



Al-Muhajirin International Conference

Fakhruddin Ar-Razi's thoughts on moral education in Tafsir Al-Kabir: A conceptual study and contemporary implementation

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Abstract

This article explores Fakhruddin Ar-Razi's perspectives on moral education as articulated in *Tafsir al-Kabir*, employing a qualitative descriptive-analytical approach through literature review. The study delves into Ar-Razi's conceptualization of moral education and its contemporary implications. Data were collected from *Tafsir al-Kabir* and relevant supporting literature. The analysis outlines key ethical principles and pedagogical elements in Ar-Razi's interpretation, while also assessing their applicability in modern educational contexts. The findings reveal that Ar-Razi's thought emphasizes the integration of intellectual and moral dimensions in character formation, grounded in Qur'anic values. Furthermore, the study identifies both the challenges and the potential for implementing Ar-Razi's moral teachings in today's educational systems, highlighting their significant contribution to character development in the modern era.

Keywords: Fakhruddin Ar-Razi; Tafsir al-Kabir; Moral education

INTRODUCTION

Moral education plays a crucial role in human life, especially in today's increasingly complex and dynamic society (Ajeng, 2024; Shah & Asghar, 2023). In this context, morality is not only associated with individual behavior, but also shapes social character, which is essential for fostering harmony in communal living. Amidst the tide of globalization that transforms societal values (Mialiawati, 2020), moral education becomes an urgent necessity to develop individuals who possess not only intellectual acumen but also sound ethical values (Abubakar, 2024). This is particularly relevant given the moral challenges faced by modern society, including rampant individualism, materialism, and the phenomenon of value disorientation across various strata of life (Yuminah & Si, 2024).

Within the Islamic tradition, *tafsir* (Qur'anic exegesis) plays a significant role as a principal source for understanding the teachings of the Qur'an (Akhyar, Batubara, & Deliani, 2024). *Tafsir* not only provides explanations of theological and juridical precepts, but also offers practical moral guidance for everyday conduct, underscoring

the centrality of virtuous character. Hence, *tafsīr* holds profound relevance in the discourse on moral education, as the Qur'anic teachings embedded within it present clear directives on living with integrity, mutual respect, and a sense of responsibility toward others (Zuhri, 2021; Sule & Mainiyo, 2024).

One of the eminent intellectuals in the Islamic scholarly tradition is Fakhruddin al-Rāzī, who is widely recognized for his encyclopedic exegesis *Tafsīr al-Kabīr* (Baharuddin et al., 2018). Al-Rāzī employed a remarkably comprehensive approach in his interpretation of the Qur'an, integrating theological, philosophical, and practical dimensions. In *Tafsīr al-Kabīr*, he not only offered meticulous explanations of Qur'anic verses but also addressed various dimensions of human life, including the cultivation of moral character (Al Mubarak, 2024). His ideas have become a key reference in studies of moral education, demonstrating his belief that good moral character is not merely the result of instruction, but a manifestation of deep spiritual comprehension rooted in Islamic teachings (Khoir & Ghozali, 2023).

A pivotal component of al-Rāzī's thought in *Tafsīr al-Kabīr* is the interplay between faith (*īmān*) and morality (*akhlāq*). He contended that genuine faith inevitably manifests in a person's actions and behavior. Accordingly, moral education is not limited to the transmission of normative ethics, but involves the cultivation of character through the internalization of religious values (Rizki et al., 2024). Hence, al-Rāzī's exegetical work is highly pertinent to the framework of moral education, as it not only explicates Qur'anic teachings but also provides the philosophical foundations for moral pedagogy applicable to both social life and formal education.

Despite the enduring relevance of al-Rāzī's contributions, integrating his concepts into contemporary educational settings presents numerous challenges. In this digital era marked by the rapid evolution of technology and information, moral values are often marginalized or eroded by external influences (Al Murshidi et al., 2024). Modern moral education thus requires an adaptive and innovative paradigm that remains faithful to the foundational principles of the Islamic tradition (Suri, 2022). Consequently, it becomes imperative to further examine how al-Rāzī's moral philosophy may be contextualized and implemented in today's educational landscapes, including formal institutions such as schools and universities, as well as in everyday communal life.

This study aims to analyze the thoughts of Fakhruddin al-Rāzī on moral education as articulated in *Tafsīr al-Kabīr*. Through this inquiry, it seeks to provide a deeper understanding of al-Rāzī's educational concepts and explore their potential applicability to the development of moral education in the modern world. Additionally, the research endeavors to present the relevance and implementation of al-Rāzī's views in contemporary contexts by identifying both the challenges and the opportunities for instilling Islamic moral values in modern society (Nafi et al., 2023; Dan et al., 2024).

The significance of this study lies in its potential to contribute to the development of moral education grounded in classical Islamic thought. It also offers an alternative framework for moral pedagogy that responds more effectively to the demands of contemporary society—demands which often diverge from traditional values. By engaging with the moral philosophy of Fakhruddin al-Rāzī, the study aspires to propose meaningful solutions to current educational challenges and to support the advancement of a more comprehensive and value-based Islamic educational paradigm.

DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī's Concept of Moral Education

Fakhruddin al-Rāzī, a prominent *mufasssir* in the Islamic intellectual tradition, made a significant contribution to the development of moral education through his magnum opus, *Tafsīr al-Kabīr* (Mukrimun & Misman, 2023). In this exegetical work, al-Rāzī explored multiple dimensions of Islamic teachings related to morality—not only from theological and legal perspectives, but also in the context of moral pedagogy and character development. His concept of moral education is grounded in the belief that good character (*akhlāq al-karīmah*) is a direct reflection of sound faith (*īmān ṣaḥīḥ*), and the two are inseparable (Yuriza & Maulida, 2024). Al-Rāzī emphasized the inextricable link between religious teachings, particularly those enshrined in the Qur'an, and the development of noble conduct in everyday life.

1. Honesty (*ṣidq*) — Al-Aḥzāb: 70–71

Honesty is identified as a foundational virtue for every individual, especially students. It should serve as the cornerstone of behavior regardless of context—whether at home, in school, or within society. Honesty in learning encompasses integrity during examinations, commitment to ethical learning practices, and sincerity in social interactions. Al-Rāzī refers to the Qur'anic verses in *Sūrat al-Aḥzāb*, 70–71, to stress the importance of truthful speech and righteous actions:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا اتَّقُوا اللَّهَ وَقُولُوا قَوْلًا سَدِيدًا (٧٠) يُصْلِحْ لَكُمْ أَعْمَالَكُمْ وَيَغْفِرْ لَكُمْ ذُنُوبَكُمْ ۗ وَمَنْ يُطِيعِ اللَّهَ
وَرَسُولَهُ فَقَدْ فَازَ فَوْزًا عَظِيمًا (٧١)

"O you who believe! Be mindful of Allah, and speak words of appropriate justice. He will rectify your deeds and forgive your sins. And whoever obeys Allah and His Messenger has certainly achieved a great triumph."

According to al-Rāzī, these verses emphasize two principal dimensions: speech and conduct. A believer is expected to speak truthfully in accordance with fact, not speculation, and to act in a manner reflecting virtues such as helpfulness and propriety. He asserted that those who fulfill these qualities are classified as *ṣāliḥīn*—the righteous—whose sins are forgiven and whose rewards are paradise (Al-Rāzī, *Maḥāṭib al-Ghayb*, vol. 25:186).

As a reinforcement of al-Rāzī's views, the Prophet Muḥammad (peace be upon him) is reported to have said:

"Leave what makes you doubt for what does not make you doubt. Verily, truthfulness brings peace of mind, and falsehood brings doubt." (Al-Tirmidhī, *Sunan al-Tirmidhī*, 194)

This aligns with the perspective of al-Fārābī, who defined happiness not as transient pleasure, but as the attainment of lasting virtues such as honesty (Faiz, 2024, p. 92).

Al-Ghazālī, moreover, elaborated on three types of honesty (*ṣidq*):

1. **Truthfulness in speech**, ensuring that what is said aligns with reality.
2. **Truthfulness in intention and will**, where sincerity is directed solely to Allah. If intentions are tainted by personal motives, the essence of honesty is lost.
3. **Truthfulness in resolve** (*‘azm*), such as sincerely intending to give charity after success. If such resolve is marked by hesitation or contradiction, it fails the test of honesty (Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā’ ‘Ulūm al-Dīn*, vol. 4:389).

2. Simplicity (*basāṭah*) — Al-Furqān: 63

Simplicity represents the second essential value in a student's moral foundation. It refers to moderation in all aspects—dress, behavior, consumption, and lifestyle—avoiding excess, particularly in tertiary needs. This principle is grounded in *Sūrat al-Furqān*, verse 63:

وَعِبَادُ الرَّحْمَنِ الَّذِينَ يَمْشُونَ عَلَى الْأَرْضِ هَوْنًا وَإِذَا خَاطَبَهُمُ الْجَاهِلُونَ قَالُوا سَلَامًا

"And the servants of the Most Merciful are those who walk upon the earth humbly, and when the ignorant address them, they say words of peace."

Al-Rāzī interpreted this verse as a call for humility and composure. He warned against arrogance, harshness, or pride in social demeanor (*Maḥāṭib al-Ghayb*, vol. 24:480). Elsewhere, the Qur'an also cautions that:

"Indeed, the wasteful are brothers of the devils, and the devil is ever ungrateful to his Lord." (*al-Isrā'*: 27)

Supporting this, the Prophet (peace be upon him) said:

عَنْ أَبِي هُرَيْرَةَ قَالَ: قَالَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ: انْظُرُوا إِلَى مَنْ أَسْفَلَ مِنْكُمْ، وَلَا تَنْظُرُوا إِلَى مَنْ هُوَ فَوْقَكُمْ، فَهُوَ أَجْدَرُ أَنْ لَا تَزْدَرُوا نِعْمَةَ اللَّهِ

"Look to those who are beneath you, not to those above you, for that is more likely to prevent you from belittling the blessings of Allah." (*Musnad al-Ṭiyālīsī*, vol. 1:262)

3. Patience (*ṣabr*) — Ash-Shūrā: 43

Patience is considered the third core value that must be cultivated within students. It must be taught, instilled, and continuously practiced, particularly when confronting tests in school, university, or in life more broadly. Often, individuals fail to exhibit patience in the face of trials, even resorting to unethical means. In his book *Positive Thinking Therapy*, Dr. Ibrahim El-Fiky emphasized the importance of shifting our mindset from asking "Why is this problem happening?" to "What is the solution to this problem?"—a subtle yet profoundly different approach (Elfiky, 2009, p. 223).

The importance of patience is underlined in the following verse:

وَلَنَبْلُوَنَّكُمْ بِشَيْءٍ مِّنَ الْخَوْفِ وَالْجُوعِ وَنَقْصٍ مِّنَ الْأَمْوَالِ وَالْأَنْفُسِ وَالثَّمَرَاتِ ۗ وَبَشِّرِ الصَّابِرِينَ، الَّذِينَ إِذَا أَصَابَتْهُمُ مُصِيبَةٌ قَالُوا إِنَّا لِلَّهِ وَإِنَّا إِلَيْهِ رَاجِعُونَ

"And We will surely test you with something of fear and hunger and a loss of wealth and lives and fruits. But give good tidings to the patient, those who, when disaster strikes them, say: 'Indeed we belong to Allah, and indeed to Him we will return.'"

In his commentary, al-Rāzī explains that the perfection of the *sharī'ah* (Islamic law) depends on the perfection of divine blessings, which can only be achieved through gratitude. Allah gives favors first, then tests, so that humans become both grateful and patient. Faith, according to classical Islamic scholars, consists of two halves: patience and gratitude (*al-īmān niṣṣuhu ṣabr wa niṣṣuhu shukr*) (Al-Rāzī, *Maḥāṭib al-Ghayb*, vol. 4:128).

Al-Rāzī also emphasized the wisdom behind Allah announcing trials beforehand—to allow believers to prepare themselves, thereby preventing fear and promoting vigilance. This vigilance, especially in students, is a trait of believers, and showcases the resilience of Muslims in the face of hardship. Such patience serves as a

da‘wah (invitation) to non-Muslims, reflecting the beauty of Islam and its spiritual strength (Al-Munāwī, *Fayḍ al-Qadīr*, vol. 4:285).

4. Compassion (*rahmah*)

Compassion is no less essential than other virtues in the life of a student. It is the foundation for creating harmony in interpersonal relations, especially within educational settings where positive interaction supports more conducive learning environments. Al-Rāzī draws upon the verse:

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ سَيَجْعَلُ لَهُمُ الرَّحْمَنُ وُدًّا

“Indeed, those who believe and do righteous deeds—The Most Merciful will appoint for them affection.” (Maryam: 96)

Al-Rāzī interpreted this verse to mean that *rahmah* (affection) arises not by request but as a natural response to one’s character. Like fear or anger, it emerges based on one’s behavior and interpersonal interactions. Therefore, he asserted that to earn love and compassion from others, one must consistently do good. Goodness leads to affection, both from people and from Allah.

The Prophet Muḥammad (peace be upon him) also affirmed:

“Love others, and you will be loved. Show compassion, and you will receive compassion.”

Furthermore, those who act with compassion gain both worldly respect and reward in the hereafter (Al-Rāzī, *Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb*, vol. 27:564).

Contemporary Implementation of Al-Rāzī's Thought on Moral Education

The application of al-Rāzī’s thoughts on moral education in today’s context—both formal and informal—presents various challenges. One of the primary obstacles is the rapid pace of socio-cultural change, particularly due to globalization and technological advancement, which often introduces values that clash with Islamic ethical norms (El-Mubarak & Hassan, 2021). Moreover, the formal education system tends to prioritize cognitive and practical skills, often sidelining moral development.

Nevertheless, there are significant opportunities to apply al-Rāzī’s concepts using interdisciplinary approaches that integrate religious instruction with psychology, moral philosophy, and the social sciences. In this way, moral education extends beyond doctrinal teaching and becomes part of comprehensive character formation (Dawam, Sajari, & Jamil, n.d.).

In formal institutions such as schools and universities, the integration of al-Rāzī’s moral philosophy can be achieved through curriculum design that embeds Islamic values into both subjects and co-curricular activities. In schools, Islamic religious education can be contextualized to emphasize values such as honesty, simplicity, patience, and compassion in daily behavior. At the university level, seminars, workshops, or extracurricular programs can cultivate ethical reasoning and value-based decision-making among students.

Outside formal education, the broader community can also benefit from al-Rāzī’s ethical teachings. Family life, professional environments, and communal settings can

all serve as platforms to embody values such as cooperation, respect, and integrity. These values, when implemented, foster social cohesion rooted in justice and empathy.

The media—both mass and digital—also plays a pivotal role. Platforms such as social media, video-based learning tools, and online moral education resources can disseminate al-Rāzī's ethical framework to a broader audience. By leveraging these tools, Islamic values can reach younger generations effectively and meaningfully (Mokodenseho et al., 2024).

In essence, while challenges persist in actualizing al-Rāzī's moral vision within modern education, opportunities abound for its contextualization. The synergy of technology, interdisciplinary education, and media outreach provides a promising avenue for reviving Qur'anic-based moral education in today's rapidly evolving world.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the moral educational thought of Fakhruddin al-Rāzī, as presented in *Tafsīr al-Kabīr*, remains highly relevant in addressing the challenges of contemporary education. Al-Rāzī proposed that moral education must be based on a profound understanding of Qur'anic teachings and rooted in the integration of moral and intellectual elements in shaping individual character.

One of the main challenges in applying moral education today is the rapid social and cultural transformation, as well as the dominance of academic and pragmatic competencies in formal education, which often undermines the role of moral character formation. In this context, al-Rāzī's moral philosophy offers a compelling framework for counterbalancing the deficiencies of modern educational systems.

Despite these challenges, there are many opportunities to implement al-Rāzī's ideas by combining religious values with interdisciplinary approaches. This includes integrating religious instruction with psychology, social science, and ethics, while also utilizing digital technology and social media to disseminate moral values more widely and effectively.

Al-Rāzī emphasized that good morals are not the result of theoretical instruction alone but stem from internalizing divine values and practicing them in everyday life. Honesty, simplicity, patience, and compassion are not merely theoretical ideals but must be reflected in personal conduct, interpersonal relationships, and communal life. In al-Rāzī's view, these values embody the essence of Qur'anic ethics and function as instruments for nurturing human integrity.

Ultimately, al-Rāzī's contributions make a significant impact on the development of a value-based character education model that goes beyond normative instruction. His framework encourages the formation of morally conscious individuals capable of embodying and applying Islamic moral values. Consequently, his thought remains a crucial resource in constructing a holistic Islamic education system—one that is spiritually grounded, intellectually robust, and socially transformative.

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