# Islamic Spiritual Character Values of al-Zarnūjī's *Ta'līm al-Muta'allim*

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*Abstract*

*In terms of being a person with noble characters, actualisation of Islamic values is considered as an important effort to build and instil Islamic ideology as the way of life, since the development of human character in Islam is mostly a process of absorbing one's passion towards such values. Therefore, the aim of this study was to investigate the pattern of Islamic character values in the light of al-Zarnūjī's Ta'līm al-Muta'allim, which has been used among the Muslim countries as the main principles of educational implementation, mainly in Islamic institutions. Several literature studies obtained were analyzed using descriptive analysis. The result of this study reveals that there are some character values in term of Islamic pattern. Finally, this study is expected to contribute to the concept of Islamic character values, being the fundamental dimension to instill the human soul with spiritual character values, and consequently become the significant assimilation based on Quran and Hadith.*

*Keywords: spirituality, character, values, al-Zarnūjī, Ta'līm al-Muta'allim.*

## 1. Introduction

In order to become a person of noble character, an actualisation of Islamic values is necessary as it is seen of supreme importance with regards to once effort to build up and instil an Islamic ideology as a way of life in a person. In Islam, the development of human character is mostly seen as a process of absorbing one's passion towards such values. Those values, that need to be formed and manifested in the person of the student in order for him/her to become a functional as a Muslim in all its behaviour, are those that form the base of an Islamic morality. According to Halstead (2010: 283), such distinctive features of person instilled with Islamic values are those 'those who believe' and 'those who do good deeds' (for example, Sura 2, v. 25, Sura 95, v. 6, Sura 103, v. 2) where both are inextricable link that exists in Islam between religion and morality as reflected in the Qur'an. It means that there should be a balance between the concept of moral duty and the concept of religious duty. In Islam, there is no separate view about 'spirituality' regarding everyday activities. This conviction creates a world view or perspective and thus aims to construct a certain attitude or behaviour.

With this regard, the compatibility between both is needed, since there is a hope to achieve the true goal. As Hussain (2010) outlined, the Islamic goal is to develop an 'Islamic personality' that will lead to personal success, growth and bring happiness to the child while forging it into becoming a social being (p.303). It means that in order to implement a noble character, it is necessary to actualize those values, since it is a process of development, cultivating and teaching on the human being, for the sake of creating the highest goal of Islam: happiness in this world and in the after here, soul perfection of society, gaining pleasure, safety, and blessing.

Concerning those distinctive features of Islamic character values, a numerous amount of literatures from the classical era of Islam can be found where principles of education are outlined that follow the aim of the purification of the soul through spiritual and ethical values (Nata, 2003). Among others, it is especially Nu'man Ibrahim al-Zarnuji who, until this day is one very prominent Muslim scholar (*ulama*). His treaties is still studied until today and is included as compulsory subject in the *Pesantren* (Islamic boarding) in Indonesia (Huda & Kartanegara, 2015a). In his work *Ta'līm al-Muta'allim Tariq al-Ta'allum* (Instructing the student in the method of learning) he outlines on how to create an educational atmosphere with teachers and students show character values (Hitti, 1948). The Islamic character values that he proposed explicitly are in compatibility with assimilation of educational strategy and an ethical religious foundation. The present study seeks to take the first step in filling this gap by reviewing a set of spiritual character values. This article begin with explaining briefly on al-Zarnuji's life and work and continue to examine these values within Islamic context.

## 2. A Brief Portrayal of *Taʻlīm al-Mutaʻallim* and al-Zarnuji

### 2.1 Taʻlīm al-Mutaʻallim

Written in the 13th century during the reign of the last Abbasid Caliph, the major contribution of this book has long been recognized by scholars (Yahya, 2005; Muʻizzuddin, 2012). This work has generally been regarded as one monumental work, with its theories much used as reference and guideline in the formulation of academic works by Islamic intellectuals as well as Western scholars, especially in the field of education (Yahya, 2005). Its contents have had a significant influence, especially the Indonesian context, whereas it was intensively studied and applied practically applied in almost all Islamic educational institutions, particularly in the pesantren; traditional Islamic boarding schools (*Salafiya*) like e.g. pesantren Gontor (Nata, 2005). Al-Zarnūjī's theories have served as the main reference for students (*santri*) in the acquisition of knowledge (Hafidzah, 2014).

As such, this treatise sets itself apart from other Islamic intellectual sources through its very distinct theories (Huda & Kartanegara, 2015b). Containing the principles of pursuit of knowledge, it gives detailed ethical foundations for the teaching-learning process as based on the religious conservative (Huda & Kartanegara, 2015b). Thus, the contents of this work are appropriately assumed to teach the students good morality and because of this, it has become a good basic subject for every student in *pesantren* in the beginning year before they receive other subjects (Hafidzah, 2014, p.202).

In addition, the first translation of the *Taʻlīm al-Mutaʻallim* was published in Mursidabad in 1265, followed by a publication in Tunis (1286 and 1873), in Cairo (1281, 1307, 1318), Istanbul (1292) as well as in Kasan (1898). Affandi (1995) points out, that commentaries on the treatise have been written by several scholars such as:

1. on behalf of Nau'i (n.d.);
2. Ibrahim ibn Nu'man (996H/1588AD);
3. Sa'rani (710-711 H);
4. Ishaq ibn Ibnu Rumi al Qili (720 H) with the title *Mir'ah al Thalibiin*;
5. Qadi ibn Zakariya al Anshari A'ashaf;
6. Otman Pazari, 1986 with the title *Tafhim al Mutafahhim*;
7. H.B. al- Faqir, without date and notification (p.67).

Among the most important commentaries on Al-Zarnujis, there are the four commentaries by Shaikh Ibrahim ibn Ismail with the title *Sharh Taʻlim al Mutaʻallim* (explanation of *Taʻlim al Mutaʻallim*), Shaikh Yahya ibn Nashuh (d.1007 H/1598 AD), a poet from Turkey, Imam Abd al Wahab al Sya'rani, a Sufi, and lastly al Qadhi Zakaria al Anshari (Yunus, 1990, p.15).

Moreover, this work (2008) contains thirteen chapters: 1) On the nature and merit of knowledge and its systematic comprehension; 2) On the intention at the time of study; 3) On choosing the knowledge (type), the teacher, the colleague and on one's permanent affiliation; 4) On respecting knowledge and its possessor; 5) On hard work, perseverance and vim; 6) On starting the lesson, its amount and its organization; 7) On *Tawakkul* (trust in God); 8) On the time for knowledge acquisition; 9) On compassion and advice (to others); 10) On making benefit and attaining *adab*; 11) On Godliness during the time of learning; 12) On what creates memory and what makes forgetful; 13) On what brings and takes away the livelihood, what makes (one) live long and what diminishes it.

### 2.2 Biographical Sketch of al-Zarnūjī

One of the Islamic educational philosophers who lived in during the Abbasid caliphate, al-Zarnūjī outlines his educational thoughts on a treatise work titled "*Taʻlīm al Mutaʻallim*" which explores ethics and morality for both teachers (*muʻallim*) and students (*mutaʻallim*) in searching for knowledge, which consists of thirteen chapters. There are two names attributed to the author of *Taʻlīm*, namely (1) Burhanuddin al-Zarnūjī, who lived in the 6th century Hijri or 13th century CE; and (2) Tajuddin al-Zarnūjī who is Nu'man Ibrahim who passed away in the 6th century Hijri at which he was also a religious scholar of the Hanafi Madhab around the 13th century CE, and thus could be recognised in year 593 H through his treatise, *Taʻlīm al Mutaʻallim* (Athiyatullah,1970,p.58-59). Meanwhile, according to al-Zirikli in the book *al-A'lam*, as cited in Muʻizzuddin (2012), the original name of the author of that book is Nuʻman ibn Ibrahim ibn Khalil al-Zarnūjī (p.2).

In addition, regarding the place where he lived, it is referred that he lived in 'Zarnuq or Zarnuj' with an assumption that the place of his birth was the state located by the Tigris river, namely Eastern Turkistan, and it is in general that he lived in the last period of the Abbasid caliphate, whose last caliph was al Muʻtasim (1258 AD/656H) (Affandi, 1993; Yahya, 2005; Muʻizzuddin, 2012). Some information regarding the period of his contemporary scholars who were regarded as al-Zarnūjī's teachers or with whom al-Zarnūjī had at least corresponded will shed the light on this problem.

Among them (Ahmad, 1986, p.14), there were:

(1) Fakhr al Islam al Hasan Ibn Mansur al Farghani Khadikan who died in 592/ 1196;

(2) Zahir al- Din al Hasan Ibn 'Ali al Marghinani, who died circa 600/ 1204;

(3) Fakhr al Din al Kashani who died in 587/1191;

(4) Imam Burhan al-Din Ali ibn Abi Bakr al-Farghinani al-Marghinani who died in 593 /1195;

(5) Imam Rukn al-Din Muhammad bin Abi Bakr Imam Khwarzade who died in 491-576 H.

Looking at the possible reason for his completion of the treatise, it can be assumed that it served a very real purpose at that time. By 1203, thirteen chapters had been compiled by al-Zarnūjī. At that time, many students had much passion to struggle both for education and for the attainment of knowledge; unfortunately they were falling short of their aim and that the students, according to him, did not find the success for their goal because most of them were not mindful of the right methods of learning. His view was that they did not abide by what was the right thing to do for them and wasted much of their time. Therefore, according to Grunebaum & Abel (1947), al-Zarnūjī decided to explain to the students a method of study which he had read about and heard from his own teachers (p.2).

## 3. Islamic Spiritual Character Values of al-Zarnūjī's Ta'līm al-Muta'allim

The Islamic spiritual character values should not be separated with the terms of extent to construct at the certain level. In this regard, according to Halstead (2010), Islamic morality, being part of Islamic spiritual character values, can conveniently be divided into three categories:

1. The obligations, duties and responsibilities set out in the *sharī'ah* (Islamic law);
2. The values and manners associated with good upbringing;
3. The personal qualities of character that a Muslim is expected to demonstrate in everyday life (p.287).

It is meant that three main emphasis above should be oriented appropriately in the relation to God (*khāliq*), society (*mu'āmalah*) and environment ('*ālamīn*). Similarly, al-Qardawi (1981) divided the terms of character (*akhlaq*) into six basic components that are: 1) individual character; 2) social-family character; 3) character that governs social life; 4) character that guides people to behave better towards animals; 5) character which guides human morality to maintain balance in the physical environment; 6) character which considers servant attitudes towards the Creator (p.106-107). From such exposition, it is obvious that although there are significant divergences, character includes wider context of human action as clearly explained by some experts above.

To inculcate noble values, as the nature in guaranteeing good relationship with one another, is related to the perspective and basic human nature. Generally, as for the scope of character education, there are three pattern of relationship, 1) into Allah, such as *tawhīd*, etc.; 2) towards fellowship, such as our parents, friends, etc.; 3) upon the universe, such as care for the nature, environmental safety, etc. It means that these above mentioned should raise up such motivation to construct the harmonious spirit. In term of motivation, this can be classified into the three categories, namely religious duty for God's pleasure, social orientation and individual development (Huda & Kartanegara, 2015d). Accordingly, these three purposes have to be based on for the sake of achieving God's pleasure in order to be happiness in hereafterlife through repairment of character values. Moreover, there are some Islamic character values of al-Zarnūjī's *Ta'līm al-Muta'allim*, where all is oriented for the purpose of soul purification, as in the following:

### 3.1 Tawbah (Repentance)

Explicitly, *tawbah* (repentance) is a crucial ethical foundation required in the field of education, because it possesses the Islamic character values. In his statement, it means that one cause of forgetting is *ma'ṣiyat* (sinning) (al-Zarnūjī, p.132). It can be understood that the *ma'ṣiyat* will become an obstacle in the human heart and thus will not influence to the reflection of knowledge. In other words, the God's goodness cannot reflect the light into sinful heart, and thus will not result the wise thinking, at which how to think and do is influenced by the darkness of heart, containing *ma'ṣiyat.* As in the poetry, 'I complained to the priest about my weakness of memorising, so that he gives me guidance to keep away from *ma'ṣiyat* (sinful deed); memorising comes from God, while God's endowment should not be blossomed to those with *ma'ṣiyat* (p.131).

That being said, it is obvious that al-Zarnūjī properly encouraged to care about soul refinement during learning process, namely keeping up good deed (*hasanah*) and avoiding bad one (*ma'ṣiyat* ). For both students and teachers, the effort as a main priority to complete is always trying to do what is permitted in Islam and to keep away from what is prohibited in Islam. In the case of analyzing, the power of memorizing is made as the standard to measure the level of successful achievement.

### 3.2 Zuhud

In terms of the nature *zuhud*, al-Zarnūjī outlined by stating that in intention (*niyyah*) as formulation of aim in education the main and first priority is to achieve God's pleasure and all other purposes under that (Huda & Kartanegara, 2015b). It means that during the learning process, regardless the level of instruction, a student should never aim solely towards the worldly life, or more particularly for material purpose at temporary times. Such an aim would result in the loss of one original focus. Moreover, one should aim for God's pleasure (*marḍātillah*). With this regard, as in his statement

Those who pursue the knowledge should pay attention to anything that has been said above. Because after all, he has crossed the line enough long exhaustion. So do not let the knowledge that has been obtained is used as a means of collecting materials abject worldliness, of little value and temporary' (al-Zarnūjī, p.19).

From this, it can be analysed that it is necessary for a student in the process of learning to minimise every effort in activities associated with worldly activities. A burdened mind would ultimately disrupt and destroy the concentration. Therefore, one should not feel sad or anxious for anyone, since all the affairs of the world, including sadness and anxiety do not bring benefit but instead will harm the heart, mind and body and can damage the good deeds.

From that perspective, according to Maududi (1966) it is clear that belief in the Hereafter is another key factor in providing morality with a strong basis and purpose (p.36). It means that the besides living in this world, it is ensured the all human being, particularly members of the Islamic society, should make this worldly life as a bridge or medium (*waṣīlah*) to achieve worldly life purpose. According to Halstead (2010), a number of key issues that have only lightly been touched on here merit fuller exploration, including the link between the *sharī'ah* (Islamic law) and moral education; the role of Muslim parents in moral education; the contribution of Muslim poetry to moral education; the concepts of moral guidance and the moral virtues in Islam; the concept of *adab* (refinement, discipline, culture) as part of moral education; and civic and moral education in specific Muslim countries, such as Egypt and Indonesia (p.294).

Moreover, Halstead (2010) pointed out that 'also meriting more detailed investigation in the future are the main differences between western and Islamic approaches to moral education, particularly the emphasis in Islam on timeless religious principles, the role of the law in enforcing morality, the different understanding of rights, the rejection of moral autonomy as a goal of moral education and the stress on reward in the Hereafter as a motivator of moral behavior (*ibid*). Hence, it is clear that based on Halstead outlines, al-Zarnūjī pointed out to emphasize the hereafter life- reward motivation, where this is central notion in Islam (Huda & Kartanegara, 2015d; 2015f).

### 3.3 Sabr (Patience)

Pertaining to Islamic character values, in the order to form human beings with noble character values, the nature of *sabr* is one of the compulsory spiritual values for those with belief (*īmān*). In this term, al-Zarnūjī emphasized on the significance of the nature *sabr*, as expressed, 'being patient and steadfast is the base of primacy in all things, but rarely there are people who can do it' (p.28). On this view, he further elaborated through poetry, saying that 'everything is surely intended to a certain level, even highest, but it is rarely for anyone to keep up in achieving what is intended' (*ibid*).

Meanwhile, concerning the term of *ṣabr* it is viewed as a solid mental state, which is stable and consistent in its establishment. The soul keeps stabilised with the commitment, at which it is not changed in any kind of severe challenges faced. In general, this *ṣabr* can be divided into two main parts. As Shihab (2007, p.263) obviously overviewed,

1. It is physical (external) dimension which means that the patient sense should be on accepting and practicing all religious duties, concerning parts of the body, such as patience in the worship of *hajj* (pilgrimage) because it can be awfully exhausting. Moreover, it is also in this category in which the patience is on accepting the temptation concerning the physical element, such as illness, etc.
2. It is mental (internal) dimension which includes the ability to maintain acceptance which otherwise could result in bad deeds, such as abstaining oneself from anger, etc.

Hence, in the educational process, it is advisable for those who are in pursuit of knowledge, as in the poetry, courage to practice patience on many levels. It means that the nature of *sabr* for the student shows that a student should have a heart that is steadfast and patient in accordance with the teacher; when studying a book it is not to be abandoned before perfectly studied and not to move to another field prior to understanding completely which holds true also to the place to learning when one is not to move to elsewhere except as forced, through the curriculum (Huda & Kartanegara, 2015a).

### 3.4    Tawakkal (submission to God)

As for *tawakkal*, al-Zarnūjī had paid attention to this by making a separate chapter (p.98). It was outlined that each student should have *tawakkal*, meaning 'absolute reliance' balanced with 'hard work'. So, here are two main points as the significant effort for being *tawakkal*, in order to make a fundamental basis for equipping the human being with noble character. An absolute reliance or submission to God, there should exactly be thought in this case of *tawakkal* that one should undertake all causes (*asbāb*)  and  *tadbīr* (endeavor and exertion) within the rules of *sharī'ah*, but it should not consider them lost from the control of the rules of *sharī'ah*. It means that one should believe that only the order and the grace of Allah can accomplish his work and in fact, the effectiveness of any endeavour is only due to the order and will of Allah. As pointed by al-Maududi (1966) belief in the Hereafter is also a key factor in providing morality with a strong basis and purpose meaning that the worldly life is a preparation, both in spiritual and mental perfection, for achieving the life to come (akhirat) (p.36).

Based on al-Zarnūjī's *Ta'lim*, concerning the specifically shared concern into the *tawakkal*, there are three main emphases as the main dimension of effort during learning. Those are:

1) Livelihood (*rizki*) and worldly matter;
2) Apprehensive life with continuous earnest (*mashaqqah*);
3) Managing time appropriately to study something new (p.98-102).

It can be analysed that in terms of *tawakkal*, all these three main dimensions should be in balance between willingness to accept the result and courage to continue in action. In other words, *tawakkal* then is to act in accordance with Allah's scheme i.e. to adopt the principles and laws of the *sharī'ah*, and to submit one's self unto Him. In every act or task, the way required for the task will be employed within the confines of the *sharī'ah* and one's trust will be placed by God. On that regard, it was emphasized that according to Abdullah ibn Hassan al-Zubaidi, as cited by al-Zarnūjī, 'whoever  studies the religion of Allah, so Allah will suffice his needs and give him sustenance from unexpected road' (p.99). From this perspective, learners are necessary to instill tawakkal in his/ her heart and should not worry about the livelihood for it can deviate their focus (p.98). Simply stated, from al-Zarnūjī's Ta'lim, it can be concluded that *tawakkal* has three fundamental principles: *ma'rifāt* (understanding), *hālat* (inner state) and *'amal* (action).

### 3.5    Tawadu' and Ta'zīm (Respect)

*Ta'ẓīm* is an attitude that should be possessed by every Muslim as a form of *akhlaq al-mahmūdah* (a noble character quality). It can be defined as 'human attitude with balance position, neither bragging and nor boasting and at the same time, not humiliating or degrading themselves excessively (Huda & Kartanegara, 2015e). For example, a scientist should keep being wise personality and not being arrogant with the knowledge achieved, because knowledge reached is not much, especially when compared with the breadth of knowledge of God.

In addition, al-Zarnūjī (2008) points out that *ta'ẓīm* will result in *ṭā'at* (adherence), but *ta'at* is not necessarily with *ta'ẓīm* (p.35). For him, it may be that *ṭā'at* is earned only through worry or threats, not from consciousness. In other words, *ta'ẓīm* is a feeling of deep admiration for someone or something elicited by their abilities, qualities, or achievements, showing a higher level of character performance possessed. Similarly, Halstead (2010) outlines, having a good relationship with parents and teachers is also very important, because children will then want to follow their example, out of love and respect for them (p.292). On this regard, *tawādu'* or *ta'ẓīm*, in accordance with a part of such values in Islam, is necessary to become the main dimension for embedding it into the human being, particularly among adolescents and children. As stated (al-Zarnuji, 2008), a knowledgeable person should be humble (ie. attitude halfway between arrogant and discouraged), do '*iffah* (encouraging to purify soul and heart).

Furthermore, the nature of *ta'ẓīm*, as in al-Zarnūjī's view (2008), has three main basis as the fundamental element to be conducted. Those are:

- Knowledge as a Light of Understanding (p.34 & 41);
- Teacher as the Most Righteous Example (p.35);
- Colleague as a Partner in Learning (p.45).

For the knowledge, featured characteristics of the knowledge are based on three distinctions, namely: *mukhtas* (special feature); *fadl* (main priority); *karāmah* (perfection) (Huda & Kartanegara, 2015h). For the teacher, it is because of the most righteous example in going through religious and high morality way of life (Huda & Kartanegara, 2015h). For the colleague, it is because significantly basic way in the effort to make a good character development (Huda & Kartanegara, 2015c; 2015h). This can be analysed as an attempt to maximise the human potentials possessed through some ways

proposed by al-Zarnuji as an effort to inculcate knowledge (*'ilm*) and wisdom (*hikmah*) through explaining the difference between *haq* (right) and *batil* (wrong) wisely in that students can absorb *fa'idah* (avail) presented by teacher (Huda & Kartanegara, 2015f).

The consequence is that in daily interactions, it is required for us to display a superior morality in speech and behaviour. In fact, it is a requirement for the perfection of faith, as noted by the Prophet that the believers with the perfect faith are those who are best in their character. Consequently, *ta'ẓīm* is one of the most important characteristics necessary to be developed in the current educational system. In addition, it is necessary to conceptualize such a process well designed to educate soul and mind element. The process is comprehensively and entirely concerning understanding, reflecting and practicing, in the order for performing the individual with knowledgeable quality, spiritual ability and good character (al-Shaybani, 1979; Huda & Kartanegara, 2015e).

### 3.6 Wara' (keeping away bad deed)

*Wara'* is defined as 'the nature containing prudence exceptional and lack of courage to approach something that is forbidden, as well as things that are hesitant (*shubhāt*)'. As stated by Prophet (pbuh), 'it is sure that *halāl* (permitted) and *harām* (prohibited) is clear and in both of them there are a lot of things doubtful that most people do not know. Hence, whoever who keeps himself from things that are doubtful in that he had cleared the religion and honor it'. People who have a high position with a preventive action have always been careful of something most permitted (*halāl*) that could lead to something tolerated (*makrūh*) or prohibited (*harām*).

In addition, al-Zarnūjī (2008) outlined distinctively this character in another separate chapter. It seems clear to him to assume that whoever, in pursuing knowledge, education at all levels, should have the nature of *wara'*, which he cited from the Hadith 'whoever is not with *wara*, while studying science, Allah will give him a trial with one of the three cases, namely: death at a young age, placed in the township along with fools, or used as a servant of the ruler' (p.120). Those involving acts of *wara'* are keeping away from too full stomach, too much sleep and needless talk (p.121). From this, al-Zarnūjī mentioned that during the process of education, at all levels, it is obligatory to keep oneself away from bad deed, which can cause negative impact. Similarly, as Adi & Satiman (2014) illustrated, it is sure not only through educational process, a knowledgeable human is produced, but also the knowledge acquired will be balanced between this world and the next. In other words, as such the balance between the worldly life and the hereafter life is of supreme importance.

With this regard, Halstead (2010) gives the illustration on tips to maintain doing good deed and keep away from bad deed. Another way to keep being consistent with *wara'* is to avoid from humans who is willing to do mischief (with some prohibited conduct), immoral behaviour (with bad deed and manners) and unemployment (with nothing to do). Therefore, there should be well-designed educative environments in order to cultivate such values, mainly involving those who have related experiences (Huda & Kartanegara, 2015e; 2015f; 2015g).

## 4. Conclusion and Recommendation

To conclude this discussion, some views on spiritual character values, as al-Zarnūjī clearly illustrated, are an important role as the foundation of soul to inculcate during the process of education where teacher and student interact with each other via informing and elucidating true meaning of teaching and learning. Hence, it needs to promote the core character values as the basis of good individual character. Finally, this study is highly expected to be a contribution for the theoretical framework of character values as an effort to equip human beings with noble qualities and traits in Islam.

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