



CONSTRUCTION OF SHAYKH NAWAWI AL-BANTANI'S MORAL EDUCATION METHOD AND ITS RELEVANCE TO CHARACTER EDUCATION: A THEMATIC ANALYSIS OF THREE SYARAH BOOKS

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze the construction of Syekh Nawawi al-Bantani's moral education method based on a thematic analysis of three commentary books (syarah), namely Nashā'ih al-'Ibād, Marāqī al-'Ubūdiyyah, and Salālim al-Fuḍalā', as well as to examine its relevance to character education. A qualitative library research approach was employed using thematic analysis on the textual data from the three works. The analysis was conducted through data identification, coding, categorization, thematic interpretation, and cross-textual synthesis. The findings indicate that Syekh Nawawi al-Bantani's moral education method forms an integrative pattern through five primary methods: lecturing or advice (nasihat), question and answer and dialogue, exemplary role modeling (uswah hasanah), habituation (ta'wīd), and spiritual exercise (riyāḍah). These five methods do not operate in isolation; rather, they form an educational process that connects value comprehension, attitude formation, behavioral practice, habituation, and inner spiritual cultivation. The advice method functions to instill moral awareness and social responsibility; dialogue fosters reflection and intellectual engagement; role modeling connects values with observable and imitable figures; habituation transforms behavior into character; while riyāḍah strengthens self-control and spiritual consciousness. This construction demonstrates that moral education in Syekh Nawawi's thought is integrative, combining cognitive, affective, behavioral, and spiritual dimensions. These findings hold strong relevance for character education, particularly in developing learning frameworks that move beyond moral knowledge to encompass value internalization, behavioral habituation, and the cultivation of inner consciousness.

Keywords: Syekh Nawawi al-Bantani; moral education; educational methods; character education; thematic analysis.

INTRODUCTION

Character education involves not only the transmission of knowledge regarding good and bad values, but also the process through which these values are understood, internalized, practiced, and integrated into students' behavior. The challenge in implementing character education is reflected in the ongoing prevalence of various forms of violence in educational environments. Based on the results of the 2022 National Assessment, as many as 36.31% of students were at risk of experiencing bullying, 26.9% were at risk of physical punishment, and 34.51% were at risk of sexual violence (Kemendikbudristek, 2023). Furthermore, the Inspectorate General of Kemendikbudristek reported handling 127 cases of violence in school environments between 2021 and 2023, with bullying and sexual violence being the most predominant cases. Other findings from the 2024 National Assessment revealed that at the elementary school level, 22% of students experienced bullying, 15% experienced physical punishment, and 37% experienced sexual violence (Purba & Octavia, 2025). These data indicate that protecting students and creating



a safe educational environment remain pressing issues. Nevertheless, such violence data do not directly prove a disconnection between moral knowledge (*moral knowing*) and moral behavior (*moral action*). Therefore, further study is required to explore educational methods that not only cultivate value comprehension, but also foster internalization, habituation, and the practice of moral values in daily life. In this context, classical Islamic educational thought, particularly that of Syekh Nawawi al-Bantani, is highly relevant to examine in order to conceptually understand methods of moral cultivation.

One of the prominent Islamic scholars who paid great attention to character formation was Syekh Nawawi al-Bantani (1813-1897 CE). As an international-caliber Archipelago (*Nusantara*) scholar who held the title *Sayyid 'Ulamā' al-Ḥijāz*, he did not merely explain moral virtues and obligations theoretically; rather, he provided methodological guidance on how individuals cultivate themselves through advice, interaction with the righteous, behavioral habituation, self-control, and spiritual exercises. Based on an analysis of his three primary works *Nashā'ih al-'Ibād*, *Marāqī al-'Ubūdiyyah*, and *Salālim al-Fuḍalā'* the moral education methods he formulated are integrative, encompassing cognitive understanding, affective internalization, psychomotor habituation, and spiritual purification (*tazkiyat al-nafs*). Previous studies on Syekh Nawawi al-Bantani have been widely conducted by scholars. These works generally capture his religious and Sufi thought (Adib, 2022; Hidayat, 2019), moral education and student ethics (Iwantoro, 2019; Maliya et al., 2020), and the relevance of his thought to the *Kurikulum Merdeka* and the modern era (Muhammad et al., 2023; Ubaedillah, 2024). However, studies specifically reconstructing moral education methods through a cross-textual thematic reading of his three commentary books (*Nashā'ih al-'Ibād*, *Marāqī al-'Ubūdiyyah*, and *Salālim al-Fuḍalā'*) remain very limited and require further conceptual strengthening. Previous scholarship often stopped at describing moral values partially without comprehensively explaining how these values are transformed into a structured and tiered educational process. In fact, methodology serves as a key element (*methodological imperative*) to understand how moral concepts can be effectively internalized within students.

Therefore, this study focuses on reconstructing Syekh Nawawi al-Bantani's moral education method by exploring his three phenomenal commentary works: *Nashā'ih al-'Ibād*, *Marāqī al-'Ubūdiyyah*, and *Salālim al-Fuḍalā'*. These three works were selected because they represent the hierarchical structure of spiritual cultivation in Islam, ranging from the domain of *sharia*, spiritual purification (*tariqah*), to the attainment of ultimate truth (*haqiqah*) and commendable virtues. These three books were analyzed thematically to discover the methodological patterns utilized in moral formation. The analysis went beyond identifying isolated methods by performing a qualitative synthesis to build a holistic construction of Syekh Nawawi al-Bantani's moral education method.

Specifically, this study aims to identify the forms of moral education methods presented by Syekh Nawawi al-Bantani across the three commentary works, construct a pattern of moral education methods based on their thematic synthesis, and analyze the relevance of this construction to the reinforcement of contemporary character education. Through this focus, this study is expected to contribute academically to the development of Islamic educational studies, particularly in bridging classical Islamic educational thought with the methodological needs of character education in the modern era.



METHODS

This study employs a qualitative approach using a library research design. According to Zed (2008), library research is not merely a data collection activity, but a series of procedures involving gathering literature, reading and recording details, and processing research materials. The primary data sources for this study consist of three primary works by Syekh Nawawi al-Bantani: *Nashā'ih al-'Ibād*, *Marāqī al-'Ubūdiyyah*, and *Salālim al-Fuḍalā'*. These three works were selected purposively because they offer deep and comprehensive discussions on moral formation, etiquette, worship, teacher-student relationships, self-control, and the development of moral behavior.

The data collection process was carried out through deep reading of texts relevant to moral education methods. Relevant data were recorded based on their source books and page numbers, followed by coding according to the identified themes. Data coding was crucial for ensuring auditability and validity between the textual findings and their interpretative outcomes (Miles et al., 2014). The researcher translated analytical units into a formal coding system, such as NI for *Nashā'ih al-'Ibād*, MU for *Marāqī al-'Ubūdiyyah*, and SAF for *Salālim al-Fuḍalā'*.

To process the textual findings, data analysis was conducted using thematic analysis as developed by Braun and Clarke (2006). This analytical process progressed systematically through several stages: data familiarization, initial reading and note-taking, textual data identification, coding, grouping codes into basic categories, searching for and identifying general themes, conducting cross-textual theme comparisons, and performing conceptual synthesis. Through this systematic process, this study successfully identified five main themes of moral education methods: advice (*nasihat*), question and answer/dialogue, exemplary role modeling (*keteladanan*), habituation (*pembiasaan*), and spiritual exercise (*riyāḍah*).

To achieve a comprehensive theoretical and conceptual construction, each theme was analyzed using a comparative analysis approach by contrasting its pattern of occurrence across the three books. The comparative results were then hermeneutically interpreted to delineate and determine the specific function of each method within the moral value internalization process. In the final stage of analysis, the established construction of moral education methods was contextually connected to the demands of contemporary character education (Lickona, 1991), particularly regarding moral knowing, moral feeling, moral action, role modeling, self-control, and the attainment of spiritual awareness.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The discussion in this section outlines the reconstruction of the lecture methodology and dawah rhetoric from the perspective of Syekh Nawawi al-Bantani. Moving away from a rigid descriptive format, the discussion is structured integratively to demonstrate how his thought transforms preaching from a mere verbal transmission into a transformative spiritual education instrument.

1. Main Finding: A Preaching Model Based on Spiritual Gradation and Public Accessibility. This study reveals that Syekh Nawawi al-Bantani formulated the preaching method not merely as the art of oral delivery (*fann al-khathabah*), but rather as a gradual pedagogical strategy (*al-tarbiyah al-tadarrujiyah*). Preaching functions as a bridge



connecting sharia doctrines with soul purification (*tazkiyat al-nafs*). For him, the effectiveness of preaching is not measured by the speaker's rhetorical eloquence, but by the depth of its impact on internalizing values of worship and moral improvement within the listener.

2. Doctrinal Evidence from the Three Works. *Salālim al-Fuḍalā'* (Foundations of Ethics and the Preacher's Spiritual Readiness). In *Salālim al-Fuḍalā'* (a commentary on *Manẓūmah Azkiyā'* by Syekh Zainuddin al-Malibari), Syekh Nawawi emphasizes the importance of alignment between knowledge and action (*'ilm wa 'amal*) as well as purity of intention for a preacher or advisor. Effective preaching demands the preacher's inner purity so that the advice given can penetrate the listener's heart:

تَجَرَّدُ لِلنَّصِيحَةِ بَيْنَ خَلْقٍ ❁ وَلَا تَقْصِدُ بِهَا جَاهًا وَمَالًا

"Purify your intention solely to offer advice among creation, and do not intend through it to seek worldly status (*jāh*) or wealth (*māl*)."

Syekh Nawawi asserts that advice or preaching not grounded in sincerity and exemplary action will remain empty rhetoric, stripped of its transformative spiritual power before the congregation. *Marāqī al-'Ubūdiyyah* (Methodology of Internalization and Gradual Delivery). Through *Marāqī al-'Ubūdiyyah* (a commentary on *Bidāyat al-Hidāyah* by Imam al-Ghazali), Syekh Nawawi formulates the etiquette of dawah and gradual message delivery. Preachers are required to pay attention to the psychological conditions and intellectual capacities of their audience (*murā'āt al-'uqūl*), avoiding complex subjects that may trigger public confusion:

وَيَنْبَغِي لِلْوَاعِظِ أَنْ يُكَلِّمَ النَّاسَ عَلَى قَدْرِ عَقُولِهِمْ وَلَا يُلْقِيَ إِلَيْهِمْ مَا لَا تَصِلُ إِلَيْهِ أَفْهَامُهُمْ فَيَكُونُ فِتْنَةً عَلَيْهِمْ

"A preacher (*wā'iz*) should speak to people according to the level of their intellect/understanding, and should not deliver material beyond their comprehension, lest it becomes a trial (*fitnah*) leading to doubt or confusion for them."

The delivery of preaching must progress gradually: starting with the correction of outward worship requirements and conditions, followed by instilling inner awareness (*khushū'*), and ultimately purifying spiritual ailments (*amrāḍ al-qalb*). *Naṣā'ih al-'Ibād* (Thematic Material Structure and Linguistic Accessibility). In *Naṣā'ih al-'Ibād* (a commentary on *Al-Munabbihāt 'alā al-Isti'dād li Yaum al-Ma'ād* by Ibn Hajar al-'Asqalani), Syekh Nawawi presents a systematic dawah material model through thematic numerical patterns (categorical advice comprising two, three, up to ten items). This pattern serves as a pedagogical technique designed to make messages easy to remember and practice. A key example highlighting the importance of maintaining spiritual advice and dawah fellowship is mentioned in the *Al-Munabbihāt al-Thulāthiyyah* chapter (three-item advice category):

مُجَالَسَةُ الْعُلَمَاءِ، وَاسْتِمَاعُ كَلَامِ الْحُكَمَاءِ، وَالنَّظَرُ إِلَى وَجْهِ الْأَوْلِيَاءِ



"(Three things that revive the soul): Sitting in gatherings with the scholars, listening to the words of the wise (*hukamā'*—prudent preachers), and looking at the faces of the saints/righteous people."

Through this work, Syekh Nawawi demonstrates that preaching or advice presented in a structured and actionable manner enables lay audiences to navigate their religious life rationally and concretely.

Synthesis: Integration of Rhetoric, Pedagogy, and Tazkiyat al-Nafs

Synthesizing the three works yields a balanced and holistic reconstruction of the preaching method; Syekh Nawawi's Preaching Method = Spiritual Credibility (*Salālim*) + Gradual Approach (*Marāqī*) + Material Systematization (*Naṣā'ih*). Syekh Nawawi integrates the preacher's inner credibility (*Salālim al-Fuḍalā'*), flexibility in delivery methods (*Marāqī al-'Ubūdiyyah*), and accessible material structuring (*Naṣā'ih al-'Ibād*). Preaching is not merely the transmission of knowledge (*ta'līm*), but a process of soul purification (*tazkiyah*) that demands deep empathy from the preacher regarding the congregation's intellectual capacities and social conditions.

Relevance to the Modern Context

Syekh Nawawi al-Bantani's thought offers a strong corrective contribution to contemporary dawah practices. In *Salālim al-Fuḍalā'*, he implicitly deconstructs the phenomenon of dawah populism by critiquing modern preachers who prioritize popularity and rhetorical sensation over sincere intentions and active alignment between word and deed. Conversely, his insights offer a form of inclusiveness and efficiency highly relevant to the social media era. As reflected in the numerical model of *Naṣā'ih al-'Ibād*, delivering messages in concise bullet points or bite-sized content aligns well with the demands of modern infographics, ensuring that the depth of classical thought is conveyed without losing its profound meaning. Furthermore, through *Marāqī al-'Ubūdiyyah*, Syekh Nawawi underscores the necessity of a humanistic and gradual dawah approach. He emphasizes that dawah should aim to educate society wisely and progressively, rather than being delivered provocatively in ways that spark polarization or public confusion.

Construction of Moral Education Methods

Table 1: Construction of Moral Education Methods

No	Method Theme	Thematic Pattern	Educational Function
1	Advice / (<i>mau'izhah</i>)	Religious advice, moral responsibility, encouragements and warnings	Instilling value awareness
2	Question and Answer / Dialogue	Reflective dialogue, intellectual questioning, teacher-student interaction	Building understanding and reflection
3	Role Modeling / Exemplarity (<i>uswah</i>)	Righteous figures, exemplary stories, ideal figure imitation	Connecting values with concrete behavior



4	Habituation (<i>ta'wīd</i>)	Practical deeds, moral discipline, habituation	Transforming behavior into habits
5	Spiritual Exercise (<i>riyāḍah</i>)	<i>Tazkiyat al-nafs</i> , self-control, spiritual consciousness	Cultivating inner depth

The table above illustrates the construction of moral education methods, which are arranged in a tiered manner to guide students from theoretical understanding to the internalization of spiritual values. This process begins with advice (*mau'izhah*), which focuses on delivering religious teachings and moral warnings to instill foundational value awareness. Next, the question-and-answer and dialogue approach is used to actively build the student's intellectual understanding through reflective discussion. These values are then clarified through role modeling (*uswah*), where students observe the concrete application of moral values in the lives of ideal figures. Once the values are understood and exemplified, the habituation method (*ta'wīd*) acts to lock these positive behaviors into daily routines and discipline. This sequence is ultimately perfected by *riyāḍah*, which targets the inner domain through spiritual purification and self-control, ensuring that noble character is not merely a physical habit, but stems from deep spiritual consciousness.

1. Advice Method: From Value Transmission to Moral Consciousness. From *Nashā'ih al-'Ibād*, it is found that advice is utilized to invite toward goodness and prevent harm. Data on page 143 (coded as NI-143) reveals themes of religious admonition, amr ma'rūf nahy munkar (enjoining good and forbidding wrong), and a balanced attitude toward worldly life. Meanwhile, *Marāqī al-'Ubūdiyyah* demonstrates advice in the form of guidance toward personal moral responsibility, introspection, and the avoidance of arrogance. Data from MU-532 indicates that advice does not merely convey information about morals, but directs individuals to evaluate themselves. In *Salālim al-Fuḍalā'*, advice appears as an encouragement to maintain consistency in good deeds, shorten worldly hopes, and strive earnestly in life. Data from SAF-184 highlights the dimensions of behavioral continuity, time awareness, and spiritual motivation. The synthesis of these three sources shows that advice in Syekh Nawawi's thought progresses from value transmission to the formation of moral consciousness. Advice encompasses social, personal, and spiritual dimensions simultaneously.
2. Dialogue: Constructing Moral Understanding Reflectively. In *Nashā'ih al-'Ibād*, dialogue manifests through rhetorical appeals and questions that prompt readers to reflect on their personal conditions. Data from NI-353 demonstrates that moral communication need not always take the form of direct question-and-answer sessions, but can occur through persuasive and reflective communication. *Marāqī al-'Ubūdiyyah* provides more explicit forms of questioning. Data from MU-124 shows the use of questions to stimulate critical thinking before students receive explanations. Thus, questions function not merely to test knowledge, but to lead readers toward deeper understanding. Furthermore, *Salālim al-Fuḍalā'* emphasizes the importance of the relationship between scholars/students and their teachers through teaching activities, attending scholarly assemblies, reading, and reviewing texts. Data from SAF-170 underscores the significance of educational interaction and active engagement in the learning process. Consequently, three patterns of dialogue emerge: persuasive-reflective dialogue, intellectual questioning, and educational interaction. All three



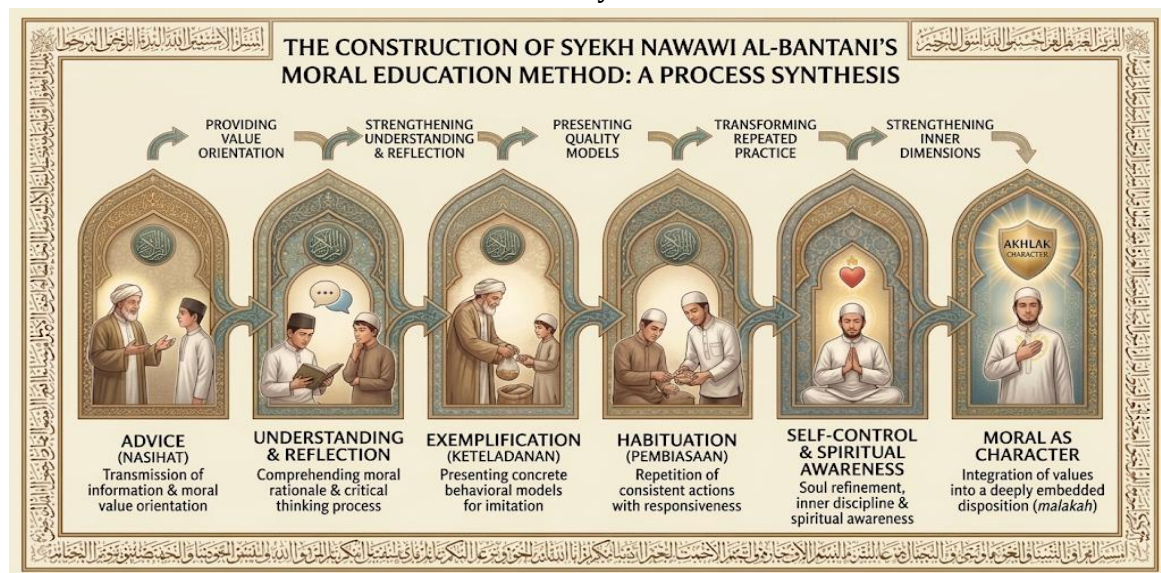
indicate that moral education is not positioned as a one-way process, but involves reflection, critical thought, and educational relationships.

3. **Role Modeling: Transforming Abstract Values into Behavioral Models.** Exemplary role modeling is one of the most prominent findings across the three works. In *Nashā'ih al-'Ibād*, Syekh Nawawi emphasizes the importance of associating with scholars who practice their knowledge and following the righteous. Data from NI-17 and NI-123 show that moral figures function as observable and imitable models. In *Marāqī al-'Ubūdiyyah*, role modeling is conveyed through the depiction of learned individuals (*'ālim*) as figures possessing educational value. Stories or narratives of righteous figures serve as media to present concrete examples of ideal behavior. Meanwhile, *Salālim al-Fuḍalā'* positions the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) as the ultimate role model whose character, actions, and words should be followed. Data from SAF-51 indicates that role modeling encompasses processes of imitation and identification with an ideal figure. The synthesis of these three works yields three forms of role modeling: direct modeling, modeling through narratives, and figure imitation. Thus, role modeling acts as a bridge between known values and observable, actionable behavior.
4. **Habituation: Transforming Values into Character.** The habituation method demonstrates how moral values are transformed into repeated behaviors. In *Nashā'ih al-'Ibād*, righteous deeds are positioned as concrete actions that form the basis of moral development. Data from NI-344 illustrates the link between practical deeds and value internalization. In *Marāqī al-'Ubūdiyyah*, habituation appears through consistent obedience and restraint from forbidden actions. Data from MU-382 and MU-492 highlight the dimensions of moral discipline and self-control built through repeated practice. In *Salālim al-Fuḍalā'*, habituation has a more explicit orientation toward character formation. External and internal etiquette (*adab*) are linked to the perfection of noble character. Data from SAF-49 and SAF-50 indicate that consistently practiced virtues become an integral part of an individual's personality. Therefore, the construction of habituation across the three works exhibits the pattern of action, repetition, internalization, character. This finding positions habituation as an essential method in bridging moral values with an individual's enduring character.
5. ***Riyāḍah*: The Spiritual Dimension in Character Formation.** Unlike the previous methods, which are more visible in educational activities, *riyāḍah* is oriented toward cultivating the inner dimension. In *Nashā'ih al-'Ibād*, obedience to divine commands and avoidance of prohibitions serve as the foundation for spiritual exercise. Data from NI-32 shows the connection between obedience, spiritual exercise, and soul purification (*tazkiyah*). In *Marāqī al-'Ubūdiyyah*, *dhikr* (remembrance of God) serves as a means of regular spiritual exercise. Data from MU-202 illustrates that practicing the remembrance of God is aimed at maintaining a spiritual connection while building self-control. In *Salālim al-Fuḍalā'*, the experience of *dhikr* is associated with the depth of spiritual awareness. Data from SAF-192 shows that the internalization of spiritual values relies not only on external motivation, but also on inner consciousness. Thus, *riyāḍah* forms the pattern of obedience, spiritual exercise, self-control, spiritual consciousness. This method demonstrates that Syekh Nawawi's moral education framework does not stop at outward behavioral modification, but equally prioritizes the cultivation of the inner state.



Based on the findings from the three works, the construction of Syekh Nawawi al-Bantani's moral education method can be understood as a layered, tiered, and continuous process. Advice provides the foundational value orientation; dialogue strengthens rational understanding and critical reflection; role modeling presents concrete behavioral models; habituation transforms values into repeated practice; while *riyāḍah* reinforces the inner dimension and spiritual consciousness. This hierarchical pattern demonstrates that moral education methods do not operate partially or in isolation, but rather complement one another systematically. This synthetic finding aligns with the research conclusions, emphasizing that these five methods comprehensively encompass the cognitive, affective, psychomotor, and spiritual domains. When structured into an educational process workflow, this systematic relationship is formulated as follows:

Figure 1: The Construction of Syekh Nawawi al-Bantani's Moral Education Method: A Process Synthesis



The above construction represents an analytical synthesis that goes beyond merely categorizing a list of methods; rather, it underscores the primary contribution of Syekh Nawawi al-Bantani's thought in mapping the transformation of moral values into a deeply embedded disposition (*malakah*).

Relevance to Character Education

To emphasize its academic scope, the relevance of Syekh Nawawi al-Bantani's thought is connected in a critical-comparative manner to Thomas Lickona's modern character education theory, supported by Albert Bandura's social learning theory, B.F. Skinner's conditioning principles, and Al-Ghazali's concept of *tazkiyat al-nafs*. The analytical focus is directed at three main pillars: moral knowing, moral action, and moral/spiritual internalization.

At the moral knowing stage, advice and dialogue in Syekh Nawawi's view operate within the domain of moral knowledge formation. Advice functions as the transmission of moral information, whereas dialogue acts as a vehicle for internal reasoning and reflection.



This aligns with Lickona's view that moral knowledge is not limited to moral awareness, but encompasses perspective taking and moral reasoning. Through this combination, students are not merely fed normative goodness, but are guided to understand the *ratio legis* (underlying rationale), enabling them to internalize these values consciously.

Furthermore, at the moral action stage, role modeling (*uswah*) and habituation (*ta'wīd*) serve to bridge cognitive understanding with concrete action. Role modeling can be explained through Albert Bandura's Social Learning Theory, where learning occurs through the observation and imitation of figures (observational learning/modeling). Educators who provide concrete examples make it easier for students to encode moral behaviors into their cognitive structures. Meanwhile, habituation finds its relevance in B.F. Skinner's operant conditioning principles, where the repetition of responsive actions forms behavioral habituation. This consistent repetition of moral actions gradually transforms external norms into an automatic character (*habitus*).

Finally, at the moral & spiritual internalization stage, the most crucial element—serving as both the differentiator and the novelty of Syekh Nawawi's construction compared to purely secular character theories—is the inclusion of the *riyāḍah* method. While Lickona positions moral feeling as an inner bridge, Syekh Nawawi deepens this dimension through a Sufistic approach that resonates with Al-Ghazali's concept of *tazkiyat al-nafs*. Through *riyāḍah*, the character education process acquires a transcendental foundation through soul cultivation, the discipline of restraining worldly desires (*mujāhadah*), and spiritual consciousness (*murāqabah*).

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that Syekh Nawawi al-Bantani's moral education methods in *Nashā'ih al-'Ibād*, *Marāqī al-'Ubūdiyyah*, and *Salālim al-Fuḍalā'* form an integrative educational construction. The thematic analysis identified five primary methods: advice (*nasihat*), question and answer/dialogue, exemplary role modeling (*uswah hasanah*), habituation (*ta'wīd*), and spiritual exercise (*riyāḍah*). These five methods serve distinct yet complementary functions in the process of moral formation. Advice functions to orient individuals toward moral values and responsibilities; dialogue constructs understanding and reflection; role modeling presents observable and imitable behavioral models; habituation transforms values into repeated practices that evolve into character; while *riyāḍah* cultivates self-control and spiritual consciousness. Based on the thematic synthesis, these methods can be understood as a process moving from value transmission, understanding and reflection, role modeling, and habituation, to the cultivation of spiritual awareness. This construction holds strong relevance for character education by expanding the educational process from the mastery of moral knowledge toward value internalization and behavioral formation. Syekh Nawawi's thought demonstrates that character formation requires an integration of cognitive, affective, behavioral, social, and spiritual dimensions. Thus, the contribution of Syekh Nawawi's thought to character education lies in constructing a methodology that continuously connects moral values with practical living and inner spiritual development.

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