



Self Management in the Perspective of Islamic Education: A Study of Behavioral Psychology and Modern Sufism

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze the concept of self-management in the perspective of Islamic education by reviewing its integration with behavioral psychology theory and modern Sufi values. Through library research, this study explores classical Islamic works and relevant contemporary theories to find common ground between spiritual disciplines and modern psychology. The results of the study show that self-management in Islam is rooted in the values of tazkiyatun nafs, murāqabah, and muhāsabah, which function as internal mechanisms for behavioral control. Meanwhile, behavioral psychology explains self-management as a process of strengthening self-control and forming positive habits through reinforcement. The integration of the two gives rise to the behavioral-spiritual education paradigm, which is an educational model that balances spiritual, emotional, and behavioral awareness. This study contributes to broadening the understanding of Islamic education to be more responsive to modern challenges, especially in character building and mental health of students in the global era.

Keywords: Behavioral Psychology, Islamic Education, Modern Sufism, Self-Management, Spiritual Education

INTRODUCTION

Self-management is the ability of a person to regulate their behavior, thoughts, and emotions in order to achieve their goals. In the context of education, this ability is a key factor in character building, discipline, and the achievement of student learning outcomes. Behavioral psychology theory emphasizes that self-management is formed through reinforcement of desired behavior, while Islamic education emphasizes spiritual awareness and control of desires as an integral part of the process of forming a complete self (insan kamil).¹

In modern psychology, self-management is understood as the process of internalizing self-control through observation, evaluation, and rewarding one's own behavior.² However, this approach is often secular and ignores the spiritual dimension of human beings. On the other hand, Islam has a very rich spiritual tradition, especially in Sufism, which teaches control of desires (*mujahadah al-nafs*), self-introspection (*muhasabah*), and improvement of spiritual quality (*tazkiyah al-nafs*).³ These two approaches, behavioral psychology and modern Sufism, have a common ground in terms of the formation of self-control, even though they depart from different epistemological paradigms.



In Islamic education, self-management is not only related to external behavior, but also to spiritual awareness. The development of discipline and responsibility in students cannot be achieved solely through a system of punishment and reward, but must be based on a spiritual understanding of the value of good deeds and intentions for the sake of Allah SWT.⁴ The modern Sufi approach offers this dimension through the concept of purification of the soul (*tazkiyah*), which can be integrated with behavioral psychology theory to form a holistic education system that touches on the physical, intellectual, and spiritual aspects.⁵

The phenomenon of moral degradation and weak self-control among students today is evidence that the conventional approach to education has not sufficiently touched on the spiritual aspects of human beings.⁶ Many studies show that the success of character education depends on the internalization of values and spiritual awareness, not just on external behavioral rules.⁷ Therefore, the development of the concept of self-management in the perspective of Islamic education integrated with modern Sufism is important to respond to the moral and spiritual crisis of the younger generation.⁸

Most previous studies have highlighted self-management from a secular and individualistic Western psychological perspective.⁹ Meanwhile, studies on self-management in Islam often focus on moral-spiritual aspects without linking them to modern behavioral theory. This study offers novelty in the form of integrating these two perspectives, behavioral psychology and modern Sufism, within the framework of Islamic education, which has not been done systematically and conceptually.

This integrative approach is expected to produce an Islamic self-management model that is applicable in the context of modern education, with behavioral self-control as a practical instrument and spiritual purification as a foundation of values.¹⁰ Thus, this study provides theoretical and practical contributions to the development of Islamic education based on a balance between rationality, morality, and spirituality.

METHODS

This literature study uses a qualitative-descriptive approach with a focus on conceptual review, text analysis, and synthesis of self-management theories in behavioral psychology and Islamic education. The researcher explores, analyzes integratively, rationally, and hermeneutically (textual interpretation) of classical and modern works that directly discuss self-management, Sufism, and behavioral psychology,¹¹ the following books: *Ihya' Ulum al-Din* by al-Ghazali; *Tazkiyah al-Nafs* by Sa'id Hawwa; Albert Bandura's Social Learning Theory; *Behavior Modification: Principles and Procedures* by Raymond G. Miltenberger,¹² as well as; scientific journal articles, Islamic education textbooks, educational psychology, and conceptual documents that support the theoretical analysis.¹³ The analysis is conducted to find relationships and similarities between concepts,¹⁴ as well as to understand the concept of self-management from two different epistemological perspectives: behavioral psychology and modern Sufism.¹⁵

LITERATURE REVIEW

The concept of self-management in psychology developed from behavior modification theory, which is rooted in B. F. Skinner's behaviorism, which emphasizes behavioral change through reinforcement and stimulus control. In the modern context,

self-management is not only understood as an individual's ability to regulate external behavior, but also includes the regulation of emotions, thoughts, and internal motivation. Goleman through the concept of emotional intelligence, asserts that self-management is part of emotional intelligence that plays an important role in shaping a person's character and success in social and professional life.¹⁶

Furthermore, research by Zimmerman on self-regulated learning shows that a person's ability to consciously regulate themselves, set goals, monitor progress, and reflect on themselves are key indicators of success in education. Thus, self-management is seen as an important foundation in the educational process because it enables students to become independent lifelong learners who are adaptive to social change.¹⁷

In the perspective of Islamic education, self-management (*al-tadbīr al-dzātī*) is rooted in the concept of *mujāhadah al-nafs*, which is a sincere effort to control one's desires and organize oneself towards moral perfection.¹⁸ Al-Ghazali in *Ihyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn* explains that self-control is a major prerequisite in the process of purifying the soul (*tazkiyah al-nafs*), which is the core of Islamic spiritual education.¹⁹ Islamic education emphasizes not only cognitive aspects, but also balance between intellectual, moral, and spiritual dimensions as a form of realizing *insan kamil* (perfect human beings).

In the context of educational institutions, self-management is part of *tarbiyah al-syakhsīyah*, which is personality development aimed at shaping disciplined, responsible individuals who are oriented towards divine values.²⁰ Therefore, self-management in Islamic education can be viewed as a continuous pedagogical process to achieve self-leadership rooted in faith and spiritual awareness.

Modern Sufism provides an ethical and spiritual dimension to self-management. According to Nurcholish Madjid, true Sufism is not a form of escape from social reality, but rather an effort at inner transformation to give birth to civilized and compassionate social behavior.²¹ Modern Sufi figures such as Said Nursi and Hamka emphasize the importance of *tazkiyah al-nafs* as a means of building moral strength that supports social change.²²

In this context, self-management in Sufism is not only about behavioral discipline, but also about developing a deep awareness of God (self-awareness of God). Someone who is able to manage themselves based on spiritual awareness will have a balance between *qalb* (heart), *'aql* (mind), and *nafs* (soul), which are the foundations of ethical behavior and social responsibility.²³

This approach was later developed in the spiritual intelligence theory by Zohar and Marshall, which explains that spiritual intelligence is the ability to give meaning and value to every human action.²⁴ In Islamic education, this theory is relevant to the concept of *ihsan*, which is the awareness to act as if always being watched by Allah. Thus, self-management in modern Sufism can be understood as the process of internalizing transcendental values into real behavior.

The integration of behavioral psychology and modern Sufism in Islamic education is a promising approach in establishing a balance between the external and internal dimensions of students. Behavioral psychology plays a role in building external discipline through a reinforcement system, while Sufism shapes internal awareness through spiritual self-regulation.²⁵

According to Alwi's research, contemporary Islamic education needs to combine empirical-psychological approaches with spiritual approaches so that students are not only intellectually intelligent but also emotionally and spiritually mature.²⁶ Thus, self-

management becomes a bridge between modern psychology and Islamic spirituality in shaping a well-rounded character.

This integrative approach is also in line with the modern Islamic education paradigm oriented towards human flourishing, namely the development of the whole human being (spirit, mind, and body) towards a balance between worldly and spiritual life.²⁷ Therefore, this study seeks to explore the relationship between self-management theory in behavioral psychology and the concept of modern Sufism in the framework of Islamic education.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of the literature review show that the concept of self-management in the perspective of Islamic education has strong relevance to the principles of behavioral psychology and modern Sufi values. Based on an analysis of primary and secondary literature published between 2014 and 2024, it was found that self-management in Islam is not only oriented towards behavioral regulation but also towards spiritual transformation as a moral and ethical foundation for students. Thus, Islamic self-management is understood as an integrative process between the cognitive, affective, and spiritual dimensions oriented towards character building (*akhlaq al-karimah*).

Conceptual pattern of islamic self-management

The results of the study show three main dimensions of self-management in Islamic education, namely: (a) the spiritual dimension (spiritual self-regulation), (b) the behavioral dimension (behavioral self-control), and (c) the reflective dimension (reflective self-awareness). These three dimensions operate synergistically to shape individuals who are disciplined, self-aware, and have strong moral control.

Table 1. Dimensions of self-management in islamic education

Dimensions	Dominant aspects	Practical indicators	Contribution to Islamic education
Spiritual	Tawhid, Tazkiyah al-nafs, Ihsan	Divine Awareness, Sincerity, Self-Reflection	Building moral foundations and transcendent values
Behavioral	Discipline, Self-control, Habit formation	Time Management, Emotional Regulation, Reinforcement of Positive Behavior	Character building through habit formation
Cognitive-Reflective	Self-awareness, Introspection, Self-analysis	Self-Evaluation, Ethical Decision Making	Fostering moral intelligence and responsibility

(Source: Processed data from Al-Ghazali [2017]; Goleman [2011]; Puspita [2020])

From the table above, it can be seen that Islamic education has a more complete conceptual structure than the Western psychological approach. While behavioral psychology emphasizes self-control as a mechanism for adapting to the environment, Islam makes it a path to moral perfection through control of the desires (*mujahadah al-nafs*) and spiritual awareness (*muraqabah*).²⁸

Integration of Behavioral Psychology and Modern Sufism

Literature analysis shows that the integration of behavioral psychology with modern Sufism can produce an educational model that is not only normative but also applicable. Behavioral psychology provides an empirical framework through the concepts of reinforcement and habit formation, while modern Sufism enriches it with spiritual dimensions such as tazkiyah al-nafs and ihsan.

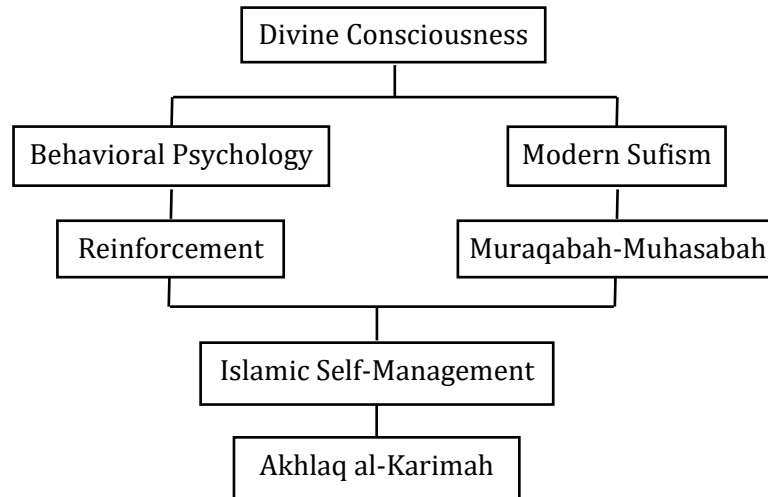


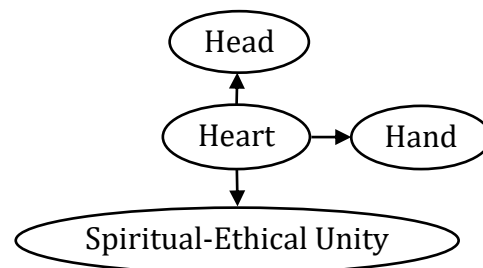
Figure 1. Integrative Model of Islamic Self-Management

(Source: Researcher analysis based on Bandura [2014]; Hamka [2019]; Nursi [2016])

The results of this integration show that good behavior can be built through two channels: external behavioral control and internal spiritual awareness. In the context of education, this means that teachers are not only behavior shapers but also spiritual mentors who guide their students' awareness to do good because of faith, not just because of punishment or reward.²⁹

Implications for contemporary islamic education

The application of Islamic self-management concepts in education can be done through the 3H (Head, Heart, Hand) approach, which includes the formation of intellectual, spiritual, and practical awareness.



Graph 1. Integration of 3H in the Formation of Islamic Self-Management

(Source: Adapted from Alwi [2020]; Azra [2019])

Head (Intellectual): Cognitive processes that train students to think reflectively, set life goals, and assess the moral consequences of their actions. **Heart (Spiritual):** The process of nurturing the heart through dzikrullah, muhasabah, and tazkiyah to build inner peace. **Hand (Action):** Concrete implementation in the form of discipline in

learning, social responsibility, and concern for others. By integrating these three domains, Islamic education is able to produce individuals who are not only intellectually skilled, but also spiritually and socially mature.³⁰

Reconstructing the paradigm of islamic education: From behaviorism to spirituality

The literature review also shows the need to reconstruct the paradigm of Islamic education so that it is not only oriented towards behavioral control, but also towards the spiritual development of students.

Bandura emphasizes that self-regulation is a key factor in learning success, but in Islam, self-regulation must be directed towards seeking Allah's pleasure. This means that behavior is not merely controlled for the sake of efficiency, but is interpreted as a form of devotion and awareness of God (*ubudiyah*).³¹

This view is in line with Hamka's thinking in Modern Sufism, which rejects the dichotomy between the world and the hereafter and emphasizes that spiritual self-control is the basis for social and professional productivity. Thus, Islamic education should combine mastery of knowledge and spiritual morality in order to produce an intelligent and civilized generation.³²

Islamic self-management synthesis model

Based on the results of literature analysis, this study produced a conceptual synthesis model that describes the integration of behavioral psychology theory and modern Sufism within the framework of Islamic education.

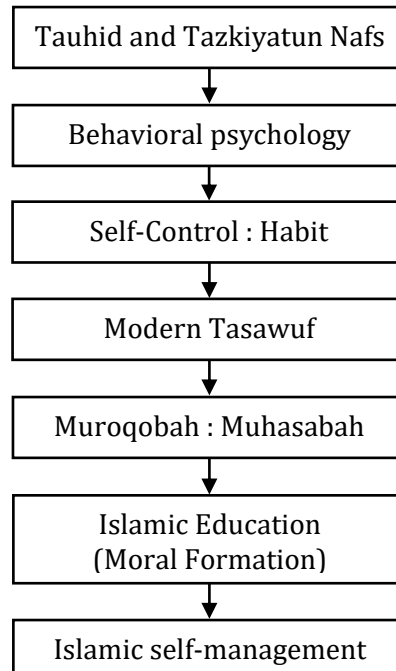


Figure 2. Islamic Self-Management Synthesis Model

This model emphasizes that the success of Islamic self-management is not only measured by an individual's ability to control behavior, but also by their ability to purify the heart and connect self-awareness to God.

This synthesis offers important novelty in contemporary Islamic education studies, namely: The integration of empirical psychology and normative Sufism; A pedagogical approach that places spirituality at the core of character building, and; The formulation of Islamic self-management concepts that can be implemented in modern education curricula.

With this approach, Islamic education is able to respond to the challenges of an era of globalization that tends to be secular and materialistic, and to restore the spiritual spirit in the teaching and learning process.³³

Conceptual implications

This study shows that self-management in Islam is not merely a mechanism of self-discipline, but an existential awareness process oriented towards God. This marks a shift from an individual-centered psychological paradigm to a theocentric (spiritual) paradigm (theocentric education).

The implications for Islamic education are significant, as they encourage a shift in orientation from simply “teaching good behavior” to “raising awareness to do good for the sake of Allah.” This is the transcendental dimension of education that distinguishes Islamic education from secular systems.

Thus, these results and discussions not only reconstruct the understanding of self-management but also provide a theoretical contribution to the development of an Islamic education paradigm oriented towards the integration of knowledge, faith, and charity.³⁴

CONCLUSION

This study confirms that self-management in the perspective of Islamic education is a harmonious integration of spiritual discipline (*tazkiyatun nafs*), psychological awareness, and behavioral control oriented towards the development of a complete personality (*insan kāmil*). In this context, Islamic education not only functions as a means of knowledge transfer, but also as a process of character building and self-potential management in order to be in harmony with divine values. The findings show that the concept of self-management in Islam is comparable to modern theories in behavioral psychology, particularly in terms of strengthening self-regulation, intrinsic motivation, and positive behavioral habits through a consistent reinforcement process.

From a spiritual perspective, the modern Sufi approach enriches the dimension of self-management by offering a model of psychological transcendence, where awareness of Allah's presence becomes the center of human behavioral control. This is in line with Al-Ghazali's (*Ihya' Ulum al-Din*) view that a person's success in managing themselves cannot be separated from their success in purifying their heart and controlling their desires. Thus, self-management in Islam is not only a cognitive or behavioral issue, but also an existential journey towards spiritual and ethical perfection.

In educational practice, this concept can be implemented through self-reflective learning, daily worship habits, reinforcement of the values of *murāqabah* and *muhāsabah*, and an evaluation system that measures not only academic results but also the discipline and self-control of students. With this approach, Islamic education can become a space for comprehensive character building, combining intellectual, emotional, spiritual, and moral intelligence.

This study concludes that the integration of behavioral psychology and modern Sufism in self-management opens up great opportunities for formulating a new paradigm in Islamic education, namely the behavioral-spiritual education paradigm. This paradigm places humans as active subjects who are not only rational and social, but also spiritual and moral. Conceptually, this is an important step towards reconstructing the Islamic education curriculum that is responsive to the moral and psychological crises of the modern generation.

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