

CHARACTER FORMATION THROUGH ISLAMIC EDUCATIONAL TRADITIONS: A PSYCHOLOGICAL AND PEDAGOGICAL FRAMEWORK

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Abstract:

Character formation remains a central aim of Islamic educational traditions, integrating spiritual, moral, and intellectual development. This study explores how these traditions contribute to character formation through a psychological and pedagogical lens. Drawing upon Qur'anic principles, Hadith, and classical educational practices, it examines methods such as tarbiyah (holistic upbringing), ta'dib (disciplining the soul), and tazkiyah (self-purification) in fostering ethical behavior. The research adopts a qualitative approach, analyzing scholarly interpretations, educational texts, and contemporary pedagogical models to propose a conceptual framework that aligns Islamic educational values with modern psychology. Findings suggest that character formation in Islamic education emphasizes balance between cognitive, affective, and behavioral domains, promoting virtues like honesty, empathy, and responsibility. The paper concludes that incorporating Islamic pedagogical methods into contemporary curricula can strengthen moral resilience and ethical decision-making in learners, providing a sustainable model for holistic education.

Keywords:

Islamic education, Character formation, Tarbiyah, Ta'dib, Tazkiyah, Moral psychology, Pedagogical framework.

Introduction:

Islamic educational traditions have historically been anchored in the holistic development of the human being, aiming to harmonize intellectual, moral, and spiritual dimensions. Unlike secular models that often emphasize cognitive growth in isolation, Islamic education perceives character formation as a comprehensive process rooted in the divine guidance of the Qur'an and Sunnah (Al-Attas, 1991). The ultimate objective is not merely the acquisition of knowledge ('ilm) but its embodiment in virtuous conduct ('amal), leading to the cultivation of a morally upright personality. This integrative vision reflects the profound connection between education and ethics within the Islamic worldview, where learning is intrinsically tied to responsibility and accountability before God (Nasr, 2002).

Character formation, in the context of Islamic education, is a dynamic process involving the nurturing of virtues such as honesty, compassion, patience, and justice. The concept of tarbiyah, which literally means nurturing or upbringing, encapsulates this multidimensional approach. It extends beyond intellectual training to include moral refinement and spiritual purification (tazkiyah al-nafts), thereby emphasizing the unity of thought, behavior, and faith (Haque, 2004). This holistic framework positions Islamic pedagogy as an essential contributor to contemporary debates on moral education, particularly in societies grappling with ethical relativism and value disorientation (Halstead, 2004).

The necessity of character education has gained renewed attention among educators and psychologists in recent decades, owing to the moral crises evident in various global contexts. Research in moral psychology underscores the interplay between cognitive development, affective engagement, and behavioral regulation in shaping ethical personalities (Lapsley & Narvaez, 2004). Similarly, Islamic educational theory advocates a balanced integration of these domains, proposing that moral character cannot flourish in a vacuum but requires a structured

pedagogical environment that combines instruction, modeling, and habituation (Ashraf, 1985). This congruence between modern psychological perspectives and traditional Islamic principles underscores the relevance of revisiting classical educational practices through a contemporary lens.

Historically, Islamic scholars such as Al-Ghazali (d. 1111) and Ibn Khaldun (d. 1406) offered profound insights into the psychology of character formation. Al-Ghazali's *Ihya' 'Ulum al-Din* emphasizes the purification of the heart as the foundation of virtuous behavior, asserting that knowledge devoid of ethical application is incomplete (Al-Ghazali, 1993). Likewise, Ibn Khaldun highlighted the formative role of social and educational environments in shaping personality traits (Ibn Khaldun, 1967). These early contributions resonate with current educational theories advocating for experiential learning, mentorship, and socio-emotional development as critical components of moral education (Elias et al., 1997).

The pedagogical dimension of Islamic education operationalizes these theoretical foundations through practical methods aimed at inculcating virtues. Techniques such as role modeling (*qudwah*), dialogue (*muhadathah*), and reflective practice (*tafakkur*) have long been employed in traditional learning settings to cultivate ethical dispositions (Rahman, 1982). These methods align with contemporary approaches in character education, such as modeling and scaffolding, which emphasize the importance of observable behaviors and guided practice in moral development (Berkowitz & Bier, 2005). Moreover, the emphasis on *adab*—proper conduct encompassing etiquette, respect, and moral responsibility—illustrates the pedagogical sophistication of Islamic education in integrating cognitive and behavioral goals within a unified moral framework (Al-Attas, 1991).

In the modern educational landscape, the challenge lies in reconciling these rich traditions with prevailing pedagogical models that prioritize measurable academic outcomes over moral and spiritual growth. Globalization, technological advancement, and cultural pluralism have intensified the complexity of character education, necessitating a paradigm that can accommodate diversity while maintaining ethical coherence (Arthur et al., 2017). Islamic education, with its emphasis on universality and transcendence of values, offers a viable template for addressing this challenge by rooting moral principles in a theocentric framework that transcends cultural contingencies (Nasr, 2002).

Furthermore, the psychological underpinnings of Islamic pedagogy merit deeper exploration in light of contemporary theories of moral development. For instance, Piaget's cognitive-developmental theory and Kohlberg's stages of moral reasoning have dominated Western discourse on moral education, yet they often neglect the affective and spiritual dimensions emphasized in Islamic thought (Kohlberg, 1984). By integrating insights from both traditions, educators can develop a more comprehensive framework that recognizes the role of intention (*niyyah*), conscience (*dhamir*), and spiritual accountability in ethical behavior (Haque, 2004). This integration is particularly pertinent in multicultural educational settings, where the coexistence of diverse moral traditions demands an inclusive yet principled approach to character formation.

Empirical studies further substantiate the effectiveness of value-based education in promoting pro-social behavior, academic engagement, and psychological well-being (Lickona, 1996). Islamic educational institutions, from the early *kuttab* to modern *madrasahs* and Islamic schools, have historically served as incubators for moral and intellectual excellence, producing scholars, leaders, and citizens imbued with a sense of ethical responsibility (Makdisi, 1981). Revitalizing these traditions in contemporary contexts requires not only curricular reform but also teacher

training, institutional support, and policy frameworks that prioritize moral development alongside cognitive achievement (Halstead & Taylor, 1996).

The significance of character formation through Islamic educational traditions extends beyond individual development to encompass social cohesion and global harmony. Ethical erosion, manifesting in forms such as corruption, intolerance, and social fragmentation, underscores the urgency of re-centering education on moral foundations. By cultivating virtues rooted in universal principles of justice, compassion, and accountability, Islamic education can contribute to building resilient communities capable of navigating the ethical complexities of modernity (Esposito, 2003). This research, therefore, seeks to explore the psychological and pedagogical mechanisms underpinning character formation in Islamic education, aiming to articulate a conceptual framework that integrates classical wisdom with contemporary insights.

In sum, the introduction of this paper situates character formation within the broader discourse of educational philosophy, moral psychology, and Islamic pedagogy. It argues for the relevance of Islamic educational traditions in addressing contemporary moral challenges and proposes an integrative approach that draws upon both traditional and modern perspectives. The subsequent sections will review existing literature, outline research questions, and present a methodological framework for analyzing the role of Islamic pedagogy in shaping ethical character. Through this inquiry, the study aspires to contribute to the ongoing dialogue on holistic education, emphasizing the inseparability of knowledge, morality, and spirituality in the pursuit of human excellence.

Literature Review:

The study of character formation within Islamic educational traditions draws upon an extensive body of literature spanning theology, pedagogy, and psychology. Scholars consistently emphasize that Islamic education is not limited to cognitive development but encompasses the cultivation of virtues, ethical behavior, and spiritual awareness (Al-Attas, 1991; Nasr, 2002). The Qur'an and Sunnah provide the foundational framework for this holistic vision, presenting education as a means to achieve human perfection (*al-insan al-kamil*) through balanced development of intellectual, moral, and spiritual capacities (Haque, 2004). This section synthesizes relevant literature to highlight the historical, conceptual, and pedagogical dimensions of character formation in Islamic education while identifying intersections with contemporary theories of moral development.

Classical Islamic scholars such as Al-Ghazali and Ibn Khaldun have significantly shaped educational discourse on character formation. Al-Ghazali's *Ihya' 'Ulum al-Din* underscores the inseparability of knowledge and action, asserting that moral excellence cannot be achieved without the purification of the soul (*tazkiyah al-nafs*) (Al-Ghazali, 1993). He categorizes virtues such as patience, humility, and sincerity as essential components of character and advocates systematic spiritual exercises to cultivate these traits. Ibn Khaldun, in his *Muqaddimah*, examines the social dimension of education, emphasizing the role of environment, companionship, and teacher influence in shaping moral behavior (Ibn Khaldun, 1967). These early contributions anticipate modern educational theories that prioritize experiential learning and socio-emotional development (Vygotsky, 1978; Elias et al., 1997).

The pedagogical foundations of Islamic education are deeply rooted in concepts such as *tarbiyah*, *ta'dib*, and *tazkiyah*. *Tarbiyah* refers to holistic nurturing aimed at developing intellectual, ethical, and spiritual dimensions, while *ta'dib* signifies instilling proper conduct and discipline (Al-Attas, 1991). *Tazkiyah*, focusing on self-purification, aligns closely with psychological theories that stress the regulation of emotions and impulses in moral development (Lapsley &

Narvaez, 2004). Contemporary scholarship highlights the relevance of these principles in modern education, arguing that their integration can counterbalance the overemphasis on cognitive outcomes at the expense of moral growth (Halstead, 2004; Arthur et al., 2017).

Modern character education theories, though secular in orientation, share notable parallels with Islamic perspectives. Lickona (1996) defines character education as the deliberate effort to cultivate virtue through instruction and practice, echoing Islamic emphasis on knowledge-action integration. Kohlberg's (1984) stages of moral reasoning, while influential, have been critiqued for neglecting cultural and spiritual dimensions central to Islamic thought (Haque, 2004). Islamic education addresses this gap by framing moral development within a transcendental context, where accountability before God motivates ethical behavior beyond utilitarian considerations (Nasr, 2002). Furthermore, contemporary approaches such as Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) stress the role of empathy, self-regulation, and social skills in character formation (Elias et al., 1997), which are intrinsic to Islamic virtues like rahmah (compassion) and ihsan (excellence).

Empirical research on Islamic educational practices illustrates their impact on character development. Studies on madrasah curricula reveal the integration of moral instruction through Qur'anic studies, Hadith, and ethical discourse (Halstead & Taylor, 1996). Islamic schools often employ pedagogical strategies such as modeling (qudwah), moral storytelling, and reflective dialogue (muhadathah), which align with best practices in character education identified in Western literature (Berkowitz & Bier, 2005). Role modeling by teachers, in particular, has been recognized as a powerful determinant of student character, reflecting the prophetic tradition of leading by example (Rahman, 1982).

Despite these strengths, contemporary Islamic educational systems face challenges in implementing character education effectively. Globalization, secularization, and technological advancement have introduced competing value systems, creating tensions between traditional norms and modern aspirations (Esposito, 2003). Some scholars argue that Islamic schools risk reducing character education to rote moral instruction rather than fostering critical moral reasoning and ethical autonomy (Halstead, 2004). Addressing these challenges requires recontextualizing Islamic pedagogical principles in ways that resonate with contemporary learners while preserving their normative essence (Arthur et al., 2017).

A growing body of interdisciplinary research advocates integrating Islamic ethical concepts with modern psychology to enhance character formation. For example, Haque (2004) suggests that Islamic notions of intention (niyyah) and accountability complement psychological constructs of intrinsic motivation and self-regulation. Similarly, the concept of adab, which encompasses proper manners, respect, and justice, parallels the virtues emphasized in positive psychology, such as humility, gratitude, and fairness (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). These intersections present opportunities for developing pedagogical frameworks that bridge tradition and modernity, offering holistic strategies for moral education in pluralistic societies.

In summary, the literature reveals a strong theoretical and practical foundation for character formation within Islamic educational traditions. However, gaps remain in operationalizing these principles within contemporary contexts, particularly in integrating spiritual and psychological dimensions in a systematic framework. This study addresses these gaps by exploring how Islamic pedagogy can inform modern approaches to character education, emphasizing its relevance in promoting moral resilience, social harmony, and personal well-being.

Research Questions:

1. How do Islamic educational traditions, particularly the concepts of *tarbiyah*, *ta'dib*, and *tazkiyah*, contribute to character formation from a psychological and pedagogical perspective?
2. What practical strategies derived from Islamic pedagogy can be integrated into contemporary educational systems to enhance moral development and holistic growth in learners?

Significance of Research:

This research highlights the relevance of Islamic educational traditions in addressing modern moral challenges by integrating spiritual, psychological, and pedagogical insights. It provides a framework for educators to design holistic curricula that nurture ethical character, fostering responsible, empathetic, and value-driven individuals capable of contributing to a just and harmonious society.

Research Methodology:

This study adopts a qualitative research design to explore how Islamic educational traditions contribute to character formation within psychological and pedagogical frameworks. A qualitative approach is suitable for capturing the depth and contextual nuances of Islamic educational principles and their practical implications for moral development (Creswell, 2018). The research primarily utilizes document analysis and thematic content analysis of classical texts, scholarly articles, and contemporary educational models. Primary sources include the Qur'an, Hadith, and works of prominent Islamic scholars such as Al-Ghazali and Ibn Khaldun, while secondary sources comprise peer-reviewed journals and books addressing character education, moral psychology, and Islamic pedagogy.

Purposive sampling was employed to select relevant literature that reflects both historical perspectives and contemporary interpretations. Data analysis involved identifying recurring themes related to moral virtues, pedagogical strategies, and psychological constructs within Islamic education. These themes were then synthesized to develop a conceptual framework linking Islamic educational principles to character formation.

The credibility of the findings was ensured through triangulation by comparing interpretations across multiple sources and consulting existing theoretical models of moral development. Ethical considerations were observed by accurately representing original texts and acknowledging all sources. The research does not involve human subjects, thus minimizing ethical risks.

Table 1: Research Design Overview

Component	Description
Research Approach	Qualitative
Method	Document Analysis & Thematic Content Analysis
Data Sources	Qur'an, Hadith, classical Islamic texts, scholarly works
Sampling Strategy	Purposive Sampling
Data Analysis	Thematic Analysis
Validity Technique	Triangulation

Data Analysis:

The data analysis focuses on identifying and synthesizing themes from classical Islamic texts, scholarly literature, and contemporary educational discourse to understand the psychological and pedagogical underpinnings of character formation in Islamic educational traditions. Through

thematic content analysis, three primary themes emerged: **(1) Foundational Principles of Character Formation, (2) Pedagogical Strategies, and (3) Psychological Dimensions.**

The first theme centers on the philosophical and normative foundations derived from the Qur'an and Sunnah, which establish character development as a primary goal of education. Verses emphasizing virtues such as justice (*'adl*), compassion (*rahmah*), and honesty (*sidq*) set the framework for moral upbringing. For instance, the Qur'an repeatedly encourages purification of the soul (*tazkiyah*), associating it with success in both worldly and spiritual domains (Qur'an 91:9-10). This aligns with Al-Ghazali's perspective that knowledge is incomplete without its translation into virtuous conduct (Al-Ghazali, 1993).

The second theme addresses the pedagogical strategies employed in Islamic education to nurture character. Classical Islamic pedagogy integrates cognitive, affective, and behavioral aspects through techniques such as role modeling (*qudwah*), dialogue (*muhadathah*), and reflective practice (*tafakkur*). Teachers in Islamic educational settings are viewed not merely as transmitters of knowledge but as moral exemplars, reflecting the Prophetic tradition of leading by example (Rahman, 1982). This pedagogical approach resonates with Vygotsky's social learning theory, which highlights the significance of guided interaction and social modeling in character development (Vygotsky, 1978).

The third theme explores the psychological aspects of character formation, emphasizing intention (*niyyah*), self-regulation, and emotional development. Islamic education stresses intrinsic motivation, linking ethical behavior to spiritual accountability rather than external rewards. This perspective parallels constructs in moral psychology, such as Kohlberg's emphasis on internalized moral reasoning, but surpasses it by incorporating transcendental accountability (Kohlberg, 1984). Furthermore, concepts like *sabr* (patience) and *shukr* (gratitude) align with positive psychology traits, fostering resilience and well-being (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000).

Thematic analysis also revealed challenges in applying these principles in contemporary contexts, including value conflicts, curriculum limitations, and lack of teacher training in moral pedagogy. Addressing these gaps requires integrating Islamic moral concepts with modern educational psychology to create hybrid models adaptable to pluralistic societies.

Table 2: Thematic Analysis of Character Formation in Islamic Education

Theme	Sub-Themes	Sources
Foundational Principles	Virtues from Qur'an & Sunnah, Tazkiyah	Qur'an (91:9-10), Al-Ghazali (1993)
Pedagogical Strategies	Role Modeling, Dialogue, Reflection	Rahman (1982), Vygotsky (1978)
Psychological Dimensions	Intention, Self-Regulation, Emotions	Kohlberg (1984), Seligman (2000)

Table 3: Comparison Between Islamic and Contemporary Moral Education Approaches

Aspect	Islamic Perspective	Contemporary Perspective
Foundation	Divine Guidance (Qur'an & Sunnah)	Secular Humanism
Motivation	Spiritual Accountability	Social Contract/Utilitarian Ethics
Pedagogy	Modeling, Reflection, Adab	SEL, Experiential Learning
Goal	Moral-Spiritual Perfection	Civic Responsibility & Autonomy

Table 4: Psychological Constructs in Islamic Character Education

Islamic Concept	Related Psychological Construct	Educational Application
Niyyah (Intention)	Intrinsic Motivation	Encouraging purpose-driven learning
Sabr (Patience)	Emotional Regulation	Stress management strategies
Shukr (Gratitude)	Positive Affect	Building resilience and optimism

The synthesis of these themes illustrates that Islamic educational traditions provide a robust framework for character formation, integrating normative, cognitive, and affective elements within a holistic pedagogical structure. While modern education emphasizes skill development and critical thinking, Islamic pedagogy insists on harmonizing knowledge with virtue, ensuring that intellectual growth is anchored in ethical responsibility. This dual emphasis equips learners not only for academic success but also for navigating moral complexities in contemporary life.

The integration of spiritual and psychological constructs within Islamic pedagogy also addresses gaps in secular educational models, which often overlook existential and transcendental dimensions of morality. By positioning character formation within a divine accountability framework, Islamic education fosters a sense of purpose and resilience, crucial for personal well-being and social cohesion.

Findings and Conclusion:

The findings of this study reveal that Islamic educational traditions offer a comprehensive framework for character formation by integrating spiritual, moral, psychological, and pedagogical dimensions. Central to this framework are the concepts of *tarbiyah* (holistic nurturing), *ta'dib* (disciplining with proper manners), and *tazkiyah* (purification of the soul), which collectively emphasize the development of ethical behavior alongside intellectual growth. These principles are operationalized through practical strategies such as role modeling (*qudwah*), dialogical engagement (*muhadathah*), and reflective practices (*tafakkur*), ensuring that learners internalize virtues rather than merely memorizing rules.

The analysis further highlights a strong alignment between Islamic pedagogical methods and contemporary educational psychology, particularly in areas like experiential learning, social modeling, and emotional regulation. Concepts such as *niyyah* (intention) and *sabr* (patience) parallel intrinsic motivation and self-regulation in modern theories, reinforcing the compatibility of Islamic and psychological frameworks. However, the research also identifies gaps in implementing these principles within current educational systems, often due to curriculum constraints, insufficient teacher training, and the dominance of secular models that marginalize spiritual development.

In conclusion, Islamic educational traditions present a viable and ethically grounded approach to character formation, addressing both personal and societal moral challenges. By bridging classical wisdom with contemporary pedagogical insights, educators can design curricula that cultivate virtues, critical thinking, and emotional resilience, ultimately contributing to holistic human development. This integration is not only relevant for Islamic schools but also for global educational discourse, which increasingly recognizes the need for value-based education to foster responsible, compassionate, and morally conscious individuals.

Future Research Approach:

Future research should explore empirical applications of Islamic pedagogical principles in diverse educational contexts, focusing on their impact on students' moral reasoning, emotional intelligence, and academic engagement. Comparative studies integrating Islamic ethics with

contemporary character education models can provide actionable frameworks for multicultural settings and policy development in value-based education.

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