


Al-bāṭiniyyah Values and Character Formation in Modern Education: A Hermeneutic Study of Imam Al-Zarnūjī's Thought

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
<p>Keywords:</p> <p><i>Al-bāṭiniyyah</i>; Character; Education</p>	<p>Education in today's modern world often faces challenges such as a lack of motivation to learn and a decline in students' moral integrity. In today's educational landscape, many systems place too much emphasis on cognitive achievement, neglecting the emotional and spiritual development of students. This article examines the <i>Al-bāṭiniyyah</i> Values and Character Formation in Modern Education: A Hermeneutic Study of Imam Al-Zarnūjī's Thought. Drawing from Imam Al-Zarnūjī's <i>Ta'lim al-Muta'allim</i>, which emphasizes the importance of sincere intention (<i>niyyah</i>) in acquiring knowledge, the study explores how spiritual values can be incorporated into modern education. Using a hermeneutic approach and a literature review, the study analyzes Al-Zarnūjī's principles and compares them with Thomas Lickona's character education model. The findings reveal that the <i>Al-bāṭiniyyah</i> approach offers a transformative, holistic educational method that balances cognitive, affective, and spiritual dimensions. It emphasizes values such as sincerity, humility, and ethical discipline as being essential to character formation. The study concludes that the <i>Al-bāṭiniyyah</i> principle enriches not only Islamic education but also contributes universally to modern character education, fostering ethical awareness and human dignity.</p> <p><i>This is an open access article under the CC BY-NC-SA license.</i></p>
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1. INTRODUCTION

Modern education faces significant challenges, particularly in fostering students' learning motivation and moral integrity. Contemporary educational systems tend to emphasize academic achievement and cognitive performance while neglecting affective and spiritual dimensions. As a result, education becomes increasingly exam oriented and focused solely on learning outcomes, marginalizing character formation, ethics, and morality (Marpaung et al., 2023; Rohova, 2024). In the age of technological advancement and digitalization, students gain broad access to information and opportunities for personalized learning. However, this also presents new challenges: technology often promotes a consumerist attitude toward shallow digital entertainment, diminishes deep reflection, and

distracts learners from meaningful learning (Dewi et al., 2023). Digital social interaction further reduces opportunities for healthy social relationships and the internalization of moral values in real life. The dominance of results-oriented education pushes students to pursue high grades and graduation rather than develop integrity, responsibility, and emotional maturity. When life success is narrowly defined by intellectual intelligence, essential values such as honesty, integrity, and social awareness are neglected, potentially resulting in an academically competent but morally indifferent generation, contributing to social crises such as corruption, injustice, and ethical degradation (Suryani et al., 2023).

To address this issue, a more holistic educational approach is needed, one that encompasses not only cognitive and technical aspects but also affective and spiritual development. Holistic education views learners as whole human beings with multiple dimensions that must be developed in balance (Isroani & Huda, 2022). This approach emphasizes the integration of academic knowledge, character building, morality, and spiritual consciousness, aiming to produce not only intelligent but also dignified individuals who positively contribute to society (Hasan et al., 2024). One relevant approach in this context is the principle of *Al-bāṭiniyyah*, rooted in the Islamic educational tradition. This principle highlights the importance of good intentions, sincerity, and internal motivation in the learning process. It asserts that education is not merely the transmission of knowledge but also the cultivation of ethical and spiritual character (Holid et al., 2024). Imam Al-Zarnūjī's thought in *Ta'lim al-Muta'allim* provides a theoretical foundation for this principle, asserting that sincere intention is the key to successful learning. In Islam, intention is central to the quality and outcome of any action. Al-Zarnūjī emphasizes that sincere intention not only determines the value of learning but also forms moral strength and inner resilience in facing challenges. True education, in his view, is the development of a complete person, where intellectual, spiritual, and moral aspects reinforce one another (Syihabuddin & Abdussalam, 2015).

The *Al-bāṭiniyyah* approach offers a promising solution to the crisis of motivation and moral integrity in modern education. By integrating spiritual dimensions, it seeks to balance intellectual and moral development. Although rooted in Islamic tradition, the principles of *Al-bāṭiniyyah* can be adapted to modern educational systems in general. By prioritizing intention and inner motivation as the keys to genuine success, this approach has the potential to shape a generation that is not only intellectually capable but also ethically and spiritually grounded. The central research questions in this study are: How can the principles of *Al-bāṭiniyyah* be applied in a modern educational context that tends to focus on cognitive achievement? How can this approach enhance students' learning motivation and moral integrity? And how can the spiritual values in *Al-bāṭiniyyah* contribute to a more holistic and dignified education?

This study adopts a comparative framework, juxtaposing Imam Al-Zarnūjī's spiritual principles rooted in *Al-bāṭiniyyah* with modern secular character education models such as that of Thomas Lickona. The comparison focuses on philosophical foundations, moral motivation, and approaches to character formation in both models. The urgency of this research lies in its potential contribution to addressing crises in contemporary education systems. While numerous character education models—such as value-based or Pancasila-based approaches—have been implemented in many countries, these models often remain normative and behavioristic, emphasizing external habituation while overlooking inner transformation. This study proposes a new approach through the internal spiritual principles of *Al-bāṭiniyyah*, grounded in conscious intention, inner motivation, and sincerity. This approach introduces a frequently neglected dimension in modern education: the inner and transcendent dimension. Thus, *Al-bāṭiniyyah* is not merely a variation of existing character education but a conceptual alternative that emphasizes transcendent responsibility and spiritual awareness.

Literature reviews reveal that previous studies have underscored the importance of character education and spiritual values in enhancing educational quality (Nurhayati et al., 2024). However, approaches based specifically on *Al-bāṭiniyyah* principles, as proposed by Al-Zarnūjī, remain underexplored—especially in modern contexts. Some Islamic education research (Wahib, 2022) highlights the need for spiritual value integration, yet few studies place sincere intention and internal

motivation at the core of character education. Therefore, the main objectives of this study are to explain the relevance of *Al-bāṭiniyah* principles in modern education, to explore Imam Al-Zarnūjī's thought as a foundation for spiritual and integrative character education, to compare the *Al-bāṭiniyah* approach with contemporary character education models, and to evaluate the strengths of internal approaches in shaping holistic character. Ultimately, this study seeks to revive classical thought within a modern framework and to introduce *Al-Zarnūjī's* insights as a conceptual alternative capable of addressing contemporary challenges in character education. Through this approach, education is reoriented not only to produce intelligent graduates but to nurture individuals of integrity and spiritual consciousness.

2. METHODS

This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach (Susanto et al., 2024) and adopts a literature review method to analyze Imam Al-Zarnūjī's thoughts in *Ta'lim al-Muta'allim* concerning the concept of *Al-bāṭiniyah* and character development in Islamic education. This approach aligns with Creswell's qualitative research model, which emphasizes the interpretive exploration of texts and the deep analysis of conceptual meanings. The research was conducted over a period of time by reviewing various primary and secondary sources relevant to the topic. The primary objective is to understand how the *Al-bāṭiniyah* principle can be applied in modern education and to explore the relationship between spiritual dimensions and character development in the learning process. Data collection was carried out through an extensive review of literature, with *Ta'lim al-Muta'allim* serving as the main primary source. This text was examined to extract core educational principles such as learning ethics, the link between intention and knowledge, and the significance of spirituality in education. Secondary sources include academic books, peer-reviewed journals, and scholarly articles accessed through databases such as Google Scholar, JSTOR, and ProQuest.

The data were analyzed using content analysis and hermeneutic methods (Suwardi & Syaifullah, 2022). Content analysis was employed to identify key themes related to spiritual and moral education in *Ta'lim al-Muta'allim*, while the hermeneutic approach, drawing on Hans-Georg Gadamer's theory of the *fusion of horizons* (*Horizontverschmelzung*), was used to interpret these themes within a contemporary educational context. This interpretive framework enables the dialogue between the classical insights of Imam Al-Zarnūjī and modern pedagogical challenges, aiming to uncover the deeper, inner meanings (*al-bāṭin*) behind educational ethics and character formation. Beyond interpretation and textual analysis, the study also incorporates a comparative literary analysis between Al-Zarnūjī's principles and Thomas Lickona's model of character education as outlined in *Educating for Character* (1991). This comparison focuses on five key aspects: philosophical foundation, source of moral motivation, the role of the teacher, methods of transmitting values, and goals of character formation. Through this comparative lens, the research contextualizes classical Islamic thought within the broader global discourse on character education, offering a meaningful contribution to the integration of spiritual values in modern educational frameworks (Munawarsyah et al., 2024).

Table: Hermeneutic Analysis (Gadamerian Framework)

Hermeneutic Aspect	Explanation in the Context of the Study
Preunderstanding	The researcher possesses a background understanding of the challenges in character and spiritual education in the modern world.
Historical Text	<i>Ta'lim al-Muta'allim</i> by al-Zarnūjī was written in the context of classical Islamic education, emphasizing ethics and spirituality.
Hermeneutic Dialogue	There is an interaction between the researcher's understanding and the meaning of the text, leading to a new interpretation of the concept of <i>Al-bāṭiniyah</i> .

Fusion of Horizons	A fusion occurs between al-Zarnūjī's historical horizon and the present-day horizon concerning character education based on spiritual values.
Contextual Application	The interpretation results are used to assess the relevance and applicability of the <i>Al-bāṭinīyah</i> concept in shaping students' character today.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This study explores the application of *Al-bāṭinīyah* principles in modern education through Imam Al-Zarnūjī's *Ta'lim al-Muta'allim*. Emphasizing sincere intention and inner action, *Al-bāṭinīyah* promotes a holistic educational approach that integrates intellectual, moral, and spiritual dimensions. The findings show that this principle enhances character development, strengthens learning motivation, and fosters spiritual awareness. It addresses challenges in modern education, such as moral decline and low student engagement, by balancing academic achievement with ethical growth. *Al-bāṭinīyah* offers a meaningful framework for shaping learners with integrity and purpose in today's complex educational landscape.

a. Findings

The Concept of Good Intention

Imam Al-Zarnūjī's *Ta'lim al-Muta'allim* emphasizes that sincere intention is a fundamental element in achieving meaningful success in the learning process. Al-Zarnūjī highlights that honest and pure intentions are not only an expression of sincerity but also the core source of inner strength that fuels determination and intrinsic motivation in students (Hafsah, 2018). This study reveals that students who possess sincere intentions demonstrate greater perseverance, moral integrity, and resilience in facing academic and non-academic challenges. They are more committed to their learning, less likely to give up when confronted with difficulties, and better prepared to succeed holistically. This approach confirms that education should not be solely outcome-oriented but must also integrate the spiritual dimension to foster character formation. In modern educational settings, the concept of good intention can be implemented through reflective practices, such as encouraging students to consider their goals before learning, and through spiritual mentorship provided by educators (Jones, 2009; Machouche et al., 2019). Incorporating moral and spiritual values into the curriculum further reinforces this principle. A well-designed curriculum that balances academic goals with ethical awareness can nurture students who are not only intellectually capable but also morally grounded and spiritually conscious (Surahman, 2024).

Balance Between Intellectual and Spiritual Aspects

The *Al-bāṭinīyah* principle, as articulated by Imam Al-Zarnūjī in *Ta'lim al-Muta'allim*, highlights the essential balance between intellectual and spiritual development in education. Al-Zarnūjī emphasized that education is not merely the transfer of knowledge from teacher to student but a comprehensive process that shapes moral character and spiritual awareness. He argued that true success in education is measured not only by academic performance but also by a student's ability to uphold ethical values and demonstrate integrity in daily life. Research supports this view, showing that integrating spiritual dimensions into modern educational systems can address weaknesses in models that focus solely on cognitive achievement. Such systems often neglect the formation of moral character, leading to a decline in ethical awareness among students. A balanced approach blending intellect with inner growth helps learners grasp the deeper meaning of education and commit to responsible behavior. Implementation includes embedding spiritual values across curricula, adopting reflective and contemplative teaching strategies, and promoting extracurricular activities like service learning and religious studies. These efforts support the internalization of virtue and the development of well-rounded individuals. Educators thus bear a dual responsibility: to cultivate both intellectual excellence and moral-spiritual sensitivity in students, preparing them for meaningful engagement in all spheres of life.

Application of Al-bāṭinīyah Concept in Modern Education

The *Al-bāṭinīyah* principle demonstrates strong relevance in modern education, offering effective solutions to issues such as low motivation and declining moral integrity among learners. By emphasizing intention and spirituality, this principle promotes a holistic approach that integrates spiritual values into curricula and teaching methods. Rather than focusing solely on academic outcomes, education rooted in *Al-bāṭinīyah* seeks to build students' moral character and spiritual depth. This integration helps students understand the true purpose of learning, not merely as a means to material success, but as a path to personal growth and ethical responsibility. When learners see education as a way to cultivate integrity and inner strength, their motivation and commitment to learning increase. In practice, this can be achieved through value-based strategies that combine cognitive and affective elements, such as incorporating ethics, religious studies, and reflective discussions into the curriculum. These allow students to internalize moral wisdom alongside academic content. Moreover, spiritual mentoring by teachers and participation in social or religious activities further strengthen character development. Through these methods, education becomes more meaningful and transformative, cultivating individuals who are intellectually capable, morally grounded, and spiritually aware. The *Al-bāṭinīyah* approach, therefore, supports the creation of a learning environment that fosters the growth of the whole person.

The Relevance of Al-bāṭinīyah Concept in the Global Context

The *Al-bāṭinīyah* principle, which emphasizes sincere intention and the integration of cognitive, affective, and spiritual dimensions, holds significant relevance in global education. Its holistic approach grounded in internal motivation and purposeful learning extends beyond academic achievement to include moral formation and character development (Taja et al., 2022; Riwanda et al., 2023). In modern educational contexts, *Al-bāṭinīyah* serves as a solution to widespread issues such as low motivation, weakened integrity, and the lack of connection between education and life's greater purpose. By incorporating spiritual and ethical values into curricula and pedagogy, educational systems can foster balanced environments that promote both intellectual growth and moral responsibility. This principle aligns with values-based and character education models found in Western systems, yet it uniquely deepens them by rooting the process in intention and spiritual awareness, as taught by Imam Al-Zarnūjī. Importantly, *Al-bāṭinīyah* is not exclusive to Islamic contexts; it can be adapted across diverse cultures and educational models. Through reflective teaching strategies, sincere purpose, and a commitment to holistic development, learners are shaped into individuals who are not only knowledgeable, but also ethically grounded and socially responsible. Thus, *Al-bāṭinīyah* provides a transformative educational framework that contributes to producing globally conscious citizens with intellectual, moral, and spiritual strength.

b. Discussion

Al-bāṭinīyah Concept in Islamic Education

The *Al-bāṭinīyah* concept in Islamic education refers to the inner, spiritual dimension of the learning process, emphasizing sincere intention, purity of heart, and the pursuit of knowledge as a means of drawing closer to Allah. In Islam, knowledge is not merely the accumulation of facts but a transformative journey toward moral refinement and divine proximity. Core elements of *Al-bāṭinīyah* include *niyyah* (intention), *ṣabr* (patience), and *tazkiyah al-naḥs* (self-purification), all of which ensure that knowledge brings true benefit and spiritual blessings. Imam Al-Zarnūjī, in *Ta'lim al-Muta'allim*, underscores that knowledge must be sought with adab, spiritual discipline, and a clean heart to be meaningful and impactful. In practice, Islamic education blends these inner dimensions with external structures such as pedagogy, curriculum, and assessment, creating harmony between intellect and spirituality. This integration is crucial to character education, where moral formation is achieved not just through rules, but through internalized virtues. Practices like self-reflection, *muhāsabah*, and acts of worship reinforce this inner growth (Sagita et al., 2025; Hasan et al., 2024). In contemporary education,

revitalizing the *Al-bāṭiniyyah* approach offers a solution to moral and ethical crises by forming learners who are not only intellectually competent but also spiritually aware, morally upright, and guided by a deep sense of integrity and purpose.

Al-bāṭiniyyah Definition and Meaning

In the context of learning principles, the *Al-bāṭiniyyah* concept refers to the inner, esoteric dimension of education that emphasizes spiritual depth, sincere intention, and the internalization of values (Afwadzi & Fattah, 2017). Derived from the Arabic word *bāṭin*, meaning hidden or deep, *Al-bāṭiniyyah* highlights that education is not solely about external achievements such as mastering material or gaining academic skills, but about the development of the soul, purification of the heart, and moral formation (Jakandar et al., 2025). This principle teaches that knowledge must be pursued with pure intentions and noble goals primarily to seek closeness to Allah and to use knowledge for the benefit of others. In practice, this involves deep reflection, understanding the essence of knowledge, and applying it meaningfully in everyday life (Waruru & Arsyad, 2024). Learners are encouraged not only to understand information at the surface level but to grasp the ethical and spiritual values embedded within it. This aligns with the teachings of Imam Al-Zarnūjī in *Ta'lim al-Muta'allim*, who emphasized adab, sincerity, and spiritual ties with one's teacher. Thus, *Al-bāṭiniyyah* is more than a method; it is a holistic approach that integrates intellect with spirituality, aiming to produce individuals who are not only intellectually capable but also morally upright and spiritually conscious.

Al-bāṭiniyyah etymology and terminology in Islam.

Etymologically, the term *Al-bāṭiniyyah* derives from the Arabic word *bāṭin* (باطن), meaning "hidden," "inner," or "esoteric," and contrasts with *al-zāhir*, meaning "outer" or "exoteric" (Wikipedia, 2025). In Islamic scholarship, *bāṭin* represents the deeper, spiritual meanings underlying religious texts and practices, whereas *zāhir* emphasizes the outward, literal interpretation (Gleave, 2023; Arikewuyo, 2023). The concept of *Al-bāṭiniyyah* thus often relates to the inward dimensions of understanding, particularly within theology and Sufism, where believers seek to grasp not only the formal legal structures of Islam but also the profound spiritual truths embedded within worship and life. In Islamic education, *Al-bāṭiniyyah* refers to the internal aspects of learning intention, sincerity, the learner's relationship with the teacher, and a reflective grasp of knowledge (Al-Ghazali, 2013). This perspective emphasizes that true education involves more than academic mastery; it requires spiritual alignment and ethical development. Historically, the term has also referred to certain sects like the Ismailis, who promote esoteric interpretations of Islam that diverge from mainstream thought. However, in the educational context, *Al-bāṭiniyyah* is best understood as an integrative approach that combines intellectual rigor with spiritual consciousness, aiming to shape learners who are both knowledgeable and morally guided according to Islamic values.

Theological and Sufistic Perspectives on Al-bāṭiniyyah.

In Islamic theology, the concept of *Al-bāṭiniyyah* reflects the belief that every outward aspect of religion holds a deeper, inner meaning. Beyond the visible framework of sharia, Islam contains spiritual wisdom that can only be grasped through contemplation and closeness to God (Faris, 2023; Syaifullah, 2023). Theologies such as Asy'ariyah and Maturidiyah view *al-bāṭin* as one of God's attributes, signifying His knowledge of all hidden realities and divine wisdom in every decree. In *bāṭiniyyah* thought, particularly within Ismaili Shī'a tradition, esoteric interpretations of the Qur'an and Islamic law are emphasized. From a Sufi perspective, *Al-bāṭiniyyah* aligns with the spiritual path (*suluk*) and self-purification (*tazkiyah al-nafs*), where true knowledge is not limited to outward learning (*ilm al-zāhir*), but also includes inner knowledge (*ilm al-bāṭin*) attained through spiritual experience. Scholars like Al-Ghazali and Ibn Arabi highlight the importance of introspection, remembrance (*dhikr*), and spiritual striving (*mujahadah*) to gain religious understanding and build character through divine connection (Rahman et al., 2017).

Al-bāṭinīyah relationship with the concept of spiritual and moral education.

The *Al-bāṭinīyah* concept in Islamic education is deeply connected to spiritual and moral development, emphasizing the inner dimensions of the learning process. In this perspective, knowledge is not merely the accumulation of external facts (*al-‘ilm al-zāhir*), but a means to attain deeper understanding of life and strengthen one’s relationship with God (*al-‘ilm al-bāṭin*) (Maslani et al., 2025; Syarif, 2020). Islamic spiritual education aims to form individuals who are both intellectually capable and morally upright. Through the *Al-bāṭinīyah* approach, educators do more than deliver academic content—they nurture sincerity, ethics, and spiritual consciousness within their students. This is realized through methods that emphasize heart purification (*tazkiyah al-nafs*), moral training (*tarbiyat al-akhlāq*), and experiential closeness to God. Influential Sufis like Al-Ghazali and Al-Zarnūjī asserted that knowledge without purity of heart and righteous action is void of benefit. Hence, Islamic moral education is grounded not only in external discipline but in inner awareness and divine connection, fostering individuals of wisdom, integrity, and balanced character (Abror et al., 2024; Syaiful & Anam, 2024).

Al-bāṭinīyah Dimensions of Islamic Education

The *Al-bāṭinīyah* dimension in Islamic education emphasizes the development of the inner and spiritual aspects of learners, including sincere intention, earnestness, and the purification of the heart throughout the educational process. This approach teaches that knowledge should not only serve academic advancement but should also be pursued with spiritual awareness and moral responsibility to benefit both the individual and society. Education rooted in the *Al-bāṭinīyah* principle views learning as a path toward self-improvement, closeness to Allah, and the cultivation of noble character (Yaqin & Sumedi, 2023). In this sense, Islamic education harmonizes intellectual achievement with spiritual development, producing individuals who are not only knowledgeable but also ethically grounded and wise. This framework is clarified through four interrelated components. **First, intention (*al-niyyah*)** is the foundation of meaningful learning. According to Imam Al-Zarnūjī in *Ta’līm al-Muta’allim*, actions lacking sincere intention are spiritually void, while intentions directed toward Allah’s pleasure and societal benefit earn divine blessings. Proper intention transforms knowledge from a worldly pursuit into an act of worship, enabling learners to improve their morals and gain deeper understanding (Mufid & Mansur Tamam, 2024). **Second, *tazkiyat al-nafs* (purification of the heart)** is vital for acquiring blessed knowledge. The heart must be cleansed of arrogance, envy, and excessive materialism to become a vessel for beneficial knowledge. Al-Zarnūjī teaches that only a purified heart can receive divine light through knowledge. Humility, patience, and sincerity allow students to absorb teachings with openness and apply them meaningfully in life. **Third, patience and perseverance (*ṣabr wa al-muthābarah*)** are essential for the intellectual journey. Learning is not immediate but requires enduring hardship, repetition, and continuous effort (Deswita et al., 2022). Imam Al-Zarnūjī and classical scholars like Al-Ghazālī demonstrated that the path to wisdom is long and often filled with obstacles—intellectual, social, or material—that must be overcome with resilience. Patience leads not only to mastery but also to internal transformation, as consistent effort refines both knowledge and character. **Fourth, adab and morals (*al-adab wa al-akhlāq*)** are inseparable from Islamic education. Education in Islam is not merely *ta’līm* (instruction) but also *tarbiyah* (character-building) (Syukri et al., 2023). Al-Zarnūjī stresses the importance of humility before teachers, sincerity in companionship, and respect for the sanctity of knowledge itself. Without adab, even vast knowledge lacks blessing. Moral values such as honesty, responsibility, discipline, and integrity are critical in determining the usefulness of knowledge in real life. In practice, learners are expected to exhibit ethical behavior that reflects their internalized understanding, ensuring that their education results in both personal refinement and societal benefit. Therefore, the *Al-bāṭinīyah* dimension transforms education into a comprehensive, spiritually conscious journey (Hasanah et al., 2022; Mulyani, 2018). It does not isolate the intellect from the soul but integrates both in a harmonious framework that nurtures not only sharp minds but also pure hearts and virtuous actions. By internalizing these principles, learners move beyond

memorization and technical proficiency, becoming individuals who live by their knowledge with humility, sincerity, and responsibility. This model serves as a reminder that the highest aim of education in Islam is not merely to know more, but to become better closer to Allah, more beneficial to others, and more refined in both intellect and soul.

Al-bāṭinīyah Application in the Context of Character Education

The application of the *Al-bāṭinīyah* concept in character education highlights the vital importance of deeply internalizing moral values within students. Education, in this perspective, transcends the mere transmission of knowledge; it involves nurturing a noble soul and a strong personality by reinforcing the inner aspects of a learner. In Islamic thought, character development does not rely solely on external factors such as rules and discipline but fundamentally depends on cultivating inner awareness that guides students to act sincerely, honestly, and responsibly. This inner dimension forms the foundation for moral shaping, embedding essential values like patience, perseverance, and resilience within the soul. Moreover, spirituality holds a central role in molding individuals who are not only knowledgeable but also ethical, by placing their relationship with Allah (*ḥablun min Allāh*) as the primary motivation for acquiring and applying knowledge for the benefit of society (Ilmi et al., 2023; Sagita et al., 2025).

Education, when viewed as a process of internalizing moral values, involves more than cognitive knowledge transfer; it is an effort to instill ethical principles deeply and sustainably. This internalization process is achieved through various means such as the example set by teachers, habituation, spiritual reflection, and direct social experiences. In Islam, the aim of moral education is to cultivate individuals with noble character, integrity, and a clear awareness of their responsibilities toward God and fellow humans. Consequently, learners do not only understand morality theoretically but embody these values in their attitudes, speech, and actions, demonstrating virtue in daily life.

The connection between the inner aspects and character building lies in the critical role spiritual values play in forming a strong, moral personality. Islamic education emphasizes that character is developed not just through intellectual understanding but also through the purification of the heart (*tazkiyatun nafs*), sincere intentions, and a strengthened awareness of the relationship with Allah (*taqarrub ilallah*). Inner qualities such as sincerity, patience, and submission to truth form the cornerstone for building honest, disciplined, and responsible individuals. Without attention to these inner dimensions, education risks becoming mechanical and superficial, failing to produce learners who truly comprehend the essence of morality. Thus, character education must incorporate a spiritual dimension that ingrains noble values in the heart, motivating learners to act ethically not just because of external rules but because of genuine inner awareness (Kamaluddin et al., 2024).

Spirituality plays a fundamental role in shaping people who are both knowledgeable and morally upright. In Islam, the pursuit of knowledge is not merely an intellectual exercise but also an act of worship requiring sincere intention and purity of heart. Spirituality lays the groundwork for humility, honesty, and responsibility in applying knowledge. It ensures that individuals prioritize the use of knowledge for the common good, not just personal or academic success. Furthermore, spirituality fosters moral steadfastness, patience, and perseverance in overcoming intellectual challenges, helping maintain a balance between knowledge acquisition and charitable deeds. Education grounded in spirituality thus produces individuals who are academically capable while possessing strong moral character and a commitment to goodness (Momen, 2024).

The relevance of *Al-bāṭinīyah* in contemporary character education lies in its emphasis on the esoteric or inner meaning of knowledge and reality, a concept rooted in Islamic philosophy and Sufism. Although often associated with mystical discourse, adapting *Al-bāṭinīyah* values within formal education can foster holistic human development, balancing intellectual, emotional, and spiritual growth. This approach asserts that knowledge is not limited to empirical facts or rational theories but includes deeper meanings accessible through contemplation, sincerity, and inner silence. Consequently, education should go beyond cognitive goals to nurture values, meaning, and

spirituality, integrating curricula with moral and religious teachings alongside reflective and dialogical learning methods (Sarim Karimullah, 2023).

Al-bāṭiniyyah encourages the cultivation of sincere intentions and purpose in learning, guiding students to seek life’s calling, shape their character, and recognize their spiritual roles. Teachers are called to be not only instructors but spiritual mentors who transmit values and wisdom. This approach also values inner experience in understanding knowledge, implemented through reflection, experiential learning, and integrating local wisdom and religious principles that enhance spiritual intelligence. Far from conflicting with modern standards-based education, *Al-bāṭiniyyah* enriches it by infusing deeper meaning and spiritual sensitivity, producing graduates who are intellectually capable, morally grounded, and spiritually aware. This represents a profound contribution of Islamic inner thought toward creating a comprehensive and transformative education model for the contemporary world (Baderiah & Munawir, 2024).

Adaptation of *Al-bāṭiniyyah* Concept in the Formal Education System: Comparison, Implications, and Challenges

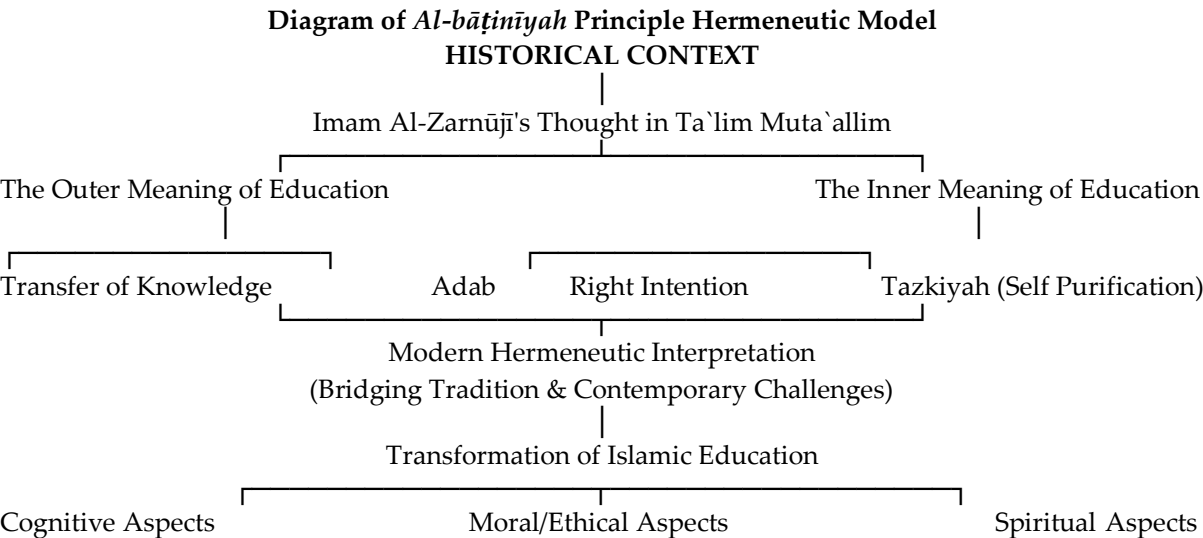
In the Islamic intellectual tradition, the concept of *Al-bāṭiniyyah* refers to the inner understanding of knowledge and reality, deeply rooted in Sufism and Islamic philosophy. This concept asserts that knowledge extends beyond the external dimension (*ẓāhirī*), such as facts and data, to include a spiritual depth accessible only through a clear heart, sincere intentions, and a profound search for meaning (Dhillon, 2012). When applied to formal education, *Al-bāṭiniyyah* offers a transformative approach that integrates intellectual, moral, and spiritual aspects. Compared to modern character education theories, like those of Thomas Lickona, which emphasize virtues such as honesty and responsibility (Asnawan, 2020), *Al-bāṭiniyyah* uniquely incorporates a transcendental spiritual dimension. It links education to God-consciousness (*taqwa*) and the pursuit of deeper life meaning. Unlike the largely secular and psychological orientation of modern character education, *Al-bāṭiniyyah* centers on the vertical relationship between humans and God as essential to true character formation.

This concept has significant implications for curriculum development. Curriculum should not only target academic competence but also foster spiritual values and personality growth. Integrating spirituality may involve designing subjects with moral reflections, selecting value-rich materials, and employing contemplative learning strategies aimed at self-transformation. The goal is to form a complete human being (*insān kāmil*) with balanced intellectual, ethical, and spiritual awareness. However, challenges exist, such as limited awareness of inner education’s importance, pragmatic educational priorities, and the dominance of secularism that separates science from values (Adawiyyah Filantropi & Martoyo Martoyo, 2024; Nasiruddin, 2021). To address these, strategies like teacher training in spirituality, embedding spiritual values across subjects, and fostering supportive learning environments are essential. Ultimately, *Al-bāṭiniyyah* enriches education by producing individuals who are not only knowledgeable but morally and spiritually grounded, a necessity in today’s complex world.

Hermeneutic Analysis Table of *Al-bāṭiniyyah* Principles in Education

Hermeneutic Aspects	Content of Interpretation	Text Source/Reference
Interpreted Text	<i>Ta’līm al-Muta’allim</i> by Imam al-Zarnūjī	Documents, pp. 61-70
Historical and Social Context	Classical Islamic education, based on <i>adab</i> , intention and spirituality	Introduction & Methodology Section
Exoteric Meaning (<i>ẓāhir</i>)	Education as transmission of knowledge from teacher to student	Chapter on the Concept of Islamic Education and Character
Esoteric Meaning (<i>bāṭin</i>)	Knowledge as a means of getting closer to Allah through sincere intentions, <i>tazkiyat al-nafs</i> , and inner earnestness.	Part Analysis: <i>Al-bāṭiniyyah</i> Concept

Intention of the Original Text Author	Conveying the importance of adab and sincere intentions in pursuing knowledge	Imam Al-Zarnūjī, <i>Ta'lim al-Muta'allim</i>
Contributions of Contemporary Interpreters	Aligning Al-Zarnūjī's spiritual values with the modern and global education system.	Article authors: Tarmizi Ninoersy and Nelli Isnayanti
Relevance to Current Issues	Moral decadence, low learning motivation, dominance of cognitive aspects	Findings and Discussion Section
Horizons of Meaning	Re-constructing modern education for character and spirituality	Closing and Global Relevance



Summary Table of Findings and Discussion		
Category	Key Findings	Discussion Implications
Good Intention	Sincere intention serves as a foundation for learning and character formation.	Requires personal reflection, spiritual guidance, and curriculum integration.
Intellectual-Spiritual Balance	A balance between academic achievement and spirituality enhances the meaningfulness of education.	Curriculum and teaching methods must integrate both cognitive and affective aspects.
<i>Al-bāṭiniyyah</i> Integration	Spiritual values can address challenges such as low motivation and moral crisis in education.	Can be implemented through value-based approaches and reflective learning experiences.
Global Relevance	This principle is universal, similar to character education in Western systems but with a transcendental depth.	Requires contextual adaptation according to cultural and value systems of each society.
Spirituality & Character	Inner aspects (intention, patience, adab) are key to forming individuals with strong moral integrity.	Character education must include spiritual dimensions, not solely rely on rules or external moral standards.

Comparative Analysis: Al-Zarnūjī and Lickona

Imam Al-Zarnūjī and Thomas Lickona are influential figures in character education, emerging from distinct epistemological, spiritual, and pedagogical traditions. Imam Al-Zarnūjī’s philosophy, presented in *Ta'lim al-Muta'allim*, is grounded in Islamic metaphysics, emphasizing knowledge’s ultimate purpose *ma'rifah* of Allah—and the soul’s purification (*tazkiyat al-nafs*). Education, for him, is a sacred process of inner transformation beyond mere information transfer. In contrast, Lickona’s

model draws from secular humanism and psychological theories, particularly Kohlberg’s moral development stages, focusing on moral cognition, emotions, and behavior. Al-Zarnūjī centers moral motivation on intention (*niyyah*), which determines the ethical value and blessing (*barakah*) of knowledge. Learners must purify their hearts and seek sincerity. Lickona, however, bases moral motivation on internalized values like empathy and social justice nurtured through supportive school environments. Teachers, in Al-Zarnūjī’s view, are spiritual guides (*murabbī*) whose character and etiquette (*adab*) are crucial, guiding students toward moral and spiritual excellence. Lickona sees teachers as facilitators who model ethical behavior and cultivate reflective classroom cultures. Character formation, for Al-Zarnūjī, involves ritual discipline, companionship with pious scholars, and practices like *dhikr* and self-monitoring, while Lickona emphasizes habit formation via school practices and democratic participation. Ultimately, Al-Zarnūjī aims to produce the *insān kāmil* a complete human with God-consciousness—while Lickona focuses on morally responsible citizens contributing to social justice and harmony.

Comparative Table: Al-Zarnūjī versus Lickona

Aspect	Al-Zarnūjī	Thomas Lickona
Philosophy	Islamic metaphysics, spiritual purification, divine accountability	Secular humanism, moral psychology, civic responsibility
Moral Motivation	<i>niyyah</i> (intention), taqwā, sincerity	Empathy, justice, prosocial reasoning
Teacher’s Role	Murabbī (spiritual guide, role model, corrector of soul)	Facilitator, role model, value implementer
Method	Adab, companionship, spiritual discipline, muhasabah	Moral dialogue, cooperative learning, curriculum integration
End Goal	Insān kāmil (complete person), seeking divine pleasure	Responsible citizen, ethical democratic participant

4. CONCLUSION

The concept of *Al-bāṭinīyah* in Imam Al-Zarnūjī’s thought teaches that true education must encompass two essential dimensions: *ẓāhir* (outer) and *bāṭin* (inner). In his seminal work *Ta’līm al-Muta’allim*, Al-Zarnūjī stresses that success in knowledge acquisition is not solely measured by mastery of subject matter or academic achievement but also deeply rooted in the purity of intention, respectful manners towards knowledge and teachers, and a spiritual connection with the Creator. Knowledge, in his view, is a divine light that can only illuminate a heart cleansed of impurities and directed towards truth. Thus, education transcends intellectual development alone, becoming a sacred spiritual journey that guides learners toward genuine understanding and meaningful living.

In today’s educational context—often dominated by pragmatic goals and quantitative achievements—the revival of *Al-bāṭinīyah* values is highly relevant. The global challenges of moral crises and erosion of human values reveal that intellectual intelligence alone, devoid of spiritual maturity and moral fortitude, risks leading societies into chaos and cultural decay. Therefore, character education grounded in spirituality is no longer a supplementary option but a critical necessity for cultivating a civilized and humane society. Integrating *Al-bāṭinīyah* into formal education rekindles the essence of education as a holistic process that nurtures body, mind, and spirit alike. This integration can be realized through reflective learning, contemplation, cultivation of good manners (*adab*), and instilling values such as honesty, sincerity, and social responsibility. Consequently, students are trained not just as intellectually capable individuals but also as wise, empathetic beings whose life orientation is shaped by divine consciousness.

Such an approach strengthens the ethical foundation of education, fosters a humane learning atmosphere, and produces graduates equipped to face contemporary challenges with knowledge, good character, and spirituality. Imam Al-Zarnūjī’s legacy thus provides invaluable inspiration for reforming Islamic education and national education systems toward truly humanizing pedagogy. The *Al-bāṭinīyah*

principle enriches character education broadly by adding a spiritual and internal dimension that deepens students' intrinsic motivation and moral integrity. Within the Islamic framework, it reinforces the principles of *tarbiyah rūḥaniyyah* (spiritual nurturing) and *ta'dīb* (moral discipline), positioning education as a transformative process cultivating piety, refined manners, and ethical uprightness.

Based on these ideas, an Integrative *Al-bāṭiniyyah* Character Education Model has been developed, emphasizing the fusion of cognitive, affective, and spiritual elements within learning. This model begins with clarifying the learner's spiritual intention (*niyyah*) and incorporates practices such as spiritual reflection (*muhāsabah*), remembrance of God (*dhikr*), and ethical dialogue. It fosters the internalization of values like patience, humility, and adab through habituation and exemplary role models. The curriculum integrates spiritual values across subjects, moving beyond the confines of religious education alone. Teachers act as *murabbīs* spiritual mentors guiding students holistically. Moreover, assessments extend beyond intellectual achievement to evaluate spiritual and moral growth.

To strengthen holistic and transformative education, strategic recommendations include promoting spirituality-based character education across all educational levels and institutions, formal and non-formal alike. Education focused solely on cognitive and technical skills risks producing intellectually sharp but morally fragile individuals. The *Al-bāṭiniyyah* concept offers a concrete path toward balancing intellectual development with spiritual and moral growth. Furthermore, educators, curriculum developers, and policymakers should craft learning models that harmonize classical Islamic thought with contemporary character education, creating integrative curricula that encourage reflection, cultivate adab, and engage students in value-centered social activities. Finally, empirical, multidisciplinary research is essential to assess the impact of *Al-bāṭiniyyah*-based education on character formation and to identify best practices for its adaptation in complex modern educational settings. Such research will provide evidence-based guidance for educational policies deeply rooted in spiritual and cultural values.

Ultimately, *Al-bāṭiniyyah* transcends philosophical discourse, offering a future educational paradigm that addresses the moral and spiritual challenges of the modern era while enriching educational practice with profound transcendental depth. This study contributes academically by comparing classical Islamic character education as represented by Al-Zarnūjī with contemporary secular models like Lickona's, proposing an integrative model that blends spiritual intentionality with modern pedagogy.

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