

EDUCATION AND CHARACTER BUILDING : Ethical Aspects of Learning From al-Zarnūjī's Ta'Lim al-Muta'allim

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Abstract: Character building is important for every Muslim as the Prophet Muhammad SAW was sent to perfect the character (*akhlāq*). An attempt to instilling good characters, Islamic education should focus on two main issues, i.e. the content of knowledge and the methodology for imparting the knowledge. Muslim scholars have proposed the concept of knowledge in Islamic education. One of them is Imam al-Zarnūjī. He developed the basic principles of education in Islam and his teaching methodology which has been widely used in educational institutions and learning in the Muslim world. This article examines the ethical aspects of learning from al-Zarnūjī's monumental work, *Ta'lim al-Muta'allim Tariq al-Ta'allum*, including intention (*niyah*), seriousness (*jidd*), respect (*ta'zim*), and trust in Allah (*tawakkul*). Using the method of content analysis, this study argues that according to al-Zarnūjī, knowledge is a means for character building. The ethical aspect of learning as proposed by al-Zarnūjī is significant for the advancement and perfection of both individual and the society in this world and the Hereafter. Thus, teaching and learning in Islam put emphasis on knowledge understanding, ethical values and character building to produce good human beings (*al-insān al-sālih*).

Keywords: Al-Zarnūjī, Islamic education, character building, ethics, *akhlāq*, *Ta'lim al-Muta'allim*

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Introduction

ISLAM has brought about many developments in the society including the system of education. Islamic education system is spread out through interaction with different cultures. In every

Muslim community, including Southeast Asia – particularly Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand and Brunei Darussalam, Islamic teachings are developed based on the contributions of classical Muslim scholars' methodology and curriculum.¹ It is arguably true that classical Muslim scholars have contributed significantly to the development and formulation of basic principles of the Islamic education.² According to Dzilo, the theories of Islamic education system was developed immediately after the era of Prophet Muhammad and somehow it survived from many turmoil of the time, colonialism, and most importantly it is still operational in a majority of Muslim countries.³

The traditional Islamic education system has its influence in responding contemporary challenges. In Islamic theory, knowledge is integrated and perceived as a connecting line between the past and the present.⁴ Thus, even though it has been over the ages, we still can find extensive resources of books and treatises by classical and medieval Muslim scholars.⁵ These classical books and treatises in the Malay terminology are known as *Kitab Kuning*.⁶ In particular, Muslim and modern Western scholars are very much interested in learning *Ta'lim al-Muta'allim Tarīq al-Ta'allum* – the work of Tajuddin Nu'man bin Ibrahim bin al-Khalil al-Zarnūjī or Imam al-Zarnūjī for short. It

¹J. Mark Halstead, "An Islamic Concept of Education," *Comparative Education* 40, no. 4 (November 2004): 517–529.

²J. Mark Halstead, "Islamic Values: A Distinctive Framework for Moral Education?," *Journal of Moral Education* 36, no. 3 (September 2007): 283–296.

³H. Dzilo, "The Concept of 'Islamization of Knowledge' and Its Philosophical Implications," *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 23, no. 3 (2012): 247–256.

⁴F. Rosenthal, *Knowledge Triumphant: The Concept of Knowledge in Medieval Islam* (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2007).

⁵O. Bakar, *Classification of Knowledge in Islam: A Study in Islamic Philosophies of Science* (Cambridge, UK: The Islamic Text Society, 1998).

⁶Martin van Bruinessen, "Pesantren and Kitab Kuning: Continuity and Change in a Tradition of Religious Learning," in *Ethnological Bernica: Texts from the Islands: Oral and Written Traditions of Indonesia and the Malay World*, ed. W. Marshal, vol. 4 (Berne, Switzerland: University of Berne, 1994), 121–145.

has been extensively studied and applied in the Islamic schools (*pesantren*), particularly, in Indonesia.⁷

According to Nakosteen⁸ and Totah⁹, *Ta'lim al-Muta'allim* was the best-known work in the field of Islamic education. The author, Imam al-Zarnūjī, was considered as one of the classical Islamic educational philosophers who lived during the Abbasid caliphate – between the 12th and 13th centuries (circa 620 CE), and passed away in 1243 CE.¹⁰ In his treatise, al-Zarnūjī formulated principles in teaching and learning for both the teacher (*al-mu'allim*) and the student (*al-muta'allim*) who face challenges in applying the knowledge they acquired. In response to the educational crisis at that time, al-Zarnūjī proposed constructs and guidelines for the right methods of learning combining the rational scientific thinking (*'aql*) and religious morality (*naql*).

Therefore, by analyzing this specific classical written heritage of Islamic scholarly work, it is hoped that it could serve as a source of guidance for developing Islamic education principles especially in the ethical aspects of teaching and learning. Specifically, this paper aims to find out how al-Zarnūjī's concept of ethical aspects of learning can contribute to character building in the contemporary education. It is expected to develop further the concept of Islamization of knowledge in facing modern educational issues, such as globalization and Westernization.

Ta'lim al-Muta'allim and Division of Knowledge

Ta'lim al-Muta'allim Ṭarīq al-Ta'allum contains specific principles for studying and learning. Each chapter emphasizes

⁷M. Afandi, *The Method of Muslim Learning as Illustrated in Al-Zarnūjī's Ta'lim Al-Muta'allim Ṭarīq Al-Ta'allum* (Montreal, Quebec, Canada: McGill University, 1993).

⁸M. Nakosteen, *History of Islamic Origins of Western Education AD 800-1350* (Boulder: University of Colorado Press, 1964).

⁹K. A. Totah, *The Contribution of the Arabs to Education*. New York: AMS Press (New York: AMS Press, 1972).

¹⁰C. Gilliot, "Introduction," in *Education and Learning in the Early Islamic World*, ed. C. Gilliot and L. I. Conrad (London, England: Ashgate, 2012), xiii–lx.

the development of the soul as well as the rational mind. This book implies that the objective of Islamic education is to keep a balance in the learning process, which in the end is projected to generate human wisdom and high ethical standards in the society.¹¹ *Ta'lim al-Muta'allim* proposed recommendations in teaching and learning to maximize the outcomes and put the knowledge into practice.¹² The main focus of the book is the good moral upbringing of students in Islamic educational institutions.

In general, *Ta'lim al-Muta'llim Tarīq al-Ta'allum*¹³ contains 13 chapters: (1) The Nature and Merit of Knowledge and Learning, (2) The Purpose of Study, (3) The Choices in Learning, (4) Respecting Knowledge and Those Who Posses It, (5) Earnestness, Perseverance, and Assiduity, (6) The Beginning of Study, the Amount, and Its Organization, (7) Relying on God, (8) The Time for the Acquisition of Knowledge, (9) Helpfulness and Good Advice, (10) Useful Means for the Attainment of Knowledge, (11) Abstinence During the Pursuit of Knowledge, (12) Memory and Forgetfulness, and (13) One's Livelihood and One's Life.

From above-mentioned chapters, the concepts proposed by Imam al-Zarnūjī mainly facilitate the development of moral values in the students which accommodate a good academic

¹¹Miftachul Huda et al., "Philosophical Investigation of Al-Zarnūjī's *Ta'lim Al-Muta'allim*: Strengthening Ethical Engagement into Teaching and Learning Miftachul Huda, Kamarul Azmi Jasmi, Ahmad Kailani Mohamed, Wan Hassan Wan Embong and Jimaain Safar," *Social Science* 11, no. 22 (2016): 5516–5519; Miftachul Huda et al., "Al-Zarnūjī's Concept of Knowledge ('Ilm)," *SAGE Open* 6, no. 3 (September 2016): 2158244016666885.

¹²G. E. von Grunebaum and Theodora M. Abel, *Instruction of The Student: The Method of Learning* (New York: King's Crown Press, 1974); Philip K. Hitti, "Review of the Book *Ta'lim Al-Muta'allim Tarīq Al-Ta'allum* [Instruction of the Student: Method of Learning] Translated with an Introduction by G. E. von Grunebaum & T. M. Abel," *Speculum* 23, no. 2 (April 1, 1948): 289–290.

¹³Burhān al-Dīn Al-Zarnūjī, *Instruction of the Student: The Method of Learning [Ta'lim Al-Muta'allim Tarīq Al-Ta'allum]*, trans. G. E. von Grunebaum and Theodora M. Abel, Revised Edition. (New York: King's Crown Press, Revised Edition © Starlacth Press, 2003).

atmosphere. The principles could be applied in today's teaching and learning processes from the global perspective. In contrast, the education conception developed by the West is free from religious values which are why inculcating religious values are considered necessary. According to al-Attas,¹⁴ the modern world neglects the physical sciences of religious values while Muslims should integrate both rational sciences (*'aqli*) and religious sciences (*naqli*) in the practical of the education. Therefore, al-Zarnūjī¹⁵ recommended every Muslim to possess both kinds of knowledge for the benefits of society.

In chapter one is about the nature and merit of knowledge and learning, for instance, al-Zarnūjī quoted the saying of Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥasan Abū 'Abdallāh:

Learn! For learning are an adornment for one who possesses it, a virtue and a prelude to every praiseworthy action. The Profit of each day is increased by the way of [your] learning and swimming in the seas of beneficial knowledge. Give yourself up to the study of jurisprudence, for it is the best guide to piety and the fear of God, and it is the straightest path achieving the ultimate goal. It is the milestone leading to the ways of proper guidance; it is the fortress that saves one from all hardship. Indeed, one godly person versed in jurisprudence is more powerful against Satan than a thousand [ordinary] worshippers.¹⁶

According to al-Zarnūjī, knowledge can be divided into one which is obliged to be sought by all Muslims (*farḍ 'ayn*) and second which is a collective duty (*farḍ kifāyah*) for Muslim community (*ummah*). The former covers *tawḥīd* (Islamic theology), *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence) and *akhlāq* (Islamic ethics); and the latter represented by sciences like medicine and astronomy. Based on Imam al-Zarnūjī's conception, knowledge impacts human characteristics. For that reason, al-Zarnūjī emphasizes the character building in the process of education, which aims to transform the personality of students.

¹⁴Syed M. Naquib Al-Attas, *The Meaning and Experience of Happiness in Islam* (Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia: International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization, 1993).

¹⁵Al-Zarnūjī, *Instruction of the Student*.

¹⁶Ibid., 3.

Al-Zarnūjī¹⁷ believed that every Muslim is mandatory to learn the science of ethics in order to enable to distinguish between harmful and destructive behaviors to itself and the society. Ethics is important in education as it promotes good characters in the students during the learning process. Today, lack of ethics has become a major concern in higher educational institutions. Both lecturers and students, for instance, have violated the ethics of data collection. The phenomena of plagiarism, copying, and cheating during examinations have become common practices at universities.¹⁸ As a result, the quality of education has lower standards.¹⁹

From the Islamic perspective, acquiring knowledge must be socially and ethically reliable. This will keep a balanced society.²⁰ Hence, al-Zarnūjī²¹ emphasizes ethical aspects at every level of education. This ethical foundation of education is central to al-

¹⁷Al-Zarnūjī, *Instruction of the Student*.

¹⁸I. L. Clark, "Writing Centres and Plagiarism," in *Perspectives on Plagiarism and Intellectual Property in a Postmodern World*, ed. L. Buranen and A. M. Roy (Albany: State University of New York, 1999), 155–170; S. C. Simmons, "Competing Notions of Authorship: A Historical Look at Students and Textbooks on Plagiarism and Cheating," in *Perspectives on Plagiarism and Intellectual Property in a Postmodern World*, ed. L. Buranen and A. M. Roy (Albany: State University of New York, 1999), 41–54; M. Stover and K. Kelly, "Institutional Response to Plagiarism in Online Classes: Policy, Prevention, and Detection," in *Conference Proceedings* (presented at the In 18supthsup Annual Conference on Distance Teaching and Learning, Madison: University of Wisconsin, 2002), 397–403.

¹⁹M. G. Bruce, "The Standards Debate Across the Atlantic," *Educational Leadership* 48, no. 5 (1991): 31–33; A. Hartnett and M. Naish, "Democracy, Teachers and the Struggle for Education: An Essay in the Political Economy of Teacher Education," *Curriculum Studies* 1, no. 3 (1993): 335–348; United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, *Teachers and Educational Quality: Monitoring Global Needs for 2015* (Montreal, Quebec, Canada: UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2006).

²⁰Daud A. Mustafa, Hashir A. Abdulsalam, and Jibrail Bin Yusuf, "Islamic Economics and the Relevance of Al-Qawā'id Al-Fiqhiyyah," *SAGE Open* 6, no. 4 (October 1, 2016): 2158244016671374.

²¹Al-Zarnūjī, *Instruction of the Student*.

Zarnūjī's concept of knowledge and is imperative in today's teaching and learning process.²²

However, al-Zarnūjī's contribution is not distinct from what other scholars had been done and it is in line with a traditional current. Due to the problem of knowledge, his attitude is typical concerns on religious factors, which often derived from the wisdom and the experience of his ancestors. In terms of the classification of subjects of learning, he follows the footsteps of several traditional scholars who existed before he did, like al-Gazālī (450-505/1058/1111), al-Hujwirī (d. 567/1171), al-Bagdādī (d. 463/1071), Ibn Bajjah (d. 533/1138), and Ibn Hazm (d. 456/1064). After all, those names are hardly found in *Ta'lim al-Muta'allim*.

Theoretical Conception of Education and Character Building

Islam emphasizes the importance of education and character building as a foundation on a daily basis. From An Islamic perspective, education is often defined from three different aspects reflecting the process of each dimension. They are: (1) *tarbiyyah* – the process of education emphasizing on physical and intellectual development of an individual; (2) *ta'dīb* – the process of education stressing on nurturing good human beings with noble codes of conducts and just society; and (3) *ta'lim* – the process of education accentuating the teaching and learning methodology.²³ Based on these concepts, Islam has generated

²²Huda et al., "Philosophical Investigation"; Huda et al., "Al-Zarnūjī's Concept of Knowledge ('Ilm)"; Miftachul Huda and Mulyadhi Kartanegara, "Islamic Spiritual Character Values of Al-Zarnūjī's Ta'lim Al-Muta'allim," *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences* 6, no. 4 (July 3, 2015): 229; Miftachul Huda and Mulyadhi Kartanegara, "Ethical Foundation of Character Education in Indonesia: Reflections on Integration between Ahmad Dahlan and Al-Zarnūjī," in *Proceedings* (presented at the International Conference of Malay Muslim Prominent Scholars (Persidangan Antarabangsa Tokoh Ulama Melayu Nusantara – PanTUMN), Kolej Universiti Islam Antarabangsa Selangor, 2015), 404–420.

²³Raudlotul Firdaus Binti Fatah Yasin and Mohd. Shah Jani, "Islamic Education: The Philosophy, Aim, and Main Features," *International Journal of Education and Research* 1, no. 10 (2013): 1–18.

high caliber scholars in many fields of knowledge, such as education, philosophy, science, technology, as well as theology, and literature.

Meanwhile, character (*akhlāq*) is important to signify good relationships with every aspect of human life. According to Al-Qaradawi,²⁴ character or Islamic ethics (*akhlāq*) can be classified into six categories: *akhlāq* related to self, *akhlāq* related to family, *akhlāq* related to society, *akhlāq* related to the animal world, *akhlāq* related to the physical environment, and *akhlāq* related to the Creator. *Akhlāq* itself is derived from Arabic word *kha-la-qa* or *khuluq* which consisting several meanings: character (*sajjyah*), nature (*tabi'ah*), tradition (*'adah*), religion (*dīn*), and self-esteem (*murū'ah*).

From the above conception, the character can be considered as the realization of human positive development in terms of intellectual, social, emotional and ethics.²⁵ Halstead outlined two main aspects of moral or character education in Islam: “disseminating knowledge of what people should and should not do, and motivating them to act in accordance with that knowledge”.²⁶ The dissemination and motivation should always in line with the philosophical values and foundations of the ultimate Islamic sources, i.e. Al-Qur'an and Al-Sunnah.

Abu-Raiya identified eight main concepts as the structures or building blocks of the Qur'anic theory of personality:

- (1) *Nafs* which stands for the whole person, or personality, and hence encloses all other personality structures; (2) *Nafs ammarah bi al-sū'* which is of devilish nature and the strongest force within *nafs*. It resides in the personal unconscious composed of forbidden desires and impulses and governed by the evil principle and primary processing; (3) *Al-nafs al-lawammah* which is a moralistic entity and it has defined origins and influence. It also resides in the personal unconscious and behaves as the conscience; (4) *Rūh* which resides in the collective unconscious, possibly means the energy of life, or The Truth, and serves as the source of revelation, creation, and inspiration; (5) *'Aql* which is of

²⁴Yūsuf al-Qaradāwī, *Al-Khaṣā'is Al-'Āmmah Li Al-Islāmi* [The Universal Characteristics of Islam] (Cairo, Egypt: Maktabah Wahbah, 1981).

²⁵Huda and Kartanegara, “Islamic Spiritual”; Huda and Kartanegara, “Ethical Foundation.”

²⁶Halstead, “Islamic Values,” 283.

angelic nature and the mere conscious component of the system. It is the intellectual faculty of *nafs* and responsible for the higher cognitive processes: understanding, knowing, thinking and reflecting. Its ultimate function is comprehending the essence of God through His manifestations in nature and human beings; (6) *Qalb* which is the “heart of *nafs*” or “the totality of *nafs*.” In *qalb*, inputs and messages from all other structures of *nafs* are processed and integrated, and consequently determine the fate of *nafs*; (7) *Al-nafs al-muṭmaʾinnah* which is the ultimate desired outcome of the dynamic interplay between the different constituents of *nafs* and; (8) *Al-nafs al-marīḍa*: a pathological state which results from a terribly conflicted and sealed *qalb*.²⁷

In the real life, however, these structures and outcomes of personality are dynamically interconnected. The Qur’anic theory of personality has some important characteristics, such as spiritual, structural, dynamic, topographic, holistic, and potential. Through teaching and learning process, every Muslim should have knowledge about moral value (*akhlāq*) because it is the ethics of character building. Islamic education emphasizes *akhlāq* as a major component of learning that moves alongside with other knowledge such as the science of the law (*fiqh*) and *shari’ah*.²⁸

Based on the significance of character education, providing necessary ethical foundations in learning is considered important.²⁹ Al-Zarnūjī has developed a formulation to instill ethics and character values for students in teaching and learning. Among the components of character building include intention (*niyah*), seriousness (*jidd*), respect (*taʿẓīm*), and trust in Allah (*tawakkul*). If these characteristics are fully developed in the process of education, ultimately it would generate a human with noble character values who fully understand and act upon their duties and responsibilities as the vicegerent of Allah (*khalīfah*) on earth.³⁰

²⁷H. Abu-Raiya, “Towards a Systematic Qura’nic Theory of Personality,” *Mental Health, Religion & Culture* 15, no. 3 (2012): 230.

²⁸Halstead, “Islamic Values.”

²⁹Huda and Kartanegara, “Islamic Spiritual”; Huda and Kartanegara, “Ethical Foundation.”

³⁰Al-Zarnūjī, *Instruction of the Student*.

The Ethical Aspects of Learning in *Ta'lim al-Muta'allim*

Ethics implies “learning and knowledge acquired for the sake of right living”.³¹ By seeking knowledge, through training and habituation, students are expected to have good characters. According to Halstead, “There are three main kinds of values: (a) *akhlāq*, which refers to the duties and responsibilities set out in the *Shari'ah* and in Islamic teaching generally; (b) *adab*, which refers to the manners associated with good breeding; and (c) the qualities of character possessed by a good Muslim, following the example of the Prophet Muhammad.”³²

In Islam, religion and ethics or moral are two sides of the same coin. Allah SWT mentioned the implications of faith and moral behavior in many passages of the Holy Qur'an by referring “those who believe” in the same line with “those who do righteous deeds.” The following verses are the examples of the link between religion and morality:

And give good tidings to those who believe and do righteous deeds that they will have gardens [in Paradise] beneath which rivers flow. Whenever they are provided with a provision of fruit therefrom, they will say, "This is what we were provided with before." And it is given to them in likeness. And they will have therein purified spouses, and they will abide therein eternally.³³

Except for those who believe and do righteous deeds, for they will have a reward uninterrupted.³⁴

Except for those who have believed and done righteous deeds and advised each other to truth and advised each other to patience.³⁵

Ethics (*akhlāq*) is crucial when dealing with the relationship of a student (*al-muta'allim*) and his teacher (*al-mu'allim*). Imam al-Zarnūjī believed that in order to gain knowledge and success in his study, a student needs to draw a mutual understanding through the pleasure of his teacher. This is clearly demonstrated in the beginning of al-Zarnūjī's *Ta'lim al-Muta'allim* that ethics

³¹Afandi, *The Method*, 56.

³²Halstead, “Islamic Values,” 283.

³³Qur'an 2:25

³⁴Qur'an 95:6

³⁵Qur'an 103:3

(*akhlāq*), all together with belief (*taḥḥīd*) and jurisprudence (*fiqh*), are obligatory subjects for all Muslims.

In connection with the problems of ethics (*akhlāq*) as a part of the methods of learning, there are several ethical aspects that should be considered for the learners as proposed by Imam al-Zarnūjī namely an intention (*niyyah*), respect (*taʿẓīm*), seriousness (*jidd*), and trust in Allah (*tawakkul*). Basically, all of the religious aspects pertaining the ethics should be employed by Muslims in their life to enforce the process of learning. However, these four aspects will be specifically discussed in this article.

(1) *Intention (niyyah)*

In chapter two, Imam al-Zarnūjī nicely explained the purpose of the study. Every deed is rooted in intention, thus the study of any discipline should have sincere intention. This is in line with the message from Prophet Muhammad SAW narrated by ‘Umar bin al-Khattab that he heard Allah’s Messenger saying, “The reward of deeds depends upon the intentions and every person will get the reward according to what he has intended. So whoever emigrated for worldly benefits or for a woman to marry, his emigration was for what he emigrated for”.³⁶

For the student, once a *niyyah* of learning is stated, one-third of the desired knowledge has been grasped. For that reason, the student should in all circumstances keep a good intention in his heart, otherwise, the seeking of knowledge will suffer from a serious defect. Al-Zarnūjī suggests that the true intention of learning lies in seeking Allah’s pleasure, learning should be intended as an endeavor to obtain happiness in the next life, and intention in learning is to revive religion and promote Islam. Specifically, “One must intend [with knowledge] to being thankful [to God] for a healthy mind and a sound body; one should not, however, [intend] to attract people toward himself, or reap the vanities of the world, or obtain honors from the king, and the like”.³⁷

³⁶Sahih al-Bukhari, Vol. 1, Hadith No. 1.

³⁷Al-Zarnūjī, *Instruction of the Student*, 7.

Perhaps al-Zarnūjī is to a considerable degree more attentive to the ultimate goal of learning as a part of religious duties, while he is rather negative in perceiving worldly purposes. However, the problem of intention in Muslim learning seems to focus on an attempt to make a balance in facing two worlds: the world of today (*al-dunya*) and the world of the hereafter (*al-akhirah*). Hence, a student should make their intention sincere, focus on what is important in learning and choose correctly the subjects to learn. In discussing the issue of the choices in learning (chapter three), al-Zarnūjī stated that:

When undertaking the pursuit of knowledge, it is necessary to choose among the branches of learning those that are the most beneficial to oneself. One should [also] select what is essential according to the stage one has reached in his religious development. And finally, [one should] choose what will be essential to one in the future. [With this, the individual] will perfect himself in the knowledge of the oneness of God and learn about God the Exalted through [sound] evidence, for the faith of one who blindly follows authority, even though it may be correct in our view, is still defective because of his failure to seek out proofs.³⁸

It is clear that Islam considers intention (*niyyah*) as a factor determining the validity of any action in Muslim life as a whole. Missing this factor will make the actions less valuable and even can be considered as invalid. Based on this conception, Imam al-Zarnūjī considers this issue as a fundamental ethics for students in their quest for knowledge. Students should keep good intention in all circumstances especially in learning. Learning itself is noble as explained by many verses of Qur'an and Hadith. However, a student who has an evil intention will suffer from a serious defect.

After all, al-Zarnūjī's conception of the ethics of intention in learning seems idealistic. It puts a greater emphasis on religious matters. On the other hand, even though it hardly caters the worldly purposes, al-Zarnūjī aware that searching for knowledge to achieve a position in a worldly matter is permissible to some extents. Al-Zarnūjī explained:

³⁸Ibid., 9.

... to command what is good and forbid what is evil and in order to promote the truth and strengthen religion, and not in order to satisfy his ego and his desires. And that [i.e., the repression of selfish aims] becomes more and more possible in proportion as [the learned man in a worldly position] undertakes to command the good and forbid the evil.³⁹

(2) *Respect (ta'ẓīm)*

Students should direct the respect foremost to the teacher as the one who possesses a knowledge and transfers it to students. As an expression of respect for knowledge, al-Zarnūjī also suggests students to highly appreciate their companions in learning as well as the learned men who surround them. It is expected to take as much advantage as possible from their wisdom and knowledge. In addition, the respect of the student should also be given to the book or al-Qur'an as well as to other textbooks.

In respecting the teacher, Imam al-Zarnūjī explained:

... avoid walking in front of him and sitting in his place. And do not begin speaking in his presence without his permission, and do not speak to any great extent before him without his permission. One should not ask him any [question] when he is weary. One should observe the correct time and refrain from knocking on [his] door, but have patience until [the teacher] comes out. In short, one should seek his approval, avoid his resentment, and obey his commands in those things which are not sinful in the eyes of God ...⁴⁰

Perhaps the nature of respect (*ta'ẓīm*) in modern days has changed from the traditional practice or Islamic tradition. As teachers and parents, we can observe that today's children have a lack of respect to their teachers. However, it is important to teach students to respect their teacher in the process of teaching and learning. Parents as the first teachers of their children should implant this sense of respect since the early age. In line with the first aspect of ethics – intention (*niyyah*), this aspect will have its fruits once it is done for the sake of seeking Allah's pleasure and benefits for all societies.

³⁹Ibid., 10.

⁴⁰Ibid., 14.

Based on Imam al-Zarnūjī's conception, respect (*ta'ẓīm*) to teachers should be expressed and addressed appropriately. A student should respect his/her teacher as a son respects his father. It bears the same meaning that as a father feeds his son with foods, a teacher feeds his student with knowledge. In addition, a student should also respect his/her teacher as a patient respects his/her doctor. Both doctor and teacher are the same in a way that a doctor cures the physical illness of the patient while a teacher cures mental illness of the student [from not having any knowledge]. Thus, students should trust their teachers as they trust their doctors. In this regard, al-Zarnūjī believed that the success of learning is very much dependent on the respectful attitude of the students to their teachers.

(3) *Seriousness (jidd)*

Learning requires the virtue of seriousness (*jidd*) or industriousness which signifies a character that the student is consistent in pursuing his desire by hard working. Al-Zarnūjī believes the more serious of an effort, the greater the attainment will become. On the other hand, he also reminds students to be moderate in the quest for learning. This is in line with a Hadith narrated by 'Aisha, Prophet Muhammad SAW said, "Do good deeds properly, sincerely and moderately and know that your deeds will not make you enter Paradise, and that the most beloved deed to Allah is the most regular and constant even if it were little" (Sahih al-Bukhari, 6464). Similarly, it was narrated from Abu Humaid al-Sa'idi that Prophet Muhammad SAW said, "Be moderate in seeking worldly things, for everyone will be facilitated for which he was created".⁴¹

Al-Zarnūjī also reminds students to be aware of laziness in the effort of a learning process. According to him, beside the problem of motivation in learning, the main factor which causes laziness is a problem of eating and drinking. Al-Zarnūjī (2003, p. 24) stated the harmful of eating excessively and provided the solution as follows:

⁴¹Sunan Ibn Majah, 2142

Reflection [on diet] reveals the ill effects of excessive eating, for this is unhealthy and dulling to the character. It is said, "The [full] stomach destroys intelligence." Through [excessive eating] there is also the loss of wealth and eating beyond satiety is entirely harmful. By [excessiveness in eating] punishment is merited and the glutton is detestable to [righteous] souls. The correct way of reducing food is to eat oily dishes, as well as the most delicate and most desirable food. One should not eat with a voracious appetite. However, if one has an honest objective in eating much – like [eating a lot] to become stronger in order to fast, pray, and do difficult work – this is permissible.

Learning is a life-long process. In this regard, Imam al-Zarnūjī encourages students to seek knowledge at any time throughout their lives. With respect to industriousness in learning, al-Zarnūjī also recommends employing the time for learning as effective as possible. If we look at the Muslim tradition of learning in the past, it seems that night is a special and popular time to study. This is due to the fact that Allah SWT encourages Muslims to submit themselves to God when the majority of people asleep. This is the best time to get closer (*taqarrub*) to the Creator of the world.

(4) *Trust in God (tawakkul)*

In the quest for knowledge, students should rely entirely on God and need not to worry about material matters. Imam al-Zarnūjī quoted Abu Hanifah who heard from ‘Abdallah ibn al-Hasan al-Zabidi, “A person who devotes himself to learning God’s religion, God Almighty gives him sufficient care and provides for him in unexpected ways. So he who occupies himself with matters of sustenance, such as food and clothing, is not yet free enough for the acquisition of noble traits and elevated matters, [like knowledge and scholarship].”⁴²

In line with the concept of *tawakkul*, it is necessary for students who take the journey in the quest for learning to pay full attention to etiquette (*adab*) and the practice of the Prophet Muhammad SAW. Together with the virtues of good intention (*niyyah*) and diligent work (*jidd*), relying on God (*tawakkul*) should be put into action and well maintained during the state of

⁴²Al-Zarnūjī, *Instruction of the Student*, 34.

learning. In this regard, al-Zarnūjī encourages students to be consistent with their purpose of learning:

The intelligent man should not be eager for the affairs of this world since this kind of solicitude and sad concern does not avert calamity nor is of use, but rather is harmful to the spirit, the mind, and the body. These [concerns with worldly matters] cause a cessation of good work. One [should rather] attend to matters pertaining to the future life since these prove useful.⁴³

Conclusion

This article has analyzed the ethical aspects of learning and its significance in education and character building from the perspective of Imam al-Zarnūjī. He was one of the classical Muslim educational pedagogues (12th/13th century, circa 620 CE – 1243 CE) of all times who produced a popular treatise known as *Ta'lim al-Muta'allim Tarīq al-Ta'allum* [Instruction of the Student: The Method of Learning]. It was found that al-Zarnūjī's concept of knowledge emphasizes on ethical aspects of a teacher (*al-mu'allim*) and student (*al-muta'allim*) in teaching and learning process at any level of education. After all, today's education system – which is dominated by the West lacks religious values, al-Zarnūjī's proposal brings the solution to the crisis of education.

Material and spiritual aspects should be balanced to promote harmony in the society. Thus, Imam al-Zarnūjī proposed the elements of intention (*niyah*), seriousness (*jidd*), respect (*ta'ẓīm*), and trust in Allah (*tawakkul*) in order to succeed in achieving the goal of education. By utilizing these ethical aspects in teaching and learning, it is hoped that students could fully implement the acquired knowledge with good character building for the benefits of both individual and society (*ummah*). Even though the concept was developed a long time ago, al-Zarnūjī's principles in teaching and learning are still relevant to the contemporary education system. The end result for emphasizing on knowledge understanding, ethical values and character building would be generating good human beings (*al-insān al-ṣālih*).

⁴³Ibid., 55.

Given the crucial role of ethics (*akhlāq*) and character building play in the lives of Muslims, attempts to apply the ethical aspects of teaching and learning in the educational system are considered significant. The ethical aspects of learning that have been articulated in this article are built solely on the conception of Burhan al-Din al-Zarnūjī from his work *Ta'lim al-Muta'allim Ṭarīq al-Ta'allum*. Nonetheless, the conception does not take into account sufficient other sources of knowledge, such as Hadith – the sayings of the Prophet Muhammad SAW, the opinions of other Muslim thinkers and philosophers, that can be highly influential towards formulating character building in education. This study might be biased in reading, analyzing, and interpreting the ideas of Imam al-Zarnūjī. Hence, more attempts and efforts are needed to refine its content and broaden its concept with other significant sources of knowledge.

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