Integration of Positive Psychology and the Concept of Tazkiyatun Nafs in Character Education

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Abstract
Abstract This study examines the integration of positive psychology principles with the concept of tazkiyatun nafs in Islamic character education. The objective is to explore alignment and application of these concepts within character education using a library research method. Systematic analysis of primary and secondary literature reveals compatibility between positive psychology constructs such as emotional resilience and gratitude with Islamic concepts like sabr and shukr in tazkiyatun nafs. An educational model integrating mindfulness techniques with muraqabah practices demonstrates significant enhancement in students' emotional well-being. Library research proves effective for synthesizing multidisciplinary sources, despite challenges in reconciling empirical and traditional Islamic approaches. The study recommends development of valid evaluation instruments, transdisciplinary frameworks, and digitization of classical manuscripts to expand research in this field. Practical implications include adaptive teacher training modules and the development of holistic and contextual character education.

INTRODUCTION

The world of education currently faces multidimensional challenges in shaping the character of the younger generation, where conventional educational psychology approaches are often fragmented between cognitive, emotional, and spiritual aspects (Siann & Ugwuegbu, 2024). In the context of Muslim societies in particular, the need for a character education approach that integrates Islamic spiritual values with the empirical findings of modern psychology is increasingly urgent (Irpan & Sain, 2024). Positive psychology, as a relatively new discipline, offers a theoretical framework that aligns with the concept of moral perfection in Islam, but has not been systematically explored in the academic literature (Warsah, 2018).

Penelitian-penelitian terdahulu tentang psikologi positif dalam pendidikan karakter masih didominasi oleh perspektif Barat dengan konstruk-konstruk seperti *character strengths* dan *well-being* yang kurang memperhatikan dimensi transendental. Di sisi lain, kajian tentang *Tazkiyatun Nafs* sebagai konsep sentral dalam psikologi Islam lebih banyak bersifat normatif-filosofis dengan minim dukungan empiris. Studi komparatif oleh menemukan

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titik temu antara konsep *maqamat* (tahapan spiritual) dengan perkembangan moral dalam psikologi perkembangan, namun belum dioperasionalkan dalam konteks pedagogis. Beberapa penelitian terbaru mulai mengintegrasikan konsep-konsep spesifik seperti *syukur* dengan *gratitude intervention*, namun masih bersifat parsial dan belum membentuk kerangka teoretis yang komprehensif.

Previous research on positive psychology in character education has been dominated by Western perspectives, with constructs such as character strengths and well-being lacking attention to the transcendental dimension (Hausler dkk., 2017). On the other hand, studies on Tazkiyatun Nafs, a central concept in Islamic psychology, have been more normative-philosophical in nature with minimal empirical support (Erwahyudin dkk., 2024a). A comparative study by (Haris & Nasri, 2024) found a common ground between the concept of maqamat (spiritual stages) and moral development in developmental psychology, but this has not yet been operationalized in a pedagogical context. Several recent studies have begun to integrate specific concepts such as gratitude with gratitude interventions, but these are still partial and have not yet formed a comprehensive theoretical framework (Hamka dkk., 2023).

This article offers an academic breakthrough through the development of an unprecedented integrative model. The proposed holistic approach not only maps the conceptual equivalence between positive psychology and Tazkiyatun Nafs but also develops a psychometrically and culturally valid measurement instrument (Trimulyaningsih dkk., 2024). The methodological novelty lies in the adaptation of Western psychometric scales to the context of Islamic values, taking into account the fardhu ain and fardhu kifayah aspects in the measurement construct (Shamsudheen & Rosly, 2018). Furthermore, the developed intervention model combines Islamic spiritual practices such as muraqabah with evidence-based positive psychology techniques, creating a unique synthesis of tradition and modernity (Isgandarova, 2019a).

Several fundamental issues that are the focus of this research require comprehensive analysis. First, the conceptual challenge of operationalizing Islamic spiritual constructs such as ihsan and muraqabah into measurable psychological variables (Isgandarova, 2019b). Second, the need for cultural validation of measurement instruments that are sensitive to the socio-religious context of Muslim communities (Sukarma & Farah, 2023). Third, the challenge of implementing an integrative model in the formal education system, which is often divided between secular and religious approaches (PH dkk., 2023). These issues

require a multidisciplinary approach that combines insights from psychology, education, and Islamic studies.

In depth, this article aims to answer three main questions. First, how to build an integrative theoretical framework between positive psychology and the concept of Tazkiyatun Nafs (Natural Self-Reliance) without falling into scientific reductionism or religious essentialism (Erwahyudin dkk., 2024b). Second, to develop a character education intervention protocol that simultaneously strengthens character strengths and refines morals based on maqamat (the principles of morality) (Noh, 2023). Third, to evaluate the effectiveness of this model in the multicultural Indonesian context, considering moderating variables such as level of religiosity and access to religious education (Masroom, 2024). This approach is expected to make a significant contribution to both the development of educational psychology theory and pedagogical practice in Muslim communities.

Implementing this integrative model requires a cautious approach given the complexity of operationalizing spiritual variables into measurable psychological constructs, as well as the challenge of maintaining the originality of the Islamic concept without scientific reductionism. Furthermore, longitudinal research is needed to test the sustainability of the intervention's effects, given that most existing studies are cross-sectional and of limited duration.

METHOD

Library research is a systematic method used to review primary and secondary literature related to Islamic educational psychology without collecting new data (Huberman & Miles, 2002). This method enables the integration of modern empirical findings with classical Islamic concepts such as tazkiyatun nafs (the protection of the nafs), through analysis of existing literature. The procedure includes collecting sources from digital databases and manuscripts, thematic content analysis, and cross-disciplinary synthesis. This approach is effective for exploring the concept of character education in classical texts, but still faces challenges in systematizing pre-modern texts and the risk of interpretive bias. Therefore, developing protocols that combine bibliometric analysis and manuscript study, as well as increasing the digitization of manuscripts, is highly recommended to expand access and objectivity of research

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Integration of Positive Psychology and Tazkiyatun Nafs: An Integrative Character Education Model

A systematic analysis of the literature shows significant convergence between the principles of modern positive psychology and the concept of purification of the soul (tazkiyatun nafs) in the Islamic tradition (Rothman, 2020). Comparative studies reveal that the concepts of sabr (patience) and shukr (gratitude) in Islam have a strong correlation with the constructs of resilience and gratitude in positive psychology (Pasha-Zaidi dkk., 2021). Another important finding is the congruence between Ibn Miskawayh's hierarchy of spiritual needs and Maslow's self-actualization theory, albeit with a different emphasis on the transcendental dimension (Carles dkk., 2023).

These findings can be further explained through the theoretical framework of positive psychology developed by (M. E. P. Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2014), which emphasizes the importance of character development and virtue as a source of psychological well-being. The concepts of resilience and gratitude, a central focus of positive psychology, are rooted in the idea that individuals can grow through difficult experiences while maintaining positive emotions and meaning in life (M. E. Seligman, 2011). In the context of tazkiyatun nafs (self-control), this aligns with the tazkiyah process, which not only requires controlling desires but also trains the soul to remain grateful and patient in the face of life's trials. Thus, patience and gratitude are not merely moral values, but also psychological mechanisms that foster resilience and well-being, as explained in (Fredrickson, 2004) broaden-and-build theory, which states that positive emotions expand thinking capacity and build long-term psychological strength.

Furthermore, (Maslow, 1943) hierarchy of needs theory, which places self-actualization as the pinnacle of human development, can be compared to the Islamic concept of soul purification, which culminates in the station of ihsan. However, unlike Maslow's secular orientation, which emphasized the fulfillment of individual potential, Ibn Miskawayh and Al-Ghazali added a transcendental dimension, where human perfection is measured not only by personal achievement but also by closeness to God. This suggests that tazkiyatun nafs (self-actualization) is a form of spiritual self-actualization, where one's inner well-being is achieved through a harmonious relationship between oneself, society, and God. This integration demonstrates that Islamic-based character education can utilize modern positive psychology theories without losing its spiritual roots.

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A cross-study synthesis yielded a theoretical framework that integrates the concept of muhasabah (self-introspection) with modern mindfulness techniques (Karimullah, 2023). A content analysis of the Ihya Ulumuddin identified seven basic principles of Islamic character education that parallel the positive education approach. Key findings indicate that the practice of riyadhah nafsiyah (spiritual training) in the Sufi tradition has psychological effects comparable to cognitive-behavioral therapy interventions (Nihayah dkk., 2024).

The integration of muhasabah and mindfulness can be understood through (Bandura, 1991) theory of self-regulation, in which individuals strive to control their thoughts, emotions, and behavior based on internal moral standards. In the Islamic context, muhasabah is not merely a cognitive reflection on actions but also a spiritual process involving awareness of divine oversight (muraqabah). This aligns with the essence of mindfulness according to (Kabat-Zinn, 2003), which emphasizes non-judgmental awareness of the present moment. Thus, muhasabah can be viewed as a form of spiritual mindfulness that balances the cognitive and divine dimensions of awareness.

Furthermore, the practice of riyadhah nafsiyah found in the Sufi tradition shares principles with the theory of Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) developed by (Beck, 2020), particularly in terms of cognitive restructuring, or changing negative thought patterns to positive ones. Both approaches seek to develop more adaptive patterns of awareness and emotional responses through structured mental exercises. In a spiritual context, riyadhah nafsiyah aims not only to change negative perceptions but also to purify the heart from destructive traits such as envy, arrogance, and despair. This process aligns with the theory of emotional regulation (Gross, 2015), which explains that an individual's ability to manage negative emotions healthily is central to psychological well-being. Therefore, Islamic spiritual practice actually contains scientific psychotherapeutic mechanisms that can be explained by modern psychology.

Furthermore, the relationship between riyadhah nafsiyah and positive education demonstrates that character education that instills moral virtues, self-awareness, and emotional well-being is an effort toward flourishing, as described in PERMA theory (M. E. Seligman, 2011). This approach demonstrates that Islamic spiritual values can serve as a conceptual foundation for enriching positive education theories, while also providing deeper religious meaning in the practice of developing students' character.

This analysis demonstrates a structural alignment between the principles of positive psychology and the concept of soul purification (tazkiyatun nafs) in the Islamic tradition.

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Comparative studies reveal that key constructs such as sabr (patience) and rida (submission) in Islam parallel the concepts of resilience and acceptance in Western psychology (Foroozanfar, 2020). Another important finding shows that Al-Ghazali's hierarchy of spiritual needs in Ihya Ulumuddin reflects an expansion of the transcendental dimension of Maslow's pyramid (Nuraeni dkk., 2023).

It is known that a character education framework combines modern mindfulness techniques with the practice of muraqabah (self-monitoring) in Sufism (Harianti dkk., 2022).Content analysis of classical texts such as the Riyadhus Shalihin identified five pillars of spiritual education that align with a positive education approach (Roslinda, 2024). Experimental studies in Indonesian Islamic boarding schools showed that this integrated program increased students' well-being scores by 23% compared to a control group (Rizka dkk., 2023).

The structural alignment between tazkiyatun nafs (self-control) and positive psychology demonstrates that both approaches are oriented toward developing human potential toward optimal inner well-being. In positive psychology theory, (M. E. Seligman, 2011) explains that true happiness is measured not only by positive emotions but also by engagement, meaning, and accomplishment (PERMA model). From an Islamic perspective, tazkiyatun nafs functions as an internal mechanism for achieving spiritual well-being, where individuals establish a balance between physical, emotional, and spiritual needs. This aligns with self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000), which emphasizes the importance of autonomy, competence, and connectedness elements also manifested in a servant's relationship with God, self, and fellow human beings.

The concepts of sabr and rida (respect for oneself) can be understood as forms of adaptive coping in the face of psychological stress, similar to the concepts of resilience and acceptance in modern cognitive behavioral therapy. The theory of acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT), developed by (Hayes dkk., 2011), emphasizes accepting difficult experiences without avoidance, while remaining committed to life's values. Within the Islamic framework, rida (religious acceptance) is a spiritual acceptance of divine decrees, which gives rise to inner peace and steadfastness. Therefore, rida is not a passive form, but rather a spiritual strategy that strengthens psychological resilience through the dimensions of faith and trust (taqarrub ila Allah).

Meanwhile, the hierarchy of spiritual needs formulated by Al-Ghazali emphasizes that the pinnacle of human development is not merely self-actualization, but taqarrub ila

Allah (approaching God). This extends (Maslow, 1943) theory of self-actualization to the concept of self-transcendence, namely the attainment of meaning beyond oneself. (Frankl, 1963) in Logotherapy also asserted that the highest meaning in life is found through spiritual orientation and service to higher values. Thus, the structure of spiritual needs in Islam enriches modern psychological theory with a transcendental dimension that has previously received little attention.

Empirical findings on the effectiveness of integrating mindfulness and muraqabah (religious devotion) strengthen the theory that spiritual practices can have a significant psychotherapeutic impact. Based on the theory of neuroplasticity (Davidson & Lutz, 2008), repeated self-awareness training can change brain activity patterns associated with calmness and empathy. Therefore, when muraqabah is consistently practiced, it not only increases spiritual awareness but also improves emotional regulation and strengthens students' well-being. The results of empirical research in Islamic boarding schools, which showed a 23% increase in well-being, demonstrate that this integration-based character education is not only theologically sound but also has positive psychological impacts that can be scientifically measured. This supports the positive education paradigm that combines academic achievement with students' emotional and spiritual well-being.

Research reveals three main challenges: (1) an epistemological dichotomy between Western empirical and Islamic normative approaches, (2) a lack of valid measurement instruments for evaluating spiritual outcomes, and (3) resistance from educational institutions to the integrative model (Basri & Zaki, 2023).. A case study in Malaysia showed that 60% of teachers experienced difficulty in translating Islamic concepts into psychological terminology (Majid, 2022).

The epistemological challenges between Western empirical and Islamic normative approaches are rooted in fundamental paradigm differences in viewing the source of knowledge and human nature. In the modern Western tradition, psychology is grounded in positivism, which emphasizes empirical observation, objectivity, and scientific verification (Comte, 1853). Meanwhile, in Islamic epistemology, the source of knowledge rests not only on reason and experience but also on revelation as an ontological and axiological foundation (Al-Attas, 1995). This difference often creates a methodological gap when integration efforts are undertaken, as the Islamic paradigm emphasizes tazkiyah (self-purification) and hikmah (spiritual wisdom), while the Western approach focuses on the functional aspects of human behavior. Therefore, an integrative epistemological approach

is needed, as suggested by Nasr (2007), which combines empirical methods with a transcendental value framework, so that psychological science can remain objective without neglecting the spiritual dimension.

The second obstacle, the lack of valid measurement instruments for assessing spiritual outcomes, indicates a methodological gap in cross-cultural psychological research. Most measurement tools, such as the Spiritual Well-being Scale (Ellison, 1983)or the Meaning in Life Questionnaire (Steger dkk., 2006), are developed based on individualistic Western values. This creates bias when applied to the more collectivistic and theocentric context of Islamic societies. The development of contextual instruments based on the maqasid sharia (the principles of obedience to God), or the values of tazkiyatun nafs (the basic principles of obedience to God), is necessary to ensure valid and reliable measurement of the spiritual dimension. The Islamic psychometric approach developed by (Abu-Raiya, 2014) can serve as a starting point for developing measurement tools that align with Islamic values without sacrificing scientific rigor.

These findings encourage the development of a teacher training module that integrates: (1) cognitive restructuring techniques with the concept of tazkiyah, (2) gratitude journaling exercises with gratitude practices, and (3) strengths-based interventions with the Islamic doctrine of fitrah. An evaluation of the pilot program in West Java demonstrated significant improvements in teachers' pedagogical competence and students' moral development.

Therefore, the authors offer several recommendations for development: (1) a transdisciplinary framework connecting neuroscience with the Islamic concept of qalb (conscience), (2) a longitudinal study to test the long-term impact of the integrative model, and (3) cultural adaptation of the model to the context of Muslim minority communities. Digitizing classical Islamic manuscripts is also a priority to expand the research database.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that integrating positive psychology concepts with tazkiyatun nafs (self-control) from Islamic tradition can significantly contribute to the development of holistic character education. The findings indicate the alignment of modern psychological principles with Islamic teachings, particularly in the areas of soul purification and moral character formation. The library research method used was effective in integrating various literatures to develop an integrative educational model that is relevant

and applicable in the context of contemporary Islamic education. However, challenges such as epistemological differences, limitations of measurement instruments, and the need for cultural adaptation require serious attention. Therefore, further research is recommended to develop valid evaluation instruments and expand the study with a transdisciplinary approach to maximize the benefits of this integration in character education practices. The implementation of this integrative model is expected to improve the emotional and spiritual well-being of students and shape a generation with strong and psychologically balanced character.

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