



INTEGRATING THE MORAL EDUCATIONAL THOUGHT OF CLASSICAL ISLAMIC SCHOLARS INTO THE CONTEMPORARY ISLAMIC RELIGIOUS EDUCATION CURRICULUM IN INDONESIA

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Abstract:

This study explored the integration of the moral educational thought of classical Islamic scholars (Ulama) into the development of contemporary Islamic education curricula. The research was motivated by the concern that current Islamic Religious Education often emphasized cognitive aspects while overlooking the ethical and character-building dimensions deeply rooted in Islamic tradition. Using a qualitative-descriptive approach, the study analyzed selected classical texts by prominent ulama such as Al-Ghazali, Ibn Miskawayh, and Ibn Khaldun, focusing on their concepts of moral education, character formation, and the philosophical foundations of ethics in learning. The findings showed that the scholars' moral educational thought provided valuable insights for constructing a more holistic curriculum that balanced knowledge, spirituality, and character. Specifically, Al-Ghazali's concept of *tazkiyat al-nafs* (purification of the soul) provided a foundation for developing assessment models that evaluate not only cognitive mastery but also learners' ethical dispositions and the sincerity of their actions, through reflective self-assessment and teacher-led moral observation. Likewise, Ibn Khaldun's theory of learning through gradual habituation (*ta'awwud*) informed a pedagogical framework that emphasizes staged moral formation, collaborative learning, and social responsibility projects within the school environment. The study further revealed that integrating classical moral philosophy enriched curriculum content, pedagogical approaches, and evaluation models in contemporary Islamic education, making them more value-oriented and contextually relevant. The discussion emphasized the significance of reconnecting with Islamic intellectual heritage to establish a value-based system capable of responding to modern educational challenges, particularly those related to digital ethical behavior, social cohesion, and character resilience. This research contributed to the theoretical foundations of curriculum development and advocated for a culturally rooted, morally grounded educational paradigm.

Keywords: Character Formation; Classical Ulama; Islamic Curriculum; Islamic Education Reform; Moral Education.

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INTRODUCTION

In recent years, concerns over declining moral values have emerged as a global issue, with educators and policymakers warning of increased cases of dishonesty, social injustice, intolerance, and a weakening of ethical awareness among younger generations

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across different societies. This challenge is also evident in many Muslim-majority countries, including Indonesia, where schools and religious institutions continue to face difficulties in fostering students' character and ethical conduct despite ongoing curriculum reforms. Within this context, the integration of moral education into Islamic Religious Education has become increasingly urgent, as a growing number of cases involving dishonesty, intolerance, disrespect, and social irresponsibility among students raises critical questions regarding the effectiveness of character formation within formal curricula. Despite ongoing curriculum reforms in many Muslim-majority countries, including Indonesia, the emphasis in Islamic Religious Education remains mainly cognitive, focusing on doctrinal understanding, ritual compliance, and textual memorization rather than ethical internalization and character formation¹.

However, although previous studies have explored moral and character education within Islamic Religious Education, most focus primarily on conceptual and normative discussions and lack practical learning models that can be applied effectively in the classroom. Existing research also tends to generalize character values without providing clear pedagogical strategies for strengthening specific moral competencies, especially those needed in contemporary digital and multicultural learning environments². It indicates a research gap in developing a more contextually grounded and pedagogically applicable approach to integrating moral education within Islamic Religious Education. Accordingly, this study seeks to address that gap by proposing a more systematic and practice-oriented model that supports the cultivation of students' moral reasoning, ethical responsiveness, and socially responsible behaviour.

This imbalance has led to a growing disconnection between Islamic knowledge and moral behaviour in learners' daily lives, a phenomenon often referred to as the crisis of moral praxis in Islamic education³. Studies have shown that while students may possess strong religious knowledge, it does not always translate into ethical sensitivity or socially responsible action. Moreover, the current pedagogical approaches tend to overlook the affective and spiritual dimensions of learning, which are essential for meaningful moral development. Therefore, there is a pressing need to revisit foundational Islamic educational thought that integrates cognition with character, doctrine with ethics, and knowledge with personal transformation.

Historically, classical Islamic scholars (*ulama*) developed rich and nuanced models of moral education that were deeply rooted in both Qur'anic teachings and socio-cultural realities. Thinkers such as Al-Ghazali (d. 1111), Ibn Miskawayh (d. 1030), and Ibn Khaldun (d. 1406) offered comprehensive frameworks of ethical development that integrated intellectual, spiritual, and behavioural dimensions⁴. Their educational philosophies emphasized *tazkiyatun nafs* (purification of the soul), habituation of virtues, and teacher-centred moral modelling as key to moral transformation.

Al-Ghazali, for instance, in his seminal work *Ihya' 'Ulum al-Din*, emphasized that

¹ Alhamuddin, "Abd Shamad Al-Palimbani's Islamic Education Concept: Analysis of Kitab Hidayah al-Sālikin Fi Suluk Māsālāk Lil Muttāqin."

² Ifa Maulida et al., "Integrating Islamic Moral Values into Holistic Education: A Systematic Character Development Model in Indonesian Junior High Schools," *Journal of Islamic Education Research* 6, no. 04 (2025), doi:10.35719/jier.v6i4.525.

³ J. Mark Halstead, "Islamic Values: A Distinctive Framework for Moral Education?" *Journal of Moral Education*, September 2007, doi:10.1080/03057240701643056.

⁴ Ibid.; Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Islamic Science: An Illustrated Study* (World of Islam Festival Publishing Company, 1976).

proper education is the cultivation of the heart, where knowledge must lead to inner reform and ethical action. He outlined a moral curriculum based on self-discipline, reflection (*muhasabah*), and constant remembrance of God (*dhikr*) as tools for nurturing virtuous character. Ibn Miskawayh, in *Tahdzib al-Akhlaq*, provided one of the earliest systematic treatments of ethics in Islam, proposing that moral character is not innate but must be acquired through deliberate effort, habituation, and rational guidance. Meanwhile, Ibn Khaldun, through his *Muqaddimah*, stressed the role of social environment, historical consciousness, and the teacher's personal integrity in shaping learners' moral outlook.

These scholars also viewed education as a lifelong moral journey, where the ultimate goal is the perfection of the soul (*al-kamal al-insani*) in harmony with divine will. Their models represent a synthesis of reason and revelation, theory and practice, and personal and communal ethics. Despite their historical distance, their insights remain relevant for addressing contemporary educational challenges, especially in restoring the balance between cognitive achievement and character formation within Islamic education systems.

Previous studies have discussed character education in Islamic schools, and some have highlighted the significance of values education in the curriculum. However, few have systematically explored the potential contribution of classical ulama's ethical thought as a conceptual foundation for contemporary Islamic education curriculum reform. This gap underscores the need for a deeper philosophical and historical engagement with Islamic moral heritage to enrich current pedagogical practices.

This study aims to explore how the moral educational thought of classical ulama can be conceptually integrated into the design and development of today's Islamic education curricula. The novelty of this research lies in bridging traditional Islamic ethical philosophy with modern curricular discourse, offering a culturally rooted and theologically sound approach to character education. The significance of this work extends to curriculum developers, Islamic education practitioners, and policymakers seeking to foster holistic educational models that cultivate both intellect and virtue.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a qualitative research approach⁵ with a conceptual and descriptive-analytical design. The research aimed to explore and interpret the moral educational thought of classical Islamic scholars (Ulama) and their relevance to the development of contemporary Islamic education curricula. The primary sources of data were classical Islamic texts authored by prominent scholars such as Al-Ghazali's *Ihya' 'Ulum al-Din*, Ibn Miskawayh's *Tahdzib al-Akhlaq*, and Ibn Khaldun's *Muqaddimah*. These texts were selected purposively for their rich ethical and educational content, which addresses the formation of character, moral psychology, and pedagogical principles.

Secondary data were obtained from contemporary academic works, journal articles, and curriculum documents related to Islamic Religious Education and character education in modern contexts. Data collection was conducted through documentation and textual analysis, focusing on extracting key themes, concepts, and pedagogical models

⁵ Matthew B. & Huberman Miles, *Qualitatif Data Analysis: A Sourcebook of New Method* (Beverly Hills: Sage Publication, 1986).

from the classical works. The data were analyzed using content analysis techniques, involving thematic categorization, comparison, and synthesis. Three stages guided the analysis process: (1) data reduction through selection of relevant textual excerpts, (2) data display in thematic categories (e.g., goals of moral education, methods, teacher roles), and (3) conclusion drawing by relating classical perspectives to current curriculum needs. This method enabled a critical and contextual understanding of how classical moral thought could be conceptually integrated into present-day Islamic education discourse⁶.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Identifying Moral Education Concepts from Classical Ulama

The study identified and analyzed key moral educational concepts from classical Islamic scholars, particularly Al-Ghazali, Ibn Miskawayh, Ibn Khaldun, and Al-Raghib Al-Asfahani. Their works reflect deeply rooted ethical frameworks that remain relevant for addressing challenges in contemporary Islamic education related to character formation. One central theme that emerged is the concept of *tazkiyatun nafs* (purification of the soul), which is regarded as the foundation of moral education. **Al-Ghazali**, in *Ihya' 'Ulum al-Din*, emphasized that the heart (*qalb*) is the center of moral decision-making and that ethical transformation must begin from within. He considered *ikhlas* (sincerity), *tawadhu'* (humility), and *amanah* (trustworthiness) not merely as moral traits, but as spiritual states cultivated through disciplined learning and spiritual reflection⁷. This approach contrasts with many modern Islamic education curricula that focus primarily on cognitive understanding and ritual practice without adequately addressing spiritual refinement.

In parallel, **Ibn Miskawayh's** *Tahdzib al-Akhlaq* presented moral development as a structured process of *riyadhah nafsyyah*, the habituation of virtues through repetition and conscious effort. He argued that good character is formed not by sudden inspiration but through repeated moral practice, guided by reason and reflection. Virtues such as *'adl* (justice) and social responsibility are acquired gradually and require a moral environment conducive to their development (Ibn Miskawayh, 1964). His model aligns with virtue ethics while embedding it firmly within the Islamic worldview.

Ibn Khaldun offered a more sociological and historical view of moral education. In his *Muqaddimah*, he emphasized *ta'dib* (moral training) and the role of imitation (*taqlid*) in character formation. He noted that learners tend to emulate their teachers, making educators' moral character a crucial factor in effective moral instruction. In this view, the school becomes not just a place of knowledge transmission, but a space of ethical modelling and social conditioning (Ibn Khaldun, 1967). His insights resonate with the contemporary concept of the hidden curriculum, wherein learners absorb values through lived experience and interaction⁸.

Al-Raghib Al-Asfahani contributed a more philosophical dimension by classifying virtues into rational (*hikmah*), emotional (*syaja'ah*), and ethical (*'iffah*) domains, with *'adl* (justice) as their balanced outcome. He asserted that moral balance is achieved through

⁶ John W Creswell and Cheryl N Path, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing among Five Approaches* (Sage Publication, 2016); James P Takona, "Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches / Sixth Edition," *Quality & Quantity* 50, no. 1 (2024): 1011–1013.

⁷ Al-Ghazali, *The Revival of the Religious Sciences (Ihya' 'Ulum al-Din)*. Translated by T.J. Winter. (Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, 2005).

⁸ A Ibn Khaldun, *Al-Muqaddimah: Muqaddimah Fi al-Tarikh* (Cairo: Dar al-Ma'arif, 2000).

continuous reflection, spiritual training, and guided self-restraint. His contribution offers a structured moral taxonomy that can guide curricular objectives in Islamic character education.

These findings suggest that classical Islamic scholars proposed a comprehensive moral educational model that integrates intellectual reasoning, spiritual depth, and behavioural practice. Unlike much of contemporary Islamic education, which tends to emphasize ritual compliance and cognitive acquisition of doctrinal content, the classical framework foregrounds the transformational nature of education aiming to shape not just what students *know*, but who they *become*⁹. In this regard, moral education is not a discrete component but the *heart* of the entire educational process, infused in every subject, practice, and pedagogical interaction.

Compared with many modern curricula, which often separate knowledge (*ma'rifah*) from ethical embodiment (*akhlaq*), the classical model offers a holistic alternative that aligns knowledge, inner disposition, and outward action. As Halstead¹⁰ and Kersten¹¹ point out, Islamic Religious Education in several Muslim-majority contexts, including Indonesia, has suffered from a lack of integration between Islamic knowledge and lived ethical behaviour. The result is a generation of learners who may understand religious doctrines but struggle to apply them meaningfully in interpersonal, social, or professional domains. The study supports this critique and offers constructive direction by retrieving and recontextualizing the moral wisdom of classical ulama. Their legacy provides pedagogical strategies that modern educators can adapt to contemporary challenges. Central to this are the principles of:

1. *Tazkiyatun Nafs* – the continuous purification of the soul from negative traits (e.g., arrogance, envy, hypocrisy) and the cultivation of positive virtues through self-discipline, reflection, and remembrance of God. This concept links closely to the Qur'anic imperative: "*He has succeeded who purifies it (the soul)*" (Q.S. Ash-Shams: 9).
2. *Riyadhah Nafsiyyah* – systematic habituation of good character through practice and repetition, paralleling what Ibn Miskawayh emphasized in *Tahdzib al-Akhlaq*. This process aligns with Aristotelian moral philosophy but is distinctly Islamic in its theological foundations and its connection to *taqwa* (God-consciousness) (Nasr, 2002).
3. Moral Exemplarity – the modelling of virtuous behaviour by teachers and community leaders, as highlighted by Ibn Khaldun in his theory of *ta'dib*. He stressed that moral formation is not primarily achieved through instruction but through imitation (*taqlid*) of respected figures¹². In a society increasingly shaped by digital influences and fragmented authority structures, restoring the role of morally upright educators as living examples becomes crucial.

Furthermore, the character traits most emphasized by classical scholars, *ikhlas* (sincerity), *amanah* (trustworthiness), *tawadhu'* (humility), *'adl* (justice), and *mas'uliyah* (*ijtima'iyah*) (social responsibility) are urgently needed today. These virtues counteract widespread ethical erosion, such as corruption, dishonesty, social apathy, and

⁹ Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas, *The Concept of Education in Islam: A Framework for an Islamic Philosophy of Education* (International Institute of Islamic Thought, 1999).

¹⁰ Halstead, "Islamic Values: A Distinctive Framework for Moral Education?"

¹¹ Carool Kersten, "Islamic Post-Traditionalism: Postcolonial and Postmodern Religious Discourse in Indonesia," *Sophia* 54, no. 4 (December 1, 2015): 473–89, doi:10.1007/s11841-014-0434-0.

¹² Ibn Khaldun, *Al-Muqaddimah: Muqaddimah Fi al-Tarikh*.

performative religiosity. Their integration into school curricula must go beyond theoretical inclusion in learning outcomes; they must be enacted through the school climate, assessment strategies, and teacher training. From a policy perspective, this study recommends a reorientation of Islamic Religious Education to rediscover its classical ethical core. It includes developing integrative modules that blend cognitive knowledge with spiritual exercises, ethical case studies, mentorship programs, and reflective practices rooted in Islamic metaphysics and pedagogy. Such a model would not only revitalize character education but also offer a uniquely Islamic contribution to the global discourse on moral and values education.

Classical Islamic Educational Thought and Its Relevance to Modern Curriculum Challenges

The moral educational thought of classical Islamic scholars remains profoundly relevant in addressing the contemporary challenges of Islamic Religious Education (IRE) curricula. Despite rapid educational reforms and the integration of modern pedagogical frameworks, there is a growing recognition among scholars and practitioners that Islamic education today particularly in Muslim-majority countries such as Indonesia tends to emphasize cognitive and doctrinal dimensions, while neglecting the affective and spiritual aspects of learning¹³. This imbalance has resulted in a widening gap between students' religious knowledge and their moral behavior, both in private and public spheres.

Classical scholars such as Al-Ghazali, Ibn Miskawayh, and Al-Raghib Al-Asfahani provide normative and philosophical foundations that are still applicable for reorienting Islamic education toward character formation. Their workplace moral education (*tarbiyah akhlaqiyyah*) is at the center of the learning process, not as an auxiliary theme, but as the ultimate goal of education itself. For example, Al-Ghazali¹⁴ emphasized that actual knowledge (*'ilm*) must lead to *amal* (action) and eventually to *akhlaq* (virtue). This triadic relationship between knowledge, practice, and character formation provides a powerful antidote to overly formalistic approaches in contemporary curricula.

Furthermore, classical perspectives offer a holistic moral framework that integrates three interdependent dimensions: personal virtue (*Akhlak*), spiritual devotion (*Ibadah*), and social ethics (*mu'amalah*). This integration is crucial for shaping well-rounded individuals who not only perform rituals but also embody Islamic values in their social lives. As Nasr¹⁵ noted, Islamic education must "transmit not only information but a way of being that is anchored in the sacred." In this sense, the classical tradition sees no dichotomy between religious ritual and ethical conduct; both are expressions of the same spiritual core.

This holistic perspective, rooted in the classical Islamic moral tradition, offers a compelling corrective to one of the most persistent critiques of contemporary Islamic Religious Education: its tendency to emphasize textual memorization, ritual correctness, and legalistic formulations at the expense of moral sensitivity, emotional intelligence, and

¹³ Masnur Muslich, *Pendidikan Karakter: Menjawab Tantangan Krisis Multidimensional* (Jakarta : Bumi Aksara, 2022); Alhamuddin Alhamuddin, Eko Surbiantoro, and Revan Dwi Erlangga, "Character Education in Islamic Perspective," in *Advances in Social Science, Education and Humanities Research*, (London: Atlantis Press, 2022).

¹⁴ Al-Ghazali, *The Revival of the Religious Sciences (Ihya' 'Ulum al-Din)*. Translated by T.J. Winter.

¹⁵ Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *The Heart of Islam: Enduring Values for Humanity* (Zondervan, 2009); Nasr, *Islamic Science: An Illustrated Study*.

spiritual depth. In many educational settings, learners are expected to master doctrinal content and perform religious obligations with precision. Yet, there is often a noticeable gap between their spiritual knowledge and ethical behaviour, a disjunction that undermines the transformative potential¹⁶ of Islamic education itself¹⁷.

The classical tradition, as articulated by figures such as Al-Ghazali, Ibn Miskawayh, and Al-Raghib Al-Asfahani, challenges this narrow paradigm by placing moral cultivation at the heart of the educational process. Central to their frameworks are concepts like *tazkiyatun nafs* (purification of the soul), *riyadhah nafsīyyah* (discipline and habituation of the self), and the development of core virtues such as *ikhlas* (sincerity), *tawadhu'* (humility), and *'adl* (justice). These concepts are not simply theoretical ideals, but practical ethical goals that require a pedagogical process involving introspection, ethical modelling, and the gradual internalization of values through experience¹⁸ and reflection¹⁹. Incorporating these elements into the Islamic Religious Education curriculum can transform it from a system of information delivery into a platform for inner development and social responsibility. This reorientation moves beyond the dichotomy between religious form and moral substance, fostering a learning environment where character formation is integral, not incidental, to spiritual learning²⁰.

Importantly, the classical Islamic moral tradition should not be viewed as an outdated relic of a bygone era. Instead, it offers profound ethical insights and pedagogical models that are urgently needed in the face of modern educational challenges. Its relevance lies not in rejecting modernity but in providing a normative framework that enables a creative and critical synthesis merging timeless ethical principles with contemporary pedagogical practices. Such integration allows Islamic education to reclaim its transformative ethos: to nurture individuals who are not only knowledgeable but also wise, ethical, and socially engaged²¹.

Strategies for Integrating Classical Thought into the Islamic Religious Education Curriculum

Strategic efforts are needed to integrate classical Islamic moral thought into the design and implementation of the Islamic Religious Education curriculum. Integration must move beyond superficial references to classical texts and instead embed their values, methodologies, and spiritual depth into the core educational framework. A key strategy involves developing Islamic Religious Education learning content that explicitly highlights the ethical teachings of scholars such as Al-Ghazali, Ibn Miskawayh, and Al-Raghib Al-Asfahani. Their elaborations on virtues such as *ikhlas* (sincerity), *'adl* (justice), *tawadhu'* (humility), and *amanah* (trustworthiness) serve as a foundation for lesson materials, thematic modules, and integrative character-building programs. These moral values are universal, yet deeply rooted in Islamic tradition, and respond to the growing ethical disorientation in contemporary student life²².

¹⁶ Halstead, "Islamic Values: A Distinctive Framework for Moral Education?"

¹⁷ Zuhdi, "Modernization of Indonesian Islamic Schools' Curricula, 1945–2003."

¹⁸ Ibn Miskawayh, *Tahdzib Al-Akhlaq Wa Tathir al-A'ra* (Cairo: al-Maṭba'ah al-Ḥusayniyah, 2015).

¹⁹ Al-Ghazali, *The Revival of the Religious Sciences (Ihya' 'Ulum al-Din)*. Translated by T.J. Winter.

²⁰ H Supriyanto, *FILSAFAT FILSAFAT FILSAFAT AKHLAK IBNU MISKAWAIH* (Bayumas: Rizquna, 2022).

²¹ Erwin Akib et al., "Study on Implementation of Integrated Curriculum in Indonesia," *IJORER: International Journal of Recent Educational Education* 1, no. 1 (2020): 39–57.

²² Halstead, "Islamic Values: A Distinctive Framework for Moral Education?"

Instructional methods must also be reoriented. Classical Islamic pedagogy emphasizes *uswah hasanah*, the embodiment of moral excellence, by teachers as well as spiritual reflection and ethical contemplation. Teachers are not merely transmitters of knowledge (*mu'allim*), but moral guides (*murabbi*) whose personal conduct significantly influences students' internalization of values Ibn Khaldun²³. Approaches, such as dialogical reflection (*muhasabah*), guided contemplation on Qur'anic ethics, and structured ethical case studies rooted in Islamic tradition, foster deeper affective learning and soul-based transformation²⁴.

Curriculum reconstruction stands as a vital endeavour in the effort to revitalize Islamic Religious Education for the 21st century. An akhlaq-centric curriculum deeply rooted in Qur'anic moral ideals and classical Islamic philosophical thought, yet deliberately responsive to contemporary realities, can effectively harmonize the spiritual, moral, and intellectual development of learners. This reconfiguration of the curriculum is not merely about adding moral content; it requires reorienting the entire educational framework so that ethical formation becomes the core, not the periphery, of Islamic education. Such a model encourages the incorporation of moral reasoning that engages with real-life ethical challenges. Issues such as digital honesty, social media ethics, environmental stewardship, consumerism, and global justice must become part of the moral discourse within Islamic Religious Education classrooms. These topics, when framed through classical virtues like *amanah* (trustworthiness), *'adl* (justice), and *mas'uliyah* *ijtima'iyah* (social responsibility), offer students both moral guidance and spiritual grounding in navigating the complexities of modern life²⁵.

This curriculum vision echoes the philosophy of Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas²⁶, who asserted that the true aim of education in Islam is the inculcation of *adab*, defined as the proper ordering of the self in relation to God, to society, and to the cosmos. For Al-Attas, knowledge without *adab* leads to confusion and injustice, both in individual behaviour and societal structure²⁷. Therefore, a truly Islamic curriculum must nurture not only the intellect but also the soul and character, restoring a holistic and sacred view of learning.

By reconstructing the curriculum in this manner, educators can bridge the gap between classical moral wisdom and contemporary pedagogical needs, offering a transformative model of Islamic education that is not only doctrinally sound but also ethically responsive, spiritually enriching, and socially relevant. The integration of classical Islamic moral thought into contemporary Islamic Religious Education should not be misconstrued as a nostalgic attempt to replicate the past. Instead, it represents a dynamic and contextually relevant renewal of ethical wisdom that responds to the moral, spiritual, and social needs of today's learners. Classical scholars such as Al-Ghazali, Ibn

²³ Ibn Khaldun, *Al-Muqaddimah: Muqaddimah Fi al-Tarikh*.

²⁴ Raudlotul Firdaus Binti Fatah Yasin, Assistant Professor, and Mohd Shah Jani, *Islamic Education: The Philosophy, Aim, and Main Features*, *International Journal of Education and Research*, vol. 1, 2013, www.ijern.com.

²⁵ Alhamuddin, "Abd Shamad Al-Palimbani's Islamic Education Concept: Analysis of Kitab Hidayah al-Sālikin Fi Suluk Māsālāk Lil Muttāqin."

²⁶ Al-Attas, *The Concept of Education in Islam: A Framework for an Islamic Philosophy of Education*; S. M. N Al-Attas, *Islam and Secularism* (Kuala Lumpur: ISTAC, 1993).

²⁷ Muhammad Alifuddin, Alhamuddin Alhamuddin, and Nurjannah Nurjannah, "School of Anak Laut (Sea Children): Educational Philanthropy Movement in Bajo Community of Three-Coral World Center," *Jurnal Iqra' : Kajian Ilmu Pendidikan* 6, no. 1 (June 2, 2021): 164–79, doi:10.25217/ji.v6i1.1057.

Miskawayh, and Al-Raghib Al-Asfahani developed moral philosophies grounded not only in revelation but also in a profound understanding of human psychology, social responsibility, and ethical formation. Re-engaging with these traditions enables educators to draw upon a legacy of character education that is both theologically robust and pedagogically rich.

This integrative strategy allows for a more balanced approach to Islamic education, one that harmonizes *naqli* (textual/scriptural) knowledge with *khuluq* (character), and doctrinal instruction with spiritual refinement. It challenges the prevailing dichotomies between form and meaning and between knowledge acquisition and moral embodiment by advocating a curriculum that places ethical transformation at its core. Within this framework, students are not merely passive recipients of religious facts but active moral agents shaped through reflection, habituation, and exemplification. Moreover, such a renewal is not only possible but necessary in the context of modernity, where rapid social changes, moral relativism, and identity fragmentation present serious challenges to Muslim youth. The classical moral tradition, with its emphasis on sincerity (*ikhlas*), humility (*tawadhu'*), justice (*'adl*), and responsibility (*mas'uliyah*), offers powerful tools to cultivate ethical resilience, spiritual depth, and civic engagement. It empowers educators to design curricula that are not only intellectually rigorous but also morally transformative, nurturing individuals who are both faithful and socially conscious²⁸.

Curriculum Reform in Islamic Religious Education

Curriculum development in Islamic Religious Education must move beyond the traditional emphasis on cognitive achievements to include the holistic transformation of learners' character²⁹. A well-structured curriculum should not only deliver doctrinal content but also cultivate moral awareness, ethical reasoning, and spiritual depth. This shift is essential to address the moral disengagement often observed among students who possess religious knowledge but lack corresponding ethical behavior³⁰.

A fundamental step is to formulate a curriculum framework that explicitly integrates character outcomes into its core objectives. Learning goals should include competencies related to integrity, empathy, responsibility, and sincerity (*ikhlas*), in addition to knowledge of Islamic teachings. This approach aligns with the classical Islamic educational tradition, which regards *ilm* (knowledge) as inseparable from *Adab* (*ethical comportment*) and *tazkiyatun nafs* (purification of the soul)³¹. To ensure effective implementation, teachers must be equipped through professional development programs that expose them to the ethical philosophies of classical scholars like Al-Ghazali, Ibn Miskawayh, and others. Such training should emphasize the internalization of moral principles, the modelling of ethical behaviour, and strategies for embedding moral discourse in classroom practice. Teachers who embody the values they teach can more

²⁸ Alhamuddin et al., "Reforming Character Curriculum Through Qur'anic Insights: The Pedagogical Relevance Of Luqman's Wisdom (Q.S. 31:13-19)," *Tarbiyah Bil Qalam: Jurnal Pendidikan Agama Dan Sains* 9, no. 2 (2025), doi:10.7401/hms52091.

²⁹ Universitas Islam Bandung, "Islamic Character Education in Indonesian National Curricula: A Critical Policy Analysis of The 2013 And Merdeka Frameworks," *Tarbiyah Islamiyah: Jurnal Ilmiah Pendidikan Agama Islam* 15, no. 1 (2025): 27-38, doi:10.18592/jtipai.v15i1.16437.

³⁰ Alhamuddin et al., "Politics of Education in Curriculum Development Policy in Indonesia from 1947 to 2013: A Documentary Research," *Jurnal Pendidikan Islam* 9, no. 1 (June 28, 2020): 29-56, doi:10.14421/jpi.2020.91.29-56.

³¹ Al-Attas, *The Concept of Education in Islam: A Framework for an Islamic Philosophy of Education*.

effectively facilitate students' moral formation³².

Moreover, the spiritual and value-oriented dimension of the curriculum must be strengthened, both in its content and in its assessment design. Evaluations should include not only knowledge-based testing but also tools for assessing character growth, reflective thinking, and behavioural changes. Spiritual practices such as guided reflection, journaling, ethical case discussions, and service learning can be integrated to nurture inner development alongside intellectual progress³³.

Developing a morally transformative Islamic Religious Education curriculum necessitates a fundamental shift in both curricular structure and pedagogical orientation. It calls for moving beyond traditional models that focus predominantly on cognitive outcomes such as memorization of texts and mastery of doctrinal content—toward an approach that integrates intellectual development with ethical formation, spiritual depth, and social consciousness³⁴. This transformation cannot occur through superficial adjustments alone; it requires reimagining the very purpose and philosophy of Islamic education³⁵.

Rooting the Islamic Religious Education curriculum in the rich ethical legacy of classical Islamic scholars such as Al-Ghazali's emphasis on the purification of the soul (*tazkiyatun nafs*), Ibn Miskawayh's structured ethical training (*Riyadhah Nafsiyyah*), and Al-Raghib Al-Asfahani's moral taxonomy provides a normative and time-tested foundation for such a shift. Their insights offer more than abstract moral ideals; they present actionable pedagogical principles that can guide the formation of character in the classroom through methods such as modelling, reflection, ethical dialogue, and spiritual practice³⁶.

Aligning these classical insights with contemporary educational realities ensures that the curriculum remains contextually relevant. Today's learners face complex moral challenges shaped by digital culture, pluralistic societies, and ethical ambiguity. Therefore, a curriculum grounded in Islamic moral wisdom must also be adaptive, dialogical, and critically engaged with students' lived experiences. It should cultivate not only religious literacy but also moral agency, emotional intelligence, and civic responsibility. By adopting such an integrative and transformative framework, Islamic Religious Education can fulfill its true potential: to nurture a generation of Muslim learners who are intellectually grounded, spiritually centered, ethically responsible, and socially engaged, capable of contributing meaningfully to both the ummah and the broader global society.

³² Halstead, "Islamic Values: A Distinctive Framework for Moral Education?"

³³ Michalinos Zembylas and Pavlos Michaelides, "The Sound of Silence in Pedagogy," *Educational theory* 54, no. 2 (2004): 193–210.

³⁴ Alhamuddin Alhamuddin et al., "Contextualizing Luqman's Wisdom in Qur'anic Character Education within the Indonesian Curriculum," *Indonesian Journal of Islamic Education Studies (IJIES)* 8, no. 1 (June 30, 2025): 17–38, doi:10.33367/ijies.v8i1.7206.

³⁵ Raqib Moslimany, Anzar Otaibi, and Frugo Shaikh, "Designing a Holistic Curriculum: Challenges and Opportunities in Islamic Education," *Journal on Islamic Studies* 1, no. 1 (2024): 52–73.

³⁶ Alhamuddin and Ahmad Fanani, "Madrasah Nizhomiah: The Influence of Intellectual Heritage and Curriculum in Evolving Islamic Education in Indonesia," *Edu Global: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam* 6, no. 1 (July 22, 2025), doi:10.56874/eduglobal.v6i1.2171; Alhamuddin and Abdul Gafur Arifin, "Reorienting Islamic Curriculum and Pedagogy in Indonesia: Aligning with National Character Education Policy," *AL-TARBIYAH: Jurnal Pendidikan* 35, no. 1 (2025): 10–21, doi:10.24235/ath.v35i.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study concluded that the moral educational thought of classical Islamic scholars such as Al-Ghazali, Ibn Miskawayh, and Al-Raghib Al-Asfahani offers a rich and holistic ethical framework that remains highly relevant for addressing the contemporary challenges of Islamic Religious Education. Their emphasis on spiritual purification (*Tazkiyatun Nafs*), moral habituation (*Riyadhah Nafsiyyah*), and character modelling (*uswah hasanah*) provides valuable pedagogical principles that can strengthen the affective and spiritual dimensions of current curricula. The integration of values such as sincerity (*Ikhlas*), justice (*'Adl*), humility (*Tawadhu*), and social responsibility (*Mas'uliyah Ijtima'iyah*) into both the content and methods of Islamic Religious Education has the potential to bridge the gap between knowledge and morality, which has often been criticized in modern educational practice. This study affirms the significance of recontextualizing classical moral thought not as a nostalgic return, but as a normative and philosophical foundation for a character-oriented, transformative curriculum responsive to the ethical crises faced by Muslim learners today.

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