



TAZKIYATUN NAFS LEARNING METHODS THROUGH THE CURRICULUM OF LOVE: ELEMENTARY STUDENTS' REASONING AND CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract: This study aimed to analyze the effect of implementing the *tazkiyatun nafs* learning method on the development of moral reasoning and students' affective character in elementary schools. The research employed a quantitative research approach with a pretest-posttest design involving 45 respondents in Rokan, Riau, Indonesia. Data were collected through Likert-scale questionnaires, observations, and documentation, and analyzed using a paired sample t-test, correlation analysis, and N-Gain calculation. The results showed a significant improvement, with the mean pretest score of 2.96 (59.2%) increasing to 4.10 (82.0%) in the posttest, with a gain of 22.8%. The t-test result indicated a value of 9.87 > 2.015 with a significance level of 0.000, while the correlation coefficient showed a strong relationship at $r = 0.82$. The N-Gain value of 0.56 was categorized as moderate to high. Therefore, the *tazkiyatun nafs* method is effective in significantly improving students' character development. These findings imply that integrating the *tazkiyatun nafs* learning method within elementary school curricula can serve as an effective pedagogical strategy for strengthening students' moral reasoning and affective character, while providing educators and curriculum developers with an evidence-based approach to implementing holistic character education.

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INTRODUCTION

Education plays a fundamental role in developing human resources through the formation of knowledge, skills, attitudes, values, and character. Modern education is expected to respond to social transformation, technological advancement, and increasingly complex moral challenges that influence students' development (Anggraini & Mahariah, 2024; Sutarja et al., 2024; Zvereva, 2023). Consequently, educational success should be evaluated not only

through academic achievement but also through the development of students' moral reasoning, affective character, and spiritual maturity (Khusnadin & Shihab, 2025; Kumar & Pravesh, 2024). Character education therefore functions as a process of internalizing values that shape students' personalities holistically. This perspective encourages schools to balance cognitive, affective, and spiritual dimensions throughout the learning process (Annabil et al., 2026; R. Aulia et al., 2024; Zakharin & Bates, 2023).

Despite the growing emphasis on holistic education, character development preliminary observations conducted at the research site revealed that classroom learning in elementary school remains predominantly focused on cognitive achievement. Teachers primarily emphasize academic performance and curriculum completion, while opportunities to cultivate students' empathy, self-control, honesty, responsibility, and moral awareness through daily learning activities are relatively limited. As a result, some students demonstrate difficulties in regulating emotions, cooperating with peers, taking responsibility for their actions, and consistently applying positive values in both classroom and school environments. The imbalance between cognitive learning and affective development suggests that existing instructional practices have not yet fully achieved the objectives of holistic character education.

One approach that has the potential to overcome this challenge is the implementation of the *tazkiyatun nafs* learning method within the framework of the Curriculum of Love. The concept of *tazkiyatun nafs* emphasizes the purification of the soul through the harmonious development of intellect (*'aql*), heart (*qalb*), spirit (*ruh*), and self-control over desire (*nafs*). The integration of intellect and heart enables students to develop critical reasoning that remains guided by ethical and moral values (Ansori et al., 2026; Rahmat et al., 2023). Holistic education should also cultivate students' affective dimensions because emotional development is an essential component of meaningful learning. Furthermore, the integration of *tazkiyah al-nafs* into Islamic education contributes to strengthening students' spiritual awareness alongside their intellectual growth. The evaluation of Islamic education should therefore incorporate affective and spiritual dimensions to ensure balanced character development (Kuo et al., 2024; Wnuk, 2024).

Previous studies have consistently demonstrated the importance of *tazkiyatun nafs* in educational settings. Research by Dongell (2024); Jenuri et al. (2025) and Park et al. (2023) focused primarily on strengthening teachers' personalities through spiritual purification. Z. Aulia et al. (2025); Pike et al. (2024) and Prayitno et al. (2023) examined the integration of critical reasoning with moral values in Islamic education. The importance of educating students' feelings as part of holistic education. Erdogdu (2024) and Lin & Jiang (2023) investigated *tazkiyah al-nafs* as a strategic objective in Islamic education for strengthening students' character. This highlighted the need to improve educational evaluation by integrating cognitive, affective, and spiritual domains. Overall, these various studies emphasize that *tazkiyatun nafs* serves as an essential foundation integrating spiritual, emotional, and intellectual aspects in

Islamic education. Therefore, comprehensively incorporating spiritual purification into the curriculum and learning evaluation systems is a crucial step in shaping holistic student character.

Although previous studies have highlighted the importance of *tazkiyatun nafs* in Islamic education, empirical evidence regarding its effectiveness in elementary schools remains limited. Most research has focused on conceptual discussions, teacher development, or qualitative perspectives without quantitatively measuring changes in students' moral reasoning and affective character following instructional interventions. Furthermore, few studies have integrated *tazkiyatun nafs* within the Curriculum of Love using measurable indicators of character development. This gap underscores the need for empirical research that quantitatively evaluates the effectiveness of this learning approach in primary education. The novelty of this study lies in integrating the *tazkiyatun nafs* learning method with the Curriculum of Love and evaluating its impact on elementary school students' moral reasoning and affective character through a quantitative approach. By employing measurable indicators before and after the learning intervention, this study provides empirical evidence on the effectiveness of the proposed model. Therefore, the study aims to analyze the effect of implementing the *tazkiyatun nafs* learning method within the Curriculum of Love on students' moral reasoning and affective character.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a quantitative approach using a one-group pretest-posttest design to examine the effectiveness of the *tazkiyatun nafs* learning method within the framework of the Curriculum of Love in improving elementary school students' moral reasoning and affective character. The research hypotheses were formulated as follows: H_0 : The implementation of the *tazkiyatun nafs* learning method has no significant effect on students' moral reasoning and affective character. H_1 : The implementation of the *tazkiyatun nafs* learning method has a significant positive effect on students' moral reasoning and affective character. The study involved 45 elementary school students from a selected elementary school in Rokan, Riau, Indonesia, who were selected using purposive sampling. Participants met the following inclusion criteria: (1) they were enrolled in classes implementing the Curriculum of Love, (2) they participated in *tazkiyatun nafs*-based learning throughout the intervention period, (3) they attended at least 90% of the learning sessions, and (4) they completed both the pretest and posttest questionnaires. These criteria ensured that all participants experienced the same learning intervention and provided complete data for analysis.

Data were collected using a five-point Likert-scale questionnaire to assess students' moral reasoning and affective character (1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neutral, 4 = agree, and 5 = strongly agree). The average questionnaire scores were interpreted using the following criteria: 1.00–1.80 = very low, 1.81–2.60 = low, 2.61–3.40 = moderate, 3.41–4.20 = high, and 4.21–5.00 = very high. Structured classroom observation sheets were used to document

students' behavioral changes during learning activities, while instructional documentation supported the observation data. Descriptive statistics summarized participants' responses, and inferential analyses included paired-sample *t*-tests to compare pretest and posttest scores, Pearson correlation analysis to examine the relationship between the implementation of the learning method and character development, and normalized gain (N-Gain) analysis to determine the magnitude of students' improvement following the intervention. These analytical procedures provided empirical evidence regarding the effectiveness of the *tazkiyatun nafs* learning method in strengthening elementary school students' moral reasoning and affective character.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

Respondent Characteristic Analysis Test And Pretest & Posttest Test

This research was conducted in the Rokan region, Riau Province, Indonesia, an area characterized by strong socio-cultural influences rooted in religious values and local wisdom. The elementary school environments in this region are generally situated in semi-urban and rural areas, where educational access continues to grow in line with the advancement of educational development programs. The schools selected as research sites maintain a relatively conducive learning atmosphere, supported by the community and parents in fostering student character. However, the implementation of character-based learning remains varied, particularly regarding the integration of spiritual and affective values into daily learning activities. These conditions make Rokan, Riau, a relevant location for examining the application of the *tazkiyatun nafs* method within the framework of the "Curriculum of Love" (*kurikulum cinta*).

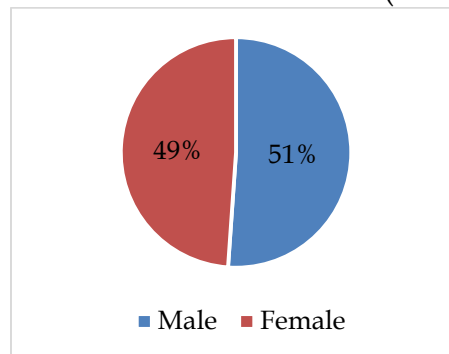


Figure 1. Respondent Characteristics According to Gender

Based on Figure 1, the distribution of respondents shows that the number of male students is 51.1% and female students is 48.9%. This composition reflects a nearly equal balance between the two groups, indicating that the research sample is representative and free from gender bias. Such balance is crucial in quantitative research, as it ensures that the analysis of student character is not influenced by the dominance of one gender group. Furthermore, these data suggest that the teaching methods under study have a relatively equal potential impact on both male and female students regarding character building.

Consequently, the validity of the research findings is strengthened, allowing for broader generalization across the elementary school population.

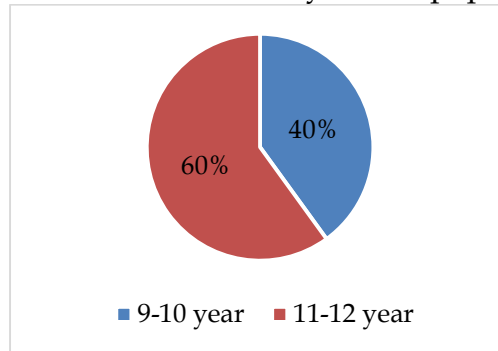


Figure 2. Respondent Characteristics According to Age

Based on Figure 2, the majority of respondents fall within the 11-12 age range at 60%, while the remaining 40% are aged 9-10. This distribution indicates that most students are at a stage of cognitive and emotional development that is more mature than the younger age group. At this age, students begin to develop more logical thinking skills, are able to understand the consequences of their actions, and can more easily internalize moral values within the learning process. Therefore, the predominance of the 11-12 age group serves as a supporting factor in the successful implementation of character-based learning methods, as these students are in the ideal phase to internalize positive values through structured and repetitive learning experiences.

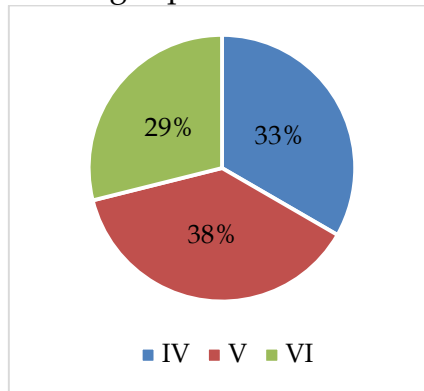


Figure 3. Respondent Characteristics According to Grade Level

Based on Figure 3, the distribution of respondents by grade level shows that fifth-grade (Class V) students account for the highest percentage at 37.8%, followed by fourth-grade (Class IV) at 33.3%, and sixth-grade (Class VI) at 28.9%. This distribution indicates that the respondents are relatively balanced across the upper elementary grades, ensuring that the collected data reflects the actual learning conditions during the final stages of primary education. This variation in grade levels provides a comprehensive overview of the effectiveness of the teaching methods across different stages of student development, while simultaneously strengthening the validity of the research findings.

Hypothesis Test

Table 1. Level of Understanding of Students' *Tazkiyatun nafs* Values (Pretest)

Understanding Indicator	Average Score	Category	Percentage (%)
Understanding honesty	2,8	Low	56,0
Understanding patience	3,0	Low	60,0
Understanding gratitude	3,2	Enough	64,0
Understanding self-control	2,7	Low	54,0
Understanding empathy	3,1	Enough	62,0
Overall average	2,96	Low-Fair	59,2

The pretest results indicate that the students' level of understanding regarding the values of *tazkiyatun nafs* remains in the low to moderate category, with an overall average score of 2.96 and a percentage of 59.2%. The indicators with the lowest achievement are found in the aspects of self control (54%) and honesty (56%), suggesting that students still face difficulties in internalizing basic moral values into their daily behavior. Meanwhile, the aspects of gratitude and empathy performed relatively better but have yet to reach the high category, ranging only between 62–64%. These conditions indicate that previous learning methods have not optimally integrated affective learning approaches or systematic spiritual value internalization. Consequently, this data reinforces the urgent need for a *tazkiyatun nafs* based learning model that is more structured, contextual, and rooted in experiential learning to significantly enhance the quality of students' character.

Table 2. Results of the Implementation of the *Tazkiyatun nafs* Method (Posttest)

Understanding Indicator	Average Score	Category	Percentage (%)
Honesty	4,1	High	82,0
Patience	4,0	High	80,0
Gratitude	4,3	Very High	86,0
Self-Control	3,9	High	78,0
Empathy	4,2	Very High	84,0
Overall Average	4,1	High	82,0

The posttest results indicate a significant improvement across all student character indicators following the implementation of the *tazkiyatun nafs* learning method within the framework of the "*Curriculum of Love*" (*kurikulum cinta*). The overall average reached 4.1, with a percentage of 82%, placing it in the high to very high category. Notably, the indicators for gratitude and empathy showed the most prominent increases, reaching 86% and 84% respectively. This demonstrates that the value-based approach and role modeling successfully strengthened the students' affective dimensions. Furthermore, improvements were observed in honesty, patience, and self-control, all of which scored above 78%, signifying more stable and positive behavioral changes. Quantitatively, there was an average increase of more than 20% compared to the pretest results, proving the method's effectiveness in enhancing the internalization of spiritual values and student character through a holistic learning system.

Table 3. Comparison of Pretest and Posttest (Gain Score)

Indicator	Pretest (%)	Posttest (%)	Gain (%)	Improvement Category
Honesty	56	82	26	High
Patience	60	80	20	Medium
Gratitude	64	86	22	High
Self-Control	54	78	24	High
Empathy	62	84	22	High
Average	59,2	82,0	22,8	High

Based on the comparison between the pretest and posttest, there is a significant improvement across all student character indicators, with an average gain score of 22.8%. The highest increase occurred in the honesty aspect (26%), demonstrating that learning interventions based on *tazkiyatun nafs* are capable of effectively improving students' fundamental behavior. Meanwhile, the self-control aspect also saw a substantial rise of 24%, indicating the success of reflective approaches and habituation in reducing impulsive behavior. Although patience showed the lowest increase compared to other indicators (20%), these results still reflect the positive impact of implementing the "Curriculum of Love" (*Curriculum Cinta*) in the learning process. These empirical trends suggest that core moral virtues connected to direct interpersonal communication respond more rapidly to structured pedagogical interventions. Conversely, intrinsic self-regulatory traits like patience require a more sustained temporal window for deeper behavioral consolidation.

Table 4. Results of the Statistical Test of Differences between Pretest and Posttest (t-Test)

Variabel	Mean Pretest	Mean Posttest	Selisih Mean	t-hitung	t-tabel (0,05)	Sig. (p-value)	Keputusan
Student Character	2,96	4,10	1,14	9,87	2,015	0,000	Significant

The results of the statistical test using the paired sample t-test showed that there was a very significant difference between the pretest and posttest scores in measuring student character after the application of the *tazkiyatun nafs* method within the framework of the love curriculum. The calculated t-value of 9.87 was much greater than the t-table of 2.015 at a significance level of 0.05, with a significance value (p-value) of 0.000 which means it is smaller than 0.05. This indicates that H0 is rejected and H1 is accepted, so it can be concluded that there is a significant influence of the learning method on improving students' affective character. Quantitatively, the average difference of 1.14 indicates a strong and consistent increase in all aspects of character measured. These results strengthen the empirical evidence that the value-based learning approach integrated with *tazkiyatun nafs* is effective in improving the moral and behavioral quality of elementary school students in a measurable and statistical manner.

Table 5. Correlation of Method Application with Character Improvement

Variable	Correlation Coefficient (r)	Significance (p)	Relationship Category
<i>Tazkiyatun nafs</i> vs Character Method	0,82	0,000	Very strong

The correlation analysis shows a very strong relationship between the implementation of the *tazkiyatun nafs* learning method and the improvement of student character, with a correlation coefficient of 0.82 and a significance value of 0.000. This value indicates that the more optimal the implementation of the value-based method and "curriculum of love," the higher the improvement in students' affective character. This relationship is both positive and significant, meaning that changes in the independent variable (learning method) are directly proportional to changes in the dependent variable (student character).

Table 6. Learning Effectiveness Based on N-Gain Indicators

Character Indicators	N-Gain Score	Effectiveness Category
Honesty	0,59	Medium
Patience	0,50	Medium
Gratitude	0,61	High
Self-Control	0,54	Medium
Empathy	0,58	Medium-High
Average	0,56	Effectiveness Category

The N-Gain analysis demonstrated that the implementation of the *tazkiyatun nafs* learning method within the Curriculum of Love resulted in an overall average N-Gain score of 0.56, indicating a moderate level of improvement in students' moral reasoning and affective character. Among the assessed character indicators, gratitude achieved the highest N-Gain score (0.61), followed by honesty (0.59), empathy (0.58), self-control (0.54), and patience (0.50). These findings indicate that all measured character dimensions improved following the learning intervention, with gratitude showing the greatest increase and patience the smallest. Notably, these variations suggest that character traits grounded in immediate social expression, such as gratitude, are more rapidly internalized through daily structured learning activities. Conversely, virtues demanding higher internal emotional regulation, like patience and self-control, exhibit a more gradual developmental trajectory among elementary students.

According to the N-Gain analysis, the *tazkiyatun nafs* pedagogical method shows moderate-to-high effectiveness, averaging a score of 0.56. The highest gain was observed in the gratitude indicator (0.61), suggesting that spiritual values were more readily internalized through the Curriculum of Love framework. Other core values, including honesty, empathy, self-control, and patience, also demonstrated meaningful improvement, although their gains remained within the moderate category. These results indicate that while the intervention effectively strengthened students' moral reasoning and affective character, sustained implementation and reinforcement may be necessary to achieve higher levels of character development across all dimensions. In conclusion, these empirical findings demonstrate that integrating *tazkiyatun nafs* into holistic curricula serves as an effective, evidence-based approach to nurturing students' moral and affective development. Ultimately, the varying levels of growth across character indicators highlight that while spiritual practices yield immediate

gains, long-term educational commitment is essential to achieving deep and balanced virtue internalization.

Discussion

The findings demonstrate that the implementation of the *tazkiyatun nafs* learning method within the Curriculum of Love positively influenced elementary school students' moral reasoning and affective character. The significant improvement observed between the pretest and posttest scores indicates that character development can be strengthened through learning experiences that integrate cognitive, affective, and spiritual dimensions. The statistical results, including the positive correlation and the moderate N-Gain score, further indicate that the intervention contributed meaningfully to students' character development. These findings suggest that value-based learning becomes more effective when students are actively engaged in reflection, moral habituation, and authentic social interaction rather than receiving moral concepts solely through theoretical instruction.

The findings are consistent with the educational philosophy of Al-Ghazali, who viewed education as a process of developing both intellectual competence and spiritual awareness (Mainuddin et al., 2023; Surasman, 2025). Likewise, previous studies have shown that *tazkiyatun nafs* strengthens moral character by harmonizing the functions of reason, the heart, and self-control (Lutz et al., 2025; Pike et al., 2024). Algurén (2025); Berhanu & Shiferaw (2023) and Shepperd & Forsyth (2023) also argued that integrating *tazkiyah al-nafs* into educational practice enhances students' ethical awareness and responsibility. While these earlier studies primarily discussed *tazkiyatun nafs* from conceptual or qualitative perspectives, the present study extends the literature by providing quantitative evidence that its implementation can produce measurable improvements in elementary school students' moral reasoning and affective character (Bandhu et al., 2024; Upoyo et al., 2024). Consequently, bridging classical Islamic educational philosophy with empirical measurement demonstrates that spiritual purification is not merely an abstract ideal, but a tangible mechanism for driving measurable character development. Ultimately, these empirical insights validate *tazkiyatun nafs* as a scientifically observable and practical intervention for fostering holistic student growth in modern classrooms.

The observed improvement may be explained by the nature of *tazkiyatun nafs*, which emphasizes continuous self-reflection, self-regulation, and the cultivation of virtuous behavior. During the learning process, students were encouraged not only to understand moral values conceptually but also to practice them repeatedly through classroom activities. Such repeated experiences gradually transformed external behavioral expectations into internal moral awareness. This process indicates that character formation is not achieved through knowledge transmission alone but through continuous opportunities for reflection, practice, and behavioral reinforcement embedded within everyday learning experiences. Consequently, the consistent integration of *tazkiyatun nafs* directly fosters sustained behavioral change by transforming abstract moral

concepts into deeply internalized habits. Ultimately, this reflective practice enables students to instinctively embody ethical virtues, thereby driving long-term positive character development.

Another important finding concerns the role of the Curriculum of Love in supporting the implementation of *tazkiyatun nafs*. A learning environment characterized by respect, compassion, and positive teacher–student relationships creates conditions in which students feel emotionally secure to reflect on their behavior and practice moral values (Krawitz et al., 2024; Ntoumanis & Moller, 2023). Within this environment, values such as honesty, gratitude, empathy, patience, and self-control become part of students' daily learning experiences rather than isolated moral lessons. This aligns with Self-Determination Theory (Howard & Slemp, 2025; Ntoumanis & Moller, 2023), which posits that a supportive and emotionally secure environment satisfies students' need for relatedness, thereby facilitating the internal motivation required to internalize complex moral virtues. The relatively higher improvement in gratitude compared with other indicators suggests that character traits closely connected with students' everyday interactions are more readily internalized, whereas dimensions such as patience and self-control require longer periods of reinforcement because they involve more complex processes of emotional regulation and behavioral consistency (Bandhu et al., 2024; Chong et al., 2024; Howard, Bradshaw, et al., 2025; Howard, Slemp, et al., 2025).

The findings also support contemporary perspectives on holistic education, which emphasize that successful learning should develop students intellectually, emotionally, socially, and spiritually. Character education therefore should not be positioned as a complementary school program but should become an integral part of classroom instruction. The integration of *tazkiyatun nafs* within the Curriculum of Love demonstrates that moral values can be embedded systematically into learning activities without reducing academic objectives. Instead, cognitive achievement and character development function as complementary dimensions that mutually strengthen students' overall educational growth. Consequently, embedding *tazkiyatun nafs* within core educational frameworks creates a synergistic ecosystem where academic rigor directly nurtures moral maturity. Ultimately, this reciprocal reinforcement drives a fundamental shift from fragmented character programs toward a fully integrated model of holistic student development.

Overall, this study contributes to the growing body of research on Islamic character education by providing empirical evidence that the *tazkiyatun nafs* learning method can be effectively implemented within the Curriculum of Love and evaluated using quantitative measures of character development. By demonstrating measurable improvements in students' moral reasoning and affective character, this study extends previous conceptual discussions and offers empirical support for integrating Islamic value-based learning into elementary education. These findings provide a stronger foundation for future research examining holistic approaches to character education across diverse educational settings.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study imply that integrating spiritual values into classroom instruction can strengthen the role of character education in elementary schools by promoting balanced cognitive, affective, and moral development. Rather than treating character formation as a separate educational objective, the Curriculum of Love provides a framework in which moral values can be embedded into everyday learning experiences. This suggests that value-based learning approaches have the potential to foster more sustainable character development when they are consistently integrated into instructional practices. The study also has important theoretical and practical implications. Theoretically, it extends the empirical literature on Islamic character education by supporting the application of *tazkiyatun nafs* as a pedagogical approach within formal primary education. Practically, the findings offer educators and curriculum developers an alternative framework for designing learning activities that integrate intellectual, emotional, and spiritual dimensions in a coherent manner. Several limitations should be acknowledged. The study was conducted in a single elementary school with a relatively small sample, limiting the generalizability of the findings. In addition, the use of a one-group pretest-posttest design without a control group restricts the ability to attribute observed changes exclusively to the intervention. Future research should involve larger and more diverse samples, employ experimental or quasi-experimental designs with appropriate comparison groups, and examine the long-term sustainability of character development outcomes. Further studies may also investigate the applicability of this approach across different educational contexts and explore its relationship with broader educational outcomes, including academic achievement, social-emotional competence, and student well-being.

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