

The Concept of the Integration of Knowledge and Ablution in Islamic Education from Az-Zarnuji's Perspective (An Analysis of the Book *Ta'lim al-Muta'allim*)

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ABSTRACT

Islamic education essentially does not only emphasize the process of transferring knowledge, but also prioritizes the formation of spirituality, morality, and the blessing (*barakah*) of knowledge. However, contemporary educational systems tend to prioritize cognitive achievement over spiritual and moral dimensions, resulting in the decline of ethical orientation and religious values in educational practices. This study aims to analyze the concept of the integration of knowledge and ablution (*wudhu*) in Islamic education from the perspective of Shaykh Burhanuddin Az-Zarnuji through an analysis of the book *Ta'lim al-Muta'allim* and its relevance to contemporary Islamic education. This study employs a qualitative approach using a library research method. Primary data were obtained from the book *Ta'lim al-Muta'allim*, while secondary data were collected from scientific journals, books, and relevant studies published between 2020–2025. Data analysis was conducted through content analysis and a hermeneutic approach to examine the philosophical dimensions of Az-Zarnuji's educational thought. The findings indicate that the integration of knowledge and ablution in Az-Zarnuji's perspective is not merely related to ritual worship practices, but also represents a holistic integration between intellectual development, spiritual purification, and character formation (*adab*). Ablution is understood as a medium of outward and inward purification that prepares students to acquire beneficial and blessed knowledge. This study also demonstrates that Az-Zarnuji's educational thought remains relevant in addressing the challenges of contemporary education, particularly moral degradation, educational pragmatism, and the weakening spirituality of students in the digital era. Therefore, the integration of knowledge and ablution can serve as a holistic and humanistic paradigm of Islamic education by emphasizing the balance between intellectual, spiritual, and moral dimensions.

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Introduction

Education is the primary instrument in shaping the quality of human beings and civilization. From the Islamic perspective, education is not only understood as a process of transferring knowledge, but also as a process of forming individuals who possess faith, noble character, and strong spiritual awareness. Therefore, Islamic education has a broader orientation compared to modern education, which tends to emphasize intellectual aspects

and technical competencies alone. Islamic education views knowledge as a path to drawing closer to Allah SWT, cultivating noble morals, and building a social life characterized by morality and civilization (Yusuf, 2020).

However, the development of modern education has shown a shift toward pragmatic and materialistic orientations. Educational success is often measured through academic achievement, formal accomplishments, and competitiveness in the job market. Consequently, the spiritual and moral dimensions of education have become marginalized. This phenomenon can be observed in the increasing moral problems within educational environments, such as declining respect for teachers, weakening discipline, rising intolerant behavior, and ethical crises among students (Waroh, Arisanti, & Herwati, 2023).

These conditions indicate that modern education has not fully succeeded in shaping human beings holistically. Education often produces individuals who excel academically but are weak in spiritual and moral aspects. In the Islamic educational tradition, success in seeking knowledge is not only measured by the breadth of knowledge possessed, but also by the usefulness and blessings of that knowledge in life. Therefore, Islamic education places spirituality and *adab* as the primary foundations in the learning process (Nasrulloh, 2024).

The moral crisis in today's educational world cannot be separated from the weak integration between knowledge and spiritual values. Modern education often separates intellectual aspects from religious dimensions, causing knowledge to be viewed merely as a means to obtain employment and social status. As a result, the learning process loses its spiritual meaning and is no longer understood as a form of devotion to Allah SWT. This phenomenon has produced generations who are intellectually intelligent but lack moral awareness and social responsibility.

In the context of Islamic education, the relationship between knowledge and spirituality is highly important. Islam views knowledge as incapable of providing benefit if acquired without purity of heart and proper manners (*adab*) (Pipit Pitriani et al., 2023). Therefore, the process of seeking knowledge must be accompanied by efforts of self-purification, both outwardly and inwardly. One form of purification in Islam is ablution (*wudhu*). Ablution is not merely a ritual before prayer, but also possesses profound spiritual, psychological, and educational dimensions.

In the classical Islamic educational tradition, the relationship between knowledge and spirituality was widely discussed by scholars, one of whom was Shaykh Burhanuddin Az-Zarnuji through his book *Ta'lim al-Muta'allim*. This book became one of the main references in the pesantren educational tradition because it discusses ethics in learning, respect for teachers, intention in seeking knowledge, and the importance of maintaining purity of heart. Az-Zarnuji emphasized that knowledge would not provide benefit if acquired without *adab* and sincerity.

This concept is in line with the study of Ainur Rofiq Sofa et al., which states that Islamic education must integrate spiritual and emotional intelligence in the moral formation of students (Sofa, Mundir, and Ubaidillah, 2024). In addition, Faizah Mardiyah and Ainur Rofiq Sofa explain that the virtue of knowledge in Islam is not only oriented toward intellectual aspects, but also toward the transformation of spirituality and the formation of human morality (Mardiyah and Sofa, 2024).

Although Az-Zarnuji did not explicitly explain ablution as a technical requirement in learning, the concept of purity (*tahārah*) is strongly reflected in his thought. Values such as avoiding sinful acts, purifying the heart, respecting teachers, and maintaining good manners demonstrate that the process of seeking knowledge requires spiritual

preparedness. In this context, ablution can be understood as a symbol of outward and inward purification that helps students build mental and spiritual readiness in learning.

Research on the integration of knowledge and spirituality in Islamic Religious Education has been widely conducted. Ainur Rofiq Sofa et al. explained that Islamic Religious Education based on spiritual and emotional intelligence plays an important role in shaping students' morality (Sofa, Mundir, and Ubaidillah, 2024). In addition, Khairul Anam and Ainur Rofiq Sofa stated that the integration of science and religion can be implemented through Qur'an-based learning approaches, enabling students to understand the relationship between science and Islamic values (Anam and Sofa, 2024). Another study by Sherly Ana Zainal and Ainur Rofiq Sofa emphasized the importance of harmonizing revelation and reason in Islamic Religious Education as an effort to build an integrative religious understanding (Zainal and Sofa, 2026).

However, studies specifically discussing the integration of knowledge and ablution (*wudhu*) as a unified spiritual and intellectual framework in Az-Zarnuji's thought remain relatively limited. Previous studies on *Ta'lim al-Muta'allim* have predominantly concentrated on *adab* and learning ethics (Syafiqoh et al., 2022; Nasrulloh, 2024), character formation (Pipit Pitriani et al., 2023), or the general relevance of Az-Zarnuji's thought to contemporary education (Mawardi & Al-Hamat, 2021), without specifically examining the role of ritual purification as a prerequisite for obtaining the blessings (*barakah*) of knowledge. Studies on the integration of spirituality and Islamic education by Sofa et al. (2024) and Mardiyah & Sofa (2024) have addressed the spiritual dimension broadly, yet none has specifically explored ablution as a distinct epistemic and spiritual mechanism within the classical Islamic learning tradition. This gap constitutes the central rationale of the present study.

Therefore, this study seeks to fill the existing gap by examining the concept of ablution as a medium of spiritual purification and as a means of attaining blessed knowledge, as understood through Az-Zarnuji's framework. This study makes two specific contributions: first, it offers a textual and hermeneutic analysis of the *wudhu*-knowledge nexus that has been overlooked in prior scholarship; second, it proposes this integration as a holistic and humanistic paradigm relevant to addressing the spiritual and moral challenges of contemporary Islamic education.

Method

This study employs a qualitative approach using a library research method. This approach was selected because the research object is a classical text whose meanings require interpretive depth rather than empirical observation. Library research is appropriate for studies that seek to analyze, reconstruct, and evaluate ideas contained within written sources, particularly in the fields of Islamic education and classical thought. The qualitative nature of this study allows for an exploratory and interpretive examination of Az-Zarnuji's educational philosophy as articulated in *Ta'lim al-Muta'allim*.

The data in this study are divided into two categories. Primary data consist of the book *Ta'lim al-Muta'allim* by Shaykh Burhanuddin Az-Zarnuji, which serves as the main textual basis for this analysis. Secondary data were obtained from scientific journals, books, academic articles, and relevant studies published between 2020–2025, covering themes of Islamic education, educational spirituality, the integration of knowledge and religion, and the concept of ablution. The use of recent secondary literature ensures that the classical thought of Az-Zarnuji is examined in dialogue with contemporary scholarly discourse.

Data were collected through systematic documentation, involving the identification, reading, classification, and synthesis of relevant textual sources. The analysis was

conducted using two complementary techniques. First, content analysis was applied to identify, categorize, and interpret the core concepts related to knowledge, purification, and ablution as presented in *Ta'lim al-Muta'allim*. Second, a hermeneutic approach was employed to interpret the deeper philosophical and spiritual meanings embedded in the text, particularly regarding the relationship between ritual purity (*tahārah*) and the acquisition of blessed knowledge. To ensure the credibility of the findings, source triangulation was conducted by cross-referencing interpretations from the primary text with relevant secondary literature, thereby strengthening the validity and consistency of the analysis.

Results and Discussion

1. Biography of Shaykh Az-Zarnuji

Shaykh Az-Zarnuji is a prominent Islamic scholar highly respected within pesantren circles. His monumental work became a gateway to success for students in acquiring knowledge. His full name is Nu'man bin Ibrahim bin Khalil Az-Zarnuji Tajuddin. The name "Az-Zarnuji" refers to the city of Zarnuj where he resided, and the name was derived from the family lineage of the region. Some scholars also added the title Burhanuddin, making his name Shaykh Burhanuddin Az-Zarnuji (Syafiqoh et al., 2022).

Shaykh Burhanuddin Az-Zarnuji was one of the prominent scholars in the field of Islamic education who became widely known through his book *Ta'lim al-Muta'allim Thariqah al-Ta'allum*. He was recognized as a Hanafi scholar who lived around the 12th to 13th century CE and originated from the region of Zarand or Transoxiana. During his intellectual journey, Az-Zarnuji studied in major centers of Islamic scholarship such as Bukhara and Samarkand under renowned scholars, including Burhanuddin Al-Marghinani, the author of *Al-Hidayah*. His educational thought emphasized the importance of manners (*adab*), morality, and spirituality in the process of seeking knowledge. According to Az-Zarnuji, success in learning is not merely determined by intellectual ability, but is also influenced by diligence, respect for teachers, patience, and the purity of the heart from reprehensible traits. Therefore, *Ta'lim al-Muta'allim* remains one of the primary references for character education in Islamic boarding schools and Islamic education institutions today (Mawardi, Alim, & Al-Hamat, 2021, pp. 26–27).

2. Works of Shaykh Az-Zarnuji

Burhanuddin Az-Zarnuji's most famous work is *Ta'lim al-Muta'allim*. Information regarding his life is indeed limited in biographical literature, but his name became widely known through this work. In his book, Az-Zarnuji mentioned several of his teachers, such as Burhan al-Din al-Marghinani, the author of *Al-Hidayah fi Furu' al-Fiqh*, as well as several scholars from the Hanafi school (Ulfa, 2022).

The book *Ta'lim al-Muta'allim* is a concise work discussing Islamic educational concepts, particularly the ethics of seeking knowledge. Despite its brevity, the book has had great influence and has been translated into various languages, such as Turkish, Latin, and Russian. The contents of the book are systematically arranged into twelve chapters discussing ethics, learning methods, and the relationship between students and teachers (Mariani, 2020).

In addition, there are opinions suggesting that Az-Zarnuji may have authored other works. This is evident from his statement in *Ta'lim al-Muta'allim* that one of his teachers requested him to write a book about Abu Hanifah's thought. Regardless of debates concerning his other works, Az-Zarnuji remains regarded as an important figure who made major contributions to the development of Islamic education through his thoughts on *adab* and knowledge (Trisnawati, 2021).

3. Position of Knowledge According to Shaykh Az-Zarnuji's Perspective

According to Az-Zarnuji, knowledge occupies a highly noble position because it serves as a means for human beings to know Allah SWT and fulfill their role as caliphs on earth. Knowledge is not merely a tool for obtaining worldly benefits, but rather a spiritual light guiding humans toward goodness. Allah SWT says:

يَرْفَعُ اللَّهُ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا مِنْكُمْ وَالَّذِينَ أُوتُوا الْعِلْمَ دَرَجَاتٍ

"Allah will raise those who have believed among you and those who were given knowledge by degrees." (QS. Al-Mujadalah: 11)

Az-Zarnuji emphasized that success in seeking knowledge is not only determined by intellectual intelligence, but also influenced by intention, perseverance, and purity of heart. According to him, knowledge obtained without *adab* will lose its benefit (Adelina Zahida Fathonah et al., 2020).

Az-Zarnuji also explained that the primary purpose of seeking knowledge is to attain the pleasure of Allah SWT, eliminate ignorance, and provide benefit to society. Thus, knowledge should not be used as a means of arrogance, popularity, or worldly interests. In the book *Ta'lim al-Muta'allim*, Shaykh Az-Zarnuji states:

إِنَّمَا يَنْبَغِي لِطَالِبِ الْعِلْمِ أَنْ يَتَوَيَّ بِطَلْبِهِ رِضَاَ اللَّهِ تَعَالَى وَالذَّارَ الْأَجْرَةَ وَإِزَالََةَ الْجَهْلِ عَنْ نَفْسِهِ وَعَنْ سَائِرِ الْجُهَالِ

Translation: "A seeker of knowledge should intend, through his pursuit of knowledge, to seek the pleasure of Allah SWT and the happiness of the Hereafter, as well as to eliminate ignorance from himself and from others who remain ignorant." (*Ta'lim al-Muta'allim*, 2019: 11).

4. Concept of Ablution (Wudhu) as a Means of Self-Purification

In Islam, ablution possesses a profound spiritual dimension. Besides functioning as a prerequisite for worship, ablution also symbolizes purification from sins and inner impurities. Allah SWT says:

إِنَّ اللَّهَ يُحِبُّ التَّوَّابِينَ وَيُحِبُّ الْمُتَطَهِّرِينَ

Translation: "Indeed, Allah loves those who repent and those who purify themselves." (QS. Al-Baqarah: 222).

Az-Zarnuji did not explicitly mention ablution as a requirement for learning. However, his teachings regarding maintaining purity of heart, avoiding sinful acts, and respecting knowledge indicate that the learning process requires spiritual readiness.

This is reflected in the narration attributed to Shaykh Imam Syamsul A'immah Al-Hulwani:

وَحَكِي عَنِ الشَّيْخِ الْإِمَامِ شَمْسِ الْأَيْمَةِ الْحُلَوَانِيِّ أَنَّهُ قَالَ: إِنَّمَا نَلْتُ هَذَا الْعِلْمَ بِالتَّعْظِيمِ، فَإِنِّي مَا أَخَذْتُ الْكَاعِدَ إِلَّا بِالطَّهَارَةِ

"It is narrated from Shaykh Imam Syamsul A'immah Al-Hulwani that he said: 'Indeed, I attained this knowledge by honoring it, and I never touched the pages of a book except in a state of purity.'" (Az-Zarnuji, *Pedoman Belajar Pelajar dan Santri*, 2019, p. 29).

This statement emphasizes that maintaining purity before interacting with knowledge reflects a form of spiritual etiquette that functions as a non-formal prerequisite in obtaining the blessings of knowledge. Psychologically, wudhu also influences emotional calmness and learning concentration (Nasution, 1986, p. 113.). The water used in wudhu provides a relaxing effect that helps students become more focused in receiving lessons.

From the perspective of Islamic education, wudhu also contains character education values. The practice of wudhu teaches discipline, cleanliness, orderliness, and obedience to rules. Therefore, habituating students to perform wudhu before studying can become part of spiritual and character education.

5. Integration of Knowledge and Ablution (Wudhu) in Islamic Education

The integration of knowledge and wudhu in Islamic education is an effort to unite intellectual and spiritual activities within the learning process. Education is not only aimed at improving intellectual abilities, but also at developing students' spiritual and moral awareness.

In Az-Zarnuji's perspective, the blessings of knowledge are greatly influenced by the spiritual condition of the seeker of knowledge. Therefore, wudhu can be understood as a means of self-purification that helps students obtain beneficial and blessed knowledge. As stated by Az-Zarnuji in the book *Ta'lim al-Muta'allim*:

هَذَا لِأَنَّ الْعِلْمَ نُورٌ وَالْوُضُوءَ نُورٌ فَيَزِيدُ نُورُ الْعِلْمِ بِهِ

"As for honoring knowledge by performing wudhu when holding or studying a book, it is because knowledge is light (nur) and wudhu is also light; therefore, the light of knowledge increases through wudhu." (Az-Zarnuji, *Pedoman Belajar Pelajar dan Santri*, 2019, p. 30).

This understanding is reinforced by the story of Shaykh Imam As-Sarakhsi, who consistently maintained purity while studying and writing knowledge. The tradition of maintaining wudhu before interacting with books is viewed as a form of respect for knowledge as well as an effort to attain its blessings.

وَأَنَّ الشَّيْخَ الْإِمَامَ شَمْسَ الْأَيْمَةِ السَّرْحَسِيِّ كَانَ مَبْطُونًا، وَكَانَ يُكْرِرُ الْوُضُوءَ فِي لَيْلَةٍ سَبْعَ عَشْرَةَ مَرَّةً، لِأَنَّهُ كَانَ لَا يُكْرِرُ الدَّرْسَ إِلَّا بِالطَّهَارَةِ

"Indeed, Shaykh Imam Syamsul A'immah As-Sarakhsi suffered from stomach illness, and on one night he repeated his wudhu seventeen times because he would not review his lessons except in a state of purity." (Az-Zarnuji, *Pedoman Belajar Pelajar dan Santri*, 2019, p. 30).

The concept of the integration of knowledge and ablution (wudhu) proposed by Az-Zarnuji has strong relevance to the contemporary holistic educational paradigm. Modern education is no longer solely oriented toward academic achievement but also emphasizes the development of character, emotional intelligence, and spiritual intelligence among learners. In this context, ablution can be understood as a means of fostering psychological and spiritual readiness prior to the learning process.

From the perspective of Islamic educational psychology, ablution functions as a medium of self-regulation that helps students achieve greater emotional stability. The process of washing the limbs in a systematic sequence creates a calming and relaxing effect that may enhance concentration and readiness for learning. Therefore, ablution serves not only as a ritual act of worship but also as an educational practice that supports the effectiveness of the learning process.

Furthermore, this concept is closely related to character education. The habit of maintaining ablution cultivates discipline, cleanliness, responsibility, and obedience to established rules. These values constitute essential components of both national educational goals and Islamic educational objectives. Consequently, the integration of knowledge and ablution may serve as an alternative approach to developing an educational system that not only produces intellectually competent students but also fosters strong spiritual awareness and moral integrity.

6. Relationship Between Barakah and Education

The concept of barakah (blessing) in Islamic education has a very broad meaning. Barakah is not only understood as an increase in the quantity of knowledge, but also as the usefulness and benefit of knowledge in life. Barakah is understood as the increase and development of goodness.

البركة هي زيادة الخير

“Barakah is the increase of goodness.” (Abu Hamid al-Ghazali, 1995, *Ihya' Ulum al-Din*).

Knowledge that contains barakah will give rise to peace of mind, noble character, and social benefit. Conversely, knowledge acquired without proper manners and spirituality has the potential to lose its beneficial value. In the context of modern education, this concept is relevant because education is not only oriented toward worldly goals, but also toward the formation of students' morality and spirituality (Nata, 2016, p. 34). Education is often understood merely as a means of obtaining employment and social status, rather than as a process of self-development and devotion to Allah SWT.

The concept of barakah is also related to the quality of the relationship between teachers and students. Az-Zarnuji emphasized that respect for teachers is one of the main conditions for obtaining beneficial knowledge. The loss of respect for teachers will result in the loss of the blessings of knowledge. This concept is affirmed by Burhanuddin Az-Zarnuji in *Ta'lim al-Muta'allim* as follows:

فإنَّ طالبَ العِلْمِ لا يَنَالُ العِلْمَ وَلا يَنْتَفِعُ بِهِ إِلاَّ بِتَعْظِيمِ العِلْمِ وَأَهْلِهِ وَتَعْظِيمِ الأُسْتَاذِ وَتَوْقِيرِهِ

“Indeed, a seeker of knowledge will not obtain knowledge or benefit from it except by honoring knowledge and its people, as well as honoring and respecting teachers.” (Az-Zarnuji, *Pedoman Belajar Pelajar dan Santri*, 2019 p. 24).

In addition, the blessings of knowledge are also closely related to the purity of the seeker's heart. A heart filled with arrogance, envy, and sinful behavior will find it difficult to receive the light of knowledge. Therefore, the process of Islamic education must be accompanied by continuous spiritual development. In *Ta'lim al-Muta'allim*, Az-Zarnuji quoted the statement of Imam Shafi'i:

#شَكَوْتُ إِلَى وَكَيْعِ سَوْءِ حِفْظِي

#فَأَرشَدَنِي إِلَى تَرْكِ المَعاصِي

#وَأخْبَرَنِي بِأَنَّ العِلْمَ نُورٌ

#وَنُورُ اللَّهِ لا يُهْدَى لِعَاصٍ

“I complained to Waki' about the weakness of my memory, then he advised me to abandon sinful acts. He told me that knowledge is the light of Allah, and the light of Allah is not granted to sinners.” (Az-Zarnuji, *Pedoman Belajar Pelajar dan Santri*, 2019 p.103).

7. Relevance of Az-Zarnuji's Thought to Contemporary Education

Az-Zarnuji's thought has great relevance to the problems of modern education. Moral crises, educational pragmatism, and the declining respect for teachers indicate the importance of strengthening spiritual values in education. Az-Zarnuji's educational concept can be applied through the habituation of proper manners (adab) in the learning process, strengthening students' spirituality, and integrating religious values into all educational activities. The habit of performing wudhu before studying can also become a simple yet effective strategy in building discipline, calmness, and students' spiritual readiness.

In the digital era, students face various moral challenges due to the unlimited flow of information. Technology provides many benefits, but it also has the potential to create individualistic and hedonistic behavior, as well as a decline in spiritual awareness. Under such conditions, Az-Zarnuji's educational concept can serve as an alternative educational

paradigm that is more humanistic and spiritual. Education should not only focus on mastering technology and academic competence, but also on forming individuals who possess moral and spiritual awareness. Furthermore, the integration of knowledge and wudhu can also be implemented in both formal educational institutions and Islamic boarding schools through the habituation of religious culture, strengthening character education, and internalizing the values of adab in all educational activities.

Conclusion

The concept of integrating knowledge and ablution (*wudhu*) in Islamic education from Az-Zarnuji's perspective demonstrates that the process of seeking knowledge is not only related to intellectual development, but also requires spiritual readiness and the cultivation of proper manners (*adab*).

In the book *Ta'lim al-Muta'allim*, Az-Zarnuji emphasizes the importance of sincere intentions, respect for teachers, maintaining purity of heart, and avoiding sinful acts as essential requirements for obtaining beneficial and blessed knowledge. In the context of education, *wudhu* is not merely understood as a ritual act of worship, but also as a symbol of both physical and spiritual purification that helps students develop calmness, discipline, and readiness to learn.

The integration of knowledge and *wudhu* represents a holistic paradigm of Islamic education because it connects intellectual, spiritual, and moral aspects into a unified whole. This concept remains relevant in contemporary education as a solution to moral crises, educational pragmatism, and the weakening of students' spirituality. Therefore, Islamic educational institutions need to integrate spiritual development into all educational activities in order to restore the blessing (*barakah*) of knowledge within the learning process.

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