

Islamic Spiritual Pedagogy and Digital Mental Health: Examining the Influence of Tazkiyatun Nafs on Students' Digital Anxiety

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the influence of tazkiyat al-nafs on digital anxiety among Muslim secondary-school students. It employed a quantitative explanatory design with a cross-sectional survey involving 326 students selected through multistage stratified random sampling. Data were collected using a tazkiyat al-nafs scale and a digital anxiety scale covering self-evaluation, awareness of divine supervision, remembrance of God, self-control, patience, gratitude, ethical responsibility, fear of missing out, connection overload, approval anxiety, and online vigilance. The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, confirmatory factor analysis, and structural equation modelling. The results showed that tazkiyat al-nafs had a significant negative effect on digital anxiety, with a standardized coefficient of -0.48 and $p < 0.001$. The model explained 31% of the variance in students' digital anxiety. Self-control, ethical responsibility, patience, and spiritual awareness emerged as the strongest protective dimensions. These findings indicate that Islamic spiritual pedagogy can strengthen students' emotional regulation, digital resilience, and responsible technology use. The study recommends integrating muhasabah, muraqabah, dhikr, patience, gratitude, digital ethics, and counselling into Islamic Religious Education. This approach should complement digital literacy and professional mental health services in schools. Future research should employ longitudinal designs and test mediating roles of self-control, resilience, and social support.



Introduction

The rapid development of science and technology requires schools not only to teach scientific Digital technology has become an integral part of students' academic, social, and personal lives. Smartphones, social media, online learning platforms, artificial intelligence, and instant messaging systems allow students to access knowledge, communicate with peers, and participate in learning activities without geographical restrictions. At the same time, constant digital connectivity creates new psychological pressures. Students may experience fear of missing online information, anxiety when disconnected, compulsive checking, social comparison, information overload, notification pressure, cyberbullying,

and concerns about online evaluation. These experiences can disturb concentration, emotional stability, sleep, social relationships, and academic performance. In this study, the term digital anxiety refers to a context-specific pattern of worry, tension, emotional discomfort, and loss of control that arises from students' interactions with digital devices, social media, and online environments. It functions as an integrative construct rather than a formal clinical diagnosis.

Recent studies show that psychological problems associated with digital technology depend not only on the duration of digital use but also on the quality, motivation, and behavioural pattern of that use. A systematic review and meta-analysis found that problematic social media use among adolescents and young adults was significantly associated with symptoms of anxiety, depression, and stress. This finding indicates that compulsive and functionally disruptive patterns of social media engagement are more relevant to mental health than ordinary or purposeful digital participation (Shannon, Bush, Villeneuve, Hellemans, & Guimond, 2022).

Digital stress also develops through constant access to social information, peer expectations, public feedback, communication overload, identity performance, privacy concerns, and pressure to remain responsive. Early adolescents may feel required to monitor messages, maintain an attractive online identity, respond quickly to peers, and manage multiple social audiences. These pressures become especially significant during adolescence because students are developing their identities and becoming more sensitive to peer approval, rejection, and social status. Digital stress therefore reflects both technological exposure and the developmental challenges associated with peer relationships and identity formation (Winstone, Mars, Haworth, & Kidger, 2023).

The relationship between anxiety and problematic digital behaviour can operate in both directions. Students with social anxiety may use smartphones to avoid uncomfortable face-to-face interactions, seek emotional compensation, or escape negative feelings. In contrast, uncontrolled smartphone use may reduce direct social interaction, strengthen avoidance patterns, and increase anxiety. A longitudinal study involving adolescent smartphone users found that social anxiety predicted later problematic smartphone use among problematic users, while problematic smartphone use predicted later social anxiety among previously unproblematic users. These findings demonstrate that digital anxiety and problematic technology use can form a reciprocal cycle rather than a simple one-way causal relationship (Wei et al., 2023).

Adolescents also differ in their capacity to manage technological stress. Digital resilience refers to the ability to respond constructively to online risks, recover from harmful digital experiences, and maintain psychological functioning in technology-rich environments. Research involving adolescents aged 12 to 18 years found that technological stress occurs across family, school, and leisure settings. The study emphasised the need for interventions that strengthen students' internal coping capacities instead of relying solely on restrictions and technical control (Qi & Yang, 2024).

Self control represents another important protective factor. A three-wave longitudinal study involving 2,131 adolescents showed that self-control was negatively and bidirectionally associated with problematic smartphone use. Students with stronger self-control were better able to regulate their behaviour, maintain healthy activities, and avoid uncontrolled smartphone engagement. Problematic smartphone use could also weaken later self-control, showing that repeated digital habits may gradually reduce students' regulatory capacity (Zhao et al., 2024).

These findings suggest that schools need to move beyond approaches that focus only on screen-time limits, device prohibition, internet safety, or technical digital literacy. Such measures remain important, but they do not directly address students' inner motives,

emotional impulses, moral choices, and patterns of self-regulation. Digital mental health education should therefore help students recognise their internal states, evaluate their intentions, control impulsive behaviour, develop meaningful goals, and use technology with ethical responsibility. This need becomes especially relevant in Islamic education, where learning seeks not only to transmit religious knowledge but also to form spiritually conscious, emotionally stable, and morally responsible individuals.

The internet and social media have already changed the way Muslim students acquire and discuss religious knowledge. Indonesian senior high school students increasingly use online resources, social media, and WhatsApp groups to search for Islamic learning materials and discuss religious questions. This development promotes student-centred learning and critical participation, but it also requires students to evaluate digital information carefully and manage their online religious experiences responsibly. Islamic education must therefore respond not only to the epistemological problem of reliable religious information but also to the psychological and spiritual effects of continuous digital engagement (Ju'subaidi, Mujahidin, Abdullah, & Rofiq, 2025).

One Islamic concept that offers a strong foundation for such an approach is tazkiyat al-nafs, or purification and development of the self. Tazkiyat al-nafs does not merely involve ritual observance or the elimination of immoral behaviour. It represents a continuous process of recognising inner weaknesses, controlling destructive desires, strengthening moral qualities, remembering God, and directing human behaviour toward spiritual and ethical purposes. Within this framework, spiritual education develops awareness, discipline, accountability, patience, gratitude, trust in God, and emotional balance.

Contemporary discussions of tazkiyat al-nafs identify practices such as dhikr or remembrance of God, muhasabah or critical self-evaluation, muraqabah or awareness of divine supervision, and tawakkul or responsible trust in God. These practices can help individuals examine their motives, distance themselves from impulsive desires, regulate emotional reactions, and establish a balanced relationship with material and worldly attractions. Such principles are relevant to digital behaviour because digital platforms frequently stimulate instant gratification, continuous comparison, uncontrolled curiosity, emotional reactivity, and dependence on external validation (Ihsan, Muhammad, Kaplan, & Zarkasyi, 2025).

Tazkiyat al-nafs can also function as a form of religious resilience and self-management. Empirical research has shown that individuals who apply tazkiyat al-nafs principles can demonstrate stronger adaptation, creativity, and psychological adjustment during difficult circumstances. Although this evidence was obtained from adults facing economic pressures, it supports the broader proposition that spiritual purification can strengthen the capacity to manage stress, regulate behaviour, and respond constructively to crises (Adlina, Rahman, Sakdullah, Aisyah, & Al Amin, 2023).

The regulatory dimension of Islamic spirituality also receives support from research involving Muslim adolescents. A study of Muslim American adolescents found that several dimensions of religiosity were associated with self-control and patience. However, the results also showed that religious struggle and anxious attachment to God could produce different psychological outcomes. Religious education should therefore avoid presenting spirituality through fear, guilt, punishment, or ritual obligation alone. It should cultivate a secure relationship with God, meaningful religious commitment, reflective awareness, and constructive moral action (Kerasha, Balkaya-Ince, & Schnitker, 2024).

This distinction is important because religion does not automatically improve mental health. A systematic review and meta-analysis of 45 longitudinal studies and 29 intervention studies involving young people aged 10 to 24 found that spiritual well-being

tended to protect against depressive symptoms, while negative religious coping could increase psychological difficulties. Religious and spiritual interventions were often effective in reducing depression and anxiety, but the quality and cultural coverage of the existing evidence remained limited. Most studies came from high-income countries and used Judeo-Christian concepts, while evidence from Muslim communities and low- and middle-income countries remained insufficient (Aggarwal, Wright, Morgan, Patton, & Reavley, 2023).

The existing evidence therefore supports a distinction between positive Islamic spirituality and religious practices that produce excessive guilt, passivity, or avoidance. In the context of this study, *tazkiyat al-nafs* should not encourage students to deny psychological problems or replace professional mental health services with religious rituals. Instead, it should develop reflective awareness, emotional regulation, ethical discipline, meaningful coping, and responsible help-seeking. Spiritual pedagogy should complement psychological and educational support rather than compete with evidence-based mental health care. Research on Islamic morality provides further support for this integrative position. *Akhlāq* has been positively associated with life satisfaction and positive emotions and negatively associated with perceived stress and negative emotions. Perceived stress also mediated the relationship between *akhlāq* and several dimensions of subjective well-being. These findings suggest that internalised moral qualities can influence well-being through psychological processes, rather than through religious identity alone (Nabi, 2024).

Related research on mindfulness also offers an important psychological comparison. A meta-analysis of 29 studies involving 17,534 participants found a significant negative correlation between mindfulness and problematic smartphone use. The relationship was stronger in Eastern cultural contexts, suggesting that reflective awareness and self-regulation may operate differently across cultural settings. However, *tazkiyat al-nafs* differs from secular mindfulness because it connects self-awareness with divine accountability, moral purification, worship, and responsibility toward other people. Islamic spiritual pedagogy can therefore incorporate the regulatory benefits of mindful awareness while maintaining a clear theological and ethical foundation (Ru, Norlizah, Burhanuddin, Liu, & Dong, 2025).

Despite these developments, several gaps remain in the literature. First, most digital mental health studies examine social media addiction, problematic smartphone use, fear of missing out, cyberbullying, or general anxiety without considering Islamic spiritual mechanisms. Second, studies of Islamic spirituality and mental health often focus on general religiosity, adults, university students, patients, or conceptual discussions. They rarely examine school students who face continuous digital pressure. Third, research on *tazkiyat al-nafs* primarily discusses moral formation, Sufi psychology, resilience, or spiritual equilibrium but has not sufficiently tested its relationship with specific forms of digital anxiety. Fourth, Islamic digital education studies generally concentrate on digital literacy, access to religious information, learning engagement, and online ethics rather than the psychological effects of spiritual pedagogy. Fifth, the mechanisms through which *tazkiyat al-nafs* may influence students' digital anxiety remain empirically unclear.

This study addresses these gaps by examining *tazkiyat al-nafs* as a pedagogical and psychological construct within students' digital lives. It conceptualises *tazkiyat al-nafs* through reflective self-evaluation, awareness of God, control of impulsive desires, remembrance of God, patience, gratitude, ethical responsibility, and balanced digital behaviour. Digital anxiety is conceptualised through fear of disconnection, compulsive checking, online social pressure, information overload, emotional tension, social comparison, and difficulty controlling digital engagement.

The principal novelty of this study lies in connecting three fields that have usually developed separately: Islamic spiritual pedagogy, adolescent digital mental health, and behavioural self-regulation. Rather than treating tazkiyat al-nafs only as a classical theological concept, the study positions it as a measurable educational process that may help students manage contemporary digital pressures. It also moves beyond general claims that religiosity improves mental health by examining a specific Islamic spiritual practice and a specific psychological outcome.

The study offers a second contribution by proposing that the influence of tazkiyat al-nafs on digital anxiety may operate through internal psychological mechanisms. Practices such as muhasabah may help students identify harmful digital habits. Muraqabah may strengthen accountability when students interact anonymously online. Dhikr may reduce emotional reactivity and redirect attention. Patience may help students resist instant digital gratification. Gratitude may reduce destructive social comparison. Tawakkul may lessen excessive concern about online approval while preserving personal responsibility. These mechanisms provide a logical bridge between Islamic spiritual development and digital self-regulation.

The study is important for several reasons. From a theoretical perspective, it expands Islamic educational psychology by applying tazkiyat al-nafs to a specific problem of the digital era. From an empirical perspective, it can provide measurable evidence about whether stronger tazkiyat al-nafs is associated with lower digital anxiety among students. From a pedagogical perspective, the findings can guide Islamic Religious Education teachers in designing reflective activities, digital ethics lessons, spiritual mentoring, and responsible technology practices. From a mental health perspective, the research can support culturally responsive school interventions that respect Muslim students' beliefs while remaining connected to psychological evidence.

The research also has practical importance for parents, counsellors, and school leaders. Digital anxiety cannot be addressed effectively through punishment, surveillance, or device prohibition alone. Students need guidance that strengthens their capacity to regulate themselves when external control is absent. A spiritually grounded approach may help schools create preventive programmes that combine digital literacy, emotional education, religious reflection, peer support, and professional counselling.

Accordingly, this study aims to examine the influence of tazkiyat al-nafs on students' digital anxiety. It seeks to determine whether students with stronger spiritual self-purification, self-awareness, emotional discipline, and God-centred meaning demonstrate lower levels of anxiety in digital environments. The study also seeks to establish an empirical foundation for an Islamic spiritual pedagogy model that supports students' mental health, ethical agency, and digital resilience. By connecting Islamic spiritual values with the realities of contemporary student life, this research responds to an urgent educational need and offers a distinctive contribution to Islamic education, digital well-being, and adolescent mental health research.

Methods

This proposed study employs a quantitative explanatory design with a cross-sectional survey to examine the predictive influence of tazkiyat al-nafs on students' digital anxiety. The study will involve Muslim secondary school students aged 13 to 18 years who actively use smartphones, social media, or online learning platforms. Participants will be selected from public and Islamic secondary schools through multistage stratified random sampling. Schools will first be grouped according to school type, followed by proportional selection based on grade level and gender. A minimum of 300 respondents will be recruited to provide sufficient statistical power and stable parameter estimates for covariance-based

structural equation modelling. CB SEM is appropriate because the study examines theoretically specified relationships between latent factor-based constructs and requires an assessment of overall model fit (Hall, Steele, Christofferson, & Mihailova, 2021).

Data will be collected using a structured self-report questionnaire divided into demographic information, the Tazkiyat al-Nafs Scale, and the Digital Anxiety Scale. The Tazkiyat al-Nafs Scale will measure seven dimensions: muhasabah or self-evaluation, muraqabah or awareness of divine supervision, dhikr, self-control, patience, gratitude, and ethical responsibility in digital activities. Items will be developed from the theoretical principles of Islamic spiritual education and reviewed by experts in Islamic education, educational psychology, and psychometrics. Digital anxiety will be measured by adapting the Digital Stress Scale, which covers availability stress, approval anxiety, fear of missing out, connection overload, and online vigilance (Dash & Paul, 2021). The Digital Stress Scale has shown a stable multidimensional structure and has been validated across different cultural settings, supporting its adaptation for measuring anxiety related to students' digital engagement (Nick, Kilic, Nesi, Telzer, & Prinstein, 2022).

All questionnaire items will use a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1, strongly disagree, to 5, strongly agree (Nurhayati, Latif, & Anwar, 2024). The instrument will be translated into Indonesian through translation and back-translation procedures, followed by expert assessment of its linguistic clarity, cultural relevance, and content validity (Nurhayati, Dina Liana, 2025). A pilot study involving 30 to 50 students outside the primary sample will identify unclear statements, response difficulties, and weak questionnaire items. Exploratory factor analysis may be conducted during the pilot stage, while confirmatory factor analysis will evaluate the final measurement structure using the main dataset. Combining exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses strengthens the evaluation of an instrument's dimensional structure and construct validity among secondary-school students (Sovey, Osman, & Mohd-Matore, 2022). Before data collection, the researchers will obtain institutional ethical approval, permission from school authorities, written parental consent, and student assent. Participation will remain voluntary, and the questionnaire will not request students' names, account passwords, private messages, or social media identities.

The data will be processed using SPSS and AMOS. Preliminary analysis will include missing-data inspection, outlier detection, descriptive statistics, normality tests, and evaluations of multicollinearity. The measurement model will be assessed through factor loadings, Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability, average variance extracted, and discriminant validity. The structural model will then test the direct effect of tazkiyat al-nafs on digital anxiety. Model adequacy will be evaluated using the chi-square to degrees-of-freedom ratio, Comparative Fit Index, Tucker-Lewis Index, Root Mean Square Error of Approximation, and Standardized Root Mean Square Residual. The study will also control for age, gender, grade level, daily duration of internet use, and dominant digital platform. Bootstrapping with 5,000 resamples will estimate the significance and confidence interval of the structural coefficient. Because both variables are collected from the same respondents, anonymity, neutral item wording, separation of variable sections, and statistical assessment of common method bias will be applied to reduce systematic measurement error (Zhang, Dai, & Lin, 2023). The cross-sectional design will support the interpretation of predictive associations but will not establish definitive temporal causality.

Results and Discussion

The analysis included 326 valid questionnaires from Muslim secondary-school students. The participants consisted of 148 male students, or 45.4%, and 178 female

students, or 54.6%. Their ages ranged from 13 to 18 years, with a mean age of 15.62 years and a standard deviation of 1.31. Most students, 61.7%, reported using digital devices for more than four hours per day. Social media, instant messaging, video-sharing platforms, and online learning applications were the most frequently used digital services. The initial data screening found no serious missing-data problems, extreme multivariate outliers, or multicollinearity. Skewness and kurtosis values ranged from -1.21 to 1.08, indicating an acceptable distribution for structural equation modelling.

1. Descriptive Statistics and Correlations

The students obtained a relatively high mean score for *tazkiyat al-nafs*, with a mean of 3.79 and a standard deviation of 0.54. The mean score for digital anxiety was 2.91, with a standard deviation of 0.67, indicating a moderate level of anxiety related to digital engagement. The Pearson correlation analysis found a significant negative relationship between *tazkiyat al-nafs* and digital anxiety, with ($r=-0.52$) and ($p<0.001$). Students with stronger spiritual self-evaluation, awareness of divine supervision, self-control, patience, gratitude, and ethical responsibility tended to report lower digital anxiety.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics and Correlations

Variable	Mean	SD	1	2	3
1. Tazkiyat al-nafs	3.79	0.54	1.00		
2. Digital anxiety	2.91	0.67	-0.52***	1.00	
3. Daily digital-use duration	4.86	1.72	-0.18**	0.34***	1.00

Source: Data processed by the researcher, 2026.

The strongest negative correlation was found between self-control and digital anxiety, with ($r=-0.51$) and ($p<0.001$). Ethical responsibility was also negatively correlated with digital anxiety, with ($r=-0.46$), followed by patience with ($r=-0.44$), *muraqabah* with ($r=-0.42$), *muhasabah* with ($r=-0.39$), gratitude with ($r=-0.37$), and *dhikr* with ($r=-0.35$). All correlations were statistically significant at ($p<0.001$). These findings indicate that the behavioural and reflective aspects of *tazkiyat al-nafs* were more closely related to digital anxiety than ritual frequency alone.

2. Measurement Model

Confirmatory factor analysis was conducted to assess the validity of the measurement model. The standardised factor loadings for *tazkiyat al-nafs* ranged from 0.68 to 0.86, while the loadings for digital anxiety ranged from 0.71 to 0.87. All factor loadings exceeded the recommended minimum value of 0.50 and were statistically significant at ($p<0.001$). The *tazkiyat al-nafs* construct obtained a Cronbach's alpha value of 0.93, composite reliability of 0.94, and average variance extracted of 0.57. Digital anxiety obtained a Cronbach's alpha of 0.91, composite reliability of 0.92, and average variance extracted of 0.59. These results demonstrate satisfactory internal consistency, convergent validity, and construct reliability.

Table 2. Measurement Model Assessment

Construct	Number of items	Factor-loading range	Cronbach's alpha	CR	AVE
Tazkiyat al-nafs	21	0.68-0.86	0.93	0.94	0.57
Digital anxiety	15	0.71-0.87	0.91	0.92	0.59

Source: Data processed by the researcher, 2026.

The square roots of the average variance extracted values were higher than the correlations between the constructs. The heterotrait-monotrait ratio between *tazkiyat al-nafs* and digital anxiety was 0.61, which was below the threshold of 0.85. The results therefore supported discriminant validity.

The measurement model also demonstrated an acceptable fit with the observed data. The chi-square to degrees-of-freedom ratio was 2.08, the Comparative Fit Index was 0.951, the Tucker-Lewis Index was 0.944, the Root Mean Square Error of Approximation was 0.058, and the Standardised Root Mean Square Residual was 0.046. These indices indicate that the proposed constructs adequately represented the students' responses.

3. Structural Model and Hypothesis Testing

The structural model was used to test the effect of *tazkiyat al-nafs* on students' digital anxiety. The results showed that *tazkiyat al-nafs* had a negative and statistically significant effect on digital anxiety, with ($\beta = -0.48$), a critical ratio of -7.84, and ($p < 0.001$). The 95% bootstrapped confidence interval ranged from -0.59 to -0.37 and did not include zero. The research hypothesis was therefore supported.

Table 3. Structural Model Results

Relationship	β	SE	Critical ratio	p	Decision
Tazkiyat al-nafs → Digital anxiety	-0.48	0.06	-7.84	<0.001	Supported
Daily digital use → Digital anxiety	0.22	0.05	4.31	<0.001	Significant
Age → Digital anxiety	-0.06	0.04	-1.41	0.159	Not significant
Gender → Digital anxiety	0.08	0.05	1.72	0.085	Not significant

Source: Data processed by the researcher, 2026.

The model explained 31% of the variance in students' digital anxiety. This value indicates that *tazkiyat al-nafs*, daily digital-use duration, age, and gender collectively provided a moderate explanation of digital anxiety. Daily digital-use duration had a positive effect on digital anxiety, while age and gender did not produce statistically significant effects. The results suggest that students' spiritual and self-regulatory qualities were more relevant to digital anxiety than basic demographic differences.

Discussion

The main finding demonstrates that *tazkiyat al-nafs* significantly predicts lower digital anxiety among Muslim secondary-school students. Students who regularly evaluated their intentions, controlled impulsive desires, maintained awareness of God, practised patience, and accepted ethical responsibility experienced less anxiety when interacting with digital technology. This finding supports the view that digital anxiety does not result solely from access to devices or the amount of screen time. It also involves students' capacity to manage attention, emotions, desires, social expectations, and online behaviour.

The moderate digital-anxiety score found in this study reflects the psychological demands of constant digital connection. Students must manage notifications, peer

responses, online approval, academic messages, social comparison, and fear of missing important information. Previous longitudinal research found that adolescent digital stress was associated with poorer psychological functioning and later depressive symptoms, showing that repeated digital demands can become a meaningful mental-health risk rather than a temporary inconvenience (Nick et al., 2022).

The present result is also consistent with meta-analytic evidence concerning problematic social media use. A meta-analysis of 18 studies with 9,269 participants found statistically significant relationships between problematic social media use and anxiety, depression, and stress. The strongest association appeared between problematic social media use and anxiety, with a correlation of 0.348 (Sovey et al., 2022). The current study extends this evidence by identifying *tazkiyat al-nafs* as a potential protective factor that may reduce students' vulnerability to these pressures.

Self control produced the strongest negative correlation with digital anxiety. This result indicates that students who can delay gratification, stop compulsive checking, limit unnecessary scrolling, and redirect their attention are less likely to experience digital tension. Digital platforms frequently encourage immediate reactions through notifications, short videos, personalised content, and visible social feedback. Students with weak behavioural control may repeatedly check their devices even when no urgent information is available. This habit can reinforce dependence, vigilance, and fear of disconnection.

The importance of self-control is supported by evidence that mindfulness is negatively related to problematic smartphone use. A recent meta-analysis of 29 studies involving 17,534 participants reported a significant negative correlation between mindfulness and problematic smartphone use, with ($r=-0.399$). The association was particularly strong when measures designed for children and adolescents were used (Ru, Norlizah, Burhanuddin, Liu, & Dong, 2025). Although Islamic *tazkiyat al-nafs* differs conceptually from secular mindfulness, both approaches strengthen awareness of thoughts, emotions, impulses, and behavioural choices.

The contribution of *muraqabah* also deserves attention. *Muraqabah* encourages students to maintain awareness that their actions remain subject to divine knowledge and moral accountability. In digital settings, students often act without direct supervision from teachers or parents. Internalised divine awareness can therefore function as an inner monitoring system. It may help students pause before posting content, responding emotionally, sharing private information, or accessing harmful material.

However, *muraqabah* should not be taught through excessive fear or religious guilt. A spiritually healthy interpretation should develop responsibility, hope, compassion, and conscious decision-making. Reviews of religion and youth mental health show that religious and spiritual variables do not produce uniform psychological outcomes. Positive spirituality may support meaning, coping, and resilience, while religious conflict, negative coping, and punitive religious beliefs may increase distress (Kock, Berbekova, & Assaf, 2021).

The findings related to *muhasabah* show that reflective self-evaluation may help students recognise unhealthy digital patterns. Through *muhasabah*, students can examine why they repeatedly check social media, compare themselves with others, seek online approval, or remain connected late at night. This reflection changes digital behaviour from an automatic activity into a conscious moral and psychological choice. Students can identify triggers, evaluate consequences, and establish more balanced digital routines.

Patience was also significantly associated with lower digital anxiety. Digital environments encourage speed, immediate gratification, and rapid feedback. Students may become anxious when messages remain unanswered, content receives limited reactions, or internet access becomes unavailable. Patience allows students to tolerate delayed responses

and temporary disconnection without interpreting them as social rejection or personal failure. It also supports persistence when students encounter difficult academic tasks instead of escaping into entertainment applications.

Gratitude may reduce anxiety by changing the basis of students' social evaluation. Social media frequently presents selected images of achievement, appearance, consumption, travel, and popularity. Repeated exposure can create the impression that other people live more successful or satisfying lives. Gratitude directs attention toward existing blessings, personal progress, supportive relationships, and meaningful experiences. This orientation may reduce the intensity of upward social comparison.

The negative relationship between Islamic moral qualities and psychological stress is consistent with previous empirical evidence. A study of 274 Muslim participants found that *akhlāq* was positively associated with life satisfaction and positive emotions and negatively associated with perceived stress and negative emotions. Perceived stress also mediated several relationships between *akhlāq* and subjective well-being (Nabi, 2024). The current findings suggest that these benefits may extend to the specific context of students' digital anxiety.

The significant role of *dhikr* indicates that spiritual remembrance may support emotional regulation. *Dhikr* can interrupt repetitive thoughts, slow impulsive reactions, and direct attention toward a stable source of meaning. Traditional Islamic spiritual practices, including *dhikr*, Qur'anic recitation, reflection, and contemplation, have been discussed as culturally grounded practices that may support attentional control and psychological well-being. However, researchers continue to call for stronger empirical studies before these practices are treated as formal psychological interventions (Funke et al., 2026).

The result also supports an Islamic understanding of spiritual balance. Contemporary discussions of *tazkiyat al-nafs* identify *dhikr*, *muhasabah*, *muraqabah*, and *tawakkul* as practices that can restore balance between material engagement and spiritual awareness. These practices encourage individuals to participate responsibly in worldly life without becoming psychologically controlled by temporary pleasure, possessions, or external approval (Ihsan, Muhammad, Kaplan, & Zarkasyi, 2025). In a digital context, this balance does not require students to reject technology. It requires them to use technology without allowing it to dominate their identity, emotions, and daily priorities.

The finding that *tazkiyat al-nafs* explained a meaningful proportion of digital anxiety is consistent with broader research on Islamic religiosity and student mental health. Research among Muslim university students found significant relationships between religiosity, quality of life, and positive mental health. The dimension of *ihsan* emerged as an important predictor of psychological quality of life and mental health (Abdul Khaiyom, Tajul Ariffin, & Md Rosli, 2022). The present study develops this argument by focusing on a specific Islamic spiritual process and a specific digital mental-health outcome among secondary-school students.

The results do not indicate that *tazkiyat al-nafs* removes every form of digital anxiety. The model explained 31 % of the variance, leaving 69 % to other factors. These factors may include cyberbullying, academic workload, family supervision, peer pressure, fear of missing out, personality, sleep quality, social support, digital literacy, and previous mental-health difficulties. Digital anxiety therefore requires a comprehensive response rather than a single spiritual intervention.

Recent systematic evidence also warns against treating religious involvement as automatically beneficial. A systematic review and meta-analysis covering 45 longitudinal studies and 29 intervention studies found that spiritual well-being often protected young people against depression and anxiety, but negative religious coping could increase psychological distress. The evidence was also limited by study quality and the

underrepresentation of Muslim populations and lower-income settings (Aggarwal, Wright, Morgan, Patton, & Reavley, 2023). Schools should therefore integrate *tazkiyat al-nafs* with digital literacy, counselling, social-emotional learning, and mental-health referral systems. Islamic Religious Education teachers can use weekly *muhasabah* journals, guided reflection, digital fasting exercises, gratitude activities, online ethical cases, and discussions about intention in technology use. School counsellors can help students identify anxiety triggers and develop practical strategies for notification management, sleep protection, social comparison, and help-seeking.

The findings also have implications for parents. Strict monitoring may temporarily restrict digital behaviour, but it may not build the internal capacity required when students use devices without supervision. Parents should combine clear digital rules with dialogue, emotional support, spiritual modelling, and gradual autonomy. The objective should not only be compliance but also the formation of students who can independently make responsible digital decisions.

In conclusion, the findings indicate that *tazkiyat al-nafs* has a significant negative influence on students' digital anxiety. Its strongest contribution appears through self-control, ethical responsibility, patience, and reflective awareness. Islamic spiritual pedagogy can therefore provide a culturally relevant foundation for developing digital resilience. It should function as a preventive and educational approach that complements, rather than replaces, professional psychological care.

Conclusion

This study concludes that *tazkiyat al-nafs* has a significant negative influence on students' digital anxiety. Students with stronger self-control, spiritual awareness, patience, gratitude, reflective self-evaluation, and ethical responsibility tend to experience lower levels of anxiety in digital environments. Among these dimensions, self-control and ethical responsibility show the strongest relationship with digital anxiety. These findings indicate that digital anxiety is not determined only by screen time or access to technology. It is also shaped by students' ability to regulate emotions, control impulses, manage social comparison, and use digital media responsibly.

The findings strengthen the role of Islamic spiritual pedagogy in supporting students' mental health in the digital era. *Tazkiyat al-nafs* can serve as a culturally relevant foundation for developing digital resilience, emotional stability, and responsible technology use. Islamic Religious Education should therefore integrate *muhasabah*, *muraqabah*, *dhikr*, patience, gratitude, and digital ethics into classroom learning, mentoring, and counselling activities. This approach can help students build internal awareness and self-discipline rather than relying only on external restrictions, surveillance, or punishment.

Schools, teachers, counsellors, and parents should apply *tazkiyat al-nafs* together with digital literacy, social-emotional learning, and professional mental health support. Spiritual education should not replace psychological treatment for students with serious anxiety symptoms. Future studies should use longitudinal or experimental designs, involve broader student populations, and examine possible mediating variables such as self-control, digital resilience, fear of missing out, social support, and problematic smartphone use. Since the statistical results in this draft were simulated, the final conclusion must be revised according to the actual SPSS and AMOS findings before publication.

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