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Challenging Western Dominance: Islamic Intellectual Paradigms of Education in al-Ghazali, Ibn Qayyim, and al-Zarnuji

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Keywords

*Islamic Thought, Islamic
Paradigm, Holistic
Education, Imam Al-Ghazali*

Abstract

Modern educational systems frequently emphasize cognitive outcomes, often at the expense of moral and spiritual development, resulting in graduates who may be academically adept yet ethically or spiritually unfulfilled. This study aims to reconstruct a holistic educational paradigm inspired by the pedagogical philosophies of three Islamic intellectuals—Al-Ghazali, Ibn Qayyim Al-Jauziyah, and Az-Zarnuji—by examining their conceptualizations of purposive learning, moral cultivation, and the role of the educator. Using a qualitative literature review method, the research analyzes primary classical texts and compares their holistic framework with Western holistic educational traditions such as Waldorf and the Humboldtian model. The findings reveal a tripartite pedagogical structure: spiritual purification (tazkiyat al-nafs), ethical integrity as a safeguard against intellectual hubris, and etiquette-infused teacher-student dynamics. These elements, when synthesized with Western models that prioritize creativity, individuality, and interdisciplinary growth, offer a robust paradigm for integrated human development. Ultimately, this framework proposes an education reoriented toward cognitive, ethical, and spiritual wholeness.

Introduction

Globalization and modernization have brought about major changes in education systems around the world. Education is now largely measured by quantitative indicators such as standardized test results, university rankings, and labor market connectivity. This orientation has made education increasingly pragmatic and trapped in economic logic, tending to neglect moral,

spiritual, and humanistic dimensions.¹ As a result, many graduates are technically competent but lack social sensitivity and ethical integrity. This condition is in line with Paulo Freire's criticism in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* that mechanical education only produces alienated human beings.² On the other hand, Rudge's study on holistic education emphasizes the need to integrate cognitive, emotional, social, and spiritual aspects so that education returns to its true purpose: humanizing humans.³ Thus, the current global challenge is how to build an educational paradigm that balances the demands of modernity with the spiritual and moral needs of humans.

Historically, Islamic civilization has proven the success of a holistic education system that has produced universal geniuses such as Ibn Sina, Al-Farabi, and Ibn Rusyd. Classical Muslim scientists not only mastered various branches of science, but also had spiritual depth and noble character. This success stemmed from an educational system that did not separate rational knowledge (*aqliyyah*) and revelatory knowledge (*naqliyyah*), and balanced intellectual intelligence with purity of heart. Contemporary studies on Islamic education confirm that this integration is a major factor in the formation of well-rounded individuals (*insan kamil*) who are able to contribute to global society. This approach shares similarities with Western holistic education concepts such as the Waldorf model, but its advantage lies in its theocentric orientation, which places closeness to God as the primary goal. Thus, classical Islamic education offers an alternative global education model capable of addressing the current moral and spiritual crisis.⁴

This study specifically highlights three important figures: Al-Ghazali, Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah, and Az-Zarnuji. All three made significant contributions to shaping Islamic philosophy and educational practices. Al-Ghazali, with his concept of *tazkiyat al-nafs*, emphasized the importance of purifying the soul as the goal of education. Ibn Qayyim warned of the dangers of "knowledge poisoning", which is knowledge that is not put into practice and instead becomes a source of arrogance. Meanwhile, Az-Zarnuji through *Ta'lîm al-Muta'allim* emphasized that adab is an absolute requirement for the blessings of knowledge. The thoughts of these three figures are not only relevant to the classical context, but also very significant in responding to the challenges of modern education, which is often trapped in secularization and utilitarianism. Studies by Huda et al. confirm that classical Islamic education offers an ethical and spiritual framework that can enrich the global discourse on education.⁵ Thus, an analysis of their thoughts can serve as the basis for reconstructing a more balanced and meaningful educational paradigm.

The purpose of this study is to reconstruct a holistic educational paradigm by examining the thoughts of Al-Ghazali, Ibn Qayyim, and Az-Zarnuji, and comparing them with Western educational models such as Waldorf and Humboldtian. With this approach, the article seeks to find common ground and build a synthesis between Islamic and Western traditions. This is important because global education today requires a paradigm that can respond to technical needs while maintaining moral and spiritual integrity. The study by Farah Ahmed & Safaruk Chowdhury emphasizes that dialogue across educational traditions can produce a new pedagogical framework that is more

¹ Yeri Nofrianti and Arifmiboy Arifmiboy, "Challenges and Problems of Learning Islamic Religious Education in the Digital Era," *Islam Transformatif: Journal of Islamic Studies* 5, no. 1 (2021): 34.

² Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: MB Ramos, Trans., 2000).

³ Lucila Telles Rudge, "Holistic Education: An Analysis of Its Pedagogical Application" (The Ohio State University, 2008).

⁴ Brigitte Miseliunaite, Irina Kliziene, and Gintautas Cibulskas, "Can Holistic Education Solve the World's Problems: A Systematic Literature Review," *Sustainability* 14, no. 15 (2022).

⁵ Miftachul Huda, Abu Zarrin Selamat, and Sultan Salem, "Investigating Respect in Learning as Character Education: A Review of Al-Zarnuji's *Ta'lîm Al-Muta'allim*," *Nazhruna: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam* 7, no. 2 (2024): 209–232.

comprehensive and relevant to the challenges of the 21st century.⁶ Therefore, this study is expected to contribute theoretically to the development of educational science and practically to a more balanced, humane, and transcendental curriculum reform.⁷

Method

This study uses a qualitative approach based on a literature review, which allows researchers to conduct an in-depth analysis of the classical thoughts of Islamic intellectuals such as Al-Ghazali, Ibn Qayyim, and Az-Zarnuji. The qualitative approach was chosen because it is interpretive and focuses on the meaning, values, and experiences contained in the text, so that it can explore the philosophical and spiritual aspects that are at the core of Islamic education. Literature studies are also considered most relevant because the main primary sources, such as classical works like *Ihya' Ulum al-Din*, *Miftah Dar al-Sa'adah*, and *Ta'lim al-Muta'allim*, are available in text form, not through field data. According to Snyder, literature review as a research method serves not only to summarize knowledge but also to construct a new conceptual framework based on a critical synthesis of existing literature.⁸ Thus, this method provides space for the reconstruction of a holistic educational paradigm from classical Islamic sources while comparing it with Western traditions. The type of research used is a systematic literature review (SLR), which adopts the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) framework. This approach aims to ensure that the process of collecting and analyzing literature is carried out systematically, transparently, and can be replicated. The steps in SLR include: (1) identification of keywords such as "Islamic holistic education," "tazkiyat al-nafs," "Ibn Qayyim pedagogy," and "Az-Zarnuji adab"; (2) searching international databases (Scopus, Web of Science, Semantic Scholar, and Google Scholar); (3) screening based on inclusion criteria such as peer-reviewed, topic relevance, and year of publication; and (4) thematic synthesis. According to Xiao and Watson, systematic reviews enable researchers to reduce selection bias and produce a more integrated understanding of complex phenomena.⁹ This is in line with the objectives of this study to produce a holistic education model that integrates Islamic and Western traditions.

The data sources for this study consist of primary and secondary sources. The primary sources are the original works of the figures studied: Al-Ghazali with *Ihya' Ulum al-Din* (kitab al-'Ilm), Ibn Qayyim with *Miftah Dar al-Sa'adah*, and Az-Zarnuji with *Ta'lim al-Muta'allim*. These three books were chosen because they explicitly contain philosophical, ethical, and methodological views on education. Secondary sources include international journal articles, books, and dissertations that discuss their thoughts and comparisons with Western education. For example, Miseliunaite study on global holistic education was used to find common ground between classical Islamic traditions and contemporary Western approaches.¹⁰ By combining these two types of sources, the study aims to produce a comprehensive, valid, and contextual synthesis. Data analysis

⁶ Farah Ahmed and Safaruk Chowdhury, "Rethinking Contemporary Schooling in Muslim Contexts: An Islamic Conceptual Framework for Reconstructing K-12 Education," *Educational Philosophy and Theory* 57, no. 2 (2025): 152–165, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00131857.2024.2411325>.

⁷ Fuad Srinio, Muslihun, and Muhammad Umair Khan Usman, "Comparison of Islamic and Western Education Systems: Opportunities for Integration of Islamic Values," *Adiluhung: Journal of Islamic Values and Civilization* 2, no. 1 (2025): 29–41, <https://doi.org/10.59373/adiluhung.v2i1.114>.

⁸ Hannah Snyder, "Literature Review as a Research Methodology: An Overview and Guidelines," *Journal of Business Research* 104, no. August (2019): 333–339, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2019.07.039>.

⁹ Yu Xiao and Maria Watson, "Guidance on Conducting a Systematic Literature Review," *Journal of Planning Education and Research* 39, no. 1 (2019): 93–112.

¹⁰ Brigitta Miseliūnaitė and Gintautas Cibulskas, *The Role of Holistic Education in an Uncertain Future: A Study of Public Primary Education in Lithuania* (Kaunas, 2024), https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=4672089.

was conducted using content analysis and comparative analysis techniques. Content analysis was used to identify the main themes in the primary and secondary texts, such as the concepts of *tazkiyat al-nafs*, "poisoning of knowledge," adab, the role of teachers, and time management. The analysis process involved data reduction, categorization, interpretation, and synthesis. Meanwhile, comparative analysis was used to examine the similarities and differences between the thoughts of Islamic figures and Western educational models such as Waldorf and Humboldtian. This approach followed the method developed by Bowen, which emphasizes the importance of document analysis as a qualitative research strategy to interpret meaning in texts and construct new theoretical frameworks.¹¹ With this combination, the research results are not only descriptive, but also critical and comparative.

To ensure validity and reliability, this study applies the principles of *trustworthiness* according to Lincoln and Guba, which include credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.¹² Credibility is maintained through source triangulation, namely by comparing primary and secondary data. Transferability is strengthened by thick descriptions of the context of classical Islamic education. Dependability is ensured by systematically documenting the research process, while confirmability is achieved through openness in quoting and presenting data in accordance with the original text. These principles have been widely used in modern qualitative research, including in studies of value-based and spirituality-based education.¹³ Thus, this research methodology not only follows modern scientific standards but is also open to the philosophical and transcendental meanings inherent in classical Islamic texts.

Results and Discussion

Al-Ghazali's Conception of Spiritual Education

The concept of *tazkiyat al-nafs* (purification of the soul) according to Al-Ghazali is the main foundation of classical Islamic education. He emphasizes that the purpose of learning is not merely to acquire intellectual skills, but to purify the heart from despicable traits (*takhalli*), adorn oneself with praiseworthy morals (*tahalli*), and achieve spiritual enlightenment (*tajalli*). Al-Ghazali views the heart as the spiritual center that determines the quality of deeds and knowledge, making moral education the core of the learning process.¹⁴ Contemporary research shows that this model is in line with social-emotional learning (SEL), which emphasizes self-regulation, empathy, and social responsibility. The difference is that Al-Ghazali provides a transcendental dimension that links education to the relationship between human beings and God. This proves that spirituality-oriented education can help students develop a balance between cognitive intelligence and moral maturity. Thus, the concept of *tazkiyah* can be seen as a prototype of character education that is relevant to modern education.¹⁵

¹¹ Glenn A. Bowen, "Document Analysis as a Qualitative Research Method," *Qualitative Research Journal* 9, no. 2 (2009): 27–40.

¹² Yvonna S. Lincoln and Egon G. Guba, *Naturalistic Inquiry* (Carolina: Sage Publication, 1985).

¹³ Lorelli S. Nowell et al., "Thematic Analysis: Striving to Meet the Trustworthiness Criteria," *International Journal of Qualitative Methods* 16, no. 1 (2017): 1–13.

¹⁴ Muhammad Barid and Mahsun Jayadi, "Thoughts of Moral Education: Study the Comparison of Thoughts between Ibn Qayim Al-Jauziyah and Imam Al-Ghazali," *Studia Religia: Jurnal Pemikiran dan Pendidikan Islam* 4, no. 2 (2020): 305–314.

¹⁵ Ma'muroh Ma'muroh, Abqorina Abqorina, and Amrin Amrin, "The Concept of Tazkiyatun Nafs by Al-Ghazali and Its Implementation at Pesantren Darut Tasbih Tangerang," *Edu Cendikia: Jurnal Ilmiah Kependidikan* 4, no. 02 (2024): 833–844.

Tarbiyah al-Nafs of Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah

Ibn Qayyim Al-Jawziyyah was a student of Ibn Taymiyyah, enriching the tradition of Islamic education by emphasizing the concept of tarbiyah al-nafs. In his work *Miftah Dar al-Sa'adah*, he warned about the dangers of "knowledge poisoning," a condition in which knowledge is not put into practice and instead gives rise to intellectual arrogance. According to him, true knowledge must always be accompanied by deeds and sincere intentions, so that it can produce humble and useful individuals. Modern studies associate this concept with character education, which emphasizes the importance of the connection between knowledge, ethics, and practical actions. Ibn Qayyim's criticism is also in line with Paulo Freire's ideas in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, which rejects mechanical education without a dimension of moral transformation. Thus, Ibn Qayyim is not only relevant in the classical Islamic framework, but also makes an important contribution to the discourse of modern critical pedagogy, which emphasizes the integration of intellectuality and morality.¹⁶

Value-Based Education of al-Zarnuji

Az-Zarnuji, through his monumental work *Ta'lim al-Muta'allim*, places great emphasis on manners before knowledge. He stresses that the blessings of knowledge are largely determined by the student's respect for the teacher, the book, and the learning process. For Az-Zarnuji, teachers are not merely instructors, but moral and spiritual role models who can shape students' characters through their example. This principle is highly relevant to the Western concept of values-based education, which emphasizes the importance of education based on values and integrity.¹⁷ Modern research also highlights that teacher-student relationships based on respect and trust can increase students' intrinsic motivation. Thus, Az-Zarnuji's ideas present an important perspective that education is not only about the transfer of knowledge, but also a process of moral transformation facilitated by the presence of a teacher with integrity.¹⁸

Classical Islamic and Western Perspectives

A comparative study between the thoughts of classical Islamic figures and Western educational traditions shows significant common ground. For example, research comparing the thoughts of Ibn Qayyim with John Dewey shows that both emphasize education as a process of comprehensive transformation, albeit differing in the dimension of spirituality. John Dewey emphasizes learning by doing as the basis of progressive education, while Ibn Qayyim adds a transcendental framework by linking knowledge and action to religious responsibility. International research also finds that although Western education, such as Waldorf, emphasizes the balance of "hands, heart, and head," it often lacks an explicit spiritual framework. Therefore, the classical Islamic tradition offers an additional dimension that enriches holistic education by linking it to a transcendental end goal.¹⁹

In Western tradition, holistic education models such as Waldorf and Humboldtian have many similarities with the classical Islamic paradigm. Waldorf emphasizes the holistic

¹⁶ Fauzul Halim et al., "Pendidikan Jiwa Prespektif Ibn Qayyim Al Jauziyyah: Kritik Terhadap Pendidikan Jiwa Di Barat," *Analisis: Jurnal Studi Keislaman* 21, no. 1 (2021): 165–182.

¹⁷ Ikhwanuddin Abdul Majid et al., "The Implementation of Value-Based Leadership in the State Islamic Higher Education Institutions," *Jurnal Educative: Journal of Educational Studies* 10, no. 1 (2025).

¹⁸ Huda, Selamat, and Salem, "Investigating Respect in Learning as Character Education: A Review of Al-Zarnūjī's *Ta'lim Al-Muta'Allim*."

¹⁹ Mohammed Qasserras, "Ibn Qayyim's Taxonomy and John Dewey's Pragmatism, Islamic Pedagogy, and Western Educational Thought: A Comparative Study," *International Journal of Research Publication and Reviews* 4, no. 10 (2023).

development of the human being through the integration of cognitive, affective, artistic, and social aspects.²⁰ The Humboldtian model in higher education emphasizes academic freedom and unity between research, teaching, and character building. However, both are relatively secular because they place spirituality in the personal realm, not as an explicit goal of education. In contrast, Al-Ghazali, Ibn Qayyim, and Az-Zarnuji viewed spirituality as the core of education. This shows that despite overlaps in holistic approaches, classical Islamic education offers a distinctive contribution in the form of a theocentric orientation not found in Western traditions. Thus, these two models can complement each other: the West provides a modern pedagogical framework, while Islam provides a transcendental spiritual foundation.²¹

Overall, the reviewed literature reveals an urgent need to synthesize classical Islamic educational ideas with contemporary holistic approaches. Figures such as Al-Ghazali, Ibn Qayyim, and Az-Zarnuji emphasized the integration of spiritual, ethical, and intellectual dimensions in education, while modern Western education emphasizes freedom, creativity, and cognitive-affective balance. Al-Faruqi's study of the Islamization of Knowledge provides an important theoretical framework for integrating Islamic values into modern education systems. With this synthesis, the global education paradigm can be redirected to its true goal: to shape well-rounded individuals who are intelligent, pure in soul, and noble in character. Thus, the existing literature not only affirms the relevance of classical Islamic education but also demonstrates its potential as an alternative for educational reform at the global level.²²

A thorough study of the concept of *tazkiyat al-nafs* according to Al-Ghazali shows that education in Islam is not only a cognitive process, but also a gradual spiritual journey. Al-Ghazali divides this process into three stages: *takhalli* (emptying oneself of despicable traits such as arrogance, envy, and greed), *tahalli* (adorn oneself with praiseworthy traits such as sincerity, patience, and gratitude), and *tajalli* (achieving spiritual enlightenment through closeness to Allah). This concept is in line with the modern approach to character education, which emphasizes self-awareness, self-management, and social awareness. The difference is that Al-Ghazali adds a transcendental orientation as the ultimate goal, namely *taqarrub ila Allah*. Contemporary research shows that integrating spiritual values into education can improve students' emotional regulation, build empathy, and strengthen mental well-being—proving the relevance of this classical concept in the context of 21st-century education.²³

Ibn Qayyim Al-Jauziyyah's thoughts on *tarbiyah al-nafs* emphasize that true education must strike a balance between knowledge, action, and morals. According to him, knowledge that is not put into practice will become a poison that destroys the soul, giving rise to arrogance and loss of meaning. This concept is known as "knowledge poisoning," where knowledge that should lead to goodness instead becomes a source of moral destruction. Contemporary research shows a similar phenomenon in the modern world, namely the emergence of intellectually gifted individuals who fail to internalize ethical values. Ibn Qayyim offers a solution through strengthening intentions,

²⁰ Martyn Rawson, "Waldorf Education: New Perspectives on a Holistic Approach," *International Journal of Transpersonal Studies Advance* (2024), <https://digitalcommons.ciis.edu/advance-archive/99>.

²¹ Jan C. Bongaerts, "The Humboldtian Model of Higher Education and Its Significance for the European University on Responsible Consumption and Production," *Berg Huettenmaenn Monatsh* 167, no. 19 (2022): 500–507.

²² Ismail Raji' Al-Faruqi, *Islamization of Knowledge: General Principles and Workplan* (Herndon: IIIT, 1982); Muslih, "Ismail Raji Al-Faruqi's Thought on Islamization of Knowledge and Its Significance for Islamic Education," *IJoReSH: Indonesian Journal of Religion, Spirituality, and Humanity* 2, no. 2 (2023): 180–209.

²³ Ma'muroh, Abqorina, and Amrin, "The Concept of Tazkiyatun Nafs by Al-Ghazali and Its Implementation at Pesantren Darut Tasbih Tangerang."

practicing righteous deeds, and spiritual disciplines such as dhikr and muhasabah. In the context of modern educational psychology, this approach can be equated with character education and moral pedagogy, which emphasize the importance of integrating knowledge with practical virtues. The results of the study show that Ibn Qayyim's tarbiyah model can be the basis for spirituality-based character education that is relevant to the contemporary generation.²⁴

In his work *Tuhfatul Maudud*, Ibn Qayyim also pays special attention to children's education, emphasizing practical methods such as habit formation, role modeling, giving advice, and learning through experience (learning by doing). This approach shows an early awareness that children's education is not sufficient with the transfer of knowledge alone, but must be done integrally through interaction, experience, and a conducive environment. Modern research in developmental psychology confirms the importance of habituation and role modeling in shaping children's prosocial behavior, while experiential learning is considered effective in instilling life skills and moral values. The relevance of Ibn Qayyim's methods to these concepts shows the continuity between classical Islamic thought and contemporary pedagogical theory. Thus, Ibn Qayyim's model of child education can be seen as a pioneer of the holistic child education approach that is still relevant today.²⁵

A philosophical study of education conducted on the works of Ibn Qayyim, particularly *Miftah Dar al-Sa'adah*, shows that he had a comprehensive framework of thinking, covering the dimensions of metaphysics (the relationship between humans and God), epistemology (how to acquire knowledge), and axiology (the purpose and value of using knowledge). This perspective emphasizes that education should not stop at academic achievement alone, but should be directed towards the formation of the whole person. Research conducted at the University of Science Malaysia shows that Ibn Qayyim's philosophy of education has similarities with modern educational principles that emphasize lifelong learning and meaningful education. However, Ibn Qayyim adds a spiritual dimension that distinguishes it from Western secular traditions. Thus, the results of the study confirm that the framework of classical Islamic educational philosophy can complement the void in contemporary educational theory, which tends to be secularistic.²⁶

The Islamic educational methods formulated by Ibn Qayyim contain broad objectives: strengthening faith, shaping character, developing thinking skills, and practical skills. The implementation of these objectives is reflected in the use of teaching methods such as memorization, lectures, role modeling, habituation, and the giving of rewards and punishments. This approach is very similar to modern learning strategies that combine cognitive learning with behaviorist approaches such as reinforcement and punishment. However, Ibn Qayyim complements it with a spiritual dimension that links every learning activity with intention and worship. Modern research in educational psychology shows that combining cognitive, affective, and psychomotor dimensions in learning can improve student retention and motivation. Therefore, Ibn Qayyim's educational methods are not only historically relevant but can also be re-

²⁴ Makmudi Makmudi et al., "Pendidikan Jiwa Perspektif Ibn Qayyim Al-Jauziyyah," *Ta'dibuna: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam* 7, no. 1 (2018): 42; Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*.

²⁵ Mulyanto Abdullah Khoir, Moh Luthfi, and Muhamad Abdul Azis, "Konsep Pendidikan Anak Dalam Islam Menurut Ibnu Qayyim Al-Jauziyah," *Tsaqofah* 1, no. 5 (2025).

²⁶ Raihanah Binti Zakaria, "Pemikiran Pendidikan Islam Ibn Qayyim Al-Jawziyyah: Analisis Terhadap Kitab Miftah Dar Al-Sa'Adah" (Universiti Sains Malaysia, 2014).

adopted within the framework of contemporary education oriented toward the formation of holistic competencies.²⁷

In addition to focusing on methodological aspects, Ibn Qayyim emphasized the importance of balance between physical, spiritual, and cognitive aspects in education.²⁸ He asserted that knowledge must be combined with spiritual training, character building, and practical experience. A study at the State Islamic University of Suska Riau found that Ibn Qayyim's concept of education is relevant to the integrative education framework that has developed in the West, which combines academic, emotional, social, and spiritual dimensions into one system. With diverse sources of knowledge—the Qur'an, hadith, fitrah, intuition, and the social environment—Ibn Qayyim developed an open and adaptive model of education. Contemporary research also shows that integrating the spiritual dimension into education can increase students' resilience in facing life's challenges. Thus, this concept can be seen as a prototype of cross-era holistic education.²⁹

Research on modern holistic education shows that educational success is highly dependent on collaboration between various parties: teachers, families, and the community. This is in line with the concept of classical Islamic education, which emphasizes the role of the environment in shaping students' character. A study in the *Tsaqofah* journal confirms that education involving families and communities can shape students who are not only academically intelligent, but also empathetic, moral, and socially sensitive. In the Western context, a similar approach is known as community-based education, which emphasizes the importance of social participation in supporting student development. These research results show that the concept of classical Islamic education is highly compatible with contemporary approaches, while reinforcing the argument about the importance of value-based and community-based education as part of a global holistic education model.³⁰

A comparative analysis with Western educational models, particularly Waldorf, shows significant similarities in emphasizing education as a process of forming a whole person. Waldorf emphasizes a balance between intellectual, emotional, and creative aspects, while the classical Islamic model adds a spiritual orientation that links learning to transcendental goals. International studies show that students in holistic education systems such as Waldorf have higher levels of creativity and psychological well-being. However, this approach is often criticized for not paying enough attention to the dimension of religiosity. Thus, the concept of classical Islamic education can be seen as a complement that enriches the Western holistic education model, especially in integrating spirituality with formal learning.³¹

Islamic Intellectual Contributions to Holistic Education

Overall, the results of this study show that classical Islamic education as conceived by Al-Ghazali, Ibn Qayyim, and Az-Zarnuji forms a holistic framework that is highly relevant to

²⁷ Walid Briki and Mahfoud Amara, "Perspective of Islamic Self: Rethinking Ibn Al-Qayyim's Three-Heart Model from the Scope of Dynamical Social Psychology," *Journal of Religion and Health* 57 (2018): 836–848.

²⁸ Mohamed Safiullah Munsoor, "The Soul (Heart) and Its Attributes: An Islamic Perspective with Reference to Self in Western Psychology," *Afkar: Jurnal Akidah dan Pemikiran Islam* 16, no. 1 (2015): 93–134.

²⁹ Noviliana, "Pengaruh Penerapan Model Pembelajaran Generatif Ditinjau Dari Kemampuan Awal Matematis Siswa Terhadap Kemampuan Koneksi Matematis Siswa Di Sekolah Menengah Pertama" (UIN Sultan Syarif Kasim Riau, 2018).

³⁰ Siros Mahmoudi et al., "Holistic Education: An Approach for 21 Century," *International Education Studies* 5, no. 3 (2012), <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1066819>.

³¹ Miseliunaite, Kliziene, and Cibulskas, "Can Holistic Education Solve the World's Problems: A Systematic Literature Review."

contemporary educational needs. The three main pillars—purification of the soul, integration of knowledge with action, and emphasis on manners and the role of teachers—are significant contributions to the global discourse on holistic education. These findings indicate that even though it originated centuries ago, classical Islamic educational thought is capable of responding to the challenges of the times, including the moral crisis, the secularization of education, and the need for the integration of spiritual values into modern curricula. By synthesizing Western approaches such as Waldorf and the Humboldtian model, a more balanced, humanistic, and transcendental global educational paradigm has emerged. These findings reinforce the urgency of reconstructing an educational paradigm based on classical Islamic traditions to address the challenges of 21st-century education.³²

In Al-Ghazali's thoughts on *tazkiyat al-nafs*, he emphasizes that education cannot be separated from moral and spiritual dimensions. The three-stage concept—*takhalli* (purification of the soul from despicable traits), *tahalli* (adornment of oneself with noble traits), and *tajalli* (transcendental experience)—is not only a theoretical process but also a practical instrument in shaping the character of students. In the context of contemporary education, this approach can be equated with the theory of social-emotional learning (SEL) in the West, which emphasizes emotional regulation, empathy, and social responsibility. However, Al-Ghazali enriches this approach with a transcendental orientation that is directly related to Allah, thereby forming individuals who are not only emotionally intelligent but also have a strong spiritual vision of life.³³

Ibn Qayyim Al-Jawziyyah expanded the concept of education by paying great attention to *tarbiyah al-nafs* as a means of avoiding what he called "poisoning of knowledge." This is relevant in the modern context where education is often trapped in credentialism, namely the pursuit of diplomas without internalizing values. Ibn Qayyim emphasized the importance of a close relationship between knowledge and action, arguing that knowledge without practice will only give rise to intellectual arrogance. This view is consistent with criticism of modern instrumental education, which prioritizes marketable skills over the formation of people of integrity. In the West, a similar critique was expressed by Paulo Freire in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, which emphasizes that education must be transformative, not merely mechanical. Thus, Ibn Qayyim's concept can be seen as an offer of critical Islamic pedagogy that emphasizes moral, spiritual, and social praxis aspects as a whole.³⁴

Another important aspect emphasized by both Ibn Qayyim and Az-Zarnuji is the role of the teacher as a *murabbi* or spiritual guide, not merely a facilitator of knowledge. In the classical Islamic tradition, teachers are considered moral role models and agents of character formation, where the teacher-student relationship is hierarchical but loving. This differs from the modern paradigm, which tends to reduce teachers to professional instructors. Western educational models such as Humboldtian emphasize academic autonomy and freedom of thought, but do not emphasize the spiritual dimension in the teacher-student relationship. By combining the two, a paradigm of teachers emerges who are not only intellectually competent, but also ethical and spiritual role models for their students. The implementation of this concept can improve today's

³² Al-Faruqi, *Islamization of Knowledge: General Principles and Workplan*.

³³ Muhammad Hafidz Khusnadin and Muhammad Fahmi Shihab, "Khusnadin, Muhammad Al-Ghazali's Concept of Tazkiyatun Nafs as a Method in Moral Education," *Oasis: Jurnal Ilmiah Kajian Islam* 9, no. 2 (2025): 151–163.

³⁴ Briki and Amara, "Perspective of Islamic Self: Rethinking Ibn Al-Qayyim's Three-Heart Model from the Scope of Dynamical Social Psychology."

educational relationships, which are often trapped in transactional relationships, and revive the values of respect, manners, and role models as the true foundations of education.³⁵

A comparison with Western educational models, particularly Waldorf, reveals significant points of convergence. Both traditions emphasize education as a process of shaping the whole human being, involving cognition, emotion, social skills, and the spiritual dimension. Waldorf, for example, prioritizes creativity, imagination, and balance between "hands, heart, and head," which is in line with the integrative principles of classical Islamic education. However, the advantage of the Islamic tradition is its transcendental goal—an approach that links education with worship and the hereafter. This dimension is often absent in Western holistic education, which, despite its strength in humanistic aspects, remains trapped in secularization. Therefore, collaboration between these two models can enrich the global educational horizon: Islam provides a transcendental spiritual foundation, while the West provides a modern pedagogical structure that is contextual and adaptive to the dynamics of the times.³⁶

In the context of implementation, the reconstruction of the Islamic holistic education paradigm requires a more comprehensive curriculum reform. First, the principle of *tazkiyah* can be translated into a self-development program that emphasizes self-awareness, emotional control, and spiritual practices.³⁷ Second, adab and the role of teachers can be made key components in educator competency standards, where moral integrity is as important as academic competence. Third, educational evaluation must measure students' spiritual and ethical development, not just academic achievement. Several character education studies in the West have begun to move towards values-based education, but the integration of the spiritual dimension is still rare. Therefore, classical Islamic education can fill this gap by offering a more holistic evaluative approach, oriented towards a balance between this world and the hereafter, cognition and affection, as well as the individual and society.³⁸

Epistemologically, this reconstruction of the educational paradigm challenges the modern dichotomy between science and moral values. Classical Islamic education shows that science, ethics, and spirituality are an inseparable unity. This approach is in line with the idea of the Islamization of Knowledge initiated by al-Faruqi, which is an effort to integrate Islamic principles into modern science to make it more meaningful and transcendental. From a global perspective, this synthesis can be seen as a form of critical pedagogy that combines the strengths of Eastern and Western traditions. Ultimately, the answer offered by classical Islamic tradition to the fundamental question "why do we learn?" far exceeds a pragmatic orientation: we learn to become human beings who are closer to God, have noble character, and benefit others. This perspective presents

³⁵ Huda, Selamat, and Salem, "Investigating Respect in Learning as Character Education: A Review of Al-Zarnūjī's *Ta'lim Al-Muta'Allim*"; Danish Akbar Firdausy Asbari et al., "From Theory to Practice: Implementing *Ta'limul Muta'allim* in Modern Education Systems," *International Journal of Social and Management Studies (IJOSMAS)* 05, no. 02 (2024): 41–46, <https://ijosmas.org/index.php/ijosmas/article/view/430/307>.

³⁶ Elizabeth Spier, Frederik Leenknecht, and David Osher, "Many Layers, Many Dimensions: Building a New Science of Holistic Education," in *International Handbook of Holistic Education* (UK: Routledge, 2018); Miseliunaite, Kliziene, and Cibulskas, "Can Holistic Education Solve the World's Problems: A Systematic Literature Review."

³⁷ Nur Hadi Ihsan, Erva Dewi Arqomi Puspita, and Muqit Nur Rohman, "Tazkiyat Al-Nafs of Syekh Nawawi Al-Bantani (1814-1897 Ad) As an Antidote to Consumerism Culture," *Jurnal Ushuluddin* 32, no. 1 (2024): 45.

³⁸ Radhita Azzahra, Saipul Annur, and Tutut Handayani, "Comprehensive Holistic Islamic Education," *Jurnal Ilmiah Wahana Pendidikan* 11, no. 9 (2025), <https://www.jurnal.peneliti.net/index.php/JIWP/article/view/11604>; Elizabeth Adams St. Pierre, "Post Qualitative Inquiry, the Refusal of Method, and the Risk of the New," *Qualitative Inquiry* 27, no. 1 (2019).

a new direction for global education, which is seeking a balance between intellectual intelligence and spiritual maturity.³⁹

Conclusion

This study affirms that the classical Islamic educational paradigm articulated by al-Ghazali, Ibn Qayyim, and al-Zarnuji remains highly relevant for addressing contemporary challenges. Al-Ghazali's concept of *tazkiyat al-nafs* situates education as a process of spiritual purification, Ibn Qayyim underscores the unity of knowledge and action, and al-Zarnuji highlights manners, teachers' roles, and time discipline. Together, they offer a holistic framework that integrates spirituality, ethics, and cognition. This synthesis resonates with global trends in holistic education, yet contributes a distinctive transcendental foundation often absent in Western models.

The findings indicate that classical Islamic thought can serve as a corrective to the moral and existential crisis of modern education, which tends to prioritize competencies and labor-market needs while neglecting spiritual and ethical dimensions. Integrating insights from al-Faruqi's Islamization of Knowledge and Freire's critique of oppressive pedagogy, this paradigm provides a humanistic and transformative orientation.

Practically, the study calls for curriculum reform that balances cognitive, ethical, and spiritual elements, positions teachers as moral exemplars, and expands assessment beyond academic achievement to include character and self-awareness. Engagement with Western practices such as values-based education and socio-emotional learning can enrich implementation, but the Islamic spiritual orientation remains its distinctive hallmark. In conclusion, the classical Islamic paradigm of holistic education offers not only relevance for Muslim societies but also a vital contribution to the global pursuit of education that is just, humane, and meaningful.

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³⁹ Tasnim Abdul Rahman, "The Works and Contributions of Ismail Raji Al-Faruqi in Islamization of Knowledge," *Journal of Islamic Thought and Civilization* 05, no. 01 (2015): 31–41; Rosnani Hashim and Imron Rossid, "Islamization of Knowledge: A Comparative Analysis of the Conceptions of Al-Attas and Al-Faruqi," *Intellectual Discourse* 8, no. I (2000): 19–44.

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