has been widely discussed in Islamic literature and spiritual psychology (Sofa et al., 2023, p. 42). Previous studies have shown that understanding human identity in vertical relation to God and horizontal relation to other creations is crucial for building strong character and spiritual awareness (Nurrohmah et al., 2024, p. 7). This literature is relevant to the research objective, which aims to explore how this self-awareness is formed and functions in the context of developing divine trust (*amanah*).

Thematically, this literature review can be grouped into three main aspects: self-awareness as a creation, as a servant, and as a caliph. *First*, the literature on self-awareness as a creation emphasizes the aspect of human dependence on Allah as the Creator. According to the Qur'an and classical tafsir (Asnawiyah, Wahid et al., 2024, p. 234), humans are creatures originating from Allah's creation with all their limitations and dependence. Contemporary studies by Hendi also reinforce the importance of this awareness as a spiritual foundation for cultivating the attitude of humility (*tawadhu*) (Hendi & Apriliana, 2024, p. 32).

Second, studies on self-awareness as a servant focus on the relationship of worship and obedience to Allah. Literature such as the work of Apriliana (Apriliana: 2017) and the modern psychospiritual approach by Nurhemelia Putri (Putri, 2025, p. 109) indicate that self-awareness as a servant involves the understanding that the purpose of life is to worship and submit to the Divine will. However, some studies also highlight challenges in consistently applying this awareness in the complexity of modern life (Arrasyid, 2020).

Third, the literature on the role of humans as khalifah or representatives of Allah on earth discusses human social and ecological responsibilities. Classical thought by Ar-Rāghib al-Aṣḥāhānī (Al-Ashfahani, 2009), emphasizes the importance of the khalifah's position in maintaining balance and justice in the world. Recent studies by Askar (2025) link the concept of khalifah with sustainable development agendas and environmental ethics (Askar & Ghofur, 2025, p. 231). However, there are differing views on how the khalifah can concretely realize this trust in the era of globalization.

Critically, although many studies have explored each of these aspects individually, there is a significant gap in the literature regarding the integration of all three dimensions of self-awareness—namely, as creation, servant, and caliph—in a holistic manner within the context of education and character development. Most research tends to address these aspects separately, without considering the interrelation and synergy among them (Ilyas, 2016).

Moreover, the existing literature is predominantly theoretical or conceptual, with limited empirical research examining how this self-awareness is formed and applied in daily life, particularly within formal educational settings. This highlights the need for more focused research on practical and contextual aspects that bridge the gap between theory and the implementation of self-awareness development (Kholil, 2024).

From the identifiable trends and patterns, there is a consensus that the formation of religious self-awareness plays a crucial role in character and moral development. However, differences remain in the methodological approaches to nurturing this awareness, ranging from traditional frameworks to more inclusive and contextual contemporary methods (Nurhayati, 2014).

The literature also supports the argument that the development of self-awareness requires not only cognitive aspects, but also spiritual experience and consistent critical thinking as means of internalizing values (Harahap, 2023). Therefore, this study employs a qualitative approach that enables in-depth exploration of subjects' experiences and understanding regarding self-awareness as a creation, servant, and vicegerent (Zikri et al., 2024).

Terminological consistency—such as the use of “self-awareness,” “creation,” “servant,” and “vicegerent”—is maintained throughout this review to clarify the study's focus and facilitate the reader's understanding of the discussion's context. The selected literature also directly supports the research question regarding how this awareness can be developed and internalized by individuals within the context of religious formation.

As a synthesis, the existing literature indicates that self-awareness as creation, servant, and vicegerent constitutes the core pillars of Islamic spiritual and moral education. However, the integration of these three aspects within the context of education remains underexplored. This study seeks to fill that gap by holistically examining the formation of such awareness and its application as a bearer of divine trust in real life, thereby offering a new contribution to the development of both theory and practice in Islamic religious education.

The Spiritual Self-Awareness in Theological-Sufi Education at Yamas Indonesia

Self-awareness as a created being, servant, and caliph represents an important form of spiritual and social consciousness in shaping human religious identity. Based on findings from interviews with 12 key informants (including presenters/*wakalah*, companions, and religious figures) in each region across four seminar sessions held by Yamas Indonesia on the island of Java—namely Bandung, Pati, Solo, and Surabaya—and a literature review of the works on Theological-Sufi thought by Ustadz Hj. Hussien Bin Abdul Latiff Singapore, *Tasawuf Jalan Nabi-Nabi* (Tiyono & Putra, 2023b), It was found that this awareness has not yet become an internalized part of religious life within the community. This study aims to identify how such self-awareness is understood, formed, and practiced in real-life contexts.

First, awareness as a creation (*makhluk*) is understood by most informants as a form of acknowledgment of existence and dependence on God. However, only 4 out of 12 informants were able to explain this concept philosophically and spiritually. The majority understood creation merely as “that which is created by Allah,” without exploring the consequential values of such acknowledgment. This indicates a gap between normative understanding and existential awareness as a weak and mortal being.

Second, in the dimension of servitude (*ubudiyah*), most informants emphasized the routine of worship as the identity of a servant. However, in-depth interviews revealed that the understanding of “*servant*” as a being who fully submits to the Divine will—encompassing aspects of morality, social service, and spiritual discipline—is still weak. For example, one participant in the seminar class of Yayasan Makrifatullah Sedunia (Yamas) in Solo stated, “*We convey the basic introduction to Allah SWT, but they do not necessarily realize the meaning of being a servant.*” This indicates that the awareness aspect has not yet integrated with practice.

Third, the awareness of being a khalifah (vicegerent) on earth is generally understood as a leadership role and social responsibility. However, only 3 out of 12 informants mentioned aspects of sustainability, justice, and trustworthiness in managing life. The majority still perceive the khalifah within the framework of power or formal leadership. This indicates that the concept of khalifah has not yet been understood holistically as a bearer of divine trust.

Fourth, observations of the learning activities show that although the values of self-awareness are taught in the basic introduction to Allah SWT, the delivery method remains cognitive-informational and has not been transformative. The speakers/facilitators of the

seminar classes at Yayasan Makrifatullah Sedunia (Yamas) focus more on awareness of the existence of Allah SWT without encouraging seminar participants to reflect on their roles as creatures, servants, and khalifah. This is supported by observation data indicating that 70% of the seminar activities are dominated by one-way lectures.

Fifth, the data also show that the seminar classes of Yayasan Makrifatullah Sedunia (Yamas) have not fully integrated the three concepts of self-awareness into the seminar curriculum. For example, no character development model was found that focuses on strengthening the spiritual identity as servants or khalifah. Some facilitators emphasized the need for contemplative spiritual training so that seminar participants held by Yayasan Makrifatullah Sedunia (Yamas) in four regions on the island of Java—Bandung, Pati, Solo, and Surabaya—can internalize the teachings in a profound, spiritual manner rather than merely formalistic.

Sixth, from a psychological perspective, seminar participants of Yayasan Makrifatullah Sedunia (Yamas) in four regions on the island of Java—Bandung, Pati, Solo, and Surabaya—who possess awareness of themselves as creatures and servants exhibit attitudes of greater humility, self-acceptance, and calmness when facing pressure. This was observed in five seminar participants whose emotions tended to be more stable. This indicates a positive correlation between spiritual awareness and personality stability.

Seventh, this study also found the influence of the environment in shaping such awareness. A religious family environment and supportive community foster the development of a more complete awareness. Conversely, seminar participants from non-religious family backgrounds found it more difficult to understand the concept of servitude (*ubudiyah*). This indicates that the formation of self-awareness requires adequate social and spiritual ecosystem support.

Eighth, an unexpected finding was the resistance from some seminar participants towards the concept of khalifah, which they perceived as "*too burdensome*." Several participants expressed feelings of inadequacy or fear of bearing such responsibility. This indicates that the spiritual concept is often not conveyed in a progressive and humane manner, resulting in a gap between idealism and reality..

Ninth, all these findings indicate the need to design an integrative model of the Theological-Sufi teachings of Ustadz Hj. Hussien Bin Abdul Latiff Singapore concerning self-awareness—combining spiritual, psychological, and social aspects. The results of this

study are expected to serve as a foundation for developing curricula or training programs based on Theological-Sufi self-awareness, especially in formal and non-formal education.

Tenth, as part of data transparency, this study employs a qualitative phenomenological approach using semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis. Data validity is ensured through triangulation across methods and sources. Therefore, the findings presented above can be accountable both methodologically and substantively (Mujib, 2015b).

Main Aspect	Indicator	Field Findings	Critical Notes
Creation	Understanding of the concept "creature"	Majority understand it only as "created by Allah"	Lack of existential reflection on limitations and mortality
	Connection to the Creator	4 out of 12 informants realize their dependence on Allah	Needs deeper spiritual approach
	Application in daily life	Minimal reflection of submission and gratitude in daily behavior	Learning is still cognitive-informational
Servitude (Ubudiyah)	Understanding of servitude (ubudiyah)	Focused on ritual worship (prayer, fasting, alms)	Lacking understanding of social and spiritual ubudiyah
	Self-awareness as servants of Allah	Seminar participants recognize the term "servant," but it's not integrated into self-identity	Limited to memorization, not value internalization
	Worship and ethics	Worship performed routinely but not encouraging moral change	Needs character education based on ubudiyah
Caliphate (Khalifah)	Self and social leadership	Understood as a task of leading or ruling	Not yet understood as a divinely entrusted responsibility
	Social and environmental responsibility	Only 3 out of 12 informants mentioned sustainability and justice	Limited ecotheology literacy in education
	Resistance to the concept	Some seminar participants feel "unworthy" to be a khalifah	Psychological and motivational approaches are needed
Supporting Factors	Family and community environment	Religious environment strengthens spiritual awareness	Ecosystem support is very influential
	Role of instructors/wakalah and methods	Instructors deliver religious material but with minimal existential reflection	Training needed for instructors in reflective and participatory methods
Implications	Seminar participants' psychology	Participants aware as servants are calmer and more humble	Positive correlation between spirituality and emotional balance
	Curriculum	No curriculum explicitly teaches these three awareness aspects	Recommendation to develop integrative curriculum
	Education model	Education is still formalistic	Needs transformative spiritual approach

Self-Awareness as a Created Being

Self-awareness as a created being is the ontological foundation in Islamic spirituality that provides human life direction as a limited, dependent, and purposeful creature (Zikri et al.,

2024). The main findings in this study indicate that human awareness as a creation of Allah SWT is not only conceptual but also forms an existential basis for living as a servant and caliph on earth. From this perspective, humans are not autonomous entities but beings born from divine will, living within limitations, and ultimately returning to the Creator. This awareness directly impacts life attitudes, social relationships, and the management of the universe.

Compared to previous studies, such as the thoughts of Imam Al-Ghazali in *Ihya Ulumuddin* (Ghazali, 1981) or Buya Hamka (Hamka, 2016), it is found that self-awareness as a created being represents the initial stage of the spiritual journey toward divine gnosis (*makrifatullah*). However, this study expands that framework by linking it to the role of humans in contemporary social and ecological realms. Beyond being a path to spiritual closeness, this self-awareness also serves as a foundation for social responsibility and environmental ethics, as emphasized by contemporary thinkers such as Seyyed Hossein Nasr, who critiques the loss of cosmic awareness in modernity (Seyyed Hossein Nasr, n.d.).

The implications of these findings extend across various domains. Practically, awareness as a created being can encourage humans to be more humble, avoid arrogance towards others, and take greater responsibility for the environment. Theoretically, this study offers an integration between Islamic spiritual ontology and social ethics. In the realm of policy, this approach can be applied in character education curricula based on spirituality, teaching individuals to recognize their origin before undertaking public roles and responsibilities (Ajat Sudrajat, 2011).

One unexpected finding in the development of this discourse is that many modern individuals feel a loss of life's meaning not due to a lack of knowledge, but because they are disconnected from the awareness that they are created beings (Khasan, 2010). This opens a new discourse in Islamic psychology that existential disturbances can originate from the absence of a healthy spiritual foundation, namely awareness as a created being (Nurhayati, 2014). In this regard, Sufism, as a spiritual legacy of Islam, offers a model for restoring this awareness through the stages of *ma'rifatullah* (gnosis of God) (Tiyono & Putra, 2023b).

The significance of this discussion is very profound, especially in addressing the crisis of identity and moral degradation amid the materialistic currents of modernity. Awareness as a

created being places humans within a solid framework of meaningful existence—that they exist not because of themselves, but because of the will of the Creator (Islam, 2016). This serves as a foundation for rebuilding an ethical system rooted in the recognition of humanity’s ontological position within the cosmos.

In the theoretical context, this study reinforces the Sufi framework concerning the structure of human existence, which begins as a created being (*makhluk*), develops into a servant (*hamba*), and then becomes a caliph (*khalifah*) (Ilyas, 2016). These three stages are inseparable and interwoven. Awareness as a created being is the initial stage of basic recognition of Allah SWT, so that humans realize their existence is solely because of Allah (Tiyono & Putra, 2023b).

However, this study also has limitations. The approach used is still based on classical and contemporary literature within the Sufi framework, supplemented by empirical data or field testing from 48 informants across four regions in Java—12 informants each from Bandung (West Java), Pati and Solo (Central Java), and Surabaya (East Java). Therefore, the applied validity of these findings remains conceptual and requires further investigation through field research in other regions, for example, outside Java.

A critical interpretation of these results must also take into account that not all religious traditions or social groups share the same perspective regarding the position of humans as created beings. Within the plurality of religious interpretations, some groups even emphasize human dominion over nature without highlighting the aspects of being created and human limitations. Therefore, it is important to avoid overgeneralizing these findings and to remain open to dialogue with other approaches, whether from other religions or modern sciences (Apriliana, 2017).

A dialogue space with other approaches in the awareness of being created forms a solid foundation for building spirituality, social ethics, and ecological responsibility in Islam. This finding not only reconstructs the position of humans in a vertical relationship with God but also in horizontal relations with fellow creatures and nature. The main contribution of this study lies in the integration between the Sufi concept and the development of holistic awareness within humans as subjects who are simultaneously creatures, servants, and caliphs (Rakhmat, 2000).

Self-Awareness as a Servant (*Hamba*)

Self-awareness as a servant represents the core of the existential relationship between humans and God in Islamic teachings. The main findings of this study show that human recognition of themselves as a servant (*'abd*) is not merely a passive status but a spiritual and moral position that shapes character, life orientation, and existential purpose. The status of servitude distinguishes humans from other creatures because it contains two simultaneous elements: absolute obedience to the Creator and the responsibility to worship in a broad sense (Tiyono & Putra, 2023b).

Compared to classical Sufistic studies such as the works of Imam Al-Ghazali and Al-Raghib al-Isfahani, which emphasize the importance of *khauf* (fear) and *mahabbah* (love) in servitude, this research shows that self-awareness as a servant is also closely related to the formation of ethical consciousness and social responsibility (Arrasyid, 2020). Within this framework, self-awareness as a servant is manifested not only in the vertical relationship (*ubudiyah*) to Allah but also in horizontal relationships expressed through empathy, justice, and respect for fellow creatures.

The implications of these findings encompass psychological, theological, and social dimensions. Psychologically, a person who realizes their status as a servant (*'abd*) will tend to possess humility, sincerity, and openness in accepting life's realities (Hadziq, 2004). Theologically, this awareness strengthens *tawhid* (monotheism) and protects individuals from the arrogance of modernism, which places humans at the center of everything (Mujib, 2015a). In social practice, the awareness of servitude encourages individuals to avoid injustice and act justly, recognizing that they are not the absolute owners of anything (A. M. dan A. R. Saputra, 2019).

These findings also open a new dimension in the study of contemporary Islamic spirituality. Amid the waves of secularism and extreme humanism, awareness of oneself as a servant (*'abd*) serves as a balancing force to prevent humans from falling into existential narcissism (Nurhayati, 2014). This result expands upon ideas proposed by figures such as Martin Lings (Lings & Allen, n.d.) and Sayyid Naquib al-Attas (Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas, n.d.) who emphasize the importance of *adab* (proper conduct) as a manifestation of servitude in daily life.

The significance of this discussion becomes even stronger when linked to the reality of modern society, which is experiencing a crisis of identity and values. In a world that places great emphasis on individual freedom and self-aggrandizement, awareness of being a servant of Allah teaches the meaning of submission and limitation (Subhi, 2016). This is not a form of human weakening, but rather the highest form of awareness—that life is not merely about oneself, but about responsibility to the Almighty and to fellow creatures.

Within the theoretical framework, awareness of servanthood (*ubudiyah*) can be linked to the Islamic concept of *fitrah* (Said et al., 2022), which states that human beings are created in a natural state of recognizing their Lord (Qur'an, Al-A'raf: 172). Awareness as a servant is an expression of returning to that original nature. This is also supported by the Sufi approach, which views the process of *suluk* (spiritual journey) as a path of returning to one's origin: a conscious servant (Riyanto, 2014).

However, this study also has a regional limitation in Java Island, as it does not empirically examine how awareness of servanthood (*ubudiyah*) impacts actual behavior in contemporary Muslim communities across Java Island. The study remains theoretical and needs to be followed up with field research outside of Java or spiritual ethnography to explore how this concept is understood and lived by Muslims from diverse cultural and social backgrounds.

A critical interpretation is also necessary in understanding the meaning of servanthood (*ubudiyah*) so that it is not misinterpreted as an inferior position that negates human agency (Asnawiyah, Wahid et al., 2024). Islam, servanthood actually liberates human beings from enslavement to anything other than Allah (Kholil, 2024). Therefore, it is important to understand this concept within the context of transcendence, not blind subordination. Servanthood in Islam represents the highest form of consciousness about the meaning of life, rather than merely mechanical obedience (Tiyono & Putra, 2023b).

Understanding the meaning of life becomes more profound when viewed through the lens of servanthood as a spiritual bridge between humans and God, which gives rise to humility, responsibility, and a broad orientation toward worship (Nurhayati, 2014). The main contribution of this study is to show that servanthood is not only theologically relevant, but also contextually aligned with the needs of modern humans who long for meaning, direction, and inner peace.

Self-Awareness as a Caliph: Bearer of Divine Trust

Self-awareness as a caliph represents the most active and responsible existential dimension of human beings. The main finding of this discussion affirms that humans are not merely passive creatures who are created, or servants who worship, but also beings entrusted with the mandate to lead, manage, and care for the earth in accordance with Divine values (Tiyono & Putra, 2023b). This awareness is crucial because it positions humans as responsible stewards, not arbitrary rulers.

The concept of *khalifah* (vicegerency) in Islam, as mentioned in QS. Al-Baqarah [2]: 30 and QS. Al-An'am [6]: 165, has been extensively explored by classical scholars such as al-Raghib al-Isfahani and contemporary figures like Fazlur Rahman (Rahman, 1980). However, the findings of this study indicate that awareness of being a *khalifah* is often weak in the socio-religious practices of Muslims, both at the individual and structural levels. This study broadens the understanding that vicegerency is not merely a political or ecological responsibility, but a spiritual consciousness that shapes one's way of thinking, behaving, and acting (Askar & Ghofur, 2025).

The implications of *khalifah* consciousness are far-reaching. Practically, it demands moral accountability in all aspects of life: from family leadership and environmental management to professional ethics. Theoretically, it supports the view that humans hold a dual role: as recipients of God's trust and as maintainers of worldly balance. In terms of public policy, an approach grounded in the values of *khalifah* can inspire policies that are sustainable, inclusive, and just (Askar & Ghofur, 2025).

The existence of global imbalances, environmental exploitation, leadership crises, and extreme individualism reinforces the urgency of cultivating *khalifah* consciousness. Modern humans are often trapped in a logic of domination and ownership rather than management and responsibility (Ilyas, 2016). These findings support new literature in eco-theology and leadership ethics that view religious values as a crucial foundation for the sustainability of civilization.

The significance of this finding lies in the restoration of human function within a framework of responsibility that transcends worldly interests. Awareness as *khalifah* encourages humans to exercise power with trustworthiness, not greed. The *khalifah* role is a reflection of *ma'rifatullah* within humans, namely as guardians and bearers of compassion for the universe (*rahmatan lil 'alamin*) (Tiyono & Putra, 2023b).

In the theoretical framework, the role of *kehalifah* can be linked to the Divine Trust (Amanah Ilahi) theory in Islamic theology studies. The concept of *amanah*, as mentioned in QS. Al-Ahzab [33]: 72, shows that humans have been entrusted with a responsibility too heavy for the heavens, the earth, and the mountains to bear. This awareness provides theological legitimacy for humans' role on earth as caretakers, not rulers (Kholil, 2024).

However, it must be acknowledged that the limitation of this study is that it has not yet explored how the values of *kekehalifahan* (stewardship) are systematically instilled in formal and spiritual education. In fact, the process of internalizing this awareness is crucial in character formation. Further studies using qualitative approaches in communities that implement the principles of *kekehalifahan* could provide a more concrete picture of spiritually-based social transformation (Ilyas, 2016).

A critical interpretation of these findings also shows that the consciousness of *kekehalifahan* (stewardship) is not without risks. It can be misused as a justification for authoritarian power or domination over nature. Therefore, it is important to frame *kekehalifahan* within the limits of *tanhid* (the oneness of God), where human power is a trust and not an absolute right. True *kekehalifahan* is one that submits to the will and laws of the Divine (Tiyono & Putra, 2023b).

Self-awareness as the caliph entrusted with the Divine mandate is the core of human social and spiritual roles. This awareness is not only an individual responsibility but also a collective duty of humanity to preserve the sustainability of creation. This study shows that without an awareness of the caliphate, humans can easily stray from their existential function. Therefore, restoring the meaning of the caliphate in modern life becomes an important contribution to a more ethical and spiritual civilization.

CONCLUSION

This study successfully demonstrates that self-awareness as a created being, servant, and caliph entrusted with the Divine mandate is a crucial foundation in shaping human spiritual identity and responsibility. The findings reveal that a deep understanding of human position before Allah not only strengthens spiritual awareness but also encourages ethical behavior and responsible leadership toward the environment and fellow beings. Theoretically, this research enriches the study of Islamic spirituality by reaffirming the multidimensional role of humans, while practically providing a basis for developing character

education grounded in faith-based values. Nonetheless, the limitations related to sample scope and specific socio-cultural contexts should be considered when generalizing the results.

Therefore, further research is recommended to explore the dynamics of this awareness within various cultural and religious contexts, as well as to integrate it with contemporary psychological approaches. This study is highly relevant in efforts to build a civilized and ethical society in facing modern challenges. Thus, self-awareness as a created being, servant, and caliph is not merely a theological concept but a vital foundation for a sustainable human civilization that lives in harmony with the universe. These findings underscore the urgency of revitalizing spiritual understanding in education and character development to realize a faithful and responsible society.

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