



The Urgency of Purifying Intention in Seeking Knowledge: Az-Zarnuji's Thought in *Ta'lim al-Muta'allim*

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Abstract

*This study examines the concept of intention, the urgency of its purification, and the relevance of Az-Zarnuji's thought in the book *Ta'lim al-Muta'allim* to contemporary Islamic education. Using a qualitative approach, the study employs content analysis of the primary text *Ta'lim al-Muta'allim*. The findings demonstrate that intention (*an-niyyah*) constitutes the primary spiritual and moral foundation that determines the blessing and value of worship in the pursuit of knowledge. Proper intention leads to beneficial knowledge (*'ilm nāfi'*) and shapes the character of scholars who are humble (*tawāḍu'*) and morally grounded. These insights are highly relevant to the context of modern education. The concept of *tazkiyat an-niyyah* can function as a spiritual foundation that strengthens the implementation of Deep Learning, ensuring that learning processes become meaningful and mindful, thereby reorienting education toward the formation of integrity-based and civilized character.*

Keywords: Az-Zarnuji, Purification of Intentions, Seeking Knowledge, *Ta'lim al-Muta'allim*

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Introduction

The pursuit of knowledge within the framework of Islamic education is not merely understood as an intellectual endeavor but also as a form of worship with spiritual and moral dimensions (Sukma Eka Wijaya et al., 2024). Islamic education does not merely emphasize the transmission of knowledge, but is fundamentally oriented toward the holistic development of moral, spiritual, and character values among learners (Hoktaviandri & Mislaini, 2020). However, in contemporary educational practice, the orientation of seeking knowledge has increasingly shifted from the noble aim of attaining Allah's pleasure toward pragmatic objectives, such as social status, academic credentials, and material gain. This shift in intention raises serious concerns regarding the erosion of etiquette (*adab*) and sincerity within teaching and learning processes. In this context, the concept of purifying intention (*tazkiyat an-niyyah*) becomes critically important for re-examining the ethical foundations of education. Az-Zarnuji, through his classical work *Ta'lim al-Muta'allim*, emphasizes that the purity of intention constitutes the core foundation for the blessing (*barakah*) of knowledge (Muhammad Tri Ridho,

2025). Without sincere intention directed solely toward Allah, knowledge loses its transformative potential and fails to generate benefit for both individuals and society. This study posits that Az-Zarnuji's concept of *tazkiyat an-niyyah* functions as a spiritual strategy for character formation, fostering meaningful and mindful learning that is aligned with contemporary educational initiatives, particularly the Deep Learning paradigm.

Several previous studies have made important scholarly contributions to exploring the values of manners (*adab*) and sincerity in Islamic education. First, research by Nasir et al., (2023) and Anisa Fitriana et al., (2024) emphasizes that ethics and pure intentions constitute the foundation of spiritual character formation, whereby the blessings (*barakah*) of knowledge are determined by intention. Furthermore, Musthafa et al. (n.d.) and Aisahningsih & Wijayanti (n.d.) highlight the urgency of intention as a fundamental and obligatory element for attaining Allah's pleasure and preserving religion. Meanwhile, Pitriani et al. (2023) examine character values from Az-Zarnuji's perspective, such as honesty and respect for teachers. Meanwhile, Rivauzi (2023) further argues that improving the quality of Islamic education must be accompanied by the internalization of moral values (character-based education) that guide students to understand the meaning of knowledge ethically and spiritually. Although these studies provide valuable insights into Islamic educational values, most of them remain focused on general aspects of sincerity or learning manners, without systematically addressing the urgency of purifying intentions as the core of the blessings of knowledge.

Although many studies have discussed Islamic educational values and sincerity, a significant research gap remains, namely the lack of comprehensive studies that specifically examine the urgency of purifying intention within the epistemological framework of Islamic education according to Az-Zarnuji. Most previous research has emphasized moral and behavioral dimensions without sufficiently elaborating the theological, psychological, and philosophical aspects of intention purification as the epistemic foundation of knowledge-seeking. In fact, Az-Zarnuji does not merely emphasize intention as an ethical prerequisite, but positions it as a spiritual framework that determines the value, direction, and blessing of knowledge. Therefore, qualitative inquiry remains necessary to explore the substantive meaning of intention purification in *Ta'lim al-Muta'allim* in response to the challenges of modern Islamic education, which increasingly tends toward rationalistic and materialistic orientations.

The novelty of this research lies in its qualitative and in-depth analysis of Az-Zarnuji's thought, not merely as a textual examination, but as a conceptual reflection on contemporary Islamic educational realities. This study highlights the urgency of purifying intention as the core of Islamic epistemology, integrating spiritual, moral, and intellectual dimensions in the pursuit of knowledge. By focusing on the relationship between intention, the blessing of knowledge, and the moral integrity of learners, this research offers a renewed reading of *Ta'lim al-Muta'allim* as an ethical and epistemological reference for contemporary Islamic education. This approach is expected to

bridge classical Islamic values with modern educational challenges, particularly in harmonizing Islamic learning ethics with the national education vision to realize Deep Learning that emphasizes the formation of civilized and integrity-based individuals. Thus, this study reaffirms the enduring relevance of Az-Zarnuji's thought in shaping an education paradigm grounded in morality and spirituality.

The expected impact of this research is both theoretical and practical. Theoretically, this study contributes to the enrichment of Islamic educational scholarship, particularly in the areas of educational philosophy and learning ethics. Practically, its findings can serve as a conceptual reference for Islamic educational institutions, educators, and students to reorient intentions and learning objectives in alignment with monotheistic values (*tawhīd*).

The implementation of intention purification within the learning system is expected to foster a learning culture oriented toward worship, intellectual honesty, and moral responsibility. Consequently, Islamic education will not only produce academically competent individuals, but also learners who are sincere, ethically grounded, and oriented toward the blessing of knowledge (Arip et al., 2023).

Method

This study adopts a qualitative approach with a library research design. This approach was selected because the focus of the study lies in analyzing the intellectual thought of a classical Islamic scholar, namely Az-Zarnuji, as articulated in his seminal work *Ta'lim al-Muta'allim*. This type of qualitative inquiry seeks to understand the meaning and substance of the concept of purifying intention (*ikhhlāṣ al-niyyah*) in the pursuit of knowledge through careful interpretation of both the textual content and contextual background of Az-Zarnuji's thought.

The data employed in this study consist of primary and secondary sources. The primary data were obtained directly from Az-Zarnuji's *Ta'lim al-Muta'allim Ṭarīq al-Ta'allum*, particularly the sections addressing intention, sincerity, the etiquette of knowledge seekers, and the relationship between intention and the blessing (*barakah*) of knowledge. Secondary data were drawn from a wide range of supporting literature, including books on Islamic education, scholarly monographs, peer-reviewed journal articles, and previous studies relevant to sincerity, learning manners (*adab al-ta'allum*), and Islamic educational values. In addition, secondary sources include contemporary studies that reinterpret Az-Zarnuji's ideas within modern educational contexts. The integration of these two data sources enables the researchers to construct a comprehensive and coherent understanding of the concept of intention purification according to Az-Zarnuji and its relevance to contemporary education.

Data collection was conducted through documentation and an in-depth literature review. This process followed systematic procedures, including identifying relevant sources, selecting pertinent texts, conducting critical readings, and recording key passages related to the research focus. The collected data were subsequently processed using qualitative content analysis,

allowing for a structured examination of recurring themes and conceptual patterns.

The data analysis technique employed was descriptive qualitative content analysis, utilizing the interactive model proposed by Miles and Huberman, which consists of three main stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. During the data reduction stage, the researcher selected, organized, and categorized information according to key themes, such as the concept of intention, the urgency of intention purification, and its implications for Islamic education. The data were then presented primarily in narrative form to facilitate interpretive depth, with limited use of tables to enhance clarity and readability.

To strengthen interpretive validity and minimize confirmation bias, this study applies reflective and comparative interpretative strategies. Recognizing that Az-Zarnuji is often idealized within Islamic educational discourse, this analysis does not merely reaffirm normative assumptions but critically examines both the strengths and limitations of his conceptualization of intention. Confirmation bias is mitigated through three methodological steps. First, *Ta'lim al-Muta'allim* is interpreted by situating Az-Zarnuji's views within the broader tradition of Islamic educational thought, particularly through comparative analysis with other classical scholars, such as Al-Ghazali, Ibn Jama'ah, and Ibn Khaldun. This comparative reading allows for the identification of points of convergence and divergence, rather than positioning Az-Zarnuji as an unquestionable authority. Second, the study employs analytical triangulation by engaging contemporary academic interpretations and modern educational theories to assess the relevance and limitations of Az-Zarnuji's concept in today's educational landscape. Third, ongoing reflective analysis is applied, whereby researchers critically examine their own interpretive assumptions to ensure that conclusions are grounded in textual evidence rather than ideological inclination. Through this methodological framework, the study maintains analytical rigor while remaining faithful to the classical text and its contemporary educational implications.

Finding and Discussion

As a foundation for ensuring the authenticity and validity of the content analysis of Az-Zarnuji's thought, this section begins with a systematic compilation of primary textual data. The Primary Data Table presented below summarizes key quotations from the chapter on Intention (*niyyah*) in *Ta'lim al-Muta'allim Tarīq al-Ta'allum*. These excerpts constitute the core textual evidence of the study and serve as the analytical basis for interpretation and synthesis. Through these selected passages, the study formulates a conceptual understanding of intention, identifies its determining factors, and examines its theoretical and practical relevance within contemporary educational contexts.

Table 1. Primary Data

(The Urgency of Purifying Intention in Seeking Knowledge: Az-Zarnuji's Thought in *Ta'lim*.)

No.	Focus of Findings (Sub-Section Analysis)	Primary Text	Key Translation	Implications of Analysis
1	Foundation & Position of Intention	"إِذْ النِّيَّةُ هِيَ ... الأصلُ في جميعِ الأفعالِ..."	"...indeed, intention is the [fundamental] basis in all deeds..."	Intention is a spiritual framework that must be present from the outset of seeking knowledge.
2	The Purpose of Pure (Transcendent) Intention	"أَنْ يَنْوِيَ ... الْمُتَعَلِّمُ بِطَلَبِ الْعِلْمِ رِضًا لِلَّهِ، وَالدَّارِ الآخِرَةِ، وَالْإِزَالََةَ الْجَهْلِ..."	"...intend to seek knowledge to seek the pleasure of Allah, the hereafter, and to eliminate ignorance..."	The intention must be oriented towards the highest goal (divine pleasure) and benefit (<i>izālat al-jahl</i>).
3	Criticism of Worldly Orientation (Pragmatic)	"وَلَا يَسْتَجْلِبْ ... حُطَامَ الدُّنْيَا، وَالْكَرَامَةَ عِنْدَ السُّلْطَانِ، وَغَيْرَهُ"	"...and not to seek worldly riches, honour from the ruler, or anything else.."	A stern warning against Hubb al-dunya and Riya, which are diseases of intention.
4	The Danger of Wasting Knowledge	"فَلَا يَصْرِفُهُ إِلَى ... الدُّنْيَا الحَقِيرَةِ الْقَلِيلَةِ القَانِيَةِ"	"...let him not turn it towards the despicable, insignificant, and transient world."	Knowledge that is obtained with great effort (<i>mujāhadah</i>) should not be used for temporary material interests.
5	Prohibition of Arrogance (Disease of the Heart)	"وَالْكَبْرِيَاءُ لِرَبِّنَا صِفَةٌ بِهِ مَخْصُوصَةٌ ...فَتَحْتَبُوهَا..."	"Arrogance (al-Kibriyā') is a trait specific to our Lord, so avoid it..."	Intellectual arrogance (<i>ujub</i>) and <i>kibriyā'</i> are the main obstacles to the blessings of al-'ilm (<i>barakah al-'ilm</i>).

No.	Focus of Findings (Sub-Section Analysis)	Primary Text	Key Translation	Implications of Analysis
6	Intentions that Produce Character	<p>إِنَّ التَّوَّاضِعَ ... مِنْ خِصَالِ الْمُتَّقِي ..."</p>	<p>"Indeed, humility (tawāḍu') is one of the characteristics of the pious..."</p>	<p>Pure intentions give birth to <i>tawāḍu'</i> and good manners, which are manifestations of academic integrity.</p>

The concept of intention in seeking knowledge, according to Az-Zarnuji in *Ta'lim al-Muta'allim*.

1. The Meaning and Position of Intention in Az-Zarnuji's Perspective

Az-Zarnuji, in his book *Ta'lim al-Muta'allim*, places intention (*an-niyyah*) as the main foundation (*al-aṣl*) of the activity of seeking knowledge (See Primary Data Table, No. 1). He emphasizes that intention is not merely a formal prerequisite, but rather an inner orientation that determines the direction, spiritual value, and blessing (*barakah*) of the entire learning process. Intention functions as the spirit of action, as stated in the well-known prophetic tradition: "*Innamal a'mālu bin-niyyāt...*" (Nasir et al., 2023b)

Az-Zarnuji's thought reflects an Islamic epistemological perspective in which knowledge possesses a sacred dimension. He asserts that knowledge is not simply a rational product, but a divine gift attained through the purification of the heart. Accordingly, intention must be sincerely purified with the sole aim of seeking Allah's pleasure and eliminating ignorance (see Primary Data Table, No. 2), as sincerity constitutes a fundamental condition for the acceptance of deeds. Within this framework, intention determines the moral and existential value of learning activities, functioning as a mechanism for both intellectual and spiritual purification (Musthafa & Meliani, 2021).

2. The Spiritual and Moral Dimensions of Intention According to Az-Zarnuji

Az-Zarnuji conceptualizes intention in the pursuit of knowledge as a form of *qalbiyyah* worship (worship of the heart) that requires sincerity and heightened spiritual awareness. Proper intention must encompass the aims of drawing closer to Allah (*taqarrub ilallah*), reviving religion, and upholding truth. He cautions that knowledge pursued for purely worldly interests may lead to inner deterioration and intellectual arrogance (See Primary Data Table, No. 3).

His moral framework is grounded in a balance between knowledge and action. Knowledge that is not rooted in sound intention, he argues, will lose its transformative power. Consequently, the purification of intention carries a broad social dimension, as it constitutes the foundation for forming the integrity of scholars and educators characterized by noble moral conduct (Yusak et al., 2024).

3. The Essence and Position of Purifying Intentions in Seeking Knowledge

Az-Zarnuji positions the purification of intention (*tazkiyat an-niyyah*) as the most fundamental element in the pursuit of knowledge. He emphasizes that knowledge acquired without proper intention will neither yield benefit nor guidance; instead, it may even lead its possessor toward moral deviation (see Primary Data Table, No. 4, concerning the dangers of neglecting and misusing knowledge). The centrality of intention lies in its role in determining whether knowledge becomes *'ilm nāfi'* (beneficial knowledge) or *ghayr nāfi'* (misleading knowledge). When grounded in sincere intention, knowledge cultivates humility (*tawādu'*) and a strong sense of ethical responsibility, rather than fostering intellectual arrogance or self-glorification (See Primary Data Table, No. 6).

4. The Process of Purifying Intentions: Ethical and Practical Perspectives

Az-Zarnuji provides ethical-practical guidance for preserving the purity of intention, emphasizing that such preservation requires patience, discipline, and continuous self-regulation. This process involves several interrelated practices.

First, *muhasabah* (self-introspection) is essential, as intentions must be consistently examined and renewed by removing worldly motivations and reorienting them toward divine purposes.

Second, guidance from a teacher plays a crucial role. Teachers function not only as transmitters of knowledge but also as moral and spiritual guides (*tazkiyah*), assisting students in safeguarding their hearts from spiritual ailments such as *riyā'* (showing off), *'ujub* (self-admiration), and *ḥasad* (envy).

Third, practical manners serve as tangible expressions of sincere intention. These include respecting teachers, maintaining inner purity, and demonstrating consistency and perseverance in the pursuit of knowledge. For Az-Zarnuji, correct intention must manifest in ethical conduct, as inner sincerity and outward behavior are inseparable.

5. Factors Affecting the Purity of Intentions

Az-Zarnuji identifies various factors that influence the purity of intention, encompassing both internal dimensions (conditions of the heart) and external dimensions (social and educational environment). To demonstrate the continuity and diagnostic relevance of this thought in relation to contemporary challenges, the following table presents a

synchronization between these classical factors and the ethical problems currently faced by educational institutions:

Table 2. Causal Analysis

No	Factors Hindering Intentions (Az-Zarnuji)	Classical Key Terms	Contemporary Manifestations / Modern Educational Issues	Ethical Solutions (<i>Tazkiyat an-Niyyah</i>)
1	Spiritual and Heart Conditions	<i>Tazkiyat an-nafs</i> , Sin/Negligence	Spiritual Gap	Self-reflection (<i>Muhasabah</i>), Repentance, and <i>Tazkiyat al-Qalb</i>
2	Learning Goals and Orientation	<i>Hubb al-Dunya</i> , Worldly Intentions	Pragmatic Orientation Crisis	Transcendent Orientation
3	Social Influence and Recognition	<i>Riya</i> (Showing Off), <i>Sum'ah</i> (Popularity)	Academic Image Culture	Spiritual Self-Control
4	Core Heart Diseases	<i>Ujub</i> (Pride), <i>Kibr</i> (Arrogance)	Intellectual Arrogance	Tawadhu' (Humility)
5	Environmental and Teacher Influence	<i>Adab Jama'i</i> , Teacher Exemplarity	Unhealthy Competitive Environment	Sincere Teacher Exemplarity, fostering <i>Ukhuwah</i> and <i>Adab</i> among students.

6. Recontextualizing Az-Zarnuji's Ethical Framework in Modern Educational Paradigms

Az-Zarnuji's ethical framework on the purification of intention (*tazkiyat an-niyyah*) remains highly relevant in responding to the challenges of modern education, particularly about the erosion of moral orientation in contemporary learning practices. Modern education, which increasingly emphasizes efficiency, performance metrics, and instrumental rationality, often reduces the learning process to a means of acquiring diplomas, social status, and material benefits. In this context, Az-Zarnuji's assertion that intention constitutes the spiritual core of knowledge functions as an ethical reminder that learning is not value-neutral, but rather carries profound moral implications.

Nevertheless, Az-Zarnuji's thought cannot be applied in a purely literal manner. Recontextualization is therefore required so that the concept of *tazkiyat an-niyyah* is understood as an ethical orientation guiding learning

motivation, rather than as a set of rigid pedagogical prescriptions. By positioning intention as a normative compass, this concept reinforces meaningful learning, promotes moral accountability, and helps to balance contemporary academic demands with spiritual motivation. In this way, Az-Zarnuji's ethical framework can complement modern educational theory by contributing to the formation of learners who are not only intellectually capable but also ethically grounded and socially responsible.

Az-Zarnuji's thought retains strong relevance as a critical response to the rational–functional orientation of modern education. In particular, his concept of the purification of intention (*tazkiyat an-niyyah*) functions as an ethical prerequisite for strengthening the *Deep Learning* approach that has become a key focus of the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education (Nur Afidah & Hafidzi, 2024).

- a. Meaningful Learning: Pure intention serves as the spiritual foundation for the realization of meaningful learning. Only when learning intentions are oriented toward Allah does knowledge attain transcendental significance, enabling it to transcend purely instrumental and worldly objectives.
- b. Mindful Learning: The purification of intention also cultivates full moral awareness (mindfulness) regarding the responsibility inherent in knowledge. This awareness prevents knowledge from degenerating into a source of intellectual arrogance (see Analysis Table, No. 4) or being reduced to surface learning (See Analysis Table, No. 3).

In sum, the urgency of purifying intention as articulated by Az-Zarnuji is not merely theological, but also constitutes a philosophical and ethical foundation for contemporary Islamic education in constructing a civilized, meaningful, and blessed learning paradigm (Alviyani et al., 2025).

7. Critical Contextualization: Historical Limits and Dialogical Engagement

The concept of intention as articulated by Az-Zarnuji in *Ta'lim al-Muta'allim* must be understood within its historical and social context. The work emerged from a medieval Islamic educational milieu characterized by informal learning structures, strong teacher authority, and deep moral concerns regarding the misuse of religious knowledge. Within this context, the emphasis on sincerity, humility, and obedience functioned as an ethical safeguard against intellectual arrogance and moral deviation.

However, when applied to contemporary educational systems, a literal implementation of Az-Zarnuji's framework encounters several limitations. Modern education operates within institutionalized systems, standardized assessment mechanisms, and diverse socio-economic realities. An uncritical application of classical ethical models risks overlooking student autonomy, critical reasoning, and the complex professional responsibilities of educators. Consequently, *tazkiyat an-niyyah* should be interpreted not as a rigid pedagogical formula, but as a normative moral orientation that guides ethical learning practices.

Dialogical engagement with other Islamic thinkers further refines this reinterpretation. Al-Ghazali concurs with Az-Zarnuji in positioning sincerity as the spirit of knowledge, yet he also cautions against excessive asceticism that may distance scholars from their social responsibilities. Ibn Jama'ah complements the ethical emphasis on intention with institutional discipline and professional ethics, highlighting the importance of structured educational norms. In contrast, Ibn Khaldun approaches education from a socio-historical perspective, emphasizing the roles of social conditions, power relations, and habitus in shaping learning processes. Compared to Az-Zarnuji's ethical orientation, Ibn Khaldun offers a form of sociological realism that balances moral idealism with contextual awareness.

From the perspective of contemporary educational theory, Az-Zarnuji's conception of intention resonates with character education, reflective pedagogy, and mindful learning. Nevertheless, modern educational frameworks emphasize the necessity of contextual adaptation, critical thinking, and active student engagement. Therefore, the relevance of *tazkiyat an-niyyah* does not lie in its direct transplantation into modern educational systems, but rather in its reinterpretation as an ethical compass that integrates spiritual motivation with pedagogical realism. This dialogical and contextual approach preserves the moral depth of classical Islamic thought while ensuring its applicability within a dynamic and pluralistic educational environment.

The Urgency of Purifying Intentions in the Pursuit of Knowledge According to Az-Zarnuji

1. The Essence and Position of Purifying Intentions in Seeking Knowledge

Az-Zarnuji, in his monumental work *Ta'lim al-Muta'allim Thariq al-Ta'allum*, positions the purification of intentions (*tazkiyat an-niyyah*) as the most fundamental element in the process of seeking knowledge. For him, pure intention constitutes the key to blessing (*barakah*) and acceptance of knowledge. Knowledge pursued without proper intention not only fails to yield benefit but may even lead its possessor toward moral deviation. This position aligns with the Prophetic tradition: "Whoever seeks knowledge that should be sought for the sake of Allah, but does so for worldly purposes, will not smell the fragrance of Paradise" (Narrated by Abu Dawud).

Az-Zarnuji further emphasizes that the pursuit of knowledge is not merely an intellectual endeavor, but also a form of worship. Consequently, he insists on the purification of intention so that all learning activities may be transformed into righteous deeds. In his view, knowledge possesses a dual potential: on the one hand, it can lead to truth and closeness to Allah; on the other, it may result in arrogance and destruction if it is not accompanied by sincerity. Thus, the purification of intention is central, as it determines whether the acquired knowledge becomes '*ilm nāfi'* (beneficial knowledge) or '*ghayr nāfi'* (misleading knowledge) (Hisyam & Johan Idrus Tofaynudin, 2024).

According to Az-Zarnuji, a clear indicator of pure intention is when a seeker of knowledge does not pursue status, praise, or material gain, but instead seeks solely the pleasure of Allah, strives to uphold religion, and aims to eliminate ignorance within both oneself and society. The purification of intention thus serves as a moral foundation that directs learning toward spiritual integrity and social benefit. When intentions are sincere, knowledge cultivates humility and responsibility, rather than intellectual pride or arrogance (Saputra & Wardan, 2025).

2. Purification of Intentions as the Path to the Blessings of Knowledge

Az-Zarnuji emphasizes that the blessings of knowledge (*barakah al-'ilm*) can only be attained through correct and pure intentions. In the opening chapter of *Ta'lim al-Muta'allim*, he asserts that blessings are not measured by the quantity of knowledge mastered, but by the extent to which that knowledge brings benefits and generates goodness. Knowledge that does not lead to righteous action is knowledge that has lost its spirit. Therefore, the purification of intention is not merely a spiritual concern but also a prerequisite for the functionality of knowledge in life.

From Az-Zarnuji's perspective, the blessings of knowledge are directly related to *tazkiyah* (purification of the self). A person whose heart is cleansed of excessive worldly motives is more receptive to the light of knowledge. This illustrates the close relationship between inner purity and intellectual clarity. Impure intentions, such as the pursuit of fame, power, or material gain, obstruct the acquisition of wisdom and deep understanding. Thus, the purification of intentions as an epistemological prerequisite for attaining true knowledge.

Az-Zarnuji further highlights the ethical dimension of the blessings of knowledge. He warns that knowledge acquired with improper intentions often leads to arrogance and moral decline. Scholars who lack sincerity may become agents of social harm when they use their knowledge for personal interests. Therefore, purifying intentions is not only related to the vertical relationship with Allah, but also has profound horizontal implications for social conduct. Knowledge rooted in pure intentions directs its possessor toward service to others and commitment to the truth (Muhammad Tri Ridho, 2025b).

3. Purification of Intention as the Ethical Foundation of Character and Academic Integrity

In Az-Zarnuji's view, the purification of intention has direct implications for character formation among seekers of knowledge. He argues that sincere intentions give rise to praiseworthy traits such as *tawadhu'* (humility), patience, perseverance, and respect for teachers. Conversely, corrupted intentions nurture arrogance, negligence, and disregard for knowledge. Accordingly, purifying intention is not solely a spiritual exercise, but an integral process in shaping moral personality.

Az-Zarnuji conceptualizes education as a process of forming the whole person, rather than merely transferring information. Within this

framework, intention functions as a moral driving force that guides learning behavior. A student who seeks knowledge with proper intention will act responsibly toward both self and society, recognizing that knowledge is a trust (*amanah*) for which one is accountable. This view aligns with the principles of Islamic education, which place adab (proper conduct) at the heart of the learning process. Az-Zarnuji underscores that educational success is determined not only by cognitive competence but also by sincerity of intention, which cultivates piety and ethical behavior.

Moreover, the purification of intention serves as a preventive mechanism against moral deviation in education. When learning is oriented primarily toward worldly goals, such as popularity, status, or wealth, education loses its ethical substance. Az-Zarnuji cautions that knowledge devoid of sincerity merely amplifies arrogance and spiritual ignorance. Therefore, purifying intention must constitute the initial step in the entire educational process, ensuring that learners do not become trapped in materialistic orientations. Through this process, students are shaped into individuals of integrity, honesty, and moral responsibility toward the knowledge entrusted to them.

4. The Relevance of the Urgency of Purifying Intentions in the Context of Contemporary Education

Az-Zarnuji's thoughts on the urgency of purifying intentions remain relevant in addressing modern educational problems that tend to be oriented towards material and academic achievements alone. Moral crises, plagiarism, unhealthy competition, and the degradation of scientific ethics are indicators that modern education often loses its spiritual orientation. In this context, the purification of intentions as taught by Az-Zarnuji serves as a correction to an overly worldly orientation in education.

The urgency of purifying intentions as described by Az-Zarnuji can be seen as a philosophical correction to surface learning, which results in memorization without meaning. The right intention will change the motivation for learning from simply pursuing grades (superficial skills) to an effort to *taqarrub ilallah* (closeness to God), which is in line with the spirit of Deep Learning to achieve a deep understanding of concepts (Meaningful). By instilling pure intentions, modern education can ensure that the knowledge gained is not only mastered but also internalized and manifested in righteous deeds, thus balancing intellectual intelligence with spiritual intelligence (SQ). This is Az-Zarnuji's essential contribution in actualizing intention-based character education.

In practice, the values of purifying intentions can be internalized in the learning process through the approach of teacher role modeling, spiritual reflection, and character education. Teachers act as spiritual guides who instill the awareness that knowledge is a trust. Meanwhile, students need to be guided to reflect on their learning motivations so that they always remain within the corridor of sincerity. Thus, education not only produces knowledgeable individuals, but also those with pure souls and noble character.

In addition, purification of intention has an impact on the scientific ethos and academic culture. Right intention will give rise to consistent enthusiasm for learning, patience in facing difficulties, and humility towards knowledge. This is very important in the information age, where knowledge is often used for egoistic interests. Az-Zarnuji's thinking reminds us that true knowledge is that which leads humans to truth and wisdom. Thus, the urgency of purifying intentions is not only theological in nature but also becomes the foundation of academic ethics and scientific professionalism.

5. Synthesis: Purification of Intentions as the Foundation of Ethics and Epistemology in Islamic Education

From the results of the analysis, it can be concluded that the purification of intentions in Az-Zarnuji's view has two main functions: first, as a foundation of ethics in the pursuit of knowledge; second, as an epistemological basis for understanding the essence of knowledge. Ethically, the purification of intentions guides learning behavior to be in harmony with the values of sincerity, responsibility, and manners. Epistemologically, purification of intention is a prerequisite for achieving true and useful knowledge. Knowledge obtained without pure intention will not enlighten the heart, as Az-Zarnuji said that knowledge without action is futile, and action without right intention will not be accepted.

This concept shows that in Islamic education, the spiritual dimension cannot be separated from the intellectual process. Purification of intentions is not only an individual moral guideline, but also a philosophical framework for the development of civilized knowledge. In the modern context, this teaching can be the basis for building a holistic educational paradigm. This concept shows that in Islamic education, the spiritual dimension cannot be separated from the intellectual process. Purification of intentions is not only a guide for individual morality but also a philosophical framework for the development of civilized knowledge. In the modern context, this teaching can be the basis for building a holistic educational paradigm that combines spiritual, emotional, and intellectual intelligence (Alviyani et al., 2025).

In practice, this confirms that *tazkiyat an-niyyah* is the spiritual key to the success of contemporary educational initiatives such as Deep Learning in shaping Pancasila Student Profiles that are not only intelligent but also have integrity. Thus, the urgency of purifying intentions according to Az-Zarnuji is not merely a moral recommendation but also a philosophical foundation for the formation of a blessed scientific civilization.

The Relevance of Az-Zarnuji's Thoughts on Purifying Intentions to the Reality of Modern Islamic Education

1. Modern Islamic Education and the Crisis of Spiritual Orientation

Islamic education in the modern era faces serious challenges in the form of a crisis of values and spirituality. The shift in the educational paradigm from an orientation toward *tahdzib an-nafs* (purification of the

soul) to material achievement and academic competition has given rise to ethical problems and moral degradation. Phenomena such as academic dishonesty, plagiarism, intellectual corruption, and weak social responsibility show that modern education often loses its spiritual dimension. In this context, Az-Zarnuji's thoughts in *Ta'lim al-Muta'allim* offer a philosophical correction to the direction of education that is too worldly-oriented. Az-Zarnuji emphasizes that the success of education is not only measured by the breadth of knowledge, but also by the extent to which that knowledge brings blessings and closeness to Allah. He warns that knowledge obtained without purification of intention can actually be a source of arrogance and moral destruction. This idea is highly relevant for reflecting on the current state of Islamic education, which on the one hand has experienced technological and methodological advances, but on the other hand faces spiritual decline and a crisis of meaning. Purification of intentions, in Az-Zarnuji's view, is the key to restoring the spirit of Islamic education so that it remains rooted in the values of monotheism and manners.

In the framework of modern education, this concept can be understood as an effort to reorient the goals of education from merely mastering competencies to shaping the character and spirituality of students. Thus, Az-Zarnuji's idea is not only theological but also methodological: it offers a moral foundation for educational design that places the spiritual dimension at the core of the learning process (Alviyani et al., 2025).

2. The Dimension of Academic Ethics in Az-Zarnuji's Thought

One of the main relevancies of Az-Zarnuji's thought to the modern world of education is in the aspect of academic ethics. In *Ta'lim al-Muta'allim*, he emphasizes the importance of sincerity of intention and manners in seeking knowledge. For Az-Zarnuji, pure intentions will lead to proper academic behavior, such as honesty, humility, sincerity in learning, and respect for teachers. This principle is in line with the demands of modern education to uphold academic integrity amid rampant scientific ethical violations.

Academic ethical issues in modern universities often stem from the wrong learning orientation. When students pursue knowledge for the sake of a degree, social status, or position, they tend to neglect the values of honesty and responsibility. Az-Zarnuji's thinking provides a normative solution that the root of this problem is impure intentions. By instilling the concept of tazkiyat an-niyyah, students will have the awareness that knowledge is a trust that must be guarded with sincerity and moral responsibility.

In modern educational practice, the values taught by Az-Zarnuji can be integrated into academic character learning, for example, through instilling the values of scientific honesty, ethical responsibility, and appreciation for the learning process. Teachers and lecturers can exemplify sincerity by treating teaching as a form of worship, not merely a profession. Thus, the

purification of intentions serves as the foundation for the formation of an ethical and civilized academic culture.

3. The Relevance of Purifying Intentions to Character and Personality Formation

The concept of purifying intentions is also highly relevant to the character education agenda that is the focus of modern Islamic education. In contemporary education systems, character formation is often associated with universal values such as honesty, discipline, responsibility, and empathy. However, Az-Zarnuji places character building at its spiritual root, namely, sincerity of intention for the sake of Allah. He teaches that every educational activity, from reading and writing to discussion, must be based on the intention to seek Allah's pleasure, not merely to gain worldly recognition.

With pure intentions, the learning process will produce personalities that are *mutawadhi* (humble), *mujtahid* (diligent), and *mukhlis* (sincere). This principle is very relevant for building a modern Islamic education paradigm that not only produces intellectually intelligent graduates, but also morally and spiritually mature ones. The value of purifying intentions becomes a means of internalizing moral awareness deeply, not through coercion, but through self-reflection and spiritual habits.

In Islamic educational institutions, this concept can be applied through *tazkiyah* (purification of the soul) activities, such as reflecting on intentions before starting lessons, spiritual guidance, or *halaqah* (circle) for the formation of manners. Teachers not only act as conveyors of knowledge but also as moral guides who help students maintain purity of intention. Thus, education will produce *ulul albab* individuals who can integrate reason and heart in real life.

4. Integration of the Concept of Purification of Intentions with the Modern Education System

In the context of a modern education system that emphasizes rationality, efficiency, and cognitive achievement, Az-Zarnuji's ideas can be integrated through a holistic, spirituality-based educational approach. The concept of purifying intentions becomes the starting point for building an educational paradigm that balances cognitive, affective, and spiritual aspects. Modern Islamic education is not only to teach religious and scientific knowledge, but must also instill awareness of the purpose and meaning behind learning activities.

Az-Zarnuji teaches that knowledge that is not accompanied by the right intentions will lose its blessings. This is in line with the current educational world's need to foster meaningful learning that is spiritually and socially meaningful. Islamic educational institutions can implement the value of purifying intentions by emphasizing the integration of knowledge and values, for example, through an *adab*-based curriculum, spiritual reflection before academic activities, or service-learning activities that connect knowledge with community service.

In addition, the concept of purifying intentions can strengthen the maqāshid syarī'ah-based educational approach, which views the purpose of education as the preservation of religion, reason, soul, and morals. By making intention the main guide, the education system can be directed to produce individuals who are balanced between intellectuality and spirituality. In the midst of globalization and competition, the value of purifying intentions becomes a moral fortress so that Islamic education does not lose its direction and identity as a means of *taqarrub ilallah*.

5. Paradigm Transformation: From Knowledge as a Worldly Instrument to Knowledge as a Path to Worship

Az-Zarnuji's thinking is also relevant in building a paradigm shift in knowledge amid the secularization of modern education. Many education systems today place knowledge as an economic and social instrument without any sacred dimension. Az-Zarnuji reminds us that knowledge in Islam is part of worship and a manifestation of tawhid. Seeking knowledge with pure intentions means placing learning activities as a path to Allah, not merely a tool for achieving worldly success.

This paradigm shift is important to restore Islamic education to its essence, which is to shape civilized, knowledgeable individuals (*insan kāmil*). When the orientation of education shifts from spiritual to material, purifying intentions becomes the first step in restoring the sanctity of educational goals. In a global context, Az-Zarnuji's message can be used as the basis for developing Islamic education that is highly competitive but still rooted in the values of divinity and humanity.

The relevance of Az-Zarnuji's thinking in the modern context lies not only in the substance of his teachings but also in his methods. He emphasizes education as a process of *tahdzib al-nafs* (self-purification) and *tazkiyah al-qalb* (purification of the heart), which is in line with the principles of character education and spiritual intelligence in contemporary education. Thus, purification of intention is not merely a spiritual dogma, but a methodology for the formation of a complete human being that unites knowledge, morality, and devotion (Idris & El-Yunusi, 2025).

6. Synthesis: Actualization of Az-Zarnuji's Thoughts in Modern Islamic Education

Based on the results of the analysis, it can be concluded that Az-Zarnuji's thoughts on the purification of intentions have deep relevance to the reality of modern Islamic education. Amidst a moral and spiritual crisis, purification of intentions is a way to restore balance between the cognitive and spiritual aspects of the educational process. This concept can be used as a philosophical foundation for the development of Islamic education that is civilized, character-building, and oriented towards the blessings of knowledge.

By integrating the values of purifying intentions into the modern education system, it is hoped that a generation of scientists and educators will emerge who are not only academically competent but also sincere,

honest, and responsible for their knowledge. This is the true relevance of Az-Zarnuji's thoughts in guiding the world of education back to the true meaning of knowledge as a path to God and a means of creating benefits for humanity.

The application of the value of purifying intentions in educational practice to shape the character of students who are honest and worship-oriented

1. Conceptual Foundation: Purification of Intentions as the Core of Islamic Education

In *Ta'lim al-Muta'allim*, Az-Zarnuji emphasizes that the core of education is not only mastery of knowledge, but also purity of intention in seeking it. Intention (*an-niyyah*) is the root of deeds; if the intention is pure, then all learning activities will be considered worship and produce the blessings of knowledge (*barakat al-'ilm*). However, if the intention is tainted by worldly ambitions, then the knowledge gained will lose its spiritual value. This principle is an important foundation for the Islamic education system in shaping the character of students who are honest and worship-oriented.

According to Az-Zarnuji, purification of intention (*tazkiyat an-niyyah*) is not a momentary process, but a continuous spiritual development. It encompasses cognitive dimensions (understanding the purpose of seeking knowledge), affective dimensions (awareness of the heart to be sincere for Allah), and psychomotor dimensions (the manifestation of sincerity in academic and social behavior). In the context of modern education, this concept can be actualized as a character-building strategy that integrates spiritual values into all aspects of learning. Therefore, the application of purification of intention is essential to produce students who are not only intelligent, but also honest, trustworthy, and responsible for the knowledge they possess (Alviyani et al., 2025).

2. Purification of Intention in Educational Practice: From Philosophy to Implementation

The implementation of the value of purification of intentions in education can be carried out through three main areas: the curriculum system, pedagogical practices, and the culture of educational institutions.

First, in the area of curriculum, the value of purification of intentions can be integrated into the vision, mission, and objectives of Islamic education. The curriculum is not only oriented towards learning outcomes but also towards value outcomes. This integration aims to create Meaningful Learning in line with the spirit of national Deep Learning. Every subject, both general and religious, needs to include spiritual values, such as sincerity, responsibility, and awareness of worship. For example, in science lessons, teachers can instill the value that understanding nature is part of recognizing the greatness of Allah; in social studies lessons, teachers emphasize that knowledge must be used for the benefit of the people.

Second, in the pedagogical realm, teachers become the main actors who instill the value of purifying intentions. In *Ta'lim al-Muta'allim*, Az-Zarnuji

emphasizes the importance of sincere teachers because the sincerity of teachers will rub off on students. Teachers who begin teaching with the intention of worship will create a spiritual learning atmosphere. Practices such as reciting prayers before and after lessons, linking knowledge to values of faith, and guiding students to purify their intentions before learning are concrete examples of the internalization of this value.

Third, in the realm of school culture, the value of purifying intentions can be realized through habit formation, role modeling, and spiritual activities. An educational environment that fosters a religious atmosphere will help students maintain sincerity. For example, *tazkiyah al-nafs* (purification of the soul) activities, halaqah adab, reflection on intentions before exams, or the habit of *dzikir al-ilmi* (prayer for useful knowledge). Thus, purification of intentions is not only a theoretical discourse, but a culture that is rooted in daily educational activities.

3. Worship Orientation in the Learning Process

The value of purifying intentions also gives rise to a worship orientation in every learning activity. According to Az-Zarnuji, seeking knowledge with the intention of pleasing Allah makes the entire learning process a form of worship, whether it be reading, writing, discussing, or researching. This view emphasizes that education in Islam is inseparable from devotion to God. Learning is not merely an intellectual process, but also a spiritual one.

In educational practice, the orientation of worship can be actualized by instilling the awareness that every effort to increase knowledge is a form of *taqarrub ilallah* (approaching Allah). Teachers can instill the principle that every academic task, if intended for Allah, is rewarded. Conversely, learning activities that are not intended for Allah only produce worldly knowledge without blessings.

This concept has a major impact on learning motivation. Students with the intention of worship will not easily become discouraged, because their goal is not only academic grades, but also divine pleasure. They will be diligent, patient, and ethical in their studies. In the context of modern education, this orientation towards worship is the highest manifestation of Mindful Learning, which maintains the spirit of learning while protecting against academic stress. By directing one's intentions towards Allah, learning activities automatically become Deep Learning because their meaning is transcendent (Hidayatulloh et al., 2024).

4. Transformation of Academic Culture through Exemplary Behavior and Habituation

The application of the purification of intentions also requires a transformation of academic culture in educational institutions. A healthy academic culture is not only measured by scientific productivity, but also by honesty, humility, and spiritual values inherent in the learning process. Az-Zarnuji gives an example that a teacher should be a *qudwah hasanah* (good role model) in maintaining intentions. He teaches that a sincere

teacher will radiate calmness and blessings in the assembly of knowledge. This cultural transformation can be done through the following strategies: First, the spiritual exemplary behavior of teachers. Teachers begin learning with prayer and convey spiritual motivation. Second, the habit of reflecting on intentions. Students are invited to write or express their intentions for learning before starting the semester or academic activities. Third, integrated religious activities. Such as halaqah niyyah, recitation of the etiquette of seeking knowledge, and guidance on sincerity for teachers and students. Fourth, character-based evaluation. In addition to assessing academic results, schools also assess aspects of attitude, honesty, and discipline.

Through this approach, the value of purifying intentions is not only normative but also becomes a value system that shapes the habits and personalities of the entire school community. An academic culture oriented towards worship will create a peaceful, collaborative, and blessed learning atmosphere.

5. Synthesis: The Value of Purification of Intentions as a Pillar of Educational Ethics

Based on an analysis of Az-Zarnuji's thinking, the application of the value of purification of intentions in educational practice has a strategic function in building an ethical and spiritually oriented Islamic education system. This value not only shapes individual personalities but also strengthens the collective morality of educational institutions.

In the context of modern education, which tends to be trapped in a materialistic orientation, purification of intention becomes a principle of spiritual liberation: freeing education from worldly ambitions towards the meaning of worship. This makes tazkiyat an-niyyah an ethical and spiritual pillar that is necessary to support the implementation of Deep Learning and the strengthening of national character. Students with the right intentions will display honest and responsible academic behavior; teachers with pure intentions will educate with compassion and sincerity; and worship-oriented educational institutions will produce knowledgeable, civilized, and integrity-filled individuals (Hidayatulloh et al., 2024).

Thus, the value of purifying intentions is not only a classical teaching from Az-Zarnuji, but a philosophical solution for contemporary Islamic education. Through its application, education can return to its true purpose: to produce knowledgeable individuals who worship through knowledge, not individuals who use knowledge merely as a tool to achieve worldly goals.

Conclusion

Based on the results of an in-depth qualitative study of Az-Zarnuji's thoughts in *Ta'lim al-Muta'allim*, it can be concluded that intention (*an-niyyah*) is a spiritual and ethical foundation that greatly determines the quality of the

process of seeking knowledge. A sincere intention for the sake of Allah, to eliminate ignorance, and to revive religion is the source of the blessings of knowledge and determines the value of worship in all learning activities, while its purification (*tazkiyat an-niyyah*) functions as an ethical-epistemological mechanism to distinguish useful knowledge (*'ilm nāfi'*) from knowledge that leads astray and shapes the character of learners with integrity. The purity of intention is influenced by various internal and external factors, such as spiritual condition, purity of heart from *riya* and *hubb al-dunya*, overly pragmatic learning orientation, and an educational environment that does not foster good manners and teacher role models. Therefore, Az-Zarnuji emphasizes the importance of self-reflection and the role of educators in maintaining the clarity of the learner's intention. His thoughts are also very relevant in the context of modern education, where the concept of *tazkiyat an-niyyah* becomes a spiritual and ethical pillar that supports the implementation of Deep Learning so that learning can take place in a meaningful and mindful manner. Thus, Islamic education can restore its spiritual orientation, prevent academic moral degradation, and produce knowledgeable individuals who are whole (*insan kamil*) and worship-oriented.

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