



A Comparative Hermeneutic Study of Al-Ghazali's Tazkiyat al-Nafs and Bandura's Self-Regulation Theory: Toward an Integrative Model of Islamic Character Education

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Abstract

The growing complexity of contemporary educational challenges indicates that character education requires not only the transmission of moral values but also the development of internal mechanisms that enable individuals to regulate their thoughts, emotions, and behaviors consistently. However, existing approaches to character education often separate spiritual-moral foundations from psychological mechanisms of self-regulation, creating a conceptual gap between ethical orientation and behavioral regulation. This study aims to critically examine and comparatively interpret Al-Ghazali's concept of tazkiyat al-nafs and Albert Bandura's theory of self-regulation in order to formulate an integrative model for Islamic character education. Employing a qualitative library research design through philosophical hermeneutic and comparative analysis, this study examines the primary works of Al-Ghazali and Bandura along with relevant scholarly literature on moral education and self-regulated learning. The findings demonstrate that both perspectives acknowledge human agency and emphasize internal processes of reflection, evaluation, and behavioral transformation. Nevertheless, Al-Ghazali conceptualizes self-regulation within a spiritual-ethical framework based on purification of the soul, muhasabah, mujahadah, and moral orientation toward God, whereas Bandura explains self-regulation through cognitive and social mechanisms involving self-monitoring, self-judgment, self-reaction, and self-efficacy. This study proposes an integrative conceptual model of Islamic character education in which tazkiyat al-nafs provides the spiritual and ethical foundation, while self-regulation mechanisms provide the psychological pathway for translating values into consistent behavior. The proposed framework contributes to the development of contemporary Islamic character education by connecting classical Islamic ethics with modern educational psychology in a reflective, adaptive, and transformative approach.

Keywords: *Tazkiyat al-Nafs, Self-Regulation, Islamic Character Education, Al-Ghazali, Bandura*



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1. Introduction

Character education has become an increasingly important concern in contemporary educational discourse as societies face complex moral, social, and technological transformations. Education is no longer expected merely to develop students' cognitive abilities and professional competencies but also to cultivate individuals who possess moral awareness, emotional maturity, and the capacity to regulate their own behavior. In this context, the central challenge of character education is not simply how students understand moral values, but how these values can be internalized and consistently manifested in everyday actions. The rapid development of digital environments has further intensified this challenge by exposing students to continuous external stimuli that may weaken reflection, self-discipline, and behavioral control.

Within this context, self-regulation has emerged as a fundamental dimension of character formation because it represents the internal mechanism through which individuals translate values into actual behavior. Although character education programs have increasingly emphasized values, discipline, and moral habituation, many approaches remain primarily normative and provide limited explanation regarding the psychological processes that enable individuals to maintain ethical behavior across different situations. Conversely, psychological theories of self-regulation offer detailed explanations of behavioral regulation mechanisms but often provide insufficient attention to moral purpose, spiritual meaning, and transcendental orientation. This separation between ethical foundation and behavioral mechanism creates a theoretical gap that requires a more integrative perspective.

In Islamic educational thought, Al-Ghazali provides a profound philosophical foundation for understanding self-regulation through the concept of *tazkiyat al-nafs* (purification of the soul). For Al-Ghazali, human behavior is closely related to the condition of the inner self, where moral development requires continuous processes of self-awareness, self-evaluation, and discipline of desire. Through concepts such as *muhasabah* (self-reflection), *mujahadah* (striving against negative impulses), and spiritual habituation, Al-Ghazali explains that character formation is not merely an external process of behavioral correction but an internal transformation of the human soul (Ghazali, 2005; Ghazali, 2010). Therefore, *tazkiyat al-nafs* provides a spiritual-ethical framework that explains why individuals should regulate their behavior based on moral consciousness and higher purposes.

Albert Bandura's theory of self-regulation provides a complementary perspective by explaining the psychological mechanisms through which individuals monitor, evaluate, and regulate their behavior. Within Social Cognitive Theory, Bandura conceptualizes human beings as active agents who are capable of exercising control over their thoughts, motivation, and actions through reciprocal interactions between personal factors, behavior, and environmental influences (Bandura, 1986). Self-regulation operates



through several interconnected processes, including self-observation, self-judgment, and self-reaction, which enable individuals to evaluate their behavior according to personal standards and adjust their actions accordingly (Bandura, 1991). Furthermore, the concept of self-efficacy represents a critical dimension of self-regulation because individuals' beliefs regarding their own capabilities influence their persistence, motivation, and ability to maintain goal-directed behavior (Artino, 2012; Rustika, 2016). Therefore, Bandura's framework provides an operational psychological explanation of how behavioral regulation occurs in real-life contexts.

Although Al-Ghazali's tazkiyat al-nafs and Bandura's self-regulation theory originate from different intellectual traditions, both perspectives share a fundamental assumption that individuals possess the capacity to consciously regulate themselves. Al-Ghazali approaches self-regulation from a spiritual and ethical orientation, emphasizing purification of the inner self, moral awareness, and alignment between human desires and divine values. In contrast, Bandura explains self-regulation through cognitive and social mechanisms that enable individuals to monitor and modify their behavior. Previous studies have demonstrated the relevance of these perspectives within their respective domains. Research on Islamic education has shown that the practice of tazkiyat al-nafs contributes to students' moral and spiritual character development through reflection, habituation, and exemplary behavior (Zurotul Munawaroh & Sholihuddin, 2021; Anwar et al., 2025). Meanwhile, studies in educational psychology indicate that self-regulation and self-efficacy play significant roles in students' learning behavior, motivation, and academic development (Fitriyani & Sugiyo, 2022; Panadero, 2017).

Despite these contributions, existing studies have largely examined spiritual-moral development and psychological self-regulation as separate areas of inquiry. Islamic educational research has extensively explored moral cultivation through concepts such as tazkiyat al-nafs, religious habituation, and value internalization; however, it has provided limited theoretical explanation regarding the psychological mechanisms through which moral values are transformed into consistent behavioral regulation. Conversely, educational psychology has developed sophisticated models of self-regulation and behavioral control, yet often pays limited attention to spiritual meaning, moral purpose, and transcendental dimensions as foundations of human action. This separation indicates a conceptual gap between the normative question of why individuals should regulate themselves and the psychological question of how such regulation occurs.

Although previous studies have provided valuable insights into moral development, tazkiyat al-nafs, and self-regulation, these discussions have generally remained within separate theoretical traditions. Research in Islamic education has emphasized spiritual purification, moral internalization, and religious habituation as foundations of character formation (Zurotul Munawaroh & Sholihuddin, 2021; Kurnianingsih et al., 2025; Anwar



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et al., 2025). However, these studies have not sufficiently explained how spiritual values operate through psychological mechanisms that enable individuals to consistently regulate their behavior. On the other hand, studies based on educational psychology have developed comprehensive explanations of self-regulation processes, including self-monitoring, self-evaluation, and self-efficacy (Bandura, 1991; Panadero, 2017), yet these approaches often provide limited attention to moral meaning and spiritual orientation as foundations of human action.

Therefore, the gap addressed in this study is not merely the absence of comparison between Al-Ghazali and Bandura, but the lack of a conceptual framework that integrates spiritual ethics and psychological mechanisms of self-regulation within Islamic character education. Through a comparative hermeneutic analysis, this study seeks to interpret the underlying assumptions, mechanisms, and educational implications of Al-Ghazali's tazkiyat al-nafs and Bandura's self-regulation theory. The integration of these perspectives is expected to provide a more comprehensive understanding of character formation by positioning spiritual values as the ethical foundation and self-regulation as the operational mechanism for translating values into consistent behavior.

Accordingly, this study aims to conduct a comparative hermeneutic analysis of Al-Ghazali's concept of tazkiyat al-nafs and Bandura's theory of self-regulation in order to develop an integrative conceptual model for Islamic character education. Specifically, this study seeks to address three research questions: How is self-regulation conceptualized within Al-Ghazali's framework of tazkiyat al-nafs and Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory?, What are the philosophical similarities and epistemological differences between these two perspectives in explaining human capacity for behavioral regulation? and How can the synthesis of these perspectives contribute to the development of an integrative model of Islamic character education that connects spiritual values with psychological mechanisms of self-regulation?

This study contributes to the theoretical development of Islamic character education by proposing an integrative framework that bridges classical Islamic ethical thought and contemporary educational psychology. Rather than positioning spiritual and psychological approaches as competing perspectives, this study demonstrates their complementary functions: tazkiyat al-nafs provides the moral and spiritual orientation of character formation, while self-regulation theory explains the cognitive and behavioral mechanisms through which such values are internalized and maintained. This conceptual integration offers a foundation for developing a more reflective, adaptive, and transformative approach to Islamic character education in contemporary educational contexts.



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2. Research Method

2.1. Research Design

This study employed a qualitative research approach with a philosophical library research design. This approach was selected because the study focuses on interpreting and comparing theoretical concepts developed by Al-Ghazali and Albert Bandura rather than collecting empirical data from educational settings. Library research enables researchers to systematically examine relevant written sources, including classical works, academic books, and scholarly articles, in order to construct a deeper conceptual understanding of a particular phenomenon (Zed, 2018).

Furthermore, this study employed a comparative hermeneutic approach to analyze the meaning, structure, and philosophical foundations of Al-Ghazali's concept of tazkiyat al-nafs and Bandura's theory of self-regulation. Hermeneutics in this study is understood not merely as textual interpretation but as an approach to understanding ideas through the interaction between texts, historical contexts, and intellectual traditions (Palmer, 1969). Therefore, the comparative hermeneutic approach allows this study to examine both similarities and differences between Islamic ethical thought and modern psychological theory while maintaining their respective epistemological contexts.

2.2. Data Sources

The data sources consisted of primary and secondary materials. Primary sources included Al-Ghazali's major works, namely *Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn*, *Kimiya' al-Sa'adah*, and *Mizān al-'Amal*, which were analyzed to identify the conceptual foundations of tazkiyat al-nafs, moral development, and self-discipline. In addition, Bandura's foundational works, including *Social Learning Theory* and *Social Foundations of Thought and Action: A Social Cognitive Theory*, were examined to explore the theoretical mechanisms of self-regulation, self-efficacy, and human agency.

Secondary sources included peer-reviewed journal articles, books, and scholarly publications related to Islamic character education, moral development, self-regulated learning, and educational psychology. The selection of these sources followed the principles of relevance, credibility, and theoretical contribution to the research focus. This process is consistent with qualitative research procedures that emphasize systematic identification, classification, and interpretation of meaningful sources (Moleong, 2019).



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2.3. Data Collection and Analysis

Data collection was conducted through documentation techniques by identifying, selecting, and organizing relevant literature according to the research objectives. The collected materials were classified into several analytical categories, including conceptual foundations, mechanisms of self-regulation, moral transformation, and educational implications.

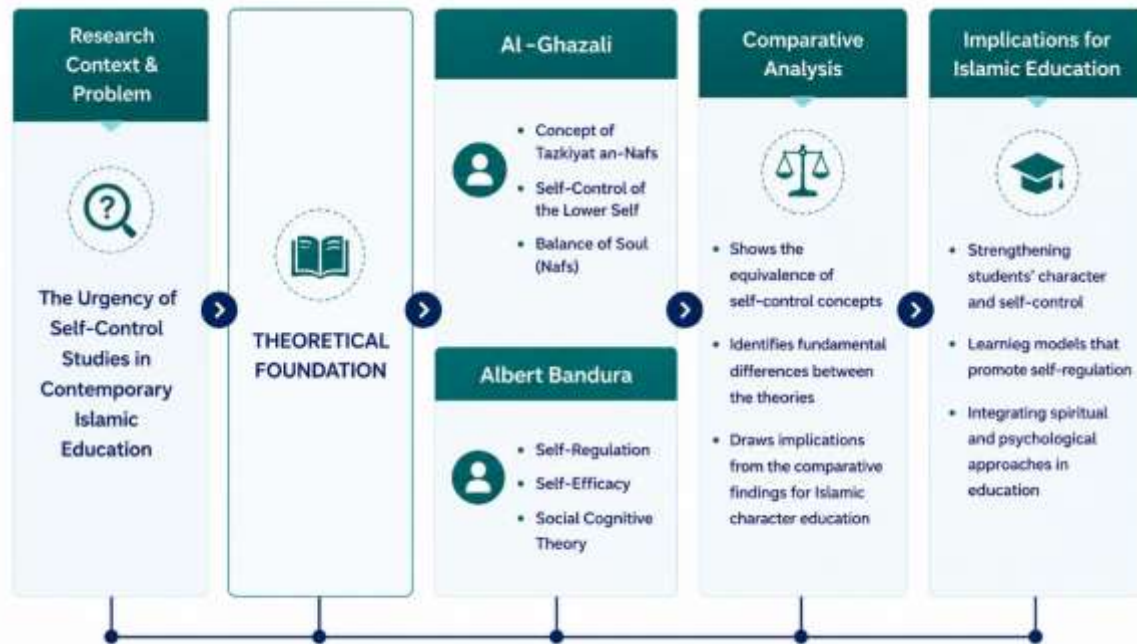
The data analysis process followed qualitative analytical procedures involving data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion formulation as proposed by Miles and Huberman (1994). However, considering the philosophical nature of this research, these analytical stages were integrated with hermeneutic interpretation. The analysis was conducted through four stages: (1) identifying the fundamental concepts of tazkiyat al-nafs and self-regulation from the original texts; (2) interpreting these concepts within their historical, philosophical, and epistemological contexts; (3) comparing the conceptual structures of Al-Ghazali and Bandura; and (4) synthesizing the findings into an integrative framework for Islamic character education.

2.4. Analytical Framework and Research Validity

To ensure analytical rigor, this study applied critical reading, source comparison, and interpretive consistency throughout the research process. In qualitative research, credibility is strengthened through careful examination of sources, consistency of interpretation, and systematic analysis of collected data (Sugiyono, 2019). Therefore, the proposed integrative model was developed through a reflective process that considered both the internal coherence of each theoretical framework and the possibility of conceptual dialogue between spiritual ethics and psychological self-regulation.

Through this methodological framework, the study does not merely compare two theoretical perspectives but attempts to reconstruct an integrative understanding of character formation by positioning tazkiyat al-nafs as the spiritual-ethical foundation and self-regulation as the psychological mechanism for sustaining moral behavior.

3. Results and Discussion



3.1 Al-Ghazali's Concept of Self-Control

The hermeneutic analysis of Al-Ghazali's works reveals that the concept of self-regulation is fundamentally embedded within the framework of tazkiyat al-nafs (purification of the soul). Although Al-Ghazali does not employ the modern psychological terminology of self-regulation, his ethical framework provides a comprehensive explanation of how individuals govern their desires, emotions, and actions through the cultivation of inner awareness and moral consciousness. In Al-Ghazali's perspective, human behavior is not merely controlled through external rules but transformed through the purification of the inner self, where reason ('aql) guides desire (nafs) according to ethical and spiritual objectives (Ghazali, 2005).

The interpretive analysis indicates that tazkiyat al-nafs operates through a continuous process of self-awareness, evaluation, and transformation. Three essential mechanisms characterize this process: muhasabah (self-reflection), mujahadah (continuous struggle against negative impulses), and riyadhah al-nafs (disciplinary cultivation of the self) (Ghazali, 2010). Muhasabah functions as an internal evaluation mechanism through which individuals examine their intentions and actions; mujahadah represents the effort to regulate desires and overcome tendencies that hinder moral development; while riyadhah establishes consistent habits through repeated ethical



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practice. Therefore, Al-Ghazali's framework presents self-regulation as a transformative process rather than merely behavioral restraint.

Furthermore, Al-Ghazali's understanding of self-regulation is inseparable from the relationship between human freedom, moral responsibility, and spiritual purpose. The regulation of desire does not imply eliminating human emotions or instincts but harmonizing them under the guidance of reason and divine consciousness. From this perspective, self-regulation becomes a process of developing moral agency, where individuals consciously direct their behavior based on internalized values rather than external supervision.

Within Islamic character education, this perspective provides an important theoretical foundation by emphasizing that character formation requires internal transformation rather than only the transmission of moral knowledge. The development of ethical behavior depends on students' capacity to reflect upon themselves, evaluate their actions, and cultivate disciplined habits. Thus, tazkiyat al-nafs can be understood as a spiritual self-regulation framework that explains how moral values are internalized and transformed into consistent behavior.

3.2 Bandura's Concept of Self-Control

The concept of self-control in Albert Bandura's thought is rooted in the framework of Social Cognitive Theory, which, according to the author's analysis, positions individuals as active agents capable of consciously regulating their behavior, thoughts, and emotions. Self-control (self-regulation) is understood not as the result of external control but as an internal process that enables individuals to direct their actions according to their own goals and standards (Bandura, 1971). Thus, according to Bandura, self-control is an adaptive capacity that maintains behavioral consistency through organized cognitive mechanisms.

Based on the author's analysis, the structure of self-regulation in Bandura's thought can be understood as a system consisting of three main mechanisms: self-observation, self-judgment, and self-reaction. Self-observation functions as the process of monitoring one's behavior, self-judgment as the evaluation of behavior based on certain standards, and self-reaction as the response to the results of that evaluation. These three mechanisms indicate that self-control is cyclical and continuous, in which individuals actively monitor, evaluate, and adjust their behavior (Bandura, 1986). According to the author's interpretation, this structure has a strong operational character because it provides concrete steps in the process of self-management.

Furthermore, the concept of self-efficacy serves as a key element in explaining the success of self-control. From Bandura's perspective, an individual's belief in their own capabilities determines the extent to which they are able to maintain behavioral regulation. According to the author's analysis, self-efficacy functions as the psychological



energy that motivates individuals to remain consistent in the process of self-regulation, particularly when facing difficulties or failure. A study by (Rustika, 2016) shows that self-efficacy has a significant influence on an individual's ability to regulate behavior, while the study by (Fitriyani & Sugiyo, 2022) confirms that self-efficacy is closely related to the success of self-regulated learning. These findings indicate that self-control from Bandura's perspective is not merely mechanical but is also strongly influenced by self-belief.

In the educational context, this concept implies that character development cannot be achieved solely through the internalization of values but must also be supported by the development of practical self-regulation skills. A study by Putri (Putri, 2020) shows that the application of emotion regulation techniques based on Social Cognitive Theory significantly improves students' self-control. Based on this analysis, it can be concluded that Bandura's concept of self-control offers an operational and applicable framework for education, as it emphasizes individuals' ability to independently regulate their behavior through the processes of self-monitoring, self-evaluation, and self-reinforcement. Thus, this approach provides an important foundation for developing a model of self-control that is adaptive and relevant to the dynamics of modern life.

3.3 Comparative Analysis of the Concepts of Self-Control from the Perspectives of Al-Ghazali and Albert Bandura.

The results of the comparative analysis indicate that the concept of self-control in the thoughts of Al-Ghazali and Albert Bandura shares a fundamental similarity in viewing human beings as active agents capable of consciously directing their behavior. According to the author's interpretation, both approaches reject external determinism and emphasize the importance of internal mechanisms as the center of behavioral control. In Al-Ghazali's thought, this mechanism is manifested through spiritual awareness in the forms of *muraqabah* and *muhasabah*, whereas in Bandura's theory it is represented by self-observation and self-judgment. This similarity suggests that self-control, from both spiritual and psychological perspectives, is rooted in individuals' reflective capacity to continuously monitor and evaluate themselves.

Furthermore, the author's analysis reveals a structural correspondence between the two concepts. The stages of *takhalli*, *tahalli*, and *tajalli* in Al-Ghazali's thought are functionally comparable to the mechanisms of self-regulation in Bandura's theory. *Takhalli* may be understood as the process of eliminating negative behavior, which parallels the evaluation of behavior against established standards (self-judgment); *tahalli* represents the development of positive behavior, corresponding to the process of corrective response (self-reaction); and *tajalli* refers to a stable condition in which values have been internalized, resembling the achievement of consistent self-regulation. These findings indicate that although the two concepts originate from different epistemological



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traditions, they possess functionally comparable mechanisms that can be integrated within a common analytical framework.

However, the fundamental difference lies in the epistemological foundation and the ultimate orientation of each concept. In Al-Ghazali's perspective, the standards of self-control are derived from absolute divine values; therefore, self-control is oriented toward achieving moral excellence and closeness to God. In contrast, Bandura's perspective views the standards of self-regulation as cognitive constructs shaped by individuals and influenced by their social environment, making them more adaptive and contextual. According to the author's analysis, this difference indicates that Al-Ghazali emphasizes the dimension of meaning (meaning-oriented), whereas Bandura emphasizes the dimension of function (performance-oriented). Rather than contradicting one another, these two perspectives complement each other in explaining the complexity of human self-control.

To strengthen this comparative analysis, it is important to examine how these concepts of self-control are implemented in educational practice. In this regard, empirical findings from Islamic boarding schools (Pondok Pesantren) provide a concrete illustration of how the integration of spiritual dimensions and self-regulatory mechanisms is manifested in everyday life. The findings show that self-control is understood as *mujahadah an-nafs*, namely the effort to avoid negative behavior and maintain obedience to Allah through disciplined habituation. Practices such as *dhikr*, *shalawat*, regular worship, and the implementation of rules and point-based disciplinary systems demonstrate the integration of spiritual training and behavioral regulation. This is consistent with Al-Ghazali's concept of self-control, which emphasizes the dimension of *tazkiyatun nafs*, while it can also be explained through Bandura's perspective as a form of self-regulation through behavioral reinforcement and modeling processes. Nevertheless, the consistency of students' self-control remains challenged outside the pesantren environment, particularly due to peer influence and technological distractions, indicating that the process of internalization has not yet become fully stable.

Based on the overall analysis, this study produces a conceptual synthesis that positions self-control as the integration of value orientation and operational mechanisms. Al-Ghazali's concept provides the normative and ethical foundation that determines the direction of behavior, while Bandura's concept offers a psychological framework explaining how such behavior can be regulated and maintained consistently. Accordingly, the principal finding of this study suggests that the ideal model of self-control within the context of Islamic character education is an integrative model that combines moral-spiritual awareness with adaptive self-regulatory abilities. This synthesis not only enriches the theoretical discourse but also offers a more applicable conceptual framework for addressing the challenges of character development in the modern era.



3.4 Conceptual Synthesis and Implications for Islamic Character Education.

Based on the conceptual synthesis developed in this study, the findings indicate that Islamic character education requires a paradigm shift from a normative approach to an integrative approach that combines value orientation with self-regulation mechanisms. According to the author's analysis, tazkiyat al-nafts should not merely be understood as a prescriptive ethical framework but should also be operationalized through self-regulation mechanisms that enable these values to be consistently translated into behavior. Thus, the main finding of this study confirms that the effectiveness of Islamic character education depends not only on the internalization of values but also on students' ability to regulate themselves consciously, reflectively, and continuously.

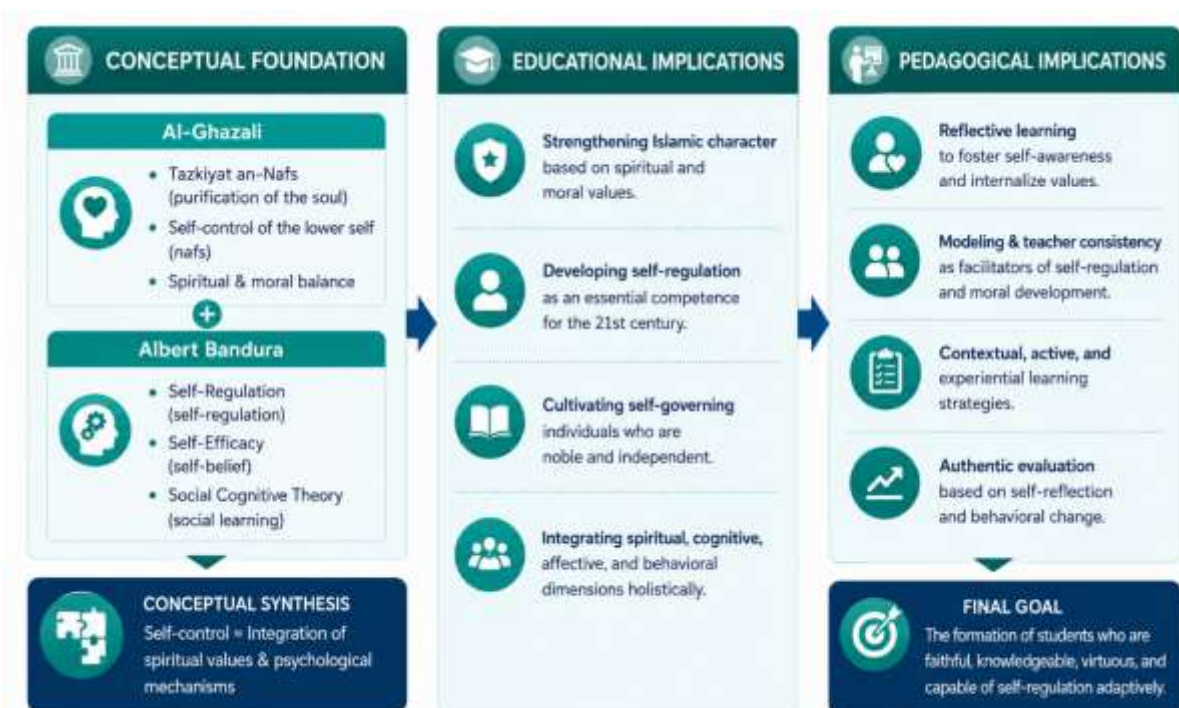
The conceptual implication of this finding is the need to redefine the goals of Islamic character education from merely fostering normative compliance to strengthening individuals' internal capacity for self-control. Within this framework, the indicators of educational success are no longer limited to rule-compliant behavior but also include self-awareness, moral evaluation (muhasabah/self-judgment), and consistency of action across various situations without external supervision. Al-Ghazali's perspective provides the foundation for the dimensions of intention and inner awareness, while Bandura offers an operational framework explaining how the process of self-regulation functions. The integration of these two perspectives produces a more comprehensive formulation of the goals of character education, namely the development of individuals who are capable of governing themselves.

At the pedagogical level, the findings suggest the need to reconstruct the design of character education so that it moves beyond the transmission of values toward the cultivation of self-awareness and self-regulation. According to the author's interpretation, practices such as structured self-reflection, reflective journals, and moral dialogue are essential because they integrate muhasabah with self-monitoring in a practical manner. In this context, teachers no longer function solely as normative authorities but also as facilitators of self-regulation who assist students in understanding, evaluating, and directing their own behavior. Consequently, character education shifts from a cognitive approach toward a reflective-transformative approach.

Furthermore, the implications extend to transforming the role of teachers and the educational ecosystem as a whole. Teachers should serve not only as moral exemplars but also as models of self-regulation who demonstrate internal processes in ethical decision-making, emotional management, and conflict resolution. At the same time, educational environments should be designed as reflective spaces that encourage the internalization of values through experience rather than mere compliance with rules. In

this context, discipline is no longer viewed as an instrument of external control but as a means of fostering personal responsibility. This demonstrates that integrating spirituality and psychology requires a fundamental transformation of educational culture.

Finally, the findings of this study have strong relevance in addressing the challenges of character education in the global and digital era, where the primary issue is no longer the lack of moral knowledge but the limited capacity for self-control in dealing with the complexity of contemporary life. The integration of Al-Ghazali's and Bandura's perspectives enables Islamic character education to move beyond a purely normative approach toward a model that is more operational, adaptive, and contextual. Therefore, the principal contribution of this study lies in formulating an integrative framework of Islamic character education that not only provides value orientation but also offers internal mechanisms through which students can consistently actualize those values in real-life situations.





4. Discussion

4.1 Self-Control as the Core of Character Education

The findings of this study confirm that self-control is not merely one component of character education but rather the core mechanism through which moral values are translated into actual behavior. From Al-Ghazali's perspective, moral development is rooted in tazkiyat al-nafs, which regulates human desires so that actions are aligned with moral consciousness. This perspective closely corresponds to Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory, which views human behavior as guided by self-regulation through the processes of self-monitoring, self-judgment, and self-reaction (Bandura, 1991). Studies in educational psychology also indicate that individuals who understand behavioral standards are better able to regulate their actions independently, making self-regulation an important indicator of the development of internal behavioral control (Setyawan & Masykur, 2022).

In educational practice, character is often taught through rules and habituation, yet these approaches do not always produce consistent behavior. This indicates that moral knowledge does not automatically lead to moral action. A study in Islamic Religious Education found that learning discipline plays a fundamental role in developing students' ability to monitor and evaluate themselves independently (Aysah & Hidayati, 2025). These findings reinforce the idea that character education is effective when students internalize behavioral standards as their own personal standards. Therefore, Islamic character education should focus on developing reflective capacity rather than merely promoting compliance with external norms.

Theoretically, self-control also bridges the cognitive and affective dimensions of education. Self-regulated learning enables students to direct their thoughts, motivation, and behavior toward achieving learning goals (Tekeng, S. N. Y., 2015). Within Al-Ghazali's framework, this function is comparable to muhasabah, the continuous process of self-evaluation to ensure that actions remain aligned with moral orientation. In other words, character is formed through repeated reflection. Character education is therefore not limited to instilling values but must also cultivate the ability to evaluate oneself based on those values.

Furthermore, the motivational dimension reinforces the position of self-control as the core of character. Bandura identifies self-efficacy as the driving force behind behavioral regulation, whereas the Islamic ethical tradition emphasizes intention (niyyah) and God-consciousness as the foundation of righteous action. Recent studies indicate that self-efficacy and emotional awareness significantly enhance students' ability to regulate their emotions (Wahyuni et al., 2024). These findings suggest that moral consistency emerges from internal conviction rather than external supervision alone. In



other words, self-control develops when individuals possess both intrinsic motivation and the psychological capacity to regulate their behavior.

Therefore, self-control can be positioned as the core of character education because it connects values, consciousness, and action within a continuous process. Without self-control, character education remains at the level of normative morality; with self-control, values are transformed into conscious habits. The integration of tazkiyat al-nafs and self-regulation demonstrates that character is not merely the result of knowing what is good but of sustaining goodness across various life situations. This perspective positions Islamic character education as a process of developing the capacity for conscious and continuous self-regulation rather than merely teaching behavioral norms.

4.2 Integrating Spiritual and Psychological Approaches

The comparative analysis indicates that the spiritual approach in Al-Ghazali's thought and the psychological approach in Bandura's theory are not contradictory but rather complementary. The Islamic educational tradition positions tazkiyat al-nafs as the foundation of human development, explaining why individuals need to exercise self-control, whereas Social Cognitive Theory explains how self-control operates through its underlying mechanisms (Bandura, 1991). When separated, religious education tends to become normative without effective strategies for behavioral change, while psychological education becomes technical but loses its moral direction. Therefore, integrating these two approaches shifts character education from the mere transmission of moral values to the development of operational moral competence (Lickona, 2013).

Within Al-Ghazali's framework, self-control begins with an awareness of life's purpose through the practices of muhasabah and mujahadah to regulate human desires. Bandura explains a similar process through self-monitoring, self-judgment, and self-reaction. When these perspectives are integrated, spiritual reflection can be understood as meaningful cognitive reflection. This continuous process of self-evaluation is consistent with the model of self-regulated learning, which identifies monitoring and reflection as the core mechanisms of behavioral change (Panadero, 2017). Thus, spiritual practices acquire pedagogical significance, serving not merely as religious rituals but also as systematic exercises in self-regulation.

This integration also clarifies the relationship between intention and self-efficacy. In Islamic ethics, intention (niyyah) constitutes the foundation of the quality of one's deeds, whereas in Bandura's theory, self-efficacy serves as the foundation of persistence in action. Studies have shown that self-efficacy enhances individuals' effort, resilience, and learning self-regulation strategies (Artino, 2012; Hayat et al., 2020). When combined with a spiritual value orientation, these capacities contribute not only to effective performance but also to meaningful behavior. In other words, confidence in one's abilities without



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moral values risks producing competence without morality, whereas moral values without self-efficacy may result in morality without consistent action.

From a pedagogical perspective, integrating spiritual and psychological approaches shifts the function of religious education from merely transmitting norms to providing practical training in self-regulation. Religious practices can be understood as a means of developing behavioral control. Repetitive activities help students cultivate the ability to resist impulses, maintain attention, and align their actions with long-term goals. Recent studies indicate that self-control is directly associated with reduced maladaptive behaviors, such as academic procrastination, while also improving learning achievement (Parsaoran et al., 2023). Furthermore, longitudinal research has demonstrated that self-control is a significant predictor of long-term academic success, even surpassing intelligence in explaining students' academic achievement (Vazsonyi et al., 2022). Therefore, religious education can be positioned as a context for developing self-regulation by connecting the understanding of values with everyday behavioral habits.

Furthermore, this integration provides a foundation for character education that is responsive to contemporary challenges. The digital era demonstrates that character-related problems often arise from weak self-control in dealing with distractions rather than from a lack of moral knowledge. Self-regulation, which involves monitoring and evaluating personal standards, has been shown to play an important role in preventing impulsive behavior (Artino, 2012; Panadero, 2017). When combined with moral awareness in Islamic education, this approach makes character education preventive rather than merely reactive to misconduct. Therefore, the integration of spirituality and psychology represents a reconstruction of character pedagogy in which values provide direction and self-regulation enables individuals to consistently live according to those values.

4.3 Relevance to Contemporary Character Issues

The character crisis among students in the modern era is no longer merely associated with a lack of moral understanding but rather with a weakening of self-control in an environment filled with distractions. The rapid development of digital technology provides constant instant stimuli that encourage impulsive behavior, causing individuals to act based on immediate desires rather than value-based considerations. From the perspective of Social Cognitive Theory, this condition reflects a low level of self-regulation in monitoring and directing behavior (Bandura, 1991). Recent studies have shown that excessive use of digital media is associated with lower self-control and increased difficulties in maintaining learning concentration among adolescents (Bläsius et al., 2021). This indicates that contemporary character problems are more regulatory than cognitive in nature; the issue is not the inability to distinguish right from wrong but the inability to consistently uphold what is right.



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Within the framework of Islamic education, this phenomenon can be understood as the dominance of instinctive desires over reflective awareness. Al-Ghazali describes it as the tendency of *nafs* to become uncontrolled when it is not disciplined through *muhasabah* and moral habituation. This perspective has become increasingly relevant in the digital era, as the modern environment intensifies external stimuli that weaken internal control. Research in educational psychology has shown that reflection-based self-regulation training effectively reduces addictive behavior toward digital devices while improving students' emotional regulation. Thus, the concept of *tazkiyat al-nafs* can be understood as a form of metacognitive training that strengthens self-awareness in regulating one's actions.

From a pedagogical perspective, integrating spiritual and psychological approaches shifts the function of religious education from merely transmitting norms to providing practical training in self-regulation. Religious habituation can be understood as a means of developing the ability to consciously regulate thoughts, emotions, and behavior. Research involving school students indicates that self-regulation is positively associated with learning independence and discipline; the better students are at regulating themselves, the better they are able to direct their behavior toward desired goals (Purwaningsih & Herwin, 2020). Another study also found that self-regulation is related to future planning among students in Islamic schools, suggesting that reflective capacity plays an important role in decision-making and behavioral control. These findings demonstrate that repeated self-awareness practices in character education serve a function comparable to the concept of *tazkiyat al-nafs*, namely developing the habit of controlling impulses before they manifest as behavior.

Furthermore, contemporary character problems are also characterized by unstable learning motivation. Many students understand the importance of discipline but struggle to maintain consistent effort. In Bandura's theory, this condition is associated with low self-efficacy, which weakens behavioral regulation. Recent research has demonstrated that self-efficacy plays an important role in learning resilience and the ability to cope with environmental distractions (Kifle & Bekele, 2021). As confidence in one's capabilities increases, individuals become better able to maintain long-term goals despite short-term temptations. This is consistent with Islamic ethics, which emphasizes awareness of life's purpose as the foundation for steadfastness (*istiqamah*) in behavior.

Therefore, the relevance of this study lies in its ability to explain the root of contemporary character problems as a crisis of self-control rather than merely a crisis of morality. The integration of spiritual training and psychological mechanisms enables education to respond to modern challenges in a preventive manner. Education not only corrects behavior after misconduct has occurred but also develops individuals' capacity to regulate their behavior before deviations arise. This approach positions self-control as an essential life competency in a modern society characterized by constant distractions.



4.4 Theoretical Contributions and Research Limitations

This study makes a theoretical contribution by affirming that self-control is the core of character education rather than merely a supporting element. The successful internalization of moral values largely depends on individuals' capacity for self-regulation. In this regard, the concepts of tazkiyat al-nafs and self-regulation can be understood as two different approaches that explain the same phenomenon, namely the human capacity to regulate behavior based on internal standards. These findings encourage a shift in character education from a normative approach toward the development of a more operational capacity for self-regulation.

Another contribution of this study lies in bridging classical Islamic thought and modern educational psychology. The findings demonstrate structural correspondences between concepts such as muhasabah and self-monitoring, mujahadah and continuous behavioral control, as well as between life purpose orientation and self-efficacy. This integration not only combines two different perspectives but also develops a conceptual framework that enables Islamic character education to be examined from a contemporary perspective without losing its theological foundation. From a pedagogical perspective, this study emphasizes the importance of balancing spiritual values as the source of direction and self-regulation as the mechanism for behavioral change.

The limitation of this study lies in its conceptual nature as a library research, which has not yet been empirically validated. Consequently, its implications remain theoretical and require verification through empirical research. In addition, the focus on only two prominent scholars leaves considerable room for further development. Therefore, future studies are recommended to examine this conceptual model in educational practice and to develop more applicable instruments and instructional designs.

5. Conclusion

This study concludes that Al-Ghazali's concept of tazkiyat al-nafs and Bandura's theory of self-regulation provide complementary perspectives for understanding human capacity to regulate behavior and develop character. Through comparative hermeneutic analysis, this study demonstrates that both frameworks recognize individuals as active agents who possess the ability to reflect upon, evaluate, and transform their actions. Nevertheless, they differ in their epistemological foundations: Al-Ghazali conceptualizes self-regulation through spiritual purification, moral awareness, and orientation toward divine values, whereas Bandura explains behavioral regulation through cognitive and social mechanisms, including self-monitoring, self-judgment, self-reaction, and self-efficacy.

The primary contribution of this study is the development of an integrative conceptual framework for Islamic character education. Within this framework, tazkiyat



al-nafs serves as the spiritual and ethical foundation that provides direction and meaning for human behavior, while self-regulation theory functions as the psychological mechanism through which these values are internalized and translated into consistent actions. This synthesis suggests that Islamic character education should move beyond moral knowledge transmission toward the cultivation of reflective individuals who are capable of consciously regulating their behavior based on internalized ethical values.

Theoretically, this study contributes to bridging classical Islamic ethical thought and contemporary educational psychology by demonstrating that spiritual and psychological approaches can complement each other in explaining character formation. However, this study is limited by its conceptual nature as a philosophical library study. Future research should empirically examine the proposed framework through educational interventions, measurement development, and cross-context validation to determine its applicability in contemporary learning environments.

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