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Late Adolescent Development and Its Implications for Education

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ABSTRACT

Late adolescence (ages 18-25 years) is a critical transitional phase toward adulthood, marked by maturity in physical, intellectual, emotional, social, moral, and religious dimensions, yet frequently challenged by emotional instability, declining learning motivation, and risks of moral degradation due to peer pressure and digital influences. This study aims to holistically examine late adolescent development and its implications for education within the Indonesian context. Employing a qualitative approach through systematic literature review, the study analyzes classical theories (Piaget, Erikson) and recent empirical research on biological maturation and Islamic religious education. Findings reveal that emotional maturity is a key factor in academic and social success, with Islamic religious education providing a moral framework for emotion regulation through values such as patience, empathy, and tawakal, thereby preventing aggression, depression, and juvenile delinquency. Educational implications include systemic reforms that promote adolescent autonomy via collaborative extracurricular programs, counseling, inclusive character education rooted in local culture, and active involvement of parents and teachers. The study concludes that a holistic Islamic religious education approach effectively optimizes the multidimensional potential of late adolescents, ensures successful transition to adulthood, and offers practical recommendations for educators and policymakers.

1. Introduction

Adolescence is a transitional stage from childhood to adulthood, not a complete break, but a continuity in which past experiences continue to influence the present and future. In this phase, adolescents must leave behind childish behaviors and learn new patterns of attitudes and behaviors to replace them. Late adolescence, generally covering ages 17–21, is a critical transitional stage toward full adulthood, during which individuals experience the completion of a holistic self development process,

encompassing both physical and psychological aspects. At this stage, late adolescents face developmental tasks that include achieving maturity in physical, intellectual, emotional, social, and religious domains, all of which are interconnected and affect their ability to cope with the challenges of adult life.

In this phase, adolescents face not only biological changes approaching adult maturity but also challenges in forming a stable identity, managing complex emotions, and building mature social relationships. Multidimensional development encompasses physical, intellectual, emotional, social, moral, and religious aspects, all of which play a crucial role in shaping a responsible and adaptive personality foundation. Failure to navigate this stage successfully can lead to long-term issues, such as emotional instability or social integration difficulties, ultimately impairing readiness for adult life. To minimize such failures, education must integrate values of inclusivity and respect for cultural and social diversity into the learning process, emphasizing tolerance, cooperation, and empathy through student-centered, cooperative, collaborative, and active approaches (Hermalinda et al., 2025).

Physically, late adolescents reach peak growth, with optimized height and reproductive function, though often mismatched with emotional maturity. Intellectually, abstract and critical thinking advances, enabling evaluation of long-term decision consequences, yet they remain vulnerable to external influences (Ash, 2025). Emotionally, development is still prone to instability due to academic pressures and identity issues, requiring virtues such as patience and *tawakal* (trust in God). Socially, peer influence predominates positive or negative, while moral and religious growth involves internalizing ethical and spiritual values, including deeper understanding of religious teachings.

The implications of late adolescent development on education are highly significant, as this stage determines an individual's readiness to enter the workforce or higher education (Trisnawati et al., 2025). Education needs to be designed to support autonomy, the development of critical skills, and emotion management, for example through the integration of inclusive values and local culture into the curriculum, as well as programs that emphasize tolerance, cooperation, and empathy. In the context of Islamic religious education, for instance, this approach can help positively channel adolescents' emotional potential, prevent moral degradation, and build stronger social awareness (Ferdian et al., 2023). Several previous studies have examined educational transitions, such as the relationship between early school dropout and patterns of transition to adulthood (Utomo et al., 2014), or the influence of parents' socioeconomic status on cognitive and non-cognitive development (Choi & Min, 2024). Nevertheless, obstacles such as low parental involvement and time constraints often become challenges, thus requiring regular evaluation and effective communication to improve the quality of education.

Therefore, a deep understanding of the dynamics of late adolescent development is essential, serving as a foundation for educators to apply effective strategies in adolescent education and for parents to provide appropriate guidance, ensuring a successful transition to adulthood. This article aims to explore late adolescent

development in greater depth, along with relevant educational strategies, to contribute to educators and policymakers in supporting Indonesia's younger generation.

2. Methodology

This study employs a qualitative method with a library research or literature review approach, defined as a data collection method that involves understanding and studying theories from various related literatures (Zed, 2008), to examine late adolescent development and its implications for education. This method was selected because it enables in-depth collection and analysis of data from diverse relevant library sources. Data were gathered by searching academic databases such as Google Scholar, ResearchGate, and reputable national journals in education and developmental psychology, followed by reconstruction from existing sources including books, journals, and prior research. Analysis was conducted using content analysis and descriptive analysis, with library materials from various references critically and thoroughly examined to support the study's propositions and ideas.

3. Results and Discussion

Adolescence is a period of rapid physical, cognitive, and psychosocial development in individuals. It is also a highly sensitive phase. The swift changes in physical, psychological, and cognitive domains during this time create significant challenges in adolescents' daily lives and can reduce their subjective well-being. Particularly from late adolescence to early adulthood, when most adolescents finish their education and gradually enter society, subsequent shifts in social roles and life pressures are likely to impact subjective well-being (Mei et al., 2025). The Center for Law, Brain & Behavior at Massachusetts General Hospital defines age boundaries for development from childhood to early adulthood as shown in the following table 1 (Contact & Kinscherff, 2022);

Table 1. Stages of Adolescent Development

Stages	Age
Juveniles	13–17 Years
Early Adolescence	10–13 Years
Middle Adolescence	14–17 Years
Late Adolescence	18–21 Years
Young Adults	22–25 Years

Late adolescence is a transitional phase from the end of adolescence to full adulthood, spanning a relatively long period from ages 17 to 22. During this time, individuals experience diverse developments, including reflection on life aspirations and the evolving dynamics of parent-child relationships as key orientations for the future. Psychologically, late adolescence marks the period when individuals begin assuming adult roles in society, no longer perceiving themselves as young children requiring strict parental guidance and rules. Instead, they position themselves on equal footing with adults, though this often presents challenges in

societal integration. Additionally, various affective aspects warrant attention, including pubertal changes involving significant physical transformations and intellectual shifts that shape characteristic adolescent thinking, particularly efforts to establish balanced, adult-like social relationships. Given the limited duration of this phase, optimizing the developmental process is essential to ensure comprehensive preparation for the more demanding challenges of adulthood (Suryana et al., 2022).

Middle and late adolescents are more likely to change their decision-making processes when facing emotional situations compared to adults, as opposed to neutral conditions where they have sufficient time to think deeply about a problem. Cognitively, adolescents are similar to adults in certain contexts; for example, by age 16, they are capable of performing on par with adults if given adequate time for rational and thoughtful deliberation, including weighing consequences before deciding. However, during adolescence, individuals experience hypersensitivity to emotional content while still developing conscious and goal directed problem solving abilities similar to those of adults. Because adolescents exhibit different brain response patterns when making decisions, exercising self restraint, and regulating emotions, their behavior is highly sensitive to emotional context. Consequently, adolescents are vulnerable to emotion-driven decisions, impulsive behavior, and poor judgment (Contact & Kinscherff, 2022). Based on this explanation, it can be concluded that late adolescence is a crucial and limited transition phase toward adulthood, during which individuals undergo multidimensional transformation. Although individuals at this stage begin to show cognitive parity with adults, they remain vulnerable to emotional hypersensitivity.

Physical Development in Late Adolescence

Development is defined as a series of structured, progressive, and continuous changes that an individual (organism) undergoes to reach maturity, encompassing both physical and psychological domains (Sabariah, 2017). In this phase, late adolescents experience the continuation of puberty, including elevated adrenal androgens (such as dehydroepiandrosterone) that peak in the early 20s, resulting in the growth of pubic and axillary hair (Bonnie & Backes, 2019). Overall, late adolescents have largely completed their physical development, achieving full adult height (Salmela-Aro, 2011). All body organs have reached optimal development and function efficiently, while psychological aspects begin to stabilize; the subsequent focus shifts to further refinement and effective utilization (Lubis, 2023).

Intellectual Development in Late Adolescence

In late adolescence, intellectual development surpasses concrete thinking, becoming increasingly abstract, logical, and idealistic. This evolving cognitive strength opens new horizons in both cognitive and social domains (Ahyani & Astuti, 2018). Late adolescent thinking is characterized by the ability to consider multiple perspectives, imagine hypothetical scenarios, debate ideas and opinions (e.g., on politics, religion, and justice), and generate novel concepts. These capacities are supported by ongoing maturation of the prefrontal cortex, the brain

region responsible for judgment, impulse control, and emotion regulation (Ricardo & Rymond, 2019). To understand the world, adolescents employ Piaget's concept of schemas, mental frameworks for organizing and interpreting information. According to Piaget, they adapt these schemas through two processes, assimilation (integrating new information into existing structures) and accommodation (modifying schemas to fit new realities) (Herdiani et al., 2023).

In summary, late adolescence is a crucial phase in which intellectual development reaches abstract, logical, and idealistic levels, transcending concrete thinking to broaden cognitive and social horizons. Marked by skills in considering diverse viewpoints, constructing hypothetical scenarios, debating complex ideas (such as politics, religion, and justice), and creating new concepts, this process is underpinned by continuing prefrontal cortex maturation, enhancing judgment, impulse control, and emotional regulation. Through Piaget's framework, adolescents dynamically adapt mental schemas via assimilation and accommodation, enabling a more flexible and sophisticated understanding of the world.

Emotional Development in Late Adolescence

Emotions encompass any intense agitation of thoughts, feelings, passions, or mental states. They also refer to distinctive feelings and thoughts, biological and psychological conditions, and a series of tendencies to act. Emotions manifest in various forms, including joy, affection, love, anger, disappointment, fear, and others. In late adolescence, emotional development culminates in the ability to adjust behavior in response to internal experiences. With increasing maturity, individuals express emotions more clearly, as these become easier to classify such as fear, anger, disgust, and hatred along side greater appreciation for values, desires, and aspirations (Purnomo et al., 2024). Emotions are a dominant factor influencing student behavior. Positive emotions enhance concentration during learning, foster enthusiasm for educational activities, and improve attention to teachers' explanations (Rahmat Saeful, 2018). Emotional intelligence significantly contributes to the development of a stable, adaptive, and positive personality. Core dimensions influencing this process include self-awareness, self-regulation, empathy, motivation, and social skills (Kalsum & Sirozi, 2025).

Social Development in Late Adolescence

Social development refers to the process by which individuals learn to harmonize with others. This includes the formation of friendships and romantic relationships, as well as experiences of bullying and loneliness. Throughout the lifespan, cognitive development enables increasingly complex social interactions, and the primary contexts for social development continue to expand. In early life, the family is the central context for social development, but in adolescence and early adulthood, the social world expands to include peers, colleagues, and others (Bronk et al., 2025). Social interaction is the key to all social life, because without social interaction there is no way of living together. Humans as social beings definitely need other people and carry out social interactions within the framework of

living together (Suzilawati et al., 2022). Late adolescents are more aware of social norms and choose which values to adopt or reject, this drives independence and the search for self identity. There is a focus on career exploration, which influences social networks (for example, joining professional communities). Adolescents begin to understand social responsibilities such as loyalty and work ethics. At this stage, emotional interest in the opposite sex and long-term commitments also begin to emerge (Yegenklychev et al., 2022).

Moral Development in Late Adolescence

Etymologically, "moral" comes from the word *mos* (*moris*), which means customs, habits, rules, or values of life. Meanwhile, "morality" is the willingness to accept and practice moral rules, values, or principles. The highest level of moral development is performing a moral act based on the calling of one's conscience, without orders, and without expectation of reward or praise. Potentially, this level is reached by individuals at the end of adolescence; however, internal and environmental factors significantly influence its achievement. Among the factors that can affect moral development are the following (Ajhuri, 2019)

1. Consistency in child-rearing.
2. Parental attitudes within the family.
3. The internalization and practice of one's religious beliefs.

Moral reasoning is a person's ability to assess situations based on moral principles and make conscious and responsible ethical decisions. Individuals with strong moral reasoning will avoid deviant behaviour not only because of fear of punishment, but also because they have a deep understanding of human values and justice (Sitompul et al., 2026). Moral development is an ongoing process that occurs throughout the lifespan; however, there are differences in the level of development between male and female adolescents. Research conducted by Ira Shapira and colleagues indicates that moral development in female adolescents tends to show higher scores, specifically at Stage V of moral development (the social contract orientation stage), compared to male adolescents (Shapira Lado et al., 2019).

Religious Development in Late Adolescence

Religion is a set of teachings containing rules, laws, norms, history, *I'tibar* (lessons/reflections), and knowledge about nature, humanity, the spirit, God, and metaphysics originating either from human sources or from a Deity worshipped by humans (Tumanggor, 2016). Religion plays a role equally important to morality in the lives of late adolescents. It allows an individual to evaluate their behavior against existential goals (the reason for their existence in the world) through the moral guidance taught by their faith. The presence of religion also provides a sense of divine protection and inner peace, which are highly needed by adolescents currently in the phase of seeking their self identity (Suryana et al., 2022). Consequently, it is hoped that adolescents can avoid behavioral deviations and obtain proper guidance to transform their attitudes into more positive ones during the process of discovering their true selves. Therefore, effective religious mentoring that aligns with the teachings is necessary. If this spiritual development proceeds smoothly, late adolescents will not lose their way, and religious growth will have a

tremendous impact on their progress and the quality of their education. The findings reveal that Qur'anic values related to emotional intelligence, such as self-control, empathy, self-motivation, and building harmonious relationships, are highly relevant in shaping students' character. These values not only support intellectual development but also enhance learners' emotional and spiritual dimension (Maulida & Hasan, 2025).

Results

The development of Late Adolescence is a multidimensional transformation toward adulthood. It is a vital transition phase from adolescence to early adulthood, with an age range generally spanning from 18 to 21 years. This phase is described as a sensitive period characterized by rapid changes in physical, cognitive, and psychosocial aspects, all of which affect subjective well-being (both academic and social). Individuals begin to step into adult roles, reflect on their aspirations, and reduce their dependency on parents. During this phase, late adolescents undergo multidimensional development. Physically, they experience continued hormonal development, reach their full adult height, and achieve smooth functioning of bodily organs. In this phase, priorities also shift toward a healthy lifestyle to prevent long-term issues such as obesity or mental health disorders. This period is not merely a biological transition, but a dynamic continuity that forms the foundation of an adaptive and responsible personality.

Physically, late adolescents undergo the final completion of a structured and progressive puberty process, where the body reaches full maturity as a series of adaptations toward adulthood. At this stage, the developmental focus shifts from pure growth to the utilization of physical potential, where psychic stability begins to form as a complement. However, imbalances between physical and emotional maturity often arise, necessitating preventive interventions to maintain holistic health. This physical transition aligns with profound intellectual development, where late adolescents move beyond the limits of concrete thinking toward the formal operational stage. Their thinking becomes increasingly abstract, logical, and idealistic, opening broad horizons of thought through the ability to consider diverse perspectives, design plans, and debate complex issues. This process is supported by the maturation of the prefrontal cortex, the brain region crucial for rational judgment, impulse control, and emotional regulation. Through the mechanisms of assimilation and accommodation, late adolescents build an adaptive and dynamic understanding of the world. Although they are cognitively on par with adults under deliberative conditions, internal factors such as emotional hypersensitivity and external influences like social media can disrupt this process, making this phase a critical window for intellectual stimulation. Emotionality, serving as the bridge between cognition and behavior, undergoes a vulnerable yet progressive transformation.

In late adolescence, emotional development reaches a peak where individuals are able to adjust their behavior to emotional contexts, classify feelings more clearly, and deeply appreciate values and aspirations. Positive emotions, for example, arouse enthusiasm for learning and concentration, while unique brain responses to

emotional stimuli (such as impulsive patterns in decision-making) make them sensitive to academic pressure and self identity. Therefore, values such as patience and tawakal (trust in God's plan) ought to be strengthened to transform this vulnerability into self regulatory strength. In the social domain, this development evolves from increasingly complex interpersonal harmonization, where the primary context shifts from the family to peers, colleagues, and society at large. Late adolescents demonstrate a profound awareness of social norms, choosing which values to internalize or reject, which drives independence and the search for self-identity. There is a focus on career exploration to form new networks, such as professional communities, while an understanding of responsibilities like loyalty and work ethics begins to mature. The influence of peers, while potentially positive, also carries risks of bullying or loneliness, making this phase a crucial period for building mature relationships.

Moral and religious development are intertwined, forming a profound ethical-spiritual compass. The internalization of spiritual values can prevent behavioral deviations, transform anxiety into a positive attitude, and support holistic growth. The implications of these developmental dynamics for education are profound, particularly through an integrated Islamic religious approach. Amid the prevalence of juvenile delinquency (such as brawls and peer pressure that undermines learning motivation), education must go beyond the mere transmission of knowledge toward the application of religious values in daily life to overcome psychological anxiety and build a resilient personality. Strategies such as identity exploration and rational decision-making, supported by parents and teachers, can transform emotional vulnerability into adaptive strength, ensuring a successful transition into the adult world. Overall, late adolescence is a symphony of harmonious, holistic transformation if navigated wisely a stage where physical and intellectual achievements meet emotional, social, moral, and spiritual maturity.

Discussion

Based on the results of the study conducted, utilizing data obtained from various literary sources, such as Piaget's theory of cognitive development, empirical studies from the National Academies of Sciences regarding biological maturation, and local perspectives, these findings confirm that late adolescence is a critical transition period requiring an adaptive educational approach to optimize potential and overcome challenges. Emotional maturity can be the key to social and academic success, where religious education can provide a moral framework for emotional regulation, such as through the integration of the values of patience and empathy, thereby preventing issues like aggression and depression. Furthermore, the role of teachers and parents in building a supportive environment is also necessary to address emotional instability, as such instability directly impacts the decline of motivation and concentration.

Furthermore, the educational implications demand system reforms to support the independence of late adolescents, such as extracurricular programs that encourage collaboration and life-skills development. Research indicates that poor mental health in late adolescence correlates negatively with educational achievement;

therefore, interventions such as school counseling and family involvement become vital (Hashmi & Fayyaz, 2022). Additionally, the integration of religious values provides a concrete solution to the primary challenges of the late adolescent phase namely, the lack of readiness to face adulthood, which potentially triggers juvenile delinquency, emotional instability, and difficulties in social integration. These problems often arise due to a lack of multidimensional guidance, leaving late adolescents vulnerable to peer pressure, emotional hypersensitivity, and identity-related anxiety.

Physically, late adolescents have achieved the optimization of their bodily organs, which serves as the fundamental foundation for adult activities; however, without proper utilization, this can actually exacerbate the imbalance with psychological aspects, as seen in the increase of androgen hormones that trigger impulsivity. Intellectually, it is confirmed that the capacity for critical thinking and schema adaptation (assimilation-accommodation) opens opportunities to analyze complex issues such as socio-religious ethics; yet, emotional hypersensitivity can lead toward irrational decisions. These findings are crucial as they justify the urgent need for education that stimulates self-regulation, where positive emotions can be enhanced through the teaching of the value of *tawakal* to build enthusiasm for learning, thereby reducing the risk of delinquency, such as brawls resulting from peer influence and other similar issues.

Furthermore, this indicates that the connection between findings lies in the holistic interconnection of developmental aspects, where the physical and intellectual dimensions serve as the foundation for emotional, social, moral, and religious growth. For instance, the maturation of the prefrontal cortex not only supports logical thinking but also emotional regulation, which in turn influences social harmonization as late adolescents begin to explore careers and long-term romantic relationships. This interconnection grows even stronger within the moral-religious dimension, where the internalization of ethical values through conscience and spiritual guidance serves as a shield to prevent behavioral deviations. Religion functions as a source of inner peace. Ultimately, without strong connections across these areas, the transition to adulthood is at risk of failure, leading to long-term issues such as low prosocial behavior or social maladaptation, especially in an era where the influence of virtual peers is becoming increasingly dominant.

The ultimate goal of this study is to ensure a successful transition for late adolescents into adulthood through sustainable educational implications, specifically a holistic Islamic education strategy: one that moves beyond mere theory to the integration of values into daily life to overcome psychological anxiety and build a responsible personality. For instance, guidance programs that combine identity exploration with religious practice can mitigate the negative impacts of peer pressure. Thus, these findings do not only interpret developmental dynamics but also serve as a catalyst for educators and parents to create a supportive environment where late adolescents can optimize their multidimensional potential to contribute positively to adult society. This study, while descriptive in nature, opens opportunities for further empirical research to validate its implementation in the field.

4. Conclusion

Late adolescence is a crucial and limited transition phase from adolescence to adulthood, during which individuals undergo the final stages of holistic self-development. Physically, late adolescents have completed their growth and reached full adult height. Intellectually, their thinking reaches the formal operational stage, becoming more abstract, logical, and idealistic marked by the ability to think critically and consider multiple perspectives. Nevertheless, their emotional development remains susceptible to instability and emotional hypersensitivity, making them vulnerable to emotion-driven decisions and impulsive behavior. Socially, they focus on career exploration, the search for self-identity, and the emergence of long term emotional interests. Meanwhile, moral and religious development reaches the internalization of ethical and spiritual values, where religion plays a vital role as a moral guide and a source of inner peace.

Therefore, a deep understanding of these dynamics is essential for educational implications, particularly through effective religious education, to ensure a successful transition to adulthood. Education holds a strategic position in optimizing the potential of late adolescents while addressing their challenges. The success of this transition depends on adaptive educational system reforms oriented toward multidimensional developmental needs. By implementing inclusive religious and culture-based educational strategies, the Indonesian youth can optimize their potential, prevent moral deviations, and contribute positively to society. This study recommends the implementation of integrated religious education programs in schools, periodic evaluations of their effectiveness, and further empirical research to test the application of these strategies across various educational contexts in Indonesia. Thus, education serves not only as a means of knowledge transfer but also as a vehicle for the formation of a complete personality ready to face the challenges of the contemporary era.

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