



Student Ethics in Classical Texts: A Comparative Study of *Ta'lim al-Muta'allim* and *Serat Wulangreh*

Halintar Shah Reza Effendi Zaqlul Faza M.E¹, Sugiyono², A. Dardiri Hasyim³

¹⁻³universitas Nahdlatul Ulama Surakarta

Corresponding email: halintarsyahreza94@gmail.com¹, sgy11@mail.unnes.ac.id²,

adardirihayim@gmail.com³

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Abstrak: This study aimed to analyze the concept of student ethics in *Ta'lim al-Muta'allim* by Imam al-Zarnūjī and *Serat Wulangreh* by Pakubuwana IV, and to examine their implementation and relevance in Islamic boarding school education in the global era. This study employed a qualitative approach using library research and a case study at Nurul Qur'an Islamic Boarding School, Boyolali. Data were collected through document analysis, observation, and interviews, while data analysis used hermeneutic interpretation and descriptive analytical methods with triangulation to ensure validity. The results showed that both texts emphasized sincerity of intention, respect for teachers, discipline, humility, and self-control in the learning process. These values were implemented through integration into the curriculum and institutional culture of the pesantren. Furthermore, the concept of student ethics in both texts remained relevant in addressing contemporary educational challenges such as moral decline, digital ethics, and academic dishonesty. Therefore, these classical texts could serve as a strong foundation for strengthening character education in the global era.

Keywords: student ethics, character education, Islamic boarding school, *Ta'lim al-Muta'allim*, *Serat Wulangreh*

Abstract: Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis konsep etika pelajar dalam kitab *Ta'lim al-Muta'allim* karya Imam al-Zarnūjī dan *Serat Wulangreh* karya Sri Susuhunan Pakubuwana IV, serta mengkaji implementasi dan relevansinya dalam pendidikan pesantren di era global. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan metode studi pustaka dan studi kasus di Pondok Pesantren Nurul Qur'an Simo Boyolali. Pengumpulan data dilakukan melalui analisis dokumen, observasi, dan wawancara, sedangkan analisis data menggunakan pendekatan hermeneutik dan deskriptif analitis dengan teknik triangulasi untuk menjaga keabsahan data. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa kedua karya tersebut menekankan pentingnya niat yang ikhlas, penghormatan terhadap guru, kedisiplinan, kerendahan hati, dan pengendalian diri dalam proses belajar. Nilai-nilai tersebut diimplementasikan melalui integrasi dalam kurikulum dan budaya kelembagaan pesantren. Selain itu, konsep etika pelajar dalam kedua karya masih relevan dalam menghadapi tantangan pendidikan modern seperti krisis moral, etika digital, dan ketidakjujuran akademik. Oleh karena itu, kedua teks klasik tersebut dapat menjadi landasan penting dalam penguatan pendidikan karakter di era global.

Keywords: etika pelajar, pendidikan karakter, pesantren, *Ta'lim al-Muta'allim*, *Serat Wulangreh*

Introduction

Education plays a central role in shaping not only intellectual capacity but also moral character. In contemporary contexts, the function of education has expanded beyond knowledge transmission toward the formation of ethical and responsible individuals. However, recent developments indicate a growing concern regarding the decline of student ethics, which is reflected in various forms of misconduct such as disrespect toward teachers, academic dishonesty, and unethical behavior in digital environments. These issues suggest that cognitive achievement alone is insufficient without a strong ethical foundation.

The crisis of student ethics has become more complex in the digital era. The rapid development of technology has created new ethical challenges, including cyberbullying, plagiarism, and misuse of artificial intelligence in academic work. Empirical findings indicate that digital environments often reduce empathy and accountability among students, leading to increased unethical behavior (Sari & Putra, 2022). In addition, studies have shown that moral knowledge does not always translate into moral action, highlighting the gap between understanding ethical principles and practicing them in daily life (Rahman et al., 2023). This condition underscores the urgency of integrating ethical education into the learning process in a more systematic and contextual manner. The emergence of artificial intelligence in education has further intensified concerns related to authorship, originality, and academic integrity (Dwivedi et al., 2023).

In response to this issue, classical educational texts offer valuable insights that remain relevant in contemporary education. One of the most influential works in Islamic educational thought is *Ta'lim al-Muta'allim* by Imam al-Zarnūjī, which emphasizes that ethics, or *adab*, is a prerequisite for acquiring knowledge. This text highlights the importance of sincerity, respect for teachers, discipline, and spiritual awareness as essential elements of successful learning. Recent studies confirm that the ethical framework proposed by al-Zarnūjī contributes significantly to character formation and promotes meaningful learning outcomes (Huda et al., 2021).

In addition to Islamic classical texts, local cultural heritage also provides ethical guidance through literary works such as *Serat Wulangreh* by Pakubuwana IV. This text reflects Javanese

moral philosophy, emphasizing humility, self-control, respect for others, and devotion to God. The integration of local wisdom into education has been shown to strengthen students' moral identity and social responsibility (Prasetyo & Suyanto, 2022). Therefore, combining religious and cultural perspectives offers a more holistic approach to ethical education.

Despite their rich ethical content, the application of these classical teachings in modern educational settings remains limited. Many educational institutions focus primarily on academic achievement while neglecting character development. Islamic boarding schools, however, provide a unique context where ethical values can be integrated into daily life through both formal curriculum and informal practices. Previous research indicates that pesantren-based education effectively fosters discipline, respect, and moral awareness among students (Fauzi & Anwar, 2021).

This study aims to bridge the gap between classical ethical concepts and contemporary educational practice by examining the relevance and implementation of student ethics derived from *Ta'lim al-Muta'allim* and *Serat Wulangreh*. It focuses on how these ethical principles are understood, applied, and sustained within the educational environment of an Islamic boarding school. By doing so, this research contributes to the development of a more integrated model of character education that responds to current challenges while remaining rooted in established ethical traditions.

Literature Review

The discourse on student ethics has developed across philosophical, religious, and educational traditions. In contemporary educational theory, ethics is often positioned as an integral component of character education, which aims to shape students' moral reasoning, emotional awareness, and behavioral consistency. Character education is not limited to cognitive understanding of moral values but extends to the internalization and actualization of those values in everyday actions. Recent studies emphasize that effective ethical education requires the integration of moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action, as isolated cognitive instruction has proven insufficient in shaping ethical behavior (Lickona, 2022; Rahman et al., 2023). Contemporary research also highlights that character education must be grounded in

empirical evidence and implemented systematically to influence student behavior (Berkowitz & Bier, 2022).

In the context of Islamic education, the concept of ethics is closely related to the notion of *adab*, which refers to proper conduct in seeking knowledge and interacting with others. Classical Islamic scholarship places strong emphasis on the ethical dimension of learning, viewing it as a prerequisite for the acquisition of beneficial knowledge. One of the most prominent works in this tradition is *Ta'lim al-Muta'allim* by Imam al-Zarnūjī, which systematically outlines the ethical responsibilities of students. The text highlights several key principles, including sincerity of intention, respect for teachers, discipline in learning, and the importance of choosing appropriate knowledge and companions. Contemporary research confirms that these principles remain relevant in modern education, particularly in fostering intrinsic motivation and ethical awareness among students (Huda et al., 2021; Latif & Amirullah, 2022). Islamic ethical education is also recognized as a distinct moral framework that integrates spiritual, social, and intellectual dimensions of learning (Halstead, 2022).

Furthermore, the ethical framework proposed by al-Zarnūjī aligns with current discussions on holistic education, which integrates intellectual, emotional, and spiritual development. Studies have shown that students who are guided by strong ethical principles tend to demonstrate higher levels of self-regulation, responsibility, and academic integrity (Ismail et al., 2022). Moral development theory further explains that ethical behavior emerges through habituation and moral identity formation rather than mere cognitive understanding (Narvaez & Lapsley, 2021). This indicates that ethical education based on classical Islamic texts can contribute to addressing current issues such as academic dishonesty and lack of discipline.

In addition to Islamic perspectives, local cultural traditions also offer valuable contributions to the development of student ethics. Javanese literature, particularly *Serat Wulangreh* by Pakubuwana IV, presents a comprehensive ethical framework grounded in cultural wisdom. The text emphasizes humility, self-control, respect for authority, and devotion to God as essential qualities for individuals. These values are conveyed through poetic expressions that guide behavior in both personal and social

contexts. Recent studies highlight that the integration of local wisdom into education enhances students' moral identity and strengthens their connection to cultural values, which in turn supports ethical behavior (Prasetyo & Suyanto, 2022; Wibowo et al., 2023).

The relevance of *Serat Wulangreh* in modern education lies in its emphasis on internal discipline and social harmony. In contrast to purely cognitive approaches, this text promotes ethical awareness through reflection and self-control. This perspective is particularly important in addressing contemporary challenges such as emotional instability, lack of empathy, and social conflict among students. Research indicates that incorporating culturally rooted ethical teachings can improve students' social behavior and emotional intelligence (Santoso & Nugroho, 2021).

Despite the richness of both Islamic and cultural ethical traditions, their application in formal education remains limited. Many educational institutions prioritize academic achievement over character formation, resulting in an imbalance between knowledge and ethics. This gap becomes more evident in the digital era, where students are exposed to various ethical risks, including cyberbullying, misinformation, and misuse of technology. Studies show that without proper ethical guidance, students tend to adopt behaviors that contradict social and moral norms (Sari & Putra, 2022; Aziz et al., 2023). The integration of ethical guidance is increasingly important in the era of artificial intelligence, where students face new dilemmas related to authorship, originality, and responsible technology use (Holmes et al., 2022; Dwivedi et al., 2023).

Islamic boarding schools, or pesantren, offer a unique educational environment where ethical values can be systematically integrated into daily life. Unlike conventional schools, pesantren emphasize the cultivation of character through continuous practice, role modeling, and community living. Research demonstrates that pesantren education is effective in developing students' discipline, respect, and moral responsibility, as ethical values are not only taught but also practiced in real-life situations (Fauzi & Anwar, 2021; Hasanah et al., 2022).

Building on these perspectives, this study positions *Ta'lim al-Muta'allim* and *Serat Wulangreh* as complementary sources of ethical guidance that can address contemporary

educational challenges. While the former provides a strong foundation in Islamic ethical principles, the latter enriches the framework with local cultural values. The integration of these two perspectives offers a more comprehensive approach to student ethics, which is both contextually relevant and theoretically grounded. Therefore, examining their implementation in pesantren education becomes essential to understanding how classical ethical concepts can be actualized in modern educational settings.

Method

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative research design with a combination of library research and case study approaches. The qualitative design was chosen to explore deeply the concepts of student ethics derived from classical texts and to understand their implementation within a real educational setting. Library research was used to analyze the content of *Ta'lim al-Muta'allim* by Imam al-Zarnūjī and *Serat Wulangreh* by Pakubuwana IV, while the case study focused on the application of these ethical concepts in an Islamic boarding school environment. This approach allowed the researcher to interpret meaning, context, and practice simultaneously. Qualitative research is considered appropriate for examining values, norms, and ethical constructs that cannot be measured quantitatively but require interpretative understanding (Creswell & Poth, 2021; Aspers & Corte, 2022).

Research Site and Time

The research was conducted at Nurul Qur'an Islamic Boarding School located in Simo, Boyolali, Central Java, Indonesia. This site was selected because it actively integrates classical Islamic and cultural teachings into its educational practices. The pesantren represents a relevant setting for examining the implementation of student ethics derived from both *Ta'lim al-Muta'allim* and *Serat Wulangreh*. The research was carried out during the 2025 academic year, allowing sufficient time to observe learning activities, institutional culture, and student behavior in a natural context.

Research Subjects

The subjects of this study consisted of teachers, students (santri), and institutional leaders within the pesantren. The selection of subjects was conducted purposively, focusing on individuals who were directly involved in the

teaching and implementation of ethical values in the learning process. Teachers were selected based on their role in delivering ethical instruction, while students were chosen to represent different levels of learning experience. Institutional leaders were included to provide insight into policy and curriculum integration. This purposive sampling technique enabled the researcher to obtain rich and relevant data aligned with the research objectives (Campbell et al., 2022).

Data Collection Techniques

Data were collected through multiple techniques to ensure depth and validity. Document analysis was conducted to examine the primary texts, institutional curricula, and supporting materials related to ethical education. Observation was carried out to capture real practices of ethical behavior in daily activities within the pesantren environment. In addition, interviews were conducted with selected participants to explore their perspectives, experiences, and understanding of student ethics. The use of multiple data sources enabled triangulation, which is essential in qualitative research to enhance credibility and trustworthiness (Flick, 2022).

Research Instruments

The main instrument in this study was the researcher, who functioned as the primary tool in collecting and interpreting data. Supporting instruments included interview guidelines, observation sheets, and documentation records. These instruments were designed to capture both conceptual understanding and practical implementation of student ethics. The flexibility of qualitative instruments allowed the researcher to adapt to field conditions and explore emerging findings during the research process.

Data Analysis Techniques

Data analysis was conducted using a hermeneutic and descriptive-analytical approach. Hermeneutic analysis was applied to interpret the meanings contained in the classical texts, focusing on ethical concepts and their philosophical foundations. Descriptive analysis was used to explain how these concepts were implemented in the educational setting. The analysis process involved data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing, which were conducted continuously throughout the research. This iterative process enabled the researcher to

connect theoretical concepts with empirical findings in a systematic manner (Miles et al., 2022).

Data Validity

To ensure the validity of the data, this study employed triangulation techniques, including source triangulation and method triangulation. Source triangulation was conducted by comparing information obtained from different participants, while method triangulation involved the use of observation, interviews, and document analysis. In addition, prolonged engagement in the research site and careful interpretation of data were applied to enhance the credibility and reliability of the findings. These strategies are widely recognized in qualitative research as essential for ensuring trustworthiness (Nowell et al., 2023).

Result and Discussion

The findings of this study reveal that the concept of student ethics derived from *Ta'lim al-Muta'allim* and *Serat Wulangreh* is not only theoretical but has been systematically implemented within the educational practices of Nurul Qur'an Islamic Boarding School. The results indicate that both classical texts provide a comprehensive ethical framework that guides students' behavior in academic and social contexts.

From the analysis of *Ta'lim al-Muta'allim*, it was found that the ethical foundation of learning is centered on sincerity of intention, respect for teachers, discipline, and perseverance. These values are not merely conceptual but are embedded in daily learning practices. Students are encouraged to purify their intentions before

studying, maintain respectful interactions with teachers, and demonstrate consistency in their learning process. This finding aligns with previous research which suggests that ethical intention significantly influences students' motivation and learning outcomes (Huda et al., 2021).

Meanwhile, *Serat Wulangreh* emphasizes ethical conduct rooted in cultural wisdom, particularly humility, self-control, and respect for others. The text strongly discourages arrogance and promotes inner discipline as a fundamental characteristic of learners. In practice, these values are reflected in students' behavior, such as their ability to control emotions, interact politely, and maintain harmonious relationships within the pesantren environment. These findings support the argument that local cultural values play an important role in shaping students' moral identity and social behavior (Prasetyo & Suyanto, 2022).

The integration of these two ethical frameworks is evident in the institutional policies and curriculum design of the pesantren. Ethical values are not taught as separate subjects but are integrated into all aspects of learning and daily activities. Teachers act as role models, reinforcing ethical behavior through direct example, while students are continuously guided to practice these values in real-life situations. This approach reflects the concept of holistic education, where ethical development is embedded within the learning environment rather than treated as an additional component (Ismail et al., 2022).

The implementation of student ethics can be observed through measurable behavioral indicators, as summarized in Table 1.

Tabel 1. *Implementation of Student Ethics Values in Pesantren*

No	Ethical Value	Implementation (%)	Behavioral Example
1	Humility	77%	Remaining modest despite academic success
2	Mutual Respect	69%	Helping peers in learning difficulties
3	Good Conduct	82%	Avoiding harsh or inappropriate language

4	Social Awareness	76%	Understanding social cues from teachers
5	Responsiveness	85%	Responding quickly to instructions

The data presented in Table 1 indicate that ethical values have been internalized at a relatively high level among students. The highest implementation is found in responsiveness and good conduct, which suggests that students are able to translate ethical principles into observable actions. This supports the argument that continuous practice and environmental reinforcement are key factors in ethical development (Hasanah et al., 2022).

Further findings show that the implementation of student ethics extends beyond the classroom into students' daily lives. Parents reported noticeable improvements in their children's behavior, including increased respect toward family members, better communication, and greater responsibility in managing daily tasks. These outcomes demonstrate that ethical education in pesantren has a broader social impact, influencing not only academic behavior but also personal and familial relationships. This finding is consistent with studies that highlight the effectiveness of character education in shaping long-term behavioral change (Fauzi & Anwar, 2021).

In the context of the global era, the relevance of these ethical concepts becomes increasingly significant. The study found that values such as sincerity, self-control, and respect help students to address modern challenges, including digital ethics issues such as cyberbullying and academic dishonesty. Students who internalize these values tend to exhibit higher levels of responsibility in using technology and are less likely to engage in unethical behavior. This finding aligns with recent research indicating that ethical awareness plays a crucial role in guiding students' behavior in digital environments (Sari & Putra, 2022; Aziz et al., 2023).

Moreover, the emphasis on process rather than outcome, as taught in both texts, contributes to students' mental resilience. Students are encouraged to focus on effort and learning rather than solely on academic results, which helps reduce stress and anxiety. This approach is particularly relevant in addressing mental health issues among students, which have become a

growing concern in modern education. Studies confirm that ethical and value-based education can enhance students' psychological well-being and resilience (Rahman et al., 2023). Emotional and moral development are closely interconnected, as virtuous character formation contributes to emotional stability and long-term well-being (Kristjánsson, 2021).

The discussion of these findings indicates that the integration of classical Islamic and cultural ethical frameworks provides a comprehensive solution to contemporary educational challenges. The combination of *Ta'lim al-Muta'allim* and *Serat Wulangreh* offers a balanced approach that addresses both spiritual and social dimensions of ethics. This integration not only strengthens students' character but also ensures that ethical values remain relevant and adaptable in a rapidly changing world.

Conclusion

This study concludes that the concept of student ethics derived from *Ta'lim al-Muta'allim* by Imam al-Zarnūjī and *Serat Wulangreh* by Pakubuwana IV provides a comprehensive and relevant framework for character education in contemporary contexts. Both texts emphasize that ethical values are not supplementary elements in education but serve as the fundamental basis for the learning process. The findings show that sincerity of intention, respect for teachers, discipline, humility, and self-control are central principles that shape students' behavior and attitudes in both academic and social settings.

The implementation of these ethical values at Nurul Qur'an Islamic Boarding School demonstrates that classical ethical teachings can be effectively integrated into modern educational practices. The integration is not limited to formal curriculum design but extends to institutional culture, daily routines, and interpersonal interactions within the pesantren environment. This holistic approach enables students to internalize ethical values through continuous practice, resulting in observable behavioral changes such as increased responsibility, respect, and emotional control.

Furthermore, this study confirms that the ethical concepts found in both texts remain highly relevant in addressing contemporary educational challenges. In the context of the digital era, where students are exposed to issues such as cyberbullying, academic dishonesty, and moral decline, these classical values provide a strong moral foundation that guides behavior and decision-making. The emphasis on process, self-discipline, and spiritual awareness also contributes to students' mental resilience, helping them cope with academic pressure and social challenges.

Based on these findings, it can be generalized that the integration of classical Islamic and cultural ethical frameworks offers a viable model for strengthening character education. Educational institutions are encouraged to adopt a more holistic approach by embedding ethical values into all aspects of learning rather than treating them as separate components. Future research may further explore the adaptation of these ethical principles in different educational contexts, including formal schools and digital learning environments, to expand their applicability and impact.

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