

## An Integrative Model of Moral Education: Ibn Miskawaih, Al-Ghazali, and Ibn Khaldun and Their Relevance to Student Character Education

Eka Firmansyah\*<sup>1</sup>, Muhammad Irsyad Setiyawan<sup>2</sup>, Rendika Vhalery<sup>3</sup>, Hendra<sup>4</sup>,  
Muhammad Nashrul Haq<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Universitas Muhammadiyah Palu, Indonesia, [ekafirmansyah689@gmail.com](mailto:ekafirmansyah689@gmail.com)

<sup>2</sup>Universitas Airlangga Surabaya, Indonesia, [Irsyadsetiyawan5@gmail.com](mailto:Irsyadsetiyawan5@gmail.com)

<sup>3</sup>Universitas Indraprasta PGRI, Indonesia, [rendikavhalery31@gmail.com](mailto:rendikavhalery31@gmail.com)

<sup>4</sup>Universitas Muhammadiyah Bima, Indonesia, [hendra@iaimbima.ac.id](mailto:hendra@iaimbima.ac.id)

<sup>5</sup>Universitas Muhammadiyah Malang, Indonesia, [anasmuhammadnh100@gmail.com](mailto:anasmuhammadnh100@gmail.com)

\*[ekafirmansyah689@gmail.com](mailto:ekafirmansyah689@gmail.com)

Received: 2026-January-15

Rev. Req: 2026-March-09

Accepted: 2022-April-22

**ABSTRACT:** *This study aims to construct an integrative model of moral education by synthesizing the thought of Ibn Miskawaih, Al-Ghazali, and Ibn Khaldun, and to examine its relevance to the religious character formation of students in Madrasah Aliyah. Employing a qualitative approach through library research, data were drawn from classical primary texts, Tahdhīb al-Akhlāq, Iḥyā’ ‘Ulūm al-Dīn, and the Muqaddimah, alongside contemporary peer-reviewed scholarship, analyzed through content analysis, comparative analysis, and integrative synthesis. The findings reveal that the three scholars offer complementary rather than competing frameworks: Ibn Miskawaih provides the psychological foundation through rational self-governance and habituation; Al-Ghazali contributes the spiritual dimension through tazkiyatun nafs, mujahadah, and riyadhah; and Ibn Khaldun supplies the sociological dimension through the formative power of social environment, culture, and institutional leadership. When synthesized, these three dimensions produce a unified model that is simultaneously psychological, spiritual, and sociological in its architecture. This model is directly relevant to Madrasah Aliyah, offering a principled framework capable of strengthening religious character formation in a holistic and sustainable manner. Aligned with SDG 4, this study affirms that genuine quality education must cultivate not only intellectual competence but the full moral formation of every learner.*

**Keywords:** *Integrative moral education, classical Islamic thought, character formation.*

## I. INTRODUCTION

Madrasah Aliyah, as an Islamic secondary educational institution, has demonstrated a notable capacity for implementing religiously grounded character education in a structured and sustained manner. In many of these institutions, the formation of students' religious character is carried out systematically through daily worship habituation, the integration of Islamic values across all subjects, mentoring programs, and a school culture that consistently reflects moral and spiritual norms. These practices are not implemented in isolation; rather, they form a coherent educational ecosystem in which students are continuously immersed in environments designed to shape their inner character. Teachers serve not only as knowledge transmitters but also as moral exemplars whose daily conduct reinforces the values being taught in the classroom.

The outcomes of this approach are visibly evident in students' attitudes and behaviors. Students in such institutions generally demonstrate higher levels of religious observance, stronger interpersonal ethics, and a more disciplined orientation toward daily life compared to their peers in general secondary schools. Religious activities such as communal prayer, Qur'ān recitation, and structured spiritual mentoring have become firmly embedded as habitual practices rather than occasional programs. This level of institutional consistency in moral formation reflects a deep organizational commitment to character education as a core educational mission, not a peripheral agenda. The success of these institutions in producing students with strong religious character is therefore not accidental, it is the product of deliberate, long-term institutional design.

Furthermore, the integration between moral education and academic learning in these institutions has reached a level of coherence that is rarely achieved in general educational settings. The school environment, curriculum, and teaching practices converge to produce a holistic formation process that simultaneously addresses students' intellectual, spiritual, and social dimensions. Leadership within the institution plays a central role in sustaining this culture, as principals and senior teachers set the moral tone for the entire learning community. In this context, religious character formation at the Madrasah Aliyah level can be considered to have achieved a high degree of effectiveness, a reality that, paradoxically, raises important theoretical and conceptual questions.

Despite this evident success, leading scholars in the field of moral and character education argue that the formation of students' religious character cannot be considered fully optimal unless it is grounded in a coherent, multi-dimensional theoretical framework that addresses the psychological, spiritual, and sociological

dimensions of moral development simultaneously. Munauwarah et al. (2024) assert that moral education must go beyond behavioral habituation and engage the deeper structure of the soul, arguing that a model without this depth remains pedagogically incomplete. Similarly, Hassan et al. (2025) contend that moral internalization is shaped by a complex interplay of internal and external factors, and that educational programs addressing only one dimension are inherently limited in their long-term impact. From the perspective of classical Islamic scholarship, Rachman et al. (2023) emphasize that genuine religious character formation in madrasah settings requires a systematic integration of spiritual purification, rational self-governance, and social habituation, none of which can be treated in isolation. In parallel, Chadijah et al. (2025) note that while religiosity may appear structurally embedded in institutional routines, its true internalization demands a theoretically grounded model that connects inner transformation with social and environmental reinforcement. Kurniasih et al. (2025) further argue that for moral character education to be sustainable and aligned with broader educational goals, it must be anchored in a comprehensive conceptual framework that integrates classical wisdom with contemporary pedagogical theory.

The gap between what has been achieved in practice and what theory demands reveals a significant conceptual deficit. While Madrasah Aliyah institutions have succeeded in cultivating observable religious character in their students, this success has largely been driven by institutional culture and routine rather than by a theoretically articulated, integrative model of moral education. The rich intellectual heritage of classical Islamic scholars, particularly Ibn Miskawaih, Al-Ghazali, and Ibn Khaldun, offers three distinct yet complementary frameworks encompassing the psychological, spiritual, and sociological dimensions of moral formation. However, these frameworks have rarely been integrated into a unified and applicable model capable of both explaining existing successes and guiding more deliberate and comprehensive educational practice.

This gap generates the central research problem of the present study: if Madrasah Aliyah institutions have demonstrably succeeded in forming students' religious character, what theoretical model is capable of explaining, systematizing, and further advancing this success in a conceptually coherent manner? Put as a research question: How can the moral education thought of Ibn Miskawaih, Al-Ghazali, and Ibn Khaldun be integrated into a unified model, and to what extent is this integrative model relevant to the formation of students' religious character in Madrasah Aliyah?

A considerable body of recent scholarship has examined moral and character education within Islamic educational contexts, providing important insights while simultaneously revealing the limitations that motivate the present study. Studies on

religious character formation have addressed diverse dimensions, including institutional culture (Chadijah et al., 2025 ; Rachman et al., 2023), the role of teacher exemplarity (Icka & Kochoska, 2024 ; Munauwarah et al., 2024), and the internalization of Islamic values through habituation (Ramadhani et al., 2023 ; Tambak et al., 2023). Scholars have also explored the thought of individual classical figures, with Munauwarah et al. (2024) focusing on Ibn Miskawaih's implications for contemporary moral education, and researchers such as Quraisy et al. (2023) examining Al-Ghazali's educational philosophy in isolation. The concept of tazkiyatun nafs as a foundation for character building has been addressed by Harahap (2023), while the integration of spiritual and scientific knowledge has been theorized by Hasan et al. (2024). Studies linking Islamic education to broader sustainability goals have also emerged, as seen in Inayati et al. (2025) and Kurniasih et al. (2025).

However, a critical examination of these studies reveals a persistent and significant gap. The vast majority of existing research treats the thought of Ibn Miskawaih, Al-Ghazali, and Ibn Khaldun as separate intellectual traditions, without synthesizing them into a single, operational educational model. Furthermore, while qualitative studies of character education in madrasah settings are abundant, none has explicitly constructed an integrative theoretical framework capable of accounting for the psychological, spiritual, and sociological dimensions of moral formation simultaneously and applying that framework to explain institutional outcomes. Studies connecting classical Islamic moral thought to SDG-aligned educational quality are similarly scarce. The present study therefore occupies a distinct and necessary position in the literature, one that moves beyond descriptive accounts of individual thinkers or institutional practices toward a coherent, integrative, and applicable model.

The novelty of this study lies in its construction of an integrative model of moral education that synthesizes the thought of three foundational classical Islamic scholars, Ibn Miskawaih, Al-Ghazali, and Ibn Khaldun, into a single, unified conceptual framework applicable to the contemporary Madrasah Aliyah context. Unlike previous studies that address these thinkers individually or comparatively, this study advances a model that is simultaneously psychological, spiritual, and sociological in its architecture, and that is designed to be not merely descriptive but operationally applicable in educational practice. This integrative model contributes directly to SDG 4 (Quality Education) by offering a theoretically robust and culturally grounded approach to ensuring that all students, regardless of background, have access to education that develops their moral character alongside their intellectual capacities, a dimension of quality education that global frameworks increasingly recognize as essential but rarely specify in culturally particular terms.

The urgency of this study is underscored by the scale of the moral crisis confronting educational institutions in the contemporary era, particularly in Muslim-majority contexts where the pressure of globalization, digital culture, and rapid social change poses persistent threats to students' moral formation. Madrasah Aliyah institutions represent one of the most strategically important sites for addressing this crisis, given their dual mandate to develop both religious and academic excellence. Yet without a coherent theoretical model to anchor their character education practices, even the most successful of these institutions risk operating on institutional inertia rather than principled design, making their outcomes difficult to sustain, replicate, or scale. This study's integrative model responds directly to this urgency, providing a conceptual infrastructure for moral education that is grounded in classical Islamic wisdom, responsive to contemporary realities, and aligned with the global imperative for inclusive and sustainable quality education enshrined in SDG 4.

This study is guided by two central research questions. The first concerns the conceptual dimension: how can the moral education frameworks of Ibn Miskawaih, Al-Ghazali, and Ibn Khaldun be integrated into a unified, multi-dimensional model of moral education that cohesively addresses the psychological, spiritual, and sociological aspects of character formation? The second concerns the applied dimension: to what extent is this integrative model relevant to and capable of strengthening the religious character formation of students in the Madrasah Aliyah context, and what are its implications for the development of more holistic and principled educational practice?

## II. METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach through library research (*al-baḥṭh al-maktabī*), a method systematically used to examine, analyze, and synthesize written sources relevant to the research problem. Data were collected from two primary categories of sources: classical Islamic texts, specifically *Tahdhīb al-Akhlāq* (Ibn Miskawaih), *Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn* and *Mīzān al-'Amal* (Al-Ghazali), and the *Muqaddimah* (Ibn Khaldun), alongside contemporary peer-reviewed journals and scholarly books that address moral education, character formation, and Islamic educational theory. Data collection proceeded through systematic reading, documentation, and thematic categorization of relevant passages and arguments drawn from these sources.

Data analysis was conducted using three interconnected techniques: content analysis, to identify the core moral education concepts advanced by each scholar; comparative analysis, to map points of convergence and divergence across the three frameworks; and integrative synthesis, to construct a unified conceptual model from the complementary dimensions each thinker contributes. Trustworthiness was maintained through source triangulation, cross-referencing classical primary texts with

contemporary scholarly interpretations, ensuring that the integrative model produced reflects both the original intent of the classical scholars and its applicability within the modern educational context.

### III. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

#### **An Integrative Model of Moral Education Based on the Thought of Ibn Miskawaih, Al-Ghazali, and Ibn Khaldun**

The construction of an integrative model of moral education requires a clear understanding of what each classical scholar contributes and how those contributions relate to one another. Upon close examination, the thought of Ibn Miskawaih, Al-Ghazali, and Ibn Khaldun does not represent three competing theories of moral formation, rather, it represents three distinct but complementary layers of a single comprehensive process. Each scholar addresses a dimension of the human person that the others do not fully cover, and it is precisely this complementarity that makes their synthesis both intellectually coherent and educationally powerful.

Ibn Miskawaih's contribution forms the psychological foundation of the integrative model. His central argument is that the human soul is composed of three faculties, reason (*al-quwwa al-'aqliyya*), the irascible impulse (*al-quwwa al-ghaḍabiyya*), and the appetitive drive (*al-quwwa al-shahwiyya*), and that moral character is essentially the product of the relationship among these three. When reason governs the other two faculties with wisdom and balance, virtue emerges naturally and consistently. When it fails to do so, moral disorder follows. This framework is significant because it locates the origin of moral character not in external behavior alone, but in the internal architecture of the human self. For educational purposes, this means that moral formation must begin at the level of the soul's structure, training students not merely to behave correctly, but to develop the rational capacity to govern their own impulses. The method Ibn Miskawaih prescribes for achieving this is habituation (*al-'āda*) and exemplary modeling (*al-quḍwa*), both of which are practical, repeatable, and teachable. His model is therefore simultaneously philosophical and pedagogical: it offers both a theory of why character develops and a method for how it can be cultivated.

Al-Ghazali's contribution adds the spiritual dimension that Ibn Miskawaih's philosophical framework does not fully address. Where Ibn Miskawaih focuses on the rational governance of the soul's faculties, Al-Ghazali goes deeper, to the question of the soul's inner condition before God. In his view, moral character is not simply a matter of psychological balance; it is a matter of spiritual purity. A person may appear

outwardly virtuous while their inner self remains dominated by pride, hypocrisy, or love of status, and for Al-Ghazali, such a person has not truly achieved moral excellence. Genuine moral character, in his framework, requires *tazkiyatun nafs*, the purification of the soul, through a two-stage process of *takhliya* (the removal of blameworthy traits) and *tahliya* (the cultivation of praiseworthy ones). This process is not passive; it demands *mujahadah* (earnest striving against the lower self) and *riyadhah* (disciplined spiritual practice) sustained over time. The significance of this contribution for the integrative model is that it introduces the dimension of interiority and sincerity into moral education. Character formed through Al-Ghazali's framework is not performative, it is rooted in genuine inner transformation oriented toward God-consciousness (*taqwā*). This spiritual grounding gives moral behavior its permanence and its motivational depth, because a person who acts out of awareness of God does not need external enforcement to behave rightly.

Ibn Khaldun's contribution completes the model by introducing the sociological dimension, the dimension that both Ibn Miskawaih and Al-Ghazali, in their focus on the individual soul, leave insufficiently addressed. Ibn Khaldun argues that human character is not formed in isolation. It is profoundly shaped by the social environment, the cultural norms, the economic conditions, and the quality of leadership within which a person lives and grows. His concept of *al-'umrān*, human civilization as a dynamic social organism, implies that moral formation is always a social process, never merely a private one. For education, this means that no matter how excellent a curriculum or how sincere an individual student's spiritual striving, moral character will struggle to take root if the surrounding social environment does not reinforce and model the values being taught. The school culture, the behavior of teachers as leaders, the peer environment, and even the broader community all function as formative forces that either support or undermine the character development happening in the classroom.

When these three dimensions are synthesized, the result is a model of moral education that operates simultaneously on three levels: the psychological level, where Ibn Miskawaih's framework trains rational self-governance and emotional balance; the spiritual level, where Al-Ghazali's framework cultivates inner purity, sincerity, and God-consciousness; and the sociological level, where Ibn Khaldun's framework ensures that the environment, culture, and leadership of the educational institution actively reinforce the values being internalized. These three levels are not sequential, they operate concurrently and mutually reinforce one another. Rational self-governance is easier to achieve in an environment that models it; spiritual sincerity is more sustainable when it is socially honored and institutionally protected; and a morally supportive environment is only possible when the individuals within it have already

undergone genuine internal formation. The integrative model thus functions as a self-reinforcing system, in which psychological, spiritual, and social formation feed into and strengthen one another continuously.

This integrative model can be visualized as a triad of dimensions converging on a single educational outcome: the formation of a morally excellent student (*al-insān al-kāmil* in the moral sense) who is internally disciplined, spiritually sincere, and socially responsible. The educational process that produces such a student must therefore be designed to operate on all three levels simultaneously, through habituation and exemplary modeling (Ibn Miskawaih), through structured spiritual discipline and soul-purification practices (Al-Ghazali), and through the deliberate cultivation of a morally coherent institutional culture and leadership (Ibn Khaldun). This is the architecture of the integrative model proposed by this study.

### **The Relevance of the Integrative Model to Religious Character Formation in Madrasah Aliyah**

Having established the conceptual architecture of the integrative model, the second research question concerns its relevance, that is, the degree to which this model is capable of explaining, strengthening, and guiding the religious character formation that is already taking place in Madrasah Aliyah institutions, and what implications it carries for educational practice.

The relevance of Ibn Miskawaih's psychological dimension to the Madrasah Aliyah context is immediately apparent. Students at the senior secondary level are at a developmental stage characterized by heightened emotional intensity, identity formation, and susceptibility to social influence. This is precisely the stage at which the three faculties of the soul, reason, the irascible impulse, and the appetitive drive, are most dynamically active and most in need of deliberate governance. The Madrasah Aliyah's existing practices of daily worship habituation, disciplined scheduling, and behavioral routines correspond directly to Ibn Miskawaih's method of habituation (*al-ʿāda*). These practices work because they train the soul's faculties through repetition until balanced and virtuous responses become second nature. However, the integrative model suggests that these practices reach their full potential only when they are accompanied by conscious reflection, when students understand not merely what they are doing but why, and how it relates to the governance of their inner selves. This implies that moral education in the Madrasah Aliyah must incorporate structured

opportunities for self-reflection, self-assessment, and guided introspection alongside the habituation practices already in place.

The relevance of Al-Ghazali's spiritual dimension is perhaps even more directly felt in the Madrasah Aliyah context, given the institution's explicitly Islamic identity and its commitment to forming students who are not merely behaviorally compliant but genuinely pious. Al-Ghazali's framework of *tazkiyatun nafs* maps precisely onto the spiritual programs that many Madrasah Aliyah institutions already implement, including Qur'ān recitation, communal supplication, spiritual counseling, and extracurricular religious activities. The integrative model, however, challenges these institutions to examine whether these programs are designed with the intentionality that Al-Ghazali's framework demands. *Takhliya*, the active removal of blameworthy traits, requires that students be guided to identify and confront their moral weaknesses, not simply to perform religious rituals. *Tahliya*, the cultivation of praiseworthy traits, requires that positive character qualities be consciously and deliberately developed, not left to emerge as incidental byproducts of routine. The model therefore calls for a more intentional and structured approach to spiritual formation within the Madrasah Aliyah, one in which teachers and counselors actively guide students through the inner work of moral self-examination and spiritual growth.

The relevance of Ibn Khaldun's sociological dimension addresses what is perhaps the most frequently overlooked aspect of character education in institutional settings, the power of the environment. The Madrasah Aliyah's success in forming students' religious character is, in significant part, a product of its distinctive institutional culture: the physical environment, the behavioral norms, the quality of teacher-student relationships, and the consistency of moral modeling provided by educators and school leaders. Ibn Khaldun's framework validates and explains this success by demonstrating that social habituation (*al-‘āda al-ijtimā‘iyya*) is one of the most powerful forces in moral formation. But it also issues a warning: institutional culture is fragile, and its moral power depends entirely on the quality of leadership that sustains it. A school whose teachers model integrity, compassion, and accountability will produce students who internalize those qualities. A school whose leadership is inconsistent or whose culture tolerates moral compromise will undermine even the most carefully designed curriculum. The integrative model therefore places the quality of institutional leadership and school culture at the center of any serious effort to strengthen character education in Madrasah Aliyah.

Taken together, the three dimensions of the integrative model have direct and far-reaching implications for educational practice in Madrasah Aliyah. At the curriculum level, the model calls for the explicit integration of moral formation goals across all subjects, not merely in Islamic religious studies classes, reflecting Ibn Miskawaih's insight that rational moral development is a cross-disciplinary endeavor. At the pedagogical level, it calls for teaching approaches that combine behavioral habituation with reflective practice and spiritual guidance, reflecting Al-Ghazali's insistence on interiority and sincerity. At the institutional level, it calls for deliberate investment in school culture, teacher moral formation, and leadership development, reflecting Ibn Khaldun's understanding that the social environment is itself the most powerful teacher. At the student level, the model calls for an approach to assessment that evaluates not only academic performance but also moral growth, spiritual development, and social responsibility, dimensions that the integrative framework recognizes as equally central to the educational mission.

The broader significance of this relevance extends beyond the walls of any single institution. The integrative model proposed in this study offers a theoretically grounded and culturally rooted framework for moral education that speaks directly to the challenges facing Islamic education in the contemporary era. In a global context increasingly shaped by moral fragmentation, digital distraction, and the erosion of communal values, the synthesis of Ibn Miskawaih's psychological wisdom, Al-Ghazali's spiritual depth, and Ibn Khaldun's sociological insight provides a robust and comprehensive response. It affirms that genuine moral formation requires attention to the whole human person, the rational, the spiritual, and the social, and that no educational institution can afford to neglect any one of these dimensions without compromising the integrity of its character education mission. For Madrasah Aliyah, whose historical identity is grounded in precisely this holistic vision of human development, the integrative model is not a foreign imposition but a theoretically articulated expression of what these institutions have always, at their best, aspired to achieve.

#### **IV. CONCLUSION**

This study concludes that the moral education frameworks of Ibn Miskawaih, Al-Ghazali, and Ibn Khaldun, when synthesized, produce a coherent and comprehensive integrative model that operates simultaneously across three mutually reinforcing dimensions: the psychological, the spiritual, and the sociological. Ibn Miskawaih's rational self-governance, Al-Ghazali's spiritual purification, and Ibn Khaldun's sociological habituation are not competing theories but complementary layers of a

single formation process, each addressing what the others leave incomplete. When applied to the Madrasah Aliyah context, this integrative model is not only theoretically robust but practically relevant, offering a principled framework capable of explaining existing institutional successes in religious character formation while simultaneously guiding more deliberate, structured, and holistic educational practice.

The implications of this integrative model extend meaningfully toward the global agenda of Sustainable Development Goal 4, which calls for inclusive, equitable, and quality education that promotes lifelong learning and the development of values-based citizenship. By grounding moral character education in a multi-dimensional classical framework, Madrasah Aliyah institutions are positioned to produce graduates who are not merely academically competent but inwardly disciplined, spiritually grounded, and socially responsible, precisely the qualities demanded of citizens capable of driving sustainable human development. In this sense, the integrative model proposed by this study represents a culturally rooted yet globally resonant contribution to the broader project of building education systems that cultivate the full moral and intellectual potential of every learner.

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*full names of author (1), full names of author (2)*