Does Ideological Religiosity Influence Academic Achievement? Insights from Structural Equation Modeling

Muslim Usman

1Department of Hajj and Umrah Management, Universitas Islam Negeri Ar-Raniry, Banda Aceh, Indonesia

*Corresponding Author e-mail: muslim.muslim@ar-raniry.ac.id

Abstract

This study investigates whether ideological religiosity directly influences academic achievement among Diploma III (D-III) Health students in Aceh, Indonesia a culturally distinctive region and the only province in the country that formally implements Islamic law (syariat Islam). This unique context creates a highly homogeneous religious environment where students commonly internalize strong ideological beliefs rooted in divine omniscience, scriptural authority, moral accountability, and prophetic ethical principles. Although such beliefs are often assumed to shape discipline, responsibility, and learning orientation, empirical evidence regarding their direct impact on academic performance remains inconsistent. Using a quantitative, cross-sectional design, data were collected from 412 students selected through simple random sampling. Ideological religiosity was measured using a validated five-item scale, while academic achievement was operationalized through cumulative grade point average (CGPA). Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) was used to evaluate both the measurement and structural models. Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) demonstrated excellent model fit, confirming ideological religiosity as a reliable and unidimensional construct. However, the structural model showed that ideological religiosity does not exert a significant direct effect on academic achievement (β = –0.10, p = .20). These findings suggest that deeply internalized religious beliefs, despite their importance for identity and moral orientation, do not directly translate into measurable academic outcomes in a highly religious and culturally uniform context. The results reinforce theoretical perspectives that religiosity influences academic performance indirectly through motivation, emotional regulation, and behavioral discipline. Practically, the study highlights that educator should prioritize strengthening students' learning strategies, motivation, and self-regulation rather than relying on ideological belief reinforcement as a pathway to improving academic achievement. Future research directions within similar Islamic educational contexts are also discussed.

Keywords: Ideological religiosity; academic achievement; structural equation modeling; confirmatory factor analysis; tertiary education

PENDAHULUAN

Religiosity is widely recognized as a multidimensional construct that shapes individual behavior, moral orientation, and life choices across diverse cultural contexts (Bag, 2023; Gebauer & Sedikides, 2021; Saroglou et al., 2020). Foundational models conceptualize religiosity through ideological, ritualistic, intellectual, experiential, and consequential dimensions, each of which reflects distinct facets of religious expression (Siddappa, 2025; Kumar et al., 2023; Herzog et al., 2020). Among these dimensions, the ideological dimension the internalized system of beliefs and convictions about religious doctrinesis considered fundamental in shaping personal identity and influencing decision-making processes. In educational settings,

ideological commitment is frequently assumed to influence self-discipline, ethical reasoning, and a sense of responsibility, which theoretically may contribute to improved academic performance (Nirmala et al., 2024; Finefter-Rosenbluh, 2022; Laadi, 2025; Shi & Qu, 2022).

However, empirical research linking religiosity to academic achievement has produced inconsistent findings. Studies conducted in various cultural contexts have shown that religiosity may enhance psychological well-being, reduce engagement in risky behaviors, and strengthen academic motivation factors that indirectly support student success (Al-Thani, 2025; Koburtay & Abualigah, 2024; Sözer & Eskin, 2023). Conversely, other research indicates that religiosity does not necessarily translate into academic advantages, as student achievement is more strongly influenced by cognitive ability, learning strategies, prior academic preparation, and institutional support systems (Komariah & Nihayah, 2023; Zuckerman et al., 2020; Horwitz, 2021). These contrasting results suggest that the relationship between religiosity and academic achievement is complex and may vary depending on the specific dimension of religiosity examined.

In predominantly Muslim societies such as Indonesia, religiosity plays a central role in shaping students' values, attitudes, and everyday behaviors (Nurdiyanto et al., 2024; Fuad & Masuwd, 2023; Achadah et al., 2022). Aceh, in particular, is distinguished by its strong Islamic identity and the formal integration of religious principles within educational institutions and regional governance (Rahman, 2022; Habiburrahim et al., 2020). Students in Diploma III (D-III) Health programs in this region are trained not only in technical competencies but also in religious-moral principles intended to shape ethical clinical practice. Given this dual emphasis, ideological religious conviction might reasonably be expected to influence academic attitudes and learning commitment (Usman & Ahamat, 2020). Perspectives within Islamic education emphasize that belief (Iman) guides human action and character formation, suggesting that ideological religiosity may contribute to discipline, moral behavior, and academic responsibility (Guna et al., 2024; Irpan & Sain, 2024; Komalasari & Yakubu, 2023; Abbas et al., 2021; Khan et al., 2021). Yet empirical evidence isolating the ideological dimension as a single predictor of academic performance remains limited.

Existing studies have predominantly examined religiosity as a global construct or emphasized ritualistic behaviors such as worship attendance and adherence to religious rules (Fatmawati et al., 2023; Halim & Hosen, 2021; Höllinger & Makula, 2021; Rostiani et al., 2021) . These ritualistic expressions are more observable and may exert a stronger influence on study habits, time management, and social interactions. In contrast, ideological religiosity is internal and abstract, making its direct association with measurable academic outcomes theoretically uncertain. Research in developmental and educational psychology indicates that belief systems may influence academic performance indirectly through mediating variables such as motivation, emotional regulation, or coping strategies, rather than operating as direct determinants (Zhang et al., 2024; Imron et al., 2023; Nieto-Carracedo et al., 2024; Ul-Haq et al., 2019). This further reinforces the need for focused investigations that examine ideological religiosity independent of other religious.

Another important gap in the literature concerns the limited application of advanced analytical techniques to investigate the nuanced relationship between

religiosity and academic achievement. Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) offers the methodological advantage of simultaneously assessing measurement validity and structural relationships among latent variables, enabling more rigorous testing of theoretically grounded hypotheses. While prior studies have used SEM to examine religiosity, they often analyze multiple dimensions collectively rather than isolating the ideological component as an independent predictor of academic achievement. Applying SEM in this study therefore not only strengthens methodological rigor but also provides conceptual clarity regarding the role of ideological religious beliefs in shaping educational performance.

The novelty of this research lies in its exclusive focus on the ideological dimension of religiosity, its application of SEM as the primary analytical tool, and its contextual contribution from a Muslim-majority region where religious identity strongly influences institutional culture and everyday life. By examining whether ideological religiosity predicts academic achievement operationalized through students' Cumulative Grade Point Average (CGPA) this study challenges the often-assumed notion that stronger religious conviction naturally leads to better academic outcomes. Instead, it offers an evidence-based perspective that encourages a more nuanced understanding of how belief systems interact with learning processes.

In line with these considerations, the purpose of this study is to analyze whether the ideological dimension of religiosity exerts a significant effect on learning achievement among D-III Health students. The findings are expected to contribute to theoretical discourse on religiosity and education, provide empirical insights for institutions seeking to integrate religious and academic development, and inform policy discussions related to character formation within health education programs. Ultimately, this study offers a clearer understanding of whether ideological religious commitment directly supports academic performance or whether its influence operates through more complex and indirect pathways.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employed a quantitative, cross-sectional survey design to examine the direct effect of ideological religiosity on academic achievement among D-III Health students. A cross-sectional approach was appropriate because it enables researchers to measure all variables at a single point in time and assess structural relationships without needing longitudinal tracking. The study followed a deductive framework, beginning with established theories of religiosity and belief systems, and then empirically testing their association with academic outcomes using structural modeling.

To ensure methodological rigor, the research used Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) as its primary analytical method. SEM is well-suited for studies involving latent psychological constructs because it evaluates both measurement validity and structural relationships simultaneously. In this study, SEM allowed the researcher to first validate the ideological religiosity construct through Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA), followed by testing its predictive effect on academic achievement. CFA was used to confirm whether the five indicators theoretically representing ideological belief God's omniscience, scriptural truth, accountability in the afterlife, divine destiny, and prophetic moral characterformed a valid and unidimensional latent construct. Table 1 showed the summary of the research design.

Table 1. Summary of Research Design

Component	Description
Approach	Quantitative, deductive
Design	Cross-sectional survey
Latent construct	Ideological Religiosity
Outcome variable	Academic Achievement (CGPA)
Analytical technique	SEM (CFA and Structural Model)

Sample and Participants

The population for this study comprised 527 final-year students enrolled in four government-owned D-III Health institutions in Aceh, the Academy of Health Analyst, Pharmacy Academy, Tjoet Nya' Dhien Nursing Academy, and Pidie Nursing Academy. These institutions represent the major vocational health education providers in the region. Final-year students were chosen because their academic achievement, measured through Cumulative Grade Point Average (CGPA), was complete and officially documented.

Using simple random sampling, a total of 412 students were selected as the study sample. This sampling technique ensured that every eligible student had an equal chance of being included, enhancing representativeness and reducing selection bias. A sample size of more than 400 meets and exceeds recommended guidelines for SEM, which require a minimum of 200 participants for stable estimation and reliable goodness of fit indices. All participants were Muslim, reflecting the sociocultural and demographic characteristics of Aceh. The sample contained students aged 19-24 years, with gender distribution following typical patterns within health programs (see Table 2).

Table 2. Population and Sample Distribution

Institution	Population	Sample	Sampling %
Health Analyst Academy	162	85	52.5%
Pharmacy Academy	100	91	91.0%
Tjoet Nya' Dhien Nursing Academy	128	107	83.6%
Pidie Nursing Academy	137	129	94.2%
Total	**527**	**412**	**78.2%**

Instruments and Procedures

Two main instruments were used to collect data, such as (1) a self-report questionnaire measuring ideological religiosity, and (2) official CGPA records obtained from institutional databases. Then instrument, the ideological religiosity

scale consisted of five indicators representing core Islamic beliefs: God's omniscience, scriptural truth, accountability in the afterlife, divine destiny and self-agency, and prophetic moral character. These items were adapted from classical Islamic psychology and education literature and refined using expert judgment. The scale used a five-point Likert format ranging from "strongly disagree" (1) to "strongly agree" (5). Validity testing through Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) showed excellent factor loadings (.902–.941) and strong sampling adequacy (KMO = .913).

Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) further validated the construct with excellent fit indices: χ^2/df = .749, RMSEA = .000, CFI = 1.000, TLI = 1.001, GFI = .998. Reliability was high (Cronbach's α = 0.954). Then for research procedures, the data were collected inside classrooms under researcher supervision. Steps included institutional permission, participant briefing, questionnaire distribution, immediate collection, CGPA extraction from academic offices, coding, and data screening.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted using a multi-stage SEM workflow (see Table 3). The first stage involved preliminary screening to ensure data suitability. Because questionnaires were completed under supervision, no missing data were observed. Normality was verified through skewness and kurtosis values within acceptable ranges. Outliers were examined using standardized residuals, and multicollinearity checks confirmed that item intercorrelations were within safe limits.

In the second stage, Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was conducted to validate the ideological religiosity measurement model. All five indicators demonstrated strong standardized loadings and the model met all major fit criteria (CFI = 1.000, RMSEA = .000). This established ideological religiosity as a statistically valid latent construct. The final stage involved structural model analysis to test the hypothesized causal effect of ideological religiosity on academic achievement. SEM results showed that the path coefficient was negative and statistically non-significant (β = –0.10, CR = –1.40, p = .20), indicating that ideological belief did not meaningfully predict students' CGPA.

Table 3. Summary of Data Analysis

Stage	Analysis	Output
Preliminary	Normality, outliers, VIF	Data valid
Measurement Model	CFA	Excellent model fit
Structural Model	SEM	β = –0.10 (ns)
Interpretation	Hypothesis testing	No direct effect

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

CFA was conducted to validate the measurement model of the ideological religiosity construct before proceeding to structural testing. The model showed an **excellent fit** to the data, with χ^2 = 1.499, df = 2, p = .473, χ^2/df = .749, RMSEA = .000, CFI = 1.000, TLI = 1.001, and GFI = .998. All fit indices surpassed recommended thresholds, indicating that the construct specification was statistically robust and

theoretically coherent. Standardized factor loadings ranged from .902 to .941, demonstrating strong convergent validity.

Measurement reliability was also high, with Cronbach's α = .954, Composite Reliability (CR) > .90, and Average Variance Extracted (AVE) > .70. These values confirm that the ideological dimension consistently captures the internalized belief system it intends to measure. The strength of the measurement model reflects the stability of ideological belief as a core religious dimension, consistent with theoretical expectations (Bag, 2023; Saroglou et al., 2020; Gebauer & Sedikides, 2021). Overall, the CFA results confirm that ideological religiosity is a psychometrically valid and unidimensional latent construct, providing a solid foundation for subsequent SEM analysis (see Figure 1).
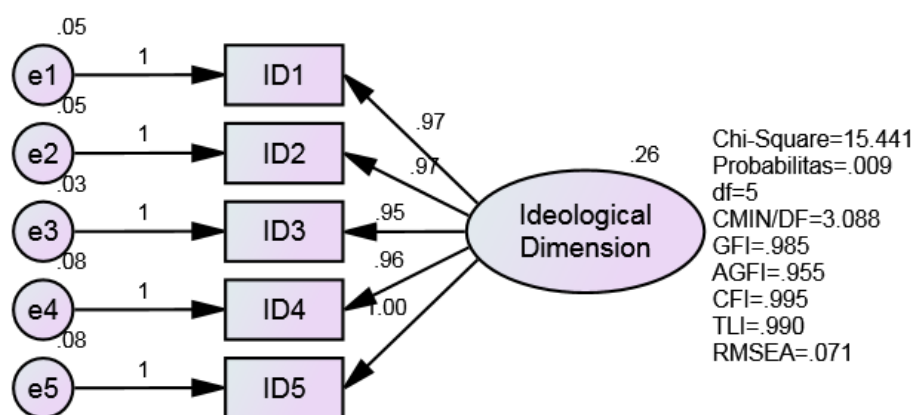
Figure 1. Confirmatory Factor Analysis of Ideological Religiosity

From the Confirmatory Factor Analysis construct Ideological Dimension chi-square value (df = 5) = 15.441 > 11.07 on probability = .009 9 .05; with $\chi 2$ / df = 3.088 > 2.00; still shows marginal fit. The RMSEA = .071 < .08, GFI value = .985; AGFI = .955; TLI = .990; and CFI = .995 indicates that it has been fit because >.90. Because the Factor Loading value is all in its entirety. The next step is to carry out respecification analysis by looking at Modification Indices (M.I.). It is obtained that e2 (ID2 indicator) has a value of M.I. high (M.I. = 6.0) so that the indicator must be removed from the model. The results of confirmatory factor analysis of the Ideological Dimension construct show that all related items have met feasibility. Namely: chi-square value = 1.499 (df2) <5.99. p = .473 5 .05. $\chi 2$ / df = .749 ≤ 2.00 RMSEA .000 ≤ .08. GFI = .998 ≥ .90. AGFI = .991 ≥ .9. TLI = 1.001 ≥ .90 and CFI = 1.000 ≥ .9 (see Figure 2).
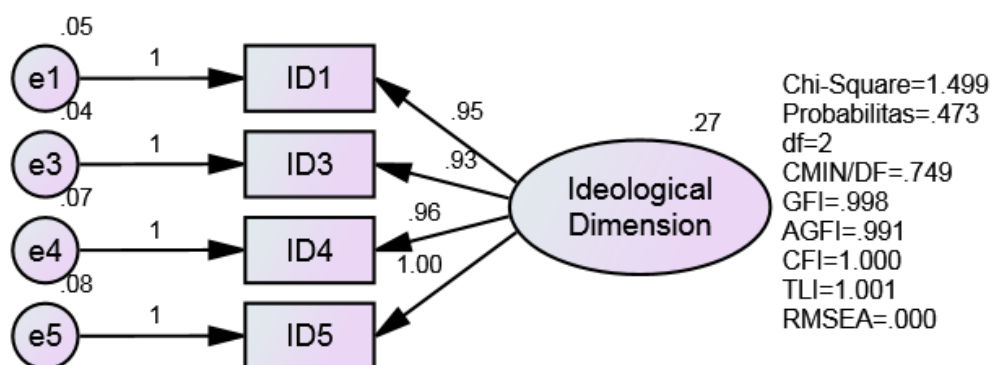
Figure 2. Confirmatory Factor Analysis Ideological Dimension Factor Final

The Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) for the Intellectual Dimension initially indicated that the measurement model did not meet acceptable fit criteria. The chi-square value ($\chi^2 = 62.471$, df = 9) exceeded the critical value of 16.92 at $p < .05$, and the χ^2/df ratio of 6.941 was substantially higher than the recommended threshold of ≤ 2.00. In addition, the RMSEA value of .120 exceeded the acceptable upper limit of .08, further confirming a poor model fit. Several incremental fit indices also failed to meet minimum standards, including AGFI (.887 < .90) and TLI (.945 < .95), despite GFI (.951) and CFI (.967) being relatively high. Together, these indices demonstrate that the initial model did not adequately represent the data.

Because the model was not yet fit, a respecification process was required. Examination of the Modification Indices (M.I.) identified substantial covariances between error terms. The indicator CD7 (e5) showed the highest MI value (25.8) and was therefore removed during the first respecification. However, model fit remained unsatisfactory ($\chi^2 = 21.675$, df = 5; critical value = 11.07, $p < .05$), indicating the need for further refinement. A second respecification eliminated CD4 (e2), which had an MI of 6.3. These modifications were necessary to improve construct validity and achieve a more acceptable measurement model.

The findings of this study demonstrate that ideological religiosity does not exert a significant direct effect on academic achievement among D-III Health students. This result is theoretically important because it reinforces longstanding arguments that belief-centered religiosity is inherently abstract and inward-focused, making it unlikely to influence measurable academic behaviors directly (Bag, 2023; Saroglou et al., 2020; Gebauer & Sedikides, 2021). Although ideological belief plays a crucial role in shaping moral identity, ethical reasoning, and worldview (Siddappa, 2025; Kumar et al., 2023; Herzog et al., 2020), it does not automatically translate into study behaviors, effort regulation, or examination performance.

The absence of a significant effect aligns with a broad body of literature suggesting that academic achievement is more strongly determined by cognitive factors, study strategies, intrinsic motivation, and the learning environment, rather than by internal belief systems (Komariah & Nihayah, 2023; Zuckerman et al., 2020; Horwitz, 2021). Psychological research further supports this interpretation, showing that religiosity typically influences achievement indirectly through mechanisms such as emotional regulation, coping strategies, and motivational processes (Zhang et al., 2024; Imron et al., 2023; Nieto-Carracedo et al., 2024; Ul-Haq et al., 2019). Because these mediators were not included in the current structural model, the absence of a direct effect is unsurprising. The findings also align with global research reporting mixed or null correlations between belief-based religiosity and academic outcomes. Ritualistic aspects of religiosity, such as structured worship, prayer habits, or religious routines tend to be more closely related to academic behavior because they cultivate discipline and consistency (Fatmawati et al., 2023; Halim & Hosen, 2021; Höllinger & Makula,

2021; Rostiani et al., 2021). In contrast, the ideological dimension is primarily cognitive and belief-oriented, and therefore less likely to predict academic performance directly.

Contextual factors in Aceh further illuminate these results. The region's strong Islamic educational culture produces a population with highly homogeneous ideological beliefs (Nurdiyanto et al., 2024; Fuad & Masuwd, 2023; Achadah et al., 2022). This homogeneity reduces variance in ideological religiosity, thereby weakening its predictive capacity in statistical models (Guna et al., 2024; Komalasari & Yakubu, 2023; Abbas et al., 2021; Khan et al., 2021). In this context, ideological religiosity functions more as a shared identity marker than a discriminating determinant of academic achievement.

From a theoretical perspective, the results support multidimensional models of religiosity (Bag, 2023; Saroglou et al., 2020) by illustrating that ideological belief influences academic outcomes only indirectly, mediated by psychological or behavioral factors not assessed in the present study. This reinforces recommendations in educational psychology to examine variables such as self-regulation, academic motivation, and resilience as potential pathways linking religiosity to performance. Practically, these results imply that (1) strengthening students' ideological beliefs alone is unlikely to enhance academic outcomes, (2) effective interventions should focus on improving motivation, metacognitive learning strategies, self-management skills, and academic resilience, and (3_ideological religiosity remains valuable in supporting ethical development, empathy, and professional responsibility, which are essential competencies in health professions, even if it does not directly improve CGPA.

CONCLUSION

This study set out to examine whether ideological religiosity exerts a direct influence on academic achievement among D-III Health students in Aceh. The findings demonstrate that, although ideological religiosity is a valid and internally consistent construct representing students' foundational belief systems, it does not serve as a direct predictor of academic performance. These results indicate that internalized religious beliefs, such as convictions about divine omniscience, scriptural truth, and moral accountability do not translate into measurable differences in students' grade outcomes. The conclusion supports the premise that ideological religiosity primarily functions as a belief-based and identity-oriented dimension rather than a behavioral determinant of academic success. As such, the ideological component of religiosity does not fulfill the predictive role hypothesized in this study. Instead, the relationship between belief systems and academic achievement is likely mediated through other psychological or behavioral factors not included in the present model. In essence, the study concludes that ideological religiosity, while important for character, moral orientation, and personal identity, does not directly influence the academic performance of health students. This finding clarifies the limits of belief-centered religiosity in educational contexts and highlights the need for future

research to investigate indirect pathways through which religiosity may influence academic outcomes.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Future research should expand the current model by incorporating psychological and behavioral mediators, such as academic motivation, emotional regulation, coping skills, and self-regulated learning because ideological religiosity may influence academic achievement indirectly rather than through a direct mechanism. Including these variables in a full structural model would provide a more comprehensive understanding of how religious belief interacts with academic behaviors. Subsequent studies are also encouraged to employ comparative designs across more diverse regions or institutions to determine whether the non-significant relationship found in Aceh is unique to its highly homogeneous religious context or reflects broader patterns in other populations.

Researchers may benefit from applying a multidimensional framework of religiosity that includes ritualistic, experiential, and behavioral components, which might show stronger associations with academic performance than ideological belief alone. Longitudinal designs are also recommended to capture developmental changes in religiosity and academic behavior over time, which cannot be observed in the cross-sectional design used in this study.

Several limitations in this research should be addressed in future work. The homogeneity of ideological belief among participants restricted variance and reduced the power to detect significant effects. The reliance on self-report measures for religiosity may also introduce response bias. Furthermore, the exclusive use of CGPA as the academic outcome may not capture other forms of student achievement such as clinical competencies, practical performance, or professional readiness. Addressing these constraints will help strengthen the validity and generalizability of subsequent research.

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