

**RECONSTRUCTING THE ESSENCE OF METHODS, TOOLS, AND
MEDIA IN ISLAMIC EDUCATION IN THE DIGITAL ERA: A TA'DIB
AND SPIRITUAL EDUCATION PERSPECTIVE**

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Keywords:

Islamic Education Philosophy, Ta'dib, Digital Learning Media, Tazkiyatun Nafs, Digital Self-Regulation,

ABSTRACT

Contemporary Islamic education faces a crisis of meaning in the digital era, frequently reducing instructional media and tools into value-neutral, pragmatic instruments and neglecting their spiritual dimensions. This research aims to establish a rigorous ontological demarcation between educational tools and media and to construct an integrative philosophical framework for their use based on Islamic epistemology. This qualitative library research employs a philosophical approach. Data were collected heuristically from academic databases and classical texts, with a focus on the foundational works of Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas and Al-Ghazali. The analysis technique employs hermeneutic interpretation, validated through source triangulation, to systematically dissect the esoteric layers of educational technologies. The findings demonstrate a novel theoretical contribution by proving that while tools are merely functional-technical instruments, digital media act as value-laden, meaning-making environments. Furthermore, this study offers a new integrative paradigm by contextualizing classical Sufi concepts to solve modern digital challenges: translating Al-Ghazali's mujahadah and riyadhah into digital self-regulation, while operationalizing Al-Attas's Ta'dib to design media that respect the hierarchy of knowledge. Conclusively, addressing digital disruption requires shifting from mechanical pedagogy to a holistic integration in which digital media serve as esoteric intermediaries, actively guiding students toward moral maturity, adab, and divine consciousness.

Article History:

*Received:
April 12, 2026*

*Accepted:
May 14, 2026*

*Published:
June 27, 2026*

How to cite:

*Mutha'aliin, A. H., Dzulfikar, M. L., Rasyid, N. A. F., Dulanam, I., & Thalib, A. (2026). Reconstructing the essence of methods, tools, and media in Islamic education in the digital era: A ta'dib and spiritual education perspective. *Atta'dib Jurnal Pendidikan Islam*, 7(1).*

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.30863/attadib.v7i1.11589>

INTRODUCTION

Contemporary Islamic education faces a massive challenge in the form of a reduction of meaning within its learning process, wherein educational elements are frequently stripped of their spiritual values (Muhaimin, 2006). Amidst social changes, technological advancements, and global challenges, various Islamic educational institutions—ranging from families, *pesantren* (Islamic boarding schools), *madrasas*, to higher education institutions—have developed diverse models to instill Islamic values alongside 21st-century skills (Nirwani Jumala & Abubakar, 2019; Wijaya, 2021). However, the phenomena of educational digitalization and modernization have led educators to perceive methods, tools, and media merely as mechanistic and pragmatic instruments (Damang, 2012).

Digital transformation presents both challenges and opportunities. Social media, Google Classroom, WhatsApp, and various other applications are utilized for religious learning, Arabic language instruction, *hadith* literacy, and religious moderation. Yet, they also demand critical literacy and supervision to protect students from hoaxes, intolerance, and symbolic violence in cyberspace (Susanto & Dwijayanto, 2022). On the other hand, neuroscience approaches and research-based Islamic education models have been developed to address the needs of the millennial generation, packaging Islamic values creatively, visually, and contextually, including in disaster mitigation contexts such as the Covid-19 pandemic (Suyadi & Widodo, 2019).

The primary problem lies in the tendency of the educational process to be oriented solely toward dry cognitive achievement (*transfer of knowledge*), thereby frequently diminishing its spiritual essence and character formation (Sari, 2024). When media and methods are measured strictly by their technical efficiency, education loses its philosophical soul. To rectify this discourse, this study employs two conceptual foundations operationally. First, the "ontological" approach, which traces the fundamental essence of an educational facility's existence to distinguish whether it is merely a supportive inanimate object or possesses value-transmission capacity. Second, the "esoteric" dimension, specifically defined as the inner or spiritual aspect of education oriented toward *tazkiyatun nafs* (purification of the soul) and divine consciousness (Wan Daud, 2003). The loss of these two fundamental dimensions leads to students'

alienation from divine values. Consequently, there is an urgent need to restore the inherent nature of these learning elements so they are not trapped in mere functional pragmatism (Darmiah, 2022).

Previous studies have examined the elements of Islamic education; however, they still leave a conceptual gap in their analytical demarcation. When mapped, the existing literature is trapped in two main tendencies. *First*, the functional-instrumental tendency. Sugiyono and Khojir (2021) examined the essence of tools and methods in the digital era, yet their review remains mechanistic, viewing them as goal-attainment devices, and critically fails to touch upon the ontological boundaries of these tools (Sugiyono & Khojir, 2021). In line with this, Jauhari (2018) highlighted the effectiveness of instructional media and asserted that media cannot replace the teacher's role; unfortunately, this approach remains heavily centered on pedagogical practicality alone without addressing the *tazkiyah* aspect. On the other hand (Jauhari & Irmawan, 2018) Saputra (2025) explored the influence of social media and the environment on behavioral formation, but the discussion emphasizes sociological aspects rather than a pure Islamic educational philosophy foundation (Saputra et al., 2025). *Second*, the macro-conceptual tendency. Studies by Zainuddin Zidan et al. (2024) and Hasibuan (2016) strongly emphasize the significance of Naquib Al-Attas's concept of *ta'dib* (Zainuddin Zidan et al., 2024). However, a fundamental weakness in both studies is the absence of a specific attempt to dissect the exact esoteric position of "methods" and "media" within the macro structure of *ta'dib* itself.

Based on the critical literature review above, the research gap is demonstrably identified: among the existing discourses, not a single study has drawn a strict, hierarchical ontological boundary between the entities "tools" and "media" while simultaneously integrating their functions into the esoteric framework of *ta'dib*. Therefore, this study aims to address this gap by offering a more comprehensive philosophical framework.

The specific objective of this article is to reconceptualize the essence of methods, tools, and media solely from the perspective of Islamic educational philosophy, while simultaneously reinforcing the demarcation lines among the three. This article seeks to prove the main argument that in the paradigm of Islamic education, methods and media are not mere technical-pedagogical

devices; rather, they are esoteric *washilah* (intermediaries) with a strong foundation in the Sufi tradition to facilitate *tazkiyatun nafs*. The author tests the premise that the failure of contemporary Islamic education to shape noble characters often stems from an epistemological misunderstanding in how tools and media are defined and understood. Through a philosophical analytical approach, this research posits that accurately situating the essence of methods, tools, and media will directly return Islamic education to its original orbit, namely, guiding both the intellect and the soul of students toward complete divine consciousness (*ma'rifatullah*) to form the Perfect Human (*Insan Kamil*).

To unravel the underlying threads of the problems and arguments presented, this article constructs a theoretical framework, systematically arranged to ensure a more focused analysis. The theoretical construction in this study is divided into three main sub-discussions. First, (a) The Essence of Methods in Islamic Education; this section will dissect the concept of *thariqah* as a philosophical path aligned with human *fitrah* (innate nature), rather than merely classroom teaching procedures. Second, (b) Conceptual Demarcation of Tools and Media; this sub-point focuses on drawing a strict ontological boundary between tools as conditioning instruments and media as intermediaries for transmitting communication. Third, (c) Esoteric Integration in Learning; this framework is tasked with analyzing the integration between outward elements and inner dimensions, examining how methods and media transform into spiritual means. This framework serves as the fundamental foundation for synthesizing the existing literature.

METHOD

This research is a qualitative study employing a library research design. The primary approach is a philosophical one combined with an esoteric (Sufi) perspective, aiming to explore essential meanings that transcend technical-instrumental understandings of educational facilities, particularly in the digital era. The main subject of this research is the conceptual discourse regarding methods, tools, and media within the Islamic education ecosystem. The primary instrument relies on the researcher as a human instrument who examines research materials in the form of primary literature from classical and contemporary Islamic educational thinkers. This primary literature includes the

principal works of Al-Ghazali, especially *Ihyā' Ulūm al-Dīn*, *Ayyuhā al-Walad*, and *Mizān al-'Amal*; as well as those of Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas, specifically *The Concept of Education in Islam: A Framework for an Islamic Philosophy of Education* (1980) and *Islam and Secularism* (1978), as the foundational texts for his *ta'dib* framework.

The selection of supporting sources and secondary literature was conducted in accordance with strictly defined inclusion and exclusion criteria. The inclusion criteria comprise: (a) sources that specifically discuss one of the three studied elements—methods, tools, or media—within the context of Islamic education; (b) classical and contemporary texts that serve as references for Sufi epistemology; and (c) indexed journal articles published within the last ten years. Meanwhile, the exclusion criteria are applied to sources that discuss educational media or methods from a purely technical-pedagogical standpoint—such as classroom action research reports—without incorporating philosophical or theological dimensions.

The philosophical and esoteric analysis procedures were carried out through four systematic and operational stages: (1) Heuristics, namely the search and collection of sources from Google Scholar, SINTA, and DOAJ databases using specific keywords: *thariqah*, Islamic education methods, *washilah*, educational esotericism, and *ta'dib*; (2) Text classification, which involves categorizing sources based on their relevance to the three studied elements (methods, tools, media) as well as their analytical perspectives (philosophical/esoteric); (3) Interpretation, referring to the hermeneutic reading of primary texts to uncover their exoteric (outward) and esoteric (inward) layers of meaning within the context of modern learning; and (4) Theoretical synthesis, namely integrating the interpretive findings into a comprehensive and coherent ontological demarcation framework.

To maintain the objectivity of the hermeneutic-interpretative analysis and ensure academic validity and accountability, this research employed two quality-assurance principles. First, source triangulation, meaning every proposed conceptual claim must be corroborated by at least three mutually reinforcing literary sources. Second, academic intersubjectivity, wherein the interpretation process refers to the exegesis of scholars and academics with recognized authority over the examined primary texts. Through these two principles, the

drawing of conclusions can be scientifically justified and protected from excessive subjective bias.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Ontological Demarcation: Distinguishing the Nature of Tools and Media in Learning

The findings of the literature review indicate that contemporary Islamic education studies still tend to use the terms "*tool*" and "*medium*" interchangeably without sufficient conceptual distinction. In fact, these two concepts possess different characteristics, functions, and implications within the educational process (Azis et al., 2025). Most previous studies on the integration of technology in Islamic Religious Education (*Pendidikan Agama Islam*) have primarily focused on using technology to facilitate learning, while paying limited attention to the fundamental distinction between tools and media. From the perspectives of the philosophy of technology and educational ontology, these concepts cannot be treated as equivalent, as they occupy different positions and perform different roles within the learning process. The lack of a clear distinction between the two may result in insufficient consideration of the value-laden dimensions embedded in the technologies employed in education.

The Nature of Tools as Functional Technical Instruments

From an ontological perspective, tools can be understood as physical objects, hardware, or technical mechanisms that assist human activities. Tools are designed to enhance efficiency, facilitate the execution of tasks, and extend the physical and technical capabilities of their users (Mattar, 2018). In the educational context, blackboards, LCD projectors, computers, internet networks, and other supporting devices can be categorized as instructional tools. Fundamentally, tools do not inherently convey specific messages or values; rather, they function as instruments that support the implementation of the learning process (Alfiah, 2025).

Accordingly, the effectiveness of a tool is generally evaluated based on its functional aspects, such as ease of use, accuracy, speed, and durability. For example, when a teacher uses a projector to display Qur'anic verses in the classroom, the projector merely serves as a means of delivering information

without influencing the meaning contained in the material being presented. In this sense, tools do not directly shape students' ways of thinking, attitudes, or beliefs. The study conducted by Sugiyono and Khojir (2021) highlights that the integration of learning materials, instructional methods, and educational tools is essential for supporting Islamic education in the digital era (Sugiyono & Khojir, 2021). Nevertheless, discussions of tools often remain limited to the assumption that they are neutral technical instruments whose impact depends entirely on the individuals who use them. While this assumption may be applicable when discussing tools, it requires further reconsideration when applied to understanding the nature of instructional media.

The Nature of Media as a Meaning-Making Environment in Learning

Unlike tools, which primarily function as technical instruments, media possess broader characteristics as environments for meaning-making within the learning process. Derived from the Latin *medius* ("intermediary" or "mediator"), media in the perspective of Islamic education are not merely channels for delivering information but also environments that shape how learners receive, understand, and interpret knowledge (Jauhari & Irmawan, 2018). Instructional media facilitate communication between educators and students while simultaneously influencing learning experiences, learners' interest, comprehension, and the transmission of values and attitudes Jauhari (2019) Consistent with these findings, the present study shows that digital media influence how learners receive, process, and interpret information throughout the learning process.

Various forms of digital media, including Learning Management Systems (LMS), interactive applications, educational games, and digital comics integrating Islamic values, function not only as content delivery platforms but also as environments shaped by interface design and underlying algorithms that influence learning patterns, attention, ways of thinking, and learners' relationships with knowledge sources (Perez et al., 2023). For instance, presenting Islamic Religious Education (PAI) on short-form video platforms often requires simplifying complex religious concepts, which can reduce the depth of understanding. This demonstrates that media are not neutral, as they shape the form and structure of the messages learners receive. Therefore, the evaluation of instructional media should consider not only cognitive learning outcomes but

also their influence on values, attitudes, and learners' spiritual development (Al-Amin et al., 2021).

Accordingly, while tools serve as technical instruments that support learning activities, media play a more fundamental role in shaping how learners construct meaning from information. This distinction is essential to ensure that educational digitalization prioritizes not only technological advancement but also alignment with the objectives and values of Islamic education. Therefore, the development and use of instructional media should be grounded in a clear philosophical framework. In this study, the educational thought of Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas provides the conceptual foundation for evaluating instructional media to ensure their consistency with the goals of Islamic education, particularly the cultivation of *adab* and the holistic development of learners' character and personality.

Contextualizing Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas's Ta'dib Framework in the Digital Era

The preceding findings concerning the influence of digital media on the learning process highlight the importance of revisiting the nature of Islamic education as a foundation for responding to technological developments. Based on a review of contemporary literature, Islamic education currently faces conceptual challenges in interpreting its goals and educational orientation. Several studies indicate that educational terms such as *tarbiyah* and *ta'lim* have often narrowed in meaning, limiting their ability to represent the comprehensive objectives of Islamic education fully. In this context, Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas proposes *Ta'dib* as an educational framework that more adequately captures the essence of Islamic education in its entirety.

Conceptual Distinction between Ta'dib, Tarbiyah, and Ta'lim

Discussions of Islamic education generally revolve around three key concepts: *tarbiyah*, *ta'lim*, and *ta'dib*. Al-Attas pays particular attention to the term *tarbiyah*, which has frequently been used as the primary equivalent of education. According to him, *tarbiyah* carries a broad semantic scope, encompassing processes of nurturing, growth, and care that apply not only to human beings but also to other living creatures (Sassi, 2021). Consequently, the

term does not fully capture the intellectual and spiritual dimensions that distinguish human education within the Islamic worldview.

In contrast, *ta'lim* primarily emphasizes teaching and the transmission of knowledge. In educational practice, this approach often focuses on the delivery of information and the mastery of learning content (Sassi, 2021). As a result, educational success is largely measured by students' cognitive achievements. However, Islamic education aims not only to develop intellectual capacities but also to cultivate character, morality, and spiritual awareness. Therefore, an educational process that is limited to *ta'lim* may produce individuals with strong academic competence but insufficient moral and ethical maturity (Ayub et al., 2020).

Recognizing these limitations, Al-Attas proposes *Ta'dib* as the foundation of Islamic education, encompassing the integrated development of cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains. *Ta'dib* is understood as the process of instilling and cultivating *adab*, which serves as the basis for the formation of human personality and character (Hamzah, 2018).

In Al-Attas's thought, *adab* is not merely synonymous with courtesy or social etiquette. Rather, it refers to the ability to understand and place everything in its proper position within the order of existence. Accordingly, education is viewed as a process of cultivating awareness that enables individuals to recognize the appropriate relationships among themselves, Allah, fellow human beings, the natural world, and knowledge itself (Hasibuan, 2016). Individuals who possess *adab* are capable of positioning reason, revelation, and other dimensions of life proportionately according to their respective roles and functions (Sassi, 2021).

This perspective is further reinforced by Wan Mohd Nor Wan Daud, who argues that many of the social and moral problems experienced in the modern era stem fundamentally from the loss of *adab* within the educational process. According to him, the acquisition of knowledge without *adab* may lead to various forms of misuse and distortion of knowledge (Wan Daud, 2003). Therefore, educational processes should be structured according to a hierarchy of values and truths so that knowledge contributes not only to intellectual development but also to the cultivation of moral responsibility.

Furthermore, Wan Mohd Nor explains the close relationship between education, *adab*, and the concept of *Din* in Islam. Drawing upon Al-Attas's thought, *Din* is not limited to religion in a ritual sense but also reflects humanity's bond with Allah and its responsibility to cultivate a civilized way of life (Wan Daud, 2003). From this perspective, education nurtures awareness that human beings bear moral and spiritual responsibilities toward their Creator. These responsibilities are manifested in social life characterized by order, ethical conduct, and adherence to Islamic values.

Implementing the Concept of Ta'dib in the Development of Digital Learning Media

Understanding the concept of *Ta'dib*, as developed by Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas, has important implications for the development and use of instructional media in the digital era. The rapid advancement of information technology, characterized by an abundance of information, the increasing use of digital media, and the transformation of learning interactions, requires a value-based framework to guide the use of technology in accordance with the objectives of Islamic education. From this perspective, instructional media cannot be regarded as value-neutral instruments; rather, they should be designed and employed on the basis of principles that support the cultivation of *adab* among learners. Drawing on the Ta'dib framework, several principles may serve as foundational guidelines for developing digital learning media.

1. Integrating the Hierarchy of Knowledge into Learning Design

The concept of *adab* in Al-Attas's thought emphasizes the importance of recognizing the hierarchy of knowledge (*maratib al-'ulum*). Consequently, instructional media should be designed with careful attention to the relationships and ordering of knowledge within the Islamic worldview (Sassi, 2021). Knowledge related to faith (*aqidah*), worship (*ibadah*), and moral conduct (*akhlaq*) may be positioned as foundational elements of the learning process and subsequently integrated with other applied and professional disciplines (Kosim, 2020). Within the context of Learning Management Systems (LMS), instructional content can be organized in preserve the proportional relationship between religious and secular knowledge. Such an approach enables learners not only to acquire technical knowledge but also

to understand the interconnection between scientific inquiry and Islamic values (Eraku et al., 2021).

2. Strengthening the Dimension of Meaning in the Learning Process

Digital technology enables learners to access vast amounts of information in a relatively short time. However, Islamic education is concerned not merely with the acquisition of information but also with the comprehension of the meanings and values embedded within it (Qazi et al., 2021). Within the framework of *Ta'dib*, instructional media should therefore be designed to encourage reflection and meaningful engagement with learning content. In addition to providing information and interactive learning activities, digital media may incorporate reflective spaces through critical questions, discussions, and contemplative activities that help learners connect knowledge with their responsibilities as human beings and as stewards (*khalifah*) on earth (Syarnubi et al., 2021).

3. Promoting Spiritual Awareness and Human Fitrah

Al-Attas views education as a means of reminding human beings of their essential nature as creatures who maintain a relationship with their Creator. This perspective is consistent with the view that education should be oriented toward the development of human *fitrah* (innate disposition) (Qazi et al., 2021). In the context of digital media, this principle may be implemented by integrating elements that foster learners' spiritual awareness. For example, learning platforms may include prayer reminders, reflective messages, or activities that encourage students to relate academic content to religious values (Nasir et al., 2021). In this way, technology serves not only to enhance the effectiveness of learning but also to support the development of learners' moral and spiritual consciousness.

These three principles demonstrate that implementing *Ta'dib* in digital learning media goes beyond mere technical use. Rather, it concerns how technology can be directed toward supporting the broader objectives of Islamic education, namely the cultivation of *adab*, the development of intellectual capacities, and the balanced nurturing of learners' spiritual dimensions.

Internalizing Al-Ghazali's Sufism: Tazkiyatun Nafs as a Character-Building Framework in the Digital Era

While the concept of *Ta'dib* developed by Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas provides a philosophical and epistemological framework for Islamic education, Al-Ghazali's Sufi thought complements it through an approach that emphasizes spiritual cultivation and character formation (Sheikh & Ali, 2019). Numerous studies on Al-Ghazali's educational thought indicate that education is not merely concerned with the transmission of knowledge but also with the development of moral character and the refinement of the inner self (Ghofar et al., 2018). From this perspective, educational success is closely linked to the spiritual and moral condition of learners as recipients of knowledge.

According to Al-Ghazali, beneficial knowledge depends not only on the quality of the content being taught but also on the spiritual readiness of learners to receive it (Sheikh & Ali, 2019). Within Al-Ghazali's epistemological framework, the *qalb* (heart) occupies a central role as the locus of consciousness, shaping how individuals understand and embody knowledge. Therefore, education should not focus exclusively on intellectual development but must also nurture moral and spiritual growth so that acquired knowledge can be translated into virtuous conduct (Sugiana, 2019).

The Relevance of Mujahadah and Riyadhah in the Digital Environment

Several studies on character education inspired by Al-Ghazali demonstrate that moral development is cultivated through the processes of *mujahadah* and *riyadhah*. *Mujahadah* refers to the persistent struggle to restrain impulses that contradict moral values, while *riyadhah* denotes continuous training and habituation aimed at developing virtuous character (Ahmadi et al., 2020).

In the digital era, both concepts remain highly relevant. Digital technologies provide unprecedented access to information, yet they also introduce challenges, including increased distractions, information overload, and declining opportunities for deep reflection (Suwar & Endayani, 2021). Many digital features are intentionally designed to maximize user engagement, thereby influencing attention patterns and behavioral tendencies (Syarnubi et al., 2021). Such conditions require strong self-regulation so that learners can utilize technology wisely and responsibly.

1. Self-Regulation in the Use of Digital Technology

In classical Sufi literature, *mujahadah* is often associated with practices such as reducing food consumption, limiting sleep, and exercising restraint in speech (Ahmadi et al., 2020). In the contemporary digital context, however, the meaning of *mujahadah* can be expanded to include self-control in managing excessive information consumption (Ghofar et al., 2018). Learners should be encouraged to develop the capacity for cognitive withdrawal or digital fasting, namely the ability to disconnect from social media and minimize digital distractions temporarily (Syarnubi et al., 2021). Through such practices, individuals can preserve inner clarity and maintain attentiveness, enabling them to engage more meaningfully with educational content.

2. Habituation of Ethical Conduct in Digital Spaces

Al-Ghazali maintained that character and morality are not fixed innate traits but can be cultivated through the repeated practice of ethical behavior until such actions become enduring dispositions (*malakah*) (Dirsa & Kusumawati, 2019). Applied to contemporary educational settings, this principle suggests that interactive learning media should incorporate features that encourage positive behavioral habits. Examples include promoting critical verification (*tabayyun*) before sharing information, fostering respectful communication in online discussions, and encouraging responsible engagement with digital content (Ahmadi et al., 2020). Such approaches help learners develop reflective rather than impulsive patterns of behavior, thereby counteracting the tendencies often reinforced by digital culture.

Tazkiyatun Nafs and the Balance of Human Potentials

The ultimate objective of moral education in Al-Ghazali's thought is the attainment of balance among the various faculties of the human soul (Ahmadi et al., 2020). He explains that human beings possess rational, emotional, and appetitive capacities that must be harmoniously regulated. Such a balance enables individuals to make sound judgments and act in accordance with moral principles (Sugiana, 2019).

Maintaining this equilibrium has become increasingly challenging in the digital era. The misuse of digital media may contribute to aggressive online

behavior, the spread of unverified information, social media addiction, and other forms of irresponsible technological engagement (Mursalin, 2018). Consequently, *tazkiyatun nafs* (spiritual purification) remains highly relevant as an educational approach that equips learners with the capacity for self-control, critical thinking, and ethical decision-making in their interactions with technology (Ghofar et al., 2018).

Within this framework, learning media should not be viewed merely as instruments for delivering content but also as tools that support character formation and spiritual development (Aini & Hariyanto, 2020). Media aligned with the principles of *tazkiyatun nafs* can help integrate cognitive learning with moral and spiritual growth, thereby fostering a more holistic educational experience (Dirsa & Kusumawati, 2019).

An important implication of Al-Ghazali's thought is that technological advancements, including Artificial Intelligence (AI), cannot fully replace the role of educators in the educational process (Ghofar et al., 2018). Although technology can facilitate information delivery and enhance learning efficiency, character formation, value transmission, and moral guidance continue to require the presence of educators. Teachers, therefore, serve not only as transmitters of knowledge but also as role models, mentors, and facilitators who guide learners toward the integrated development of their intellectual, moral, and spiritual capacities (Syarnubi et al., 2021).

The Balance of Spiritual Faculties and Tazkiyatun Nafs in Digital Education

In Al-Ghazali's framework, moral education seeks to establish equilibrium among the various faculties of the human soul (Ahmadi et al., 2020). Such balance is achieved when the rational faculty (*quwwah al-'aqliyyah*) effectively governs and directs both the emotional faculty (*quwwah al-ghadabiyyah*) and the appetitive faculty (*quwwah al-shahwaniyyah*) (Sugiana, 2019). In other words, a morally upright individual employs reason to regulate emotions and desires in accordance with ethical and religious principles.

In the digital age, maintaining this balance presents new challenges. The dominance of emotional impulses may manifest in aggressive online communication, hate speech, cyberbullying, and social media conflicts (Chen et al., 2020). Likewise, the dominance of appetitive desires may be reflected in

excessive technology use, social media dependency, online gaming addiction, and the consumption of inappropriate digital content. (Yanto, 2020) Furthermore, weakened critical thinking skills may leave learners vulnerable to misinformation, fake news, and other forms of unverified information circulating in digital environments (Suwar & Endayani, 2021).

In response to these challenges, the concept of *tazkiyatun nafs* offers a relevant educational approach centered on self-awareness, behavioral regulation, and character development. Through this process, educational media are positioned not only as vehicles for knowledge transmission but also as instruments that support the moral and spiritual formation of learners (Mohamad et al., 2020). This perspective is consistent with Muhaimin's view that religious education should strengthen the spiritual dimension of learners so that religion is reflected not only in cognitive understanding but also in everyday attitudes and actions (Muhaimin, 2006).

The implications of Al-Ghazali's perspective suggest that a corresponding emphasis must accompany the integration of technology in education on moral and spiritual development (Ifenthaler et al., 2024). While digital technologies, including Artificial Intelligence, can enhance learning effectiveness, they cannot replace the educator's essential role in character formation (Humble & Mozelius, 2022). Consequently, teachers and lecturers remain indispensable as mentors, role models, and guides who assist learners in developing their intellectual, moral, and spiritual capacities in an integrated manner (Chan & Tsi, 2024). Within the context of Islamic education, this role is particularly significant in ensuring that technological advancement remains aligned with the broader educational objective of cultivating knowledgeable, ethical, and responsible individuals (Purwanto, 2021).

An Integrative Framework for Islamic Education in the Digital Era

This study offers a conceptual contribution through the integration of the ontological analysis of media, Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas's concept of *Ta'dib*, and Al-Ghazali's concept of *tazkiyatun nafs* (Yunita et al., 2025). This integration results in a framework that can be used to both understand and guide the use of digital media in Islamic education in a more comprehensive way.

1. Ontological Redefinition of Educational Media

The first contribution of this study lies in its effort to distinguish between tools and media in the learning process conceptually. Previous studies have tended to use these two terms interchangeably or position them within relatively similar functions (Thapliyal et al., 2022). This study demonstrates that tools and media possess distinct ontological characteristics. Tools function as technical instruments that support the learning process. In contrast, media serve not only as channels of information but also as entities that shape how learners receive, understand, and interpret knowledge (Stancin et al., 2020).

From this perspective, the development of educational technology should not focus solely on providing digital infrastructure. It must also consider the characteristics of the media being employed, including interface design, interaction patterns, and the learning environment they create.

2. Contextualizing Tazkiyatun Nafs within the Digital Environment

The second contribution of this study is its attempt to contextualize the concepts of *mujahadah*, *riyadhah*, and *tazkiyatun nafs* within the realities of digital education. These concepts have traditionally been discussed primarily in relation to spiritual cultivation and moral education (Zaiyani et al., 2025). This study demonstrates that these values remain highly relevant in addressing the challenges associated with the use of digital technology.

In this context, self-regulation, attention management, the ability to limit digital distractions, and the cultivation of ethical digital habits can be understood as contemporary manifestations of *mujahadah* and *riyadhah* within modern learning environments (Hasyim, 2024). Consequently, *tazkiyatun nafs* is positioned not merely as a spiritual concept but also as a framework for character development in response to the challenges of the digital age.

3. Operationalizing the Concept of Ta'dib in Digital Educational Practice

The third contribution of this study lies in its effort to connect the concept of *Ta'dib* with the practical use of digital learning media. Existing studies on *Ta'dib* generally focus on its philosophical and epistemological

dimensions within Islamic education (Putra et al., 2023). This study seeks to translate the concept into a more operational context by developing principles for using digital media to cultivate *adab*.

Within this framework, *Ta'dib* functions as a normative foundation that provides direction for the use of technology, while *tazkiyatun nafs* serves as an internal mechanism that assists learners in developing self-control and moral awareness (Yunita et al., 2025). These two concepts are viewed as complementary elements in constructing a model of Islamic education that is responsive to technological developments while remaining committed to character formation.

Based on these three contributions, the novelty of this study lies in the development of a paradigm that integrates three key components: the ontological analysis of digital media, the concept of *Ta'dib* as an educational foundation, and *tazkiyatun nafs* as a mechanism for self-development. Unlike previous studies that generally focus either on technological effectiveness or on philosophical discussions in isolation, this study offers an integrative framework that connects technology, education, and spirituality within a single conceptual model (Zaiyani et al., 2025; Hasyim, 2024).

Through this approach, the use of digital media in Islamic education is understood not merely as a technical or pedagogical issue but also as an integral part of the processes of cultivating *adab*, strengthening character, and fostering learners' spiritual awareness in the digital era (Taufik, 2020).

Practical and Philosophical Implications for the Transformation of Islamic Education in the Digital Era

The foregoing discussion demonstrates that the utilization of technology in Islamic education extends beyond technical aspects of teaching and learning and encompasses philosophical dimensions related to educational goals, orientations, and values (Shobirin et al., 2025). Within the Indonesian educational context, where various policies emphasize character development, learner autonomy, and twenty-first-century competencies, the findings of this study provide an additional perspective on the importance of integrating moral

and spiritual dimensions into the process of digital educational transformation (Taufik, 2020).

From the perspective of Islamic education, learning autonomy is not merely understood as the freedom of learners to make educational choices (Zaiyani et al., 2025). Rather, it is viewed as the capacity to make decisions based on knowledge, moral responsibility, and ethical considerations. Therefore, the development of learner autonomy should be accompanied by the cultivation of character, *adab*, and spiritual awareness so that education is oriented not only toward academic achievement but also toward the holistic development of the individual.

Transforming the Role of Teachers in the Digital Learning Ecosystem

Another implication of this study is the need to strengthen teachers' roles in responding to the rapid development of digital technologies. Digital competence remains an essential requirement for educators, particularly in utilizing various educational platforms and learning media. However, technological proficiency alone is insufficient to address the broader challenges facing Islamic education in the digital age (Shobirin et al., 2025).

From the perspective proposed in this study, teachers are not merely users of technology but are also responsible for directing the use of learning media in ways that are consistent with the objectives of Islamic education (Putra et al., 2023). This role includes the ability to select, evaluate, and manage digital learning resources based on pedagogical, ethical, and Islamic considerations (Taufik, 2020).

Accordingly, teachers' responsibilities extend beyond providing engaging and interactive media. They also include ensuring that such media contribute to character formation, critical thinking development, and the strengthening of learners' moral awareness (Shobirin et al., 2025). In this context, teachers serve as learning curators who help students navigate the vast array of information and knowledge sources available in digital environments.

This perspective aligns with the view that scientific knowledge and religious values should be integrated within the educational process (Yunita et al., 2025). Consequently, the use of digital media should be situated within an educational framework that not only promotes learning effectiveness but also

prioritizes cultivating adab, character development, and enhancing learners' spiritual consciousness. Through such an approach, digital transformation in Islamic education can proceed in a more balanced manner while remaining aligned with the holistic objectives of education.

Developing Adab-Oriented Learning Media

Based on the ontological analysis presented in this study, the development of digital learning media cannot be understood merely as a technical undertaking (Thapliyal et al., 2022). Educational technology designers, software developers, and educational administrators must recognize that the design of learning media influences how learners interact with knowledge and develop learning habits. Therefore, media development should take into account pedagogical, ethical, and philosophical dimensions that are consistent with the objectives of Islamic education (Stancin et al., 2020).

From the perspective of *Ta'dib*, several principles may guide the development of digital learning media. First, information architecture should be systematically organized by considering the interrelationships among different domains of knowledge (Sani & Achadi, 2025). Content related to fundamental Islamic values may serve as the foundation that guides learners' understanding of other forms of knowledge. In this way, the learning process is oriented not only toward acquiring information but also toward developing a comprehensive worldview about knowledge.

Second, media design should provide opportunities for reflection and meaning-making. Visual elements, animations, and interactive features undoubtedly play important roles in enhancing learner engagement; however, their use should remain aligned with educational objectives (Zaiyani et al., 2025). Media that rely excessively on visual stimulation may divert learners' attention away from deep understanding (Thapliyal et al., 2022). Consequently, learning media should balance interactivity with opportunities for reflection and contemplation of the subject matter being studied (Putra et al., 2023).

Third, evaluation systems integrated into learning media should be designed not only to assess cognitive achievement but also to support character development and learner responsibility (Shobirin et al., 2025). In addition to measuring learning outcomes through tests and quizzes, digital learning media

can facilitate self-reflection assessments, participation in discussions, learning discipline, and activities that demonstrate the development of learners' attitudes and behaviors throughout the learning process.

Transforming Educational Ecosystems in the Digital Era

The findings of this study indicate that educational success is determined not only by the availability of technology but also by the ability of educational institutions to direct its use in accordance with their educational objectives. The experiences of various Islamic educational institutions demonstrate that academic advancement and institutional development often progress alongside the strengthening of values, academic culture, and character formation that serve as the foundation of educational life (Warisno et al., 2025).

In the context of digital transformation, educational institutions need to view technology not merely as supporting infrastructure for learning but also as an integral component of the educational environment that influences learners' ways of thinking, behavior, and social interactions (Al-Attas, 1980). Consequently, policies promoting educational digitalization should be accompanied by efforts to strengthen moral values, academic ethics, and character development to ensure that technological advancements contribute more effectively to the educational process (Ghufron & Anam, 2026).

At this point, Al-Ghazali's concept of *tazkiyatun nafs* provides an important perspective by emphasizing that educational success depends not only on the quality of instructional content or the sophistication of learning media but also on learners' moral and spiritual readiness to receive and apply knowledge (Khanom et al., 2025). Therefore, the development of learning media oriented toward character formation constitutes an essential component of efforts to realize the objectives of Islamic education in a more comprehensive manner (Fahyuni et al., 2020).

Through the integration of the ontological analysis of media, the concept of *Ta'dib*, and the approach of *tazkiyatun nafs*, this study proposes a conceptual framework that positions technology as a means of supporting both the advancement of knowledge and the cultivation of *adab* (Lisyani & Soabar Al Ghazal, 2023). Through this approach, digital transformation in Islamic education is expected to produce not only learners with strong academic

competencies and digital literacy skills but also individuals who are capable of utilizing technology responsibly, ethically, and in accordance with Islamic values (Handrianto et al., 2023).

CONCLUSION

1. There is a fundamental ontological distinction between "tools" and "media" within Islamic education. Tools function as neutral, functional-instrumental devices (e.g., hardware or projectors) intended to support learning technically. Conversely, media act as value-laden, meaning-making environments. Because media inherently influence how students receive, process, and interpret information, their utilization must be evaluated through a philosophical lens rather than relying solely on pedagogical or technical efficiency.
2. To prevent the reduction of education to mere cognitive achievement (*ta'lim*), Islamic education in the digital era must be firmly grounded in the framework of *Ta'dib* (the inculcation of *adab*). Digital learning media should be purposefully designed to respect the hierarchy of knowledge (*maratib al-'ulum*), provide spaces for critical reflection, and awaken learners' inherent spiritual consciousness (*fitrah*).
3. In addressing contemporary digital challenges—such as technological addiction, distractions, and misinformation—the Sufistic concept of *tazkiyatun nafs* (purification of the soul) proves highly relevant. The practice of *mujahadah* is framed as cognitive self-regulation, or "digital fasting," to mitigate excessive consumption. At the same time, *riyadhah* is operationalized through the continuous habituation of ethical conduct (such as *tabayyun* or critical verification and respectful communication) within cyberspace.
4. Although advanced technologies and Artificial Intelligence (AI) can optimize learning efficiency and information transfer, the esoteric elements essential for character formation cannot be automated. Teachers retain a crucial and irreplaceable role as moral exemplars, spiritual mentors, and "digital curators" who guide students in harmonizing their intellectual, emotional, and spiritual faculties.

5. The future development of digital media and Learning Management Systems (LMS) must transcend superficial visual appeal and mechanical interactivity. Media design must incorporate an information architecture that aligns with Islamic values, balance sensory stimulation with opportunities for contemplation, and integrate comprehensive evaluation systems that assess not only cognitive outcomes but also the progressive development of students' moral responsibility and character.

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