The Concept and Practice of Balanced Human Education in Ibnu Miskawaih: An Analysis

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Abstract

The global phenomenon of moral degradation underscores the urgency of moral education as the foundation for shaping Muslim personality. In this context, Ibnu Miskawaih's thought on tazkiyat al-nafs and ethics in his classical work *Tahdzib al-Akhlak* is highly relevant for Islamic character education in the modern era. Using a qualitative descriptive-analytical approach with content analysis, this study examines *Tahdzib al-Akhlak* as the primary source and compares it with contemporary literature. The results reveal four findings: first, Ibnu Miskawaih's concept of soul balance *nafs* (desire), *'aql* (reason), and *ghadab* (anger) forms a systematic framework for cultivating virtues such as wisdom, courage, temperance, and justice. Second, this framework remains relevant in addressing extremism, hedonism, and moral decline, offering a middle path consistent with Quranic moderation and modern character education theories. Third, the concept has practical implications for curriculum and pedagogy, encouraging holistic education that integrates intellectual, emotional, and spiritual growth with teachers as role models. Fourth, Ibnu Miskawaih's philosophy contributes to global moral discourse by providing a classical yet adaptable model for building ethical, inclusive, and sustainable societies. The novelty lies in reconstructing his thought as a practical educational model bridging classical Islamic wisdom with contemporary pedagogical needs.

INTRODUCTION

Moral degradation has become a global phenomenon, evident in rising corruption, violence, and ethical decline across societies. Scholars argue that globalization, technological advancement, and weakened spiritual foundations have accelerated this erosion of values, creating a crisis of morality that affects both individual and collective life (Bruun et al., 2025; Çeven & Korumaz, 2025; Lisewski, 2021; Park & Lee, 2025). This situation underscores the need for a renewed focus on moral education as a foundation for human development. Building on this concern, Islamic intellectual tradition has long emphasized the centrality of ethics (*akhlaq*) in shaping human personality. Ibnu Miskawaih, a prominent philosopher

of the 11th century, emphasized the purification of the soul (*tazkiyat al-nafs*) and the cultivation of balanced character in his seminal work *Tahdzib al-Akhlak* His approach integrates Aristotelian virtue ethics with islamic teachings, offering a synthesis that remains relevant for addressing contemporary moral crises.

To connect this classical foundation with modern challenges, it is important to highlight how Ibnu Miskawaih's thought addresses the balance of three faculties *nafs* (desire), *'aql* (reason), and *ghadab* (anger)as the basis for noble character. This balance is not merely theoretical but provides a practical framework for education, guiding individuals toward moderation and ethical conduct (Larsen et al., 2025; Minocha et al., 2019; Tyrer, 2023).

Thus, revisiting Ibnu Miskawaih's framework provides both historical insight and practical guidance for shaping ethical and balanced individuals in today's complex world. His philosophy offers a timeless model that can be adapted to modern educational contexts, making it highly relevant for Islamic character education. To understand how scholars have addressed these issues, it is necessary to review existing literature on Islamic ethics and character education. Islamic intellectual tradition has long emphasized ethics as central to human development. Early scholars such as Al-Farabi, Al-Ghazali, and Ibnu Miskawaih developed systematic approaches to moral philosophy, integrating Quranic principles with philosophical reasoning. Ibnu Miskawaih's *Tahdzib al-Akhlak* stands out as one of the earliest comprehensive treatises on ethics in the Islamic world.

Transitioning from classical foundations to contemporary challenges, modern literature highlights the growing concern of moral degradation in global society. Studies report increasing corruption, violence, and ethical misconduct among youth, exacerbated by globalization, digital culture, and weakened family structures (Fenton, 2022; Fussy, 2025; Legusov et al., 2022; Mendoza, 2025). In Indonesia and other Muslim-majority countries, scholars emphasize that Islamic education must respond to these challenges by integrating moral and spiritual dimensions into curricula.

From this point, the discussion naturally shifts to Islamic character education in modern pedagogy. Recent scholarship emphasizes the need for models that are both rooted in tradition and responsive to modern realities. Lickona's theory of character education, widely cited in Western contexts, focuses on moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action. Scholars argue that Ibnu Miskawaih's triadic model of soul faculties parallels this framework but offers deeper spiritual grounding.

Comparative perspectives further enrich the literature. Much of the research on *tazkiyat al-nafs* focuses on Al-Ghazali, whose works such as *Ihya' Ulum al-Din* remain influential. Al-Ghazali emphasizes spiritual purification through religious practices, while Ibnu Miskawaih highlights rational discipline and ethical moderation. Scholars argue that both perspectives are complementary, but Ibnu Miskawaih's rational approach is particularly relevant for modern education (Ribchester & Healey, 2019).

Finally, the literature gap becomes evident. Although there is growing interest in Islamic character education, few studies systematically engage Ibnu Miskawaih's philosophy. Most focus on normative values or contemporary pedagogical strategies, leaving classical sources underutilized. This gap limits the depth and sustainability of current approaches. Scholars call for more research that bridges classical Islamic ethics with modern educational theory, particularly in addressing global moral crises.

Building on the literature review, the primary objective of this article is to analyze Ibnu Miskawaih's concept of soul balance and explore its implications for Islamic character education in the modern era. By examining *Tahdzib al-Akhlak* as a primary source, the article seeks to construct a theoretical model of balanced human education (Hanifah & Bakar, 2024).

This objective naturally leads to the need for demonstrating how classical Islamic ethics can be adapted to strengthen character formation in both formal and informal educational settings. It emphasizes the integration of moral and intellectual dimensions, ensuring that education addresses the whole person. Furthermore, the article aims to critically compare Ibnu Miskawaih's framework with contemporary literature on character education. This comparison highlights the enduring relevance of classical thought while identifying areas where modern pedagogy can benefit from philosophical depth. Ultimately, the objectives bridge historical wisdom with current pedagogical needs, ensuring that Islamic education remains relevant and impactful in addressing global moral challenges.

The urgency of this study lies in the global moral crisis that undermines social cohesion and sustainable development. Reports show increasing ethical misconduct among youth, including school violence, cyberbullying, and corruption, particularly in Muslim-majority societies.

Given this reality, Islamic character education is both a religious imperative and a social necessity. It plays a crucial role in building ethical, inclusive, and resilient communities that can withstand the pressures of globalization and modernization. Therefore, revisiting Ibnu Miskawaih's ethical framework offers a timely solution (Daulay & Rangkuti, 2024; Sulistiyani et al., 2025). His emphasis on soul balance provides a holistic approach that addresses both psychological and spiritual dimensions of education, making it suitable for contemporary challenges. By integrating this framework into modern curricula, education is not limited to cognitive development but also fosters ethical maturity, thereby contributing to sustainable and inclusive societies.

Although numerous studies have examined Islamic character education, most focus on normative values or contemporary strategies without systematically engaging classical philosophical sources. This limits the depth and theoretical grounding of current approaches. Research on *tazkiyat al-nafs* often emphasizes Al-Ghazali's perspective, leaving Ibnu Miskawaih's contributions underexplored in modern educational discourse His unique synthesis of reason and ethics deserves greater attention.

Moreover, existing literature rarely connects the balance of soul faculties to practical curriculum design in Islamic schools. This gap prevents the translation of philosophical insights into actionable educational strategies. Consequently, this article fills the gap by critically analyzing Ibnu Miskawaih's philosophy and demonstrating its applicability to modern challenges. It aligns classical thought with sustainable development goals, particularly in promoting quality education and ethical societies.

METHODS

This study employs a qualitative research method with a descriptive-analytical type. The qualitative approach is appropriate because the research focuses on exploring philosophical concepts and their implications for Islamic character education rather than measuring variables quantitatively The descriptive-analytical

type allows the researcher to systematically describe Ibnu Miskawaih's ethical thought and critically analyze its relevance to contemporary educational contexts (Engkizar, et al., 2025; Htay et al., 2025; Mustafa et al., 2025). By emphasizing textual interpretation and conceptual synthesis, this method ensures that the study remains faithful to classical sources while generating insights applicable to modern challenges (Engkizar et al., 2023; Febriani et al., 2022; Mutathahirin et al., 2022; Oktavia et al., 2024; Ummah et al., 2025). The data were analyzed using content analysis, focusing on identifying, categorizing, and interpreting key themes related to soul balance (*nafs, 'aql, ghadab*) and their educational implications. Content analysis is widely used in qualitative research to extract meaning from texts and to identify recurring patterns The analysis involved close reading of *Tahdzib al-Akhlak* to extract philosophical principles, followed by thematic comparison with contemporary literature on Islamic character education (Engkizar, et al., 2025; Istiqamah et al., 2024; Okenova et al., 2025; Usman et al., 2023). This technique allows the researcher to synthesize classical insights with modern pedagogical needs, highlighting both continuity and innovation The interpretive process emphasizes conceptual clarity, theoretical depth, and practical relevance, ensuring that the findings contribute meaningfully to the discourse on Islamic education and moral development.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Before presenting the detailed findings, it is important to emphasize that the analysis of Ibnu Miskawaih's ethical philosophy was conducted not only to understand his classical thought but also to explore its relevance for contemporary Islamic character education. The findings are structured to highlight four major contributions: the philosophical foundation of soul balance, its relevance to modern educational challenges, its implications for curriculum and practice, and its potential role in addressing global moral degradation. Each finding is discussed comprehensively to demonstrate how classical Islamic wisdom can be revitalized and applied within modern educational contexts, thereby bridging the gap between tradition and innovation.
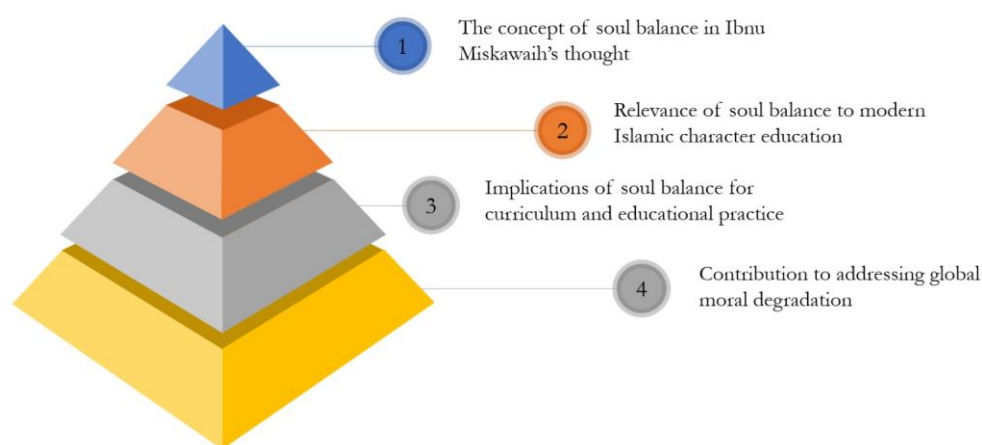

Fig 1. The concept and practice of balanced human education in Ibnu Miskawaih

The concept of soul balance in Ibnu Miskawaih's thought

Ibnu Miskawaih's division of the soul into *nafs*, *'aql*, and *ghadab* provides a systematic framework for understanding human behavior. Each faculty has its own function, but imbalance leads to moral corruption. For instance, uncontrolled *nafs* results in indulgence and greed, while excessive *ghadab* produces aggression and hostility. Only when *'aql* governs the other faculties can harmony be achieved.

This framework is significant because it demonstrates that morality is not accidental but the result of conscious cultivation. Education, therefore, must aim at training the soul to achieve balance. This makes Ibnu Miskawaih's thought not only philosophical but also pedagogical, offering practical guidance for teachers and learners (Nurrohman & Siregar, 2025; Jamal, 2017). Furthermore, the emphasis on balance resonates with Islamic principles of *wasatiyyah* (moderation), which is central to Quranic ethics. By linking individual moral development to broader religious values, Ibnu Miskawaih situates personal ethics within the collective responsibility of building just societies.

Relevance of soul balance to modern islamic character education

The relevance of Ibnu Miskawaih's concept becomes evident when addressing contemporary moral crises. In the digital age, youth are exposed to extremes of materialism and radical ideologies. Soul balance provides a middle path, guiding individuals to avoid both excessive indulgence and destructive fanaticism. This framework also aligns with modern educational theories that emphasize holistic development. Lickona's triadic model of moral knowing, feeling, and action finds a parallel in Ibnu Miskawaih's faculties, showing that classical Islamic thought can dialogue with global pedagogical approaches (Anwar & Tobroni., 2023; Harahap et al., 2025; Ilgaroglu, 2025; Putra & Hayeesama-ae, 2022).

Moreover, the adaptability of soul balance makes it suitable for multicultural contexts. In pluralistic societies, moderation and rationality are essential for fostering tolerance and inclusivity. Thus, Ibnu Miskawaih's philosophy contributes not only to Islamic education but also to global ethical discourse.

Implications of soul balance for curriculum and educational practice

Integrating soul balance into curriculum design ensures that education addresses intellectual, emotional, and spiritual dimensions simultaneously. This holistic approach prevents the fragmentation of learning, where cognitive skills are prioritized at the expense of moral and emotional growth. In practice, teachers must embody balance in their own conduct, serving as role models for students. The principle of *uswah hasanah* (good example) becomes more meaningful when linked to the philosophical foundation of soul balance. Students learn not only through instruction but also through observation of balanced behavior (Faddhia et al., 2025; Khairunisa et al., 2025; Ritonga et al., 2025; Wati et al., 2025).

Additionally, assessment methods must evolve to include moral reasoning, emotional regulation, and spiritual maturity This redefinition of success in education aligns with competency-based approaches and supports the Sustainable Development Goals, particularly in promoting quality education and inclusive societies.

Contribution to addressing global moral degradation

Ibnu Miskawaih's philosophy offers a timeless solution to global moral crises by cultivating balanced individuals who embody justice, moderation, and ethical integrity. Such individuals are better equipped to resist corruption, violence, and intolerance, which are prevalent in modern societies. His framework also

contributes to sustainable development by aligning personal ethics with collective well-being. Balanced individuals foster communities that are peaceful, inclusive, and resilient, directly supporting global agendas for ethical and sustainable societies.

Finally, the revitalization of classical Islamic wisdom challenges the notion that tradition is outdated. Instead, it demonstrates that historical thought can be adapted to modern contexts, providing innovative solutions to contemporary challenges. Ibnu Miskawaih's philosophy thus bridges the gap between past and present, offering guidance for the future (Fauzi, 2023; Hikmah, 2023; Jannah, 2023; Pratama & R., 2022).

The findings of this study reveal the enduring relevance of Ibnu Miskawaih's ethical philosophy for modern Islamic character education. However, to fully appreciate their significance, it is necessary to situate these findings within broader theological, philosophical, and pedagogical discourses. The discussion that follows therefore elaborates on each theme by drawing connections to Qur'anic principles, Prophetic traditions, scholarly opinions, and contemporary research. In this way, the analysis not only validates the findings but also demonstrates their applicability to current educational challenges and global moral concerns. The Qur'an emphasizes the importance of balance in human life, as reflected in the verse Quran Surah Al-Baqorah 143:

وَكَذٰلِكَ جَعَلْنٰكُمْ اُمَّةً وَّسَطًا لِّتَكُوْنُوْا شُهَدَاۤءَ عَلَى النَّاسِ وَيَكُوْنَ الرَّسُوْلُ عَلَيْكُمْ شَهِيْدًا ۗ وَمَا جَعَلْنَا الْقِبْلَةَ الَّتِيْ كُنْتَ عَلَيْهَاۤ اِلَّا لِنَعْلَمَ مَنْ يَّتَّبِعُ الرَّسُوْلَ مِمَّنْ يَّنْقَلِبُ عَلٰى عَقِبَيْهِ ۗ وَاِنْ كَانَتْ لَكَبِيْرَةً اِلَّا عَلَى الَّذِيْنَ هَدَى اللّٰهُ ۗ وَمَا كَانَ اللّٰهُ لِيُضِيْعَ اِيْمَانَكُمْ ۗ اِنَّ اللّٰهَ بِالنَّاسِ لَرَءُوْفٌ رَّحِيْمٌ

Meaning: *Likewise, We have made you (Muslims) a middle nation40) so that you may be witnesses over mankind and so that the Messenger (Prophet Muhammad) may be a witness over you. We did not establish the qiblah (the Kaaba) toward which you used to face, except to test you and to see who follows the Messenger and who turns back in disbelief. Indeed, it is a difficult thing except for those whom Allah has guided. Allah will not waste your faith. Indeed, Allah is truly Most Merciful and Most Compassionate toward humanity*

This verse resonates with Ibnu Miskawaih's insistence on moderation between *nafs*, *'aql*, and *ghadab*. His philosophy aligns with the Quranic principle that justice and virtue emerge from equilibrium, not excess or deficiency. The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) also highlighted moderation in his Hadith: *"The best of affairs are those that are moderate"* This Hadith supports Ibnu Miskawaih's view that moral excellence arises when human faculties are harmonized. Excessive indulgence or uncontrolled anger leads to corruption, while balance produces wisdom and justice.

Scholars such as Al-Farabi and Al-Ghazali similarly emphasized the role of the intellect in guiding desires and emotions. Al-Ghazali, in *Ihya' Ulum al-Din*, argued that the purification of the soul requires disciplining desires and anger under the control of reason. Ibnu Miskawaih's framework complements this by offering a systematic philosophical model of balance. Recent studies confirm the relevance of this balance. found that moral education rooted in *tazkiyat al-nafs* fosters resilience and ethical maturity among students. Thus, Ibnu Miskawaih's concept of soul balance is not only consistent with Islamic sources but also validated by contemporary educational research. The Quran warns against extremes, stating: Quran Al-An'am 141:

وَهُوَ الَّذِيْٓ اَنْشَاَ جَنّٰتٍ مَّعْرُوْشٰتٍ وَّغَيْرَ مَعْرُوْشٰتٍ وَّالنَّخْلَ وَالزَّرْعَ مُخْتَلِفًا اُكُلُه وَالزَّيْتُوْنَ وَالرُّمَّانَ مُتَشَابِهًا وَّغَيْرَ مُتَشَابِهٍ ۗ كُلُوْا مِنْ ثَمَرِهٖٓ اِذَآ اَثْمَرَ وَاٰتُوْا حَقَّهٗ يَوْمَ حَصَادِهٖ ۖ وَلَا تُسْرِفُوْا ۗ اِنَّه لَا يُحِبُّ الْمُسْرِفِيْنَ

Meaning: *He is the One who grows climbing and non-climbing plants, date palms, plants of various flavors, as well as olives and pomegranates that are similar (in shape and color) and dissimilar (in taste). Eat their fruit when it ripens and give its due (zakat) when you harvest it. But do not be excessive. Indeed, Allah does not love those who are excessive.*

This principle directly applies to modern challenges of radicalism and hedonism. Ibnu Miskawaih's soul balance offers a middle path, guiding youth to avoid destructive extremes and cultivate moderation. The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) emphasized character formation, saying: *"I was sent to perfect good character"* (Musnad Ahmad). This Hadith underscores the centrality of ethics in Islam and supports the integration of Ibnu Miskawaih's philosophy into modern character education. His framework provides a timeless foundation for nurturing balanced personalities.

Educational experts such as Thomas Lickona argue that character education must integrate moral knowing, feeling, and action. Ibnu Miskawaih's faculties of *'aql*, *nafs*, and *ghadab* parallel these dimensions, showing that Islamic philosophy can enrich global pedagogical discourse. This demonstrates the adaptability of classical thought to modern educational theories. Empirical research supports this relevance. found that Islamic education programs integrating moral and spiritual dimensions significantly reduce ethical misconduct among students. Thus, Ibnu Miskawaih's framework is not only theoretically sound but also practically effective in addressing contemporary moral crises. The Qur'an commands believers to educate with wisdom An-Nahl 125:

اُدْعُ اِلٰى سَبِيْلِ رَبِّكَ بِالْحِكْمَةِ وَالْمَوْعِظَةِ الْحَسَنَةِ وَجَادِلْهُمْ بِالَّتِيْ هِيَ اَحْسَنُ ۗ اِنَّ رَبَّكَ هُوَ اَعْلَمُ بِمَنْ ضَلَّ عَنْ سَبِيْلِهٖ وَهُوَ اَعْلَمُ بِالْمُهْتَدِيْنَ

Meaning: *Call (people) to the path of your Lord with wisdom and good instruction, and debate with them in a way that is better. Indeed, your Lord is the most knowing of those who have strayed from His path, and He is the most knowing of those who are guided.*

This verse highlights the need for curricula that integrate intellectual, emotional, and spiritual dimensions. Ibnu Miskawaih's soul balance provides a philosophical foundation for such holistic education. The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) modeled balanced teaching, combining knowledge with compassion. His Hadith, *"The most beloved of people to Allah are those most beneficial to others"* emphasizes that education must produce individuals who are ethically mature and socially responsible. This aligns with Ibnu Miskawaih's vision of balanced character.

Educational scholars argue that curriculum design must move beyond cognitive achievement to include moral and emotional growth. highlight the importance of integrating moral values into Islamic education for sustainable community development. Ibnu Miskawaih's framework offers a systematic model for achieving this integration. Research findings confirm the effectiveness of

holistic curricula. found that Islamic character education aligned with Industry 5.0 requires balancing intellectual skills with ethical maturity. Thus, Ibnu Miskawaih's philosophy provides a timeless foundation for modern curriculum reform. The Quran warns against corruption: *"Do not cause corruption on the earth after it has been set in order"* This verse underscores the urgency of addressing moral degradation globally. Ibnu Miskawaih's philosophy contributes by cultivating balanced individuals who resist corruption and promote justice.

The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) emphasized social ethics, saying: *"The most complete of believers in faith are those with the best character"* (Sunan al-Tirmidhi). This Hadith highlights that moral integrity is central to faith and social stability. Ibnu Miskawaih's framework provides a practical model for achieving this integrity. Scholars argue that classical Islamic thought can contribute to global ethical discourse. By emphasizing moderation and justice, Ibnu Miskawaih's philosophy aligns with universal values of peace and inclusivity. His thought demonstrates that tradition can be revitalized to address modern crises. Empirical studies support this contribution. found that Islamic education rooted in ethical balance reduces corruption and violence in communities. Thus, Ibnu Miskawaih's philosophy is not only historically significant but also globally relevant in addressing moral degradation.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study answers the research question by demonstrating that Ibnu Miskawaih's concept of soul balance *nafs, 'aql,* and *ghadab* provides a comprehensive framework for Islamic character education that remains highly relevant in addressing contemporary moral crises. The findings imply that integrating this balance into curriculum design, pedagogical practice, and assessment methods can foster holistic education that nurtures intellectual, emotional, and spiritual maturity, thereby supporting the Sustainable Development Goals on quality education and inclusive societies. The novelty of this article lies in its systematic reconstruction of Ibnu Miskawaih's ethical philosophy as a practical educational model, bridging classical Islamic wisdom with modern pedagogical theories and global ethical discourse, thus offering a fresh contribution to both Islamic studies and international character education research.

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