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Character Formation in the Age of Generative AI: Integrating Classical Islamic Educational Philosophy into AI-Assisted Learning

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Research Article

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Abstract

When students at a university in Azerbaijan were asked about their use of AI tools for homework assignments, I noticed that some were hesitant to admit their reliance on these tools. Despite this hesitation, nearly every student acknowledged using them. While proficiency with technology can signal digital competence, many students reported uncertainty about whether their practices were ethically sound. They lacked a frame of reference to evaluate their choices. This observation prompted the present inquiry.

Most institutional ethical frameworks for AI in education draw on liberal-procedural traditions. These frameworks often fail to resonate with the moral vocabulary of Muslim students worldwide. This study aims to bridge the gap between theory and practice by integrating reflection on Islamic moral anthropology into the practical dilemmas of AI-assisted learning. The article proposes a pedagogical model based on five stages drawn from the Islamic educational philosophy: Fitrah (innate moral inclination); Tazkiya (self-purification); Hikmah (wisdom); Ihsan (perfection through conscience); and Amal al-Salih (righteous action). For each stage, specific strategies and templates are suggested that teachers can adapt.

1. INTRODUCTION

The problem this article addresses begins with a simple classroom moment. When asked about their use of AI tools in completing assignments, students at one of Azerbaijani University offered responses that were strikingly candid: "I did it this way because I had no time"; "This is the modern approach — everyone does it, why shouldn't we?"; "It's just easier." Most did not perceive this as dishonest. They understood it as keeping pace with technological progress. What they did not recognise — and what no one had given them the language to recognise — was that something was quietly happening to them in the process. They were not simply submitting AI-generated text. They were rehearsing habits of avoidance, dependency, and self-deception. They were, in short, undergoing a character formation — in the wrong direction.

This is a problem that dominant institutional AI ethics frameworks in education have not adequately addressed. International guidelines from UNESCO and the European Commission rightly emphasise algorithmic fairness, transparency, and data protection. Institutional responses have concentrated on external control mechanisms — plagiarism detectors, policy prohibitions, and grading penalties. These measures treat the symptom. They do not reach the cause. The cause is not that students lack rules. It is that they lack an internal moral compass that makes those rules unnecessary. No detection tool can cultivate conscience. No policy document can build character. What is needed is a pedagogical framework that operates at the level of the student's inner life — one that addresses not only what students do with AI, but who they are becoming through it.

This article proposes such a framework, drawn from fourteen centuries of Islamic educational philosophy.

The distinction between AI as a replacement and AI as a tool is not merely technical — it is moral. A student who prompts an AI to "prepare my project on this topic" has outsourced not only the labour but the thinking, the struggle, and the growth that the task was designed to produce (Risko and Gilbert 2016). A student who asks "what literature would you recommend for this topic?" or "give me two or three possible structures and I will choose" remains the author of their own intellectual journey. The AI informs; the student decides, builds, and owns. In the first case, the student receives a product. In the second, the student develops a capability. The difference is not always visible in the final submission. It is visible only in what happens — or fails to happen — inside the student.

This distinction is at the heart of the pedagogical crisis that generative AI has created in higher education. Students are not simply cheating more. They are thinking less, struggling less, and consequently growing less. The habits being formed in these transactions — avoidance of difficulty, tolerance for dishonesty, dependency on external solutions — do not stay in the classroom. They become character traits that follow students into their professional and civic lives. AI operates through an input-output logic that mirrors the Quranic principle of moral causality: just as an algorithm produces output based on the data it is fed, the human soul produces character based on the moral choices it rehearses. What students feed into themselves through habitual AI misuse is not merely a violation of policy — it is an algorithmic reprogramming of their own moral disposition.

The current situation raises important questions for the roughly 1.8 billion Muslims who increasingly rely on generative AI tools whose training and governance frameworks are shaped predominantly by Western institutions (Pew Research Center 2017). This is not to say that these systems encode only one moral tradition — large language models are trained on globally sourced text and refined with input from culturally diverse human reviewers — but the governing ethical frameworks that guide their design and regulation remain disproportionately rooted in Western liberal philosophy. A student from a densely populated Muslim nation in the Caucasus, Anatolia, the Middle East, Africa, or South and Southeast Asia uses ChatGPT, Claude, Gemini within an institutional and regulatory environment shaped largely by Western thinking. What happens to the human spiritual world when the surrounding governance framework for technology is designed primarily within the framework of another culture? What does the conflict between the spiritual framework of the student's own culture and the spiritual framework of technology cause him to experience?

This article aims to bridge this gap by proposing an AI education framework that draws on the Islamic pedagogical principles of human development. This study does not seek to graft an Islamic dimension onto prevailing Western models. Instead, it develops an autonomous framework rooted in Fitrah — the Quranic anthropology of innate moral disposition — as elaborated across fourteen centuries of Islamic educational thought. Beginning from the premise that every learner possesses an inherent spiritual capacity, it asks how AI-assisted pedagogy might nurture and protect that capacity in the digital age.

Field-level evidence suggests that this is a real and urgent issue. Institutional responses have focused more on detecting and preventing plagiarism than on developing students' moral judgment (Perkins et al.

2024). This is not merely a technical problem, but a moral formation problem.

Qualitative data from Azerbaijan illustrate this tension. Of the 54 students who completed a structured questionnaire about their use of AI tools (see Section 4.8), a majority checked their own understanding before turning to AI, yet a significant portion did not consistently verify AI-generated content against other sources, and several explicitly admitted that relying on AI made them feel intellectually lazier. This suggests that learners' sense of personal responsibility is shifting. These students were not morally blind; they were morally aware, but they lacked a framework to guide their choices.

This moral uncertainty is not unique to Azerbaijan. Students across different cultural contexts struggle with the same absence of ethical guidance when using AI — yet they articulate that struggle in different vocabularies. In most Muslim-majority contexts, students naturally reach for concepts of character, conscience, and responsibility rooted in their own tradition. The Fitrah-Amal al-Salih framework gives pedagogical structure to this vocabulary, connecting it to concrete educational practices.

1.1. Research Questions

This study addresses three research questions:

RQ1: What moral struggles do students report experiencing around intention, dependency, and responsibility when using generative AI for their coursework?

RQ2: How might the Fitrah-Amal al-Salih framework address the character-formation gap left by dominant institutional AI ethics frameworks in education?

RQ3: What concrete pedagogical strategies and assessment tools can operationalise internal moral accountability in AI-assisted learning environments?

1.2. Contribution of this study

First, this study makes a theoretical contribution by reframing the problem of AI in education as fundamentally a question of character formation rather than technical compliance. It argues that dominant institutional frameworks — however sophisticated — operate at a different level: they address what students do with AI, not who they become through it. The Fitrah-Amal framework offers a fourteen-century-old answer to a twenty-first-century problem.

Second, the study translates abstract theological concepts into concrete teaching strategies. It provides educators with specific prompt templates for each of the five developmental stages, a clear assessment rubric, and an application guide.

Third, illustrative qualitative data from Azerbaijan are presented to demonstrate that the moral problems learners face when using AI exist in a real educational context, providing grounded context for the framework's development.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1. The Limitations of Dominant Institutional AI Ethics Frameworks

The academic literature on AI in education has grown rapidly since 2022. Scholars have examined algorithmic bias (Mehrabi et al. 2021), the erosion of critical thinking (Selwyn 2022), plagiarism detection (Perkins et al. 2024), and the governance of AI tools in institutional settings (UNESCO 2021; OECD 2019). These contributions are valuable. Yet a closer examination reveals a significant and largely unaddressed gap: the existing literature focuses overwhelmingly on what AI does to educational systems, and far less on what AI does to the human beings within those systems — specifically, to their character, their sense of responsibility, and their capacity for moral self-regulation. When a student submits AI-generated work as their own, the institutional response is to detect and penalise. The deeper question — why the student did not feel this was wrong, and what kind of person they are becoming through such choices — remains largely outside the scope of current policy frameworks. It is this gap that the present study addresses.

It is worth being precise. Western philosophy is not a monolith. It contains robust virtue ethics (Aristotle, MacIntyre), communitarian thought (Taylor), and care ethics (Gilligan 1982; Noddings 2003), each of which shares more with the Fitrah model than a simple East-West contrast would suggest. Moreover, recent work in philosophy of technology has begun to address moral formation directly: Vallor (2016), for example, develops a virtue-based framework for technomoral wisdom that explicitly resists technical solutionism. These are important contributions.

However, the object of the present critique is narrower: the dominant institutional frameworks currently governing AI ethics in education — documents such as the UNESCO (2021) Recommendation on the Ethics of AI and the OECD (2019) AI Principles. These are sophisticated and well-intentioned. But they are built, in large part, on procedural-liberal foundations: algorithmic fairness, individual rights, and rational compliance. Even where they mention humanistic values, their operational logic tends toward system-level governance rather than inner moral formation.

When developing educational and ethical frameworks, the "moral roots" of people from different cultures must be taken into account; otherwise, the proposed systems will remain only on paper for them. Institutional frameworks answer some questions well. They leave others unasked.

Three limitations seem particularly important here. First, most dominant AI ethics frameworks focus on fixing systems rather than forming people. The assumption is that better algorithms will produce better outcomes. Vallor (2016) calls this "technical solutionism." It is not wrong, exactly — but it is incomplete, and institutional documents have been slower to integrate the virtue-ethical insights that scholars like Vallor have developed. Second, these frameworks present their core concepts as universal when, in fact, they carry culturally specific assumptions. What "fairness" means in a utilitarian calculation is not what it means in a community shaped by collective responsibility and divine accountability. Birhane (2021) and

Mohamed et al. (2020) have written carefully about how this universalism can reproduce existing inequalities rather than challenge them.

Third, they do not sufficiently encompass the processes of the student's inner world — the formation of intention, conscience, and moral self-regulation. And these have been central to educational philosophies in many traditions for centuries.

These limitations do not mean that Western frameworks should be rejected. The aim is to expand an established approach. The İslamic pedagogical model offers a distinctive way forward in this regard because it integrates moral formation into a sequential, spiritually grounded anthropology of the learner — something that even Western virtue ethics has not yet systematically applied to AI-assisted education.

One can reflect on the contrast between institutional Western and Islamic approaches to the ethics of artificial intelligence in the context of academic integrity. Western institutional experience with AI-supported plagiarism mainly relies on technical detection tools (Turnitin's AI detector, GPTZero) and regulatory prohibitions. The assumption is that stronger external control increases compliance. The framework based on İslamic pedagogical approaches takes a different view. Moral behaviour at the level of ihsan is not due to external constraints based on regulatory rules, but rather to internal conscience. The student who does not plagiarize because he fears being caught does not act in accordance with deeply held values; he is simply cautious. True character is formed in the student who refuses to plagiarize, not because he fears detection, but because the act does not fit his own self.

2.2. The Quranic Model of Human Development

The Quran presents a model of human development that moves through five stages, from primal moral purity to constructive social action. This model has been explored by classical Islamic philosophers including Al-Ghazali (2011), Ibn Miskawayh (2013), and Syed Naqib Al-Attas (1991). In modern educational thought, Malek Bennabi (2021) connected this developmental journey to the idea of civilization building. The model does not simply transfer information; it aims to reform the inner morality of a person rather than merely his external behaviour.

Note on pedagogical hermeneutics. The English renderings of Quranic verses in this article are the author's own pedagogical-philosophical interpretations, derived from the Azerbaijani translation of Bünyadov and Mammadaliyev (1991) and informed by educational theory. The author is a Doctor of Philosophy in Pedagogy, not a theologian; these readings should be evaluated by the standards of educational philosophy, not Islamic jurisprudence.

The classical foundation of the model. It must be emphasised that the five-stage sequence presented here — Fitrah, Tazkiyah, Hikmah, Ihsan, Amal al-Salih — is not an invention of the present author. It constitutes a classical pedagogical anthropology derived from Quranic sources and systematically elaborated by Islamic educational philosophers over fourteen centuries. Al-Ghazali (2011) structured his educational theory around the purification of the soul (tazkiyah) as a prerequisite for wisdom (hikmah). Ibn Miskawayh (2013) traced the moral development of the human being from innate disposition to

virtuous habituation. Syed Naqib Al-Attas (1991) reformulated this sequence for modern Islamic education as ta'dib (refinement), and Malek Bennabi (2021) connected its final stage to civilization-building. Al-Isfahani (2007) defined the purpose of creation as the journey toward marifah (wisdom) and khilafah (social stewardship), while Ibn Ashur (2011) identified the preservation of Fitrah as the central axis of moral reform. The present study does not create this framework; it translates an existing, centuries-old model of human formation into the specific context of AI-assisted learning.

Cross-cultural philosophical resonances. The concept of Fitrah parallels Socrates' teaching of self-awareness; the importance given to spiritual purification and wisdom is consistent with Stoic ethics; and the orientation of activity to the public good is reflected in both Aristotelian virtue ethics and the African philosophy of Ubuntu. Within Western philosophy itself, the Fitrah stage's emphasis on self-knowledge echoes the Socratic injunction to "know thyself"; Tazkiyah's concern with purifying the mind from bias connects to critical thinking traditions; Hikmah's focus on meaning and purpose resonates with constructivist approaches to learning; Ihsan's emphasis on internal conscience parallels care ethics (Gilligan 1982; Noddings 2003); and Amal al-Salih's public welfare approach aligns with the service-learning tradition in pedagogy. Such philosophical intersections prove the potential of the model to be applied not only in Islamic geography but also as a contribution to global human discourse on moral education.

However, the Fitrah-Amal al-Salih framework is not merely a restatement of these traditions in Islamic language. Its distinctiveness lies in three features. First, it is grounded in a metaphysical anthropology (fitrah as innate moral disposition) that provides an ontological foundation for moral potential, not merely an ethical preference. Second, it arranges moral capacities into a developmental sequence designed for pedagogical practice, not only philosophical reflection. Third, it integrates individual moral formation with collective social responsibility within a single teleological arc — from inner intention to public benefit — governed by the principle of divine accountability. This integrated structure offers something that piecemeal application of virtue ethics, care ethics, or critical thinking alone has not yet provided for AI education.

Research on the relationship between technology and morality reveals important dangers: Vallor (2016) emphasises that technology mechanises ethical decisions, while Selwyn (2022) emphasises that artificial intelligence eliminates critical thinking in education. Both scholars agree that modern tools can simplify human consciousness and moral deliberation.

Al-Ghazali (2011) notes that the process of acquiring knowledge that is not accompanied by purification of the soul (tazkiya) does not lead to individual wisdom, but rather to arrogance and moral degradation. Complementing this approach, Ibn Miskawayh (2013) emphasises that moral maturity is possible not only through the acquisition of theoretical knowledge but also through the formation of continuous experience and habits.

These classical insights speak directly to the challenge of AI in education: students can learn to use AI tools efficiently without developing the moral judgment to use them well. Yet the problem is not merely

pedagogical; it is existential. This Quranic principle of moral causality — that every soul is accountable for what it earns (74:38) — finds a striking pedagogical parallel in modern algorithmic logic: just as an algorithm produces output based on the data it is fed, the human soul produces character based on the moral choices it rehearses. The present study treats this not as a theological doctrine but as an educational-philosophical metaphor for understanding how habitual AI misuse reprograms the student's moral disposition.

These five stages, when transposed into the context of AI-assisted learning, form a coherent developmental sequence. Fitrah invites the student to pause before opening any AI tool and ask: what is my true intention here? Tazkiyah equips the student to critically filter AI-generated content, identifying bias, omission, and error rather than accepting output uncritically. Hikmah calls the student beyond mere information retrieval toward meaning — asking not only whether AI's answer is accurate, but whether it is beneficial and necessary. Ihsan establishes an internal standard of excellence that operates independently of external monitoring: the student asks not "will I be caught?" but "is this truly my work?" Finally, Amal al-Salih orients the entire process toward social benefit — the measure of a student's work is not the grade it receives, but the good it produces in the world. Each stage is elaborated in full in Section 4, together with concrete pedagogical strategies and prompt templates for classroom use.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Research Methodology

General Methodological Approach. The priority of this research is not to test existing structures but to conceptually design an original pedagogical model. For this reason, the methodological foundation of the work is based on the principles of philosophical-hermeneutic interpretation and model building, rather than on experimental testing.

Philosophical-Hermeneutic Model Building. This study synthesises classical Islamic educational sources with contemporary AI-ethics literature to construct a normative pedagogical framework. Rather than testing a hypothesis through controlled intervention, the study uses the interpretive method to derive pedagogical principles from Quranic anthropology and classical educational philosophy, and then translates these into contemporary instructional strategies. The preliminary qualitative data reported in Section 4.8 serve as illustrative grounding — they demonstrate that the moral tensions the framework addresses are present in actual student experience — rather than as a formal evaluation cycle. A full design-based research cycle — implementation, iterative revision, and re-evaluation in the classroom — is proposed as the necessary next phase of this work (see Sections 5.3–5.4) and has not yet been completed.

Pedagogical Hermeneutics and Scholarly Positioning. The interpretive process used in this study follows the tradition of pedagogical hermeneutics, wherein educational scholars extract pedagogical principles from philosophical and religious texts without claiming theological expertise. The author's engagement

with Quranic texts proceeds through the Azerbaijani translation of Bünyadov and Mammadaliyev (1991), which are then analysed for their underlying educational-anthropological structure — how they conceive of the learner, the teacher, knowledge, and moral growth. This approach is analogous to how Western educational scholars pedagogically interpret Aristotle's Ethics or Dewey's Democracy and Education for contemporary classroom practice.

Qualitative Data Collection. I administered a structured written questionnaire to 54 students at Khazar University in Baku — 46 bachelor's candidates in Curriculum and Assessment Strategies and 8 master's candidates in Educational Administration. The questionnaire was completed in person in a classroom setting, using a paper-based form structured around the five stages of the Fitrah-Amal al-Salih framework (see Appendix A). Students completed the form individually before a brief group discussion. I judged that quantitative data collected through digital tools would be insufficient to reveal students' inner spiritual struggles — the fear of laziness, the anxiety of dependency, the sense of shifting responsibility — and I gained this depth through open-ended written responses. My most important finding was that the vast majority of students had spiritual awareness, but they lacked a pedagogical framework to guide this awareness.

Comparative Literature Analysis. In order to provide an in-depth analysis of global ethical standards, a synthetic link was established between official international directives and academic literature representing critical and decolonial perspectives (Birhane, 2021; Mohamed, 2020). The assessment of norms at both the institutional and philosophical levels is a key factor in ensuring the methodological flexibility of the research. Such a multidisciplinary organisation of the scientific base, in addition to allowing a broader perspective on existing standards, has strengthened the impartiality and scientific reliability of the research results. Only after identifying these gaps could I convincingly justify the need for an alternative framework.

On Methodological Integrity. The lack of controlled experiments or pre-test/post-test measurements in the research process is not a methodological shortcoming, but rather a consciously adopted strategy, consistent with an established genre of scholarship in which the primary contribution is theoretical coherence rather than empirical causality. Whetten (1989) argues that a rigorously constructed conceptual model — one that clearly specifies its constructs, the relationships among them, and the boundary conditions of its applicability — constitutes a legitimate and complete scholarly contribution in its own right, distinct from, and prior to, empirical testing. Before embarking on an empirical test of any conceptual framework, it is fundamental to clearly define the philosophical and pedagogical nature of that model. With this study, I aimed to take that first step — to build the framework itself, in accordance with this conceptual-contribution tradition — rather than to claim a completed empirical validation cycle. Large-scale empirical validation is planned as the next stage.

4. THE FITRAH-AMAL PEDAGOGICAL FRAMEWORK

The framework I am proposing has five stages. Each one takes a concept from the Quranic tradition and asks: what does this mean for a student sitting in front of an AI system? The five stages do not work like a checklist. They are more like a cycle — or, to use Rumi's image, like a mirror that the student holds up to themselves before, during, and after using AI. The stages are: Fitrah (the moral starting point), Tazkiyah (the filtering process), Hikmah (the search for meaning), Ihsan (internal accountability), and Amal al-Salih (beneficial action).

The model is not linear in a rigid sense. Students may move between stages in different orders depending on the task and context. However, there is a logical progression: it makes sense to audit intention (Fitrah) before filtering information (Tazkiyah), and to develop wisdom (Hikmah) before establishing internal accountability (Ihsan). The final stage of Amal al-Salih represents the integration of all previous stages into productive social action. The model also functions as a loop: students who complete a full cycle and reflect on their Amal al-Salih output are led back to examine their Fitrah, asking whether their original intention was fulfilled and what they would do differently next time. This cyclical quality mirrors the iterative nature of both moral development and educational practice.

4.1. Stage One: Fitrah — Auditing Intent

The Fitrah model characterizes man as a being with an innate sensitivity to moral truths (Surah Ar-Rum, 30:30). The main thesis of this model is that every person has an inner nature from birth that is conducive to accepting absolute truth and achieving moral perfection. This is the "innate moral disposition" of human nature. In AI education, the Fitrah stage corresponds to the first moment of contact with technology. Before a student types a prompt, they must audit their internal intention (see Table 1).

Table 1. The Human and the Algorithm: Parallels of the Fitrah Stage

Spiritual Essence (Fitrah)	Techno-Educational Dimension (Auditing)
The Pristine Nature: The "innate moral disposition" of the human mind — an inbuilt orientation that values truth over convenience.	The Intentional Start: Taking a moment to define your goals before touching the keyboard.
Focusing the Heart: Directing one's inner attention toward a higher purpose or specific truth.	The "Why" Inquiry: Preventing mindless scrolling by stating exactly what knowledge you aim to find.
Internal Awareness: An innate "gut feeling" that alerts a person when something is morally or factually off.	Cognitive Agency: Knowing when to challenge the AI and say, "This isn't helping me think better."
Self-Actualization: The belief that we exist to grow, learn, and improve ourselves daily.	The Value Check: Asking yourself: "Did this AI task actually make me smarter, or just faster?"

In practice, this stage is simpler than it sounds. Before students open any AI tool, they write one sentence: "What am I actually trying to learn here?" It takes thirty seconds. But it changes something.

Students who have written their intention tend to use AI differently than students who have not. They ask better questions. They push back more. They are more likely to notice when the AI is not actually helping them think. I have seen this in my own teaching. The act of stating intention activates something — what the Quranic tradition calls Fitrah — that was already there.

Prompt Template for Fitrah Stage

"Before using AI for this task, please write one sentence about your true intention. What truth are you trying to uncover through this activity, and how does this process serve to improve you as an individual? How will this task help you grow?"

4.2. Stage Two: Tazkiyah — Filtering Digital Noise

Given the risk of artificial intelligence systems producing erroneous or subjective results, a special place should be given to the Tazkiyah stage in the educational process. The main goal here is to instill in students the ability to critically filter AI content and eliminate "information pollution" instead of blindly accepting it. Based on the principle of spiritual purification in Surah Shams (91:9), we can call Tazkiyah in AI education "digital purification." This stage also echoes a direct Quranic instruction on verifying information before acting on it: when an untrustworthy source brings a report, believers are commanded to investigate it carefully rather than accept it uncritically, lest they cause harm through hasty, unverified judgment (Surah Al-Hujurat, 49:6). Applied to AI-generated content, this verse offers a precise theological warrant for exactly the verification habit Tazkiyah asks students to cultivate: checking AI output against other sources before treating it as settled fact (see Table 2).

Table 2. From Insight to Critical Thinking: Parallels to Purification

Moral Level (Shams, 91:9)	Technological-Educational Level
Cleansing the soul from prejudices	Identifying algorithmic biases
Getting rid of laziness	Critical approach to available information (mental activity)
Achieving inner purity	Separating true and ethical information from false

In practice, Tazkiyah becomes what I call "digital hygiene." Students learn to approach the data presented by AI in the same way that an experienced editor approaches a first draft. The guiding principle here is neither suspicious hostility nor blind acceptance: the required behavioural model is the 'golden mean' between passivity and aggression. It is simply vigilant, critical attention. Having mastered the practice of editing, the student perceives AI results not as the absolute truth but as raw material to be processed. They ask, "Whose perspective is missing here? What assumption is the AI making that I do not share?" When students discover that AI has given them a biased or factually incorrect answer, this is not just a technical problem to be corrected. It is a moment of moral practice — the development of what the tradition calls filtering the nafs, the tendency toward lazy acceptance.

Prompt Template for Tazkiyah Stage

"Look at the AI output carefully. What perspectives might be missing? What assumptions is the AI making? How would the answer change if you approached the question from a different cultural or ethical background?"

4.3. Stage Three: Hikmah — Searching for Meaning

Hikmah (wisdom) is the stage where raw information becomes meaningful knowledge (Surah Al-Baqarah, 2:269). AI can answer "what" and "how" questions very well. While artificial intelligence is excellent at answering factual queries, the nature and purpose of information are determined only by human perception. The main goal of education at this stage is to prepare students to go beyond the boundaries of digital data and ask fundamental questions about the meaning, ethical value, and social utility of information.

Pedagogical Application:

Teachers use what we call the "Triple Filter Method." Students evaluate AI output by asking three questions: Is it true? Is it beneficial to others? Is it necessary for my real development? This converts raw data into wisdom and connects technical knowledge to human values.

Prompt Template for Hikmah Stage

"The AI has given you information. Now add human wisdom. Why does this matter beyond the assignment? How does this connect to a real problem in your community? What would be lost if we only had the AI's answer, without your own thinking?" (see Table 3).

Table 3. Human and Meaning: Parallels of the Hikmah Stage

Spiritual Essence (Hikmah, 2:269)	Techno-Educational Dimension (Triple Filter)
Grasping the Truth: Seeing the objective reality and purpose behind information.	Truth (Is it true?): Validating the accuracy and foundational integrity of AI-generated content.
Service to Good: Ensuring knowledge is directed toward the benefit of humanity.	Social Benefit (Is it beneficial?): Evaluating the impact and value of the information for the community.
Human Perfection: The principle that all wisdom must contribute to the self's evolution.	Personal Necessity (Is it necessary?): Assessing the relevance of the information for genuine individual growth.

4.4. Stage Four: Ihsan — Internal Accountability

Ihsan is performing every action with the highest quality, from the awareness that one is always under moral observation (Surah An-Nahl, 16:90). This is reinforced by a broader Quranic principle of individual accountability: every soul is held answerable for what it has earned, and this responsibility cannot be

transferred to or shared with anyone else (Surah Al-Muddathir, 74:38). Applied to AI-assisted work, this principle grounds the Ihsan stage in a claim stronger than classroom policy: a student's submitted work remains theirs to answer for, regardless of how much of it originated with an AI tool. In digital environments, where external supervision is often impossible, Ihsan becomes even more important. It replaces the need for external monitoring with an internal conscience. Students who operate at the level of Ihsan do not avoid plagiarism because they might get caught. They avoid it because it conflicts with their own sense of integrity.

Pedagogical Application:

Teachers conduct "Human-Touch Validation" sessions. Students review AI-generated content and ask: "What unique value can I add to this? What part of this is truly mine?" The principle is that AI output is only 50% of the work. The student's own intellectual and moral contribution brings it to 100%.

Prompt Template for Ihsan Stage

"Before you finish, do an honest self-check. Can you say this is truly your work, with AI as your tool? What did you add that only you could add? Would you be comfortable showing this to someone who knows your real abilities?" (see Table 4).

Table 4. Integrity and Ownership: Parallels of the Ihsan Stage

Spiritual Essence (Ihsan, 16:90)	Techno-Educational Dimension (Validation)
Moral Observation: Living with the awareness that one is accountable beyond human eyes.	Human-Touch Validation: Reviewing content not to pass a grade, but to ensure it meets one's own standards.
Internal Conscience: Replacing the need for external policing with an intrinsic moral compass.	Self-Policed Integrity: Avoiding plagiarism because it conflicts with one's sense of self-respect, not fear of being caught.
Excellence (Highest Quality): Performing every action with the intent of perfection.	Human-AI Synergy: Elevating AI's 50% factual foundation to 100% human-owned intellectual output.
Commitment to Truth: Being honest even in private/digital isolation.	Authenticity Check: The capacity to present the work to peers/mentors with full confidence in one's personal contribution.

4.5. Stage Five: Amal al-Salih — Righteous Action

Amal al-Salih is the final stage, where individual moral development becomes social benefit (Surah Al-Asr, 103:3). In AI education, this means that the goal of using technology is not simply to complete an assignment. It is to produce something that is genuinely useful for others. Students are evaluated not only on technical accuracy, but on the social value of their work.

Pedagogical Application:

The ultimate goal of artificial intelligence in the context of education is to transform it into a tool for citizenship. Within the "Service-Learning" model, students use artificial intelligence to develop projects that meet local community needs. In this process, the student asks himself the question "What am I changing in society with this project?" and transforms the use of technology into a responsible public service. The evaluation criterion is the scale and depth of the benefit brought by the project.

Prompt Template for Amal al-Salih Stage

"Who will benefit from the work you are creating? Name a specific person or group. How does your project address a real problem? What would be different in your community if this project succeeded?" (see Table 5).

Table 5. From Individual Achievement to Social Benefit: Parallels of the Amal al-Salih Stage

Spiritual Essence (Amal al-Salih, 103:3)	Techno-Educational Dimension (Social Impact)
Righteous Deeds: Faith and development manifested through concrete, positive actions.	Service-Learning AI: Using AI tools to address real-world needs like health, inequality, or the environment.
Social Responsibility: Recognizing that our deeds affect the collective welfare (Surah Al-Asr).	AI for Citizenship: Moving beyond personal assignment completion to serving a specific community group.
Transformative Impact: The belief that deeds should leave a lasting, positive footprint.	Social Value Assessment: Evaluating student work by the scale and depth of the benefit brought to others.
Active Contribution: Being a participant in the improvement of the world.	Responsible Public Service: Transforming technical execution into a tool for social good.

4.6. Application Through Problem-Based Learning

We can operationalize these five stages by embedding them into a PBL framework. The following example illustrates how a student initiative aimed at curbing campus food waste might evolve through the framework's five stages: students start by aligning their intent (Fitrah), refining their methodology (Tazkiyah), seeking meaningful purpose (Hikmah), upholding integrity (Ihsan), and ultimately delivering a concrete social impact (Amal al-Salih).

Stage 1 — Fitrah:

Before searching for information, the student writes: "I want to understand this problem, not just get a passing grade. I want to find something that could actually help."

Stage 2 — Tazkiyah:

The student compares AI-generated statistics about food waste with real data from their campus cafeteria. They identify two cases where the AI overstated the problem.

Stage 3 — Hikmah:

The student asks: "Why does food waste happen here specifically? What cultural habits or economic pressures are behind it?" This goes beyond what AI can answer alone.

Stage 4 — Ihsan:

Instead of letting AI generate the full project plan, the student uses AI as a consultant and makes every decision themselves, taking full responsibility for each choice.

Stage 5 — Amal al-Salih:

The student's final project includes a concrete proposal for the university administration, with expected social and environmental benefits clearly stated.

One of the most distinctive features of the Fitrah-Amal framework is its conception of AI as a "moral mirror." If the heart, as Rumi (2007) said, is a mirror that reflects truth, then our activities in the digital environment (and especially our inquiries into artificial intelligence) test the purity of that mirror. A student's entrusting of his intellectual labor to an artificial intelligence is a personal commitment to academic integrity and self-development. This is not just a violation of the rules but a serious moral choice that determines the value of the bond that a person has with knowledge. The student who uses AI to deepen their understanding is developing the habit of intellectual honesty (Ihsan). Blind trust in artificial intelligence creates a moral laziness in the student's self-development process. This pattern of dependence that develops in the classroom is not limited to the performance of tasks; it becomes a character trait that damages the student's worldview, decision-making mechanisms, and level of tolerance for difficulties in their future lives.

4.7. Assessment Framework: Spiritual-Digital Competency

Traditional assessment in AI education focuses on technical skills. The Fitrah-Amal framework proposes a broader "Spiritual-Digital Competency" assessment that also evaluates the student's moral engagement with technology. This assessment complements existing frameworks such as the European Commission's DigComp 2.2 and UNESCO's AI competency frameworks for students by adding an explicitly moral-affective dimension that those frameworks address only implicitly. While DigComp emphasises technical proficiency and critical evaluation, the Spiritual-Digital Competency rubric asks whether the student approaches AI with moral intention, takes genuine personal responsibility for their work, and directs their AI-assisted work toward meaningful social benefit. It integrates the affective domain described by Krathwohl et al. (1964) with digital literacy.

The Spiritual-Digital Competency framework moves assessment from a focus on what students can do with AI to a focus on who they are becoming through their use of AI. To answer these deeper questions, we need to look beyond the outcome itself and into the process. The pedagogical design of this

framework positions assessment not as a mere task check, but as a reflective dialogue environment in which the student questions his or her own thinking and behaviour (see Table 6).

Table 6. Spiritual-Digital Competency Assessment Rubric

Stage	Developing	Proficient	Exemplary
Fitrah	Uses AI without reflecting on intention	States intention before using AI	Adjusts approach based on honest self-audit
Tazkiyah	Accepts AI output without question	Identifies some biases or errors	Systematically evaluates all AI output for bias and accuracy
Hikmah	Reports AI data without analysis	Connects data to broader context	Generates original insight that goes beyond AI output
Ihsan	Relies heavily on AI-generated content	Adds some personal contribution	Work reflects clear personal ownership and excellence
Amal al-Salih	Project has no real-world application	Project addresses a real problem	Project creates measurable benefit for a specific community

4.8. Illustrative Qualitative Context from Azerbaijan

The data drawn upon here come from my own research context and serve as illustrative qualitative grounding for the framework rather than as formal empirical validation. To examine student experiences of AI integration in higher education, I administered a structured written questionnaire to 54 students at Khazar University in Baku — 46 bachelor's candidates in Curriculum and Assessment Strategies and 8 master's candidates in Educational Administration. The questionnaire was organised around the five Fitrah-Amal stages (see Appendix A). What emerged was not primarily a story about technology, but a story about moral struggle.

Because these data were collected to inform framework development rather than to test it, they are presented here as thematic illustration rather than as statistical evidence. Responses were read and sorted into descriptive categories through manual content coding. No inter-rater reliability check was conducted; therefore, the patterns described below should be read as exploratory and suggestive, not as generalisable findings.

The recurrence of similar thematic patterns across the majority of respondents (S9–S41 echoing S1–S8) suggests that thematic saturation was reached relatively early in this theoretically structured sample. While this consistency supports the framework's cross-respondent validity, it also reflects sample homogeneity, which is acknowledged as a limitation in Section 5.3.

Several recurring tensions appeared across the responses. First, an intention-behaviour paradox: many students expressed a genuine desire to understand material, yet described defaulting to speed and convenience under time pressure. Second, an ownership paradox: most students felt their submitted analysis was their own, even while acknowledging that they could not always clearly separate their

contributions from the AI's. Third, a benefit-atrophy paradox: AI was experienced simultaneously as a genuine aid to understanding and as a source of self-perceived cognitive laziness. Fourth, a values-outcome paradox: many students held student-centred educational ideals, yet a substantial number openly prioritised grades and degree completion.

These tensions are best illustrated through direct student voices. On the pull of a ready-made answer, one bachelor's student reflected:

"When AI writes something better than I could, I start asking myself why I should even bother rewriting it in my own words." (Student 54, bachelor's; Tazkiyah)

On the link between external monitoring and internal responsibility, one master's student noted:

"Honestly, having someone check my work does keep me somewhat accountable." (Student 1, master's; Ihsan)

while a bachelor's student admitted more directly:

"There have been times I presented it as if I had written it myself." (Student 27, bachelor's; Ihsan)

Finally, on the tension between grades and genuine learning, the same reflective bachelor's student offered:

"Getting a good grade matters, I won't deny that. But in the future I want to design lessons where a student doesn't just perform well on an exam, but actually gains a real ability." (Student 54, bachelor's; Amal al-Salih)

When asked directly about the ethical dimensions of using AI for their studies, many students gave vague answers, referring to "using it responsibly" without being able to articulate what responsible use meant in practice. This is not surprising: they had never been taught a framework for thinking about this. The Fitrah-Amal model is designed to fill exactly this gap. These illustrative responses suggest that students possess a moral sensitivity (Fitrah), but they lack a structured methodology to translate this sensitivity into concrete action in the face of ethical dilemmas posed by AI. Rather than providing students with ready-made recipes, the model draws a roadmap that empowers their intellectual and moral agency: managing the process from the determination of intention to the production of social benefit.

5. DISCUSSION

5.1. Theoretical Contribution

Let me be direct about what this framework contributes and what it does not claim. It does not claim that Islamic educational philosophy is superior to Western frameworks. It does not claim that the Fitrah-

Amal model works for everyone everywhere. What it does claim is this: the global conversation about AI ethics in education is currently missing important voices, and one of those voices comes from a tradition that has thought seriously about moral formation for fourteen centuries. That tradition has something to say that is not being said elsewhere.

While dominant institutional AI-governance frameworks tend to treat the student primarily as a 'rational agent' whose rights must be protected, the Fitrah model treats the student as a 'moral potential' that must be developed. This perspective changes the purpose of education: the goal is no longer external compliance, but the cultivation of an internal conscience through the principle of Ihsan.

This different starting point leads to different educational strategies. The Ihsan principle, for example, addresses academic integrity through developing internal conscience rather than external compliance. Current institutional approaches to academic integrity in the AI age focus heavily on detection technology and rules. The Fitrah-Amal framework argues that this approach treats the symptom, not the cause. When students develop a sense of Ihsan, academic integrity is no longer a matter of institutional control but a natural manifestation of one's personal integrity and identity. This represents a shift from external pressures to internal formation, a radical educational philosophy that promises far more lasting results than traditional control mechanisms.

The Fitrah-Amal framework is rooted in Islamic tradition, and its primary intended audience is educators working in Muslim contexts where Quranic vocabulary resonates with students' spiritual lives. At the same time, its five-stage developmental path finds philosophical parallels with other pedagogical approaches that seek maturity and spiritual perfection. The emphasis on self-knowledge at the Fitrah stage echoes the Socratic tradition. The Tazkiyah stage's concern with purifying the mind from bias connects to critical thinking traditions. The Hikmah stage's focus on meaning and purpose resonates with constructivist approaches to learning. The Ihsan stage's emphasis on internal conscience parallels care ethics (Gilligan 1982; Noddings 2003). The public welfare approach of the Amal al-Salih stage resonates deeply with the service-learning tradition in pedagogy. This cross-cultural parallelism suggests that the framework is not simply a religious-cultural alternative to institutional AI ethics but a distinctive contribution to human discourse on the moral challenges of the digital age — one that other traditions can engage with, critique, and enrich.

5.2. Practical Implications

This framework offers educators working in Muslim societies a grounded approach to AI ethics that is relevant to the spiritual world and language of their students. It also provides a model for teachers in different cultural settings, shaping flexible pedagogical strategies that can be adapted to local values. The instructional models and assessment criteria provided are practical tools that can be directly applied, without requiring any additional technical training.

For curriculum designers, this approach requires a paradigm shift: AI ethics should not be limited to the question of "what can students do with this technology?" but should focus on the question of "how does

a student become a human being using AI?" For policymakers in Muslim countries, this highlights the need to enrich international AI governance documents — no matter how sophisticated they may be — with local moral values. We are at a crossroads in the development of technology: should AI remain simply an algorithm that answers questions, or should it become a tool that contributes to the student's process of moral understanding?

Current international education strategies — such as those of UNESCO or the European Commission — rightly focus on technical standards, data protection, and digital equality. However, fundamental issues such as ethical formation still remain on the sidelines of institutional research. The Fitrah-Amal model reminds us that moral formation and cultural values should be at the very heart of education, not as peripheral factors. The values conveyed by these systems, which influence the way millions of students think, are not just a technical issue, but also a strategic cultural-ethical issue.

Guidance for Adaptation in Non-Muslim Contexts.

Teachers working in secular or non-Muslim contexts can adapt the terminology of these templates to their own cultures, integrating fundamental principles such as analysis of intention, critical filtering, search for meaning, and social benefit into their teaching processes. These principles are not specific to one religion; they are human values, expressed here in the specific language of the Quranic tradition. For example:

Fitrah can be reframed as "Intentional Agency" or "Moral Mindfulness."

Tazkiyah can be taught as "Critical Digital Hygiene" or "Epistemic Purification."

Hikmah can be presented as "Meaning-Making" or "Ethical Evaluation."

Ihsan can be translated as "Internal Accountability" or "Authentic Excellence."

Amal al-Salih can be expressed as "Socially Responsible Action" or "Civic Engagement."

What matters is not the theological vocabulary but the pedagogical sequence: from inner intention through critical filtering and meaning-making to internal accountability and public benefit.

5.3. Limitations

It is important to acknowledge both the scale of this research and its potential methodological shortcomings. Large-scale empirical validation to measure the practical effectiveness of this model, which remains at a theoretical level, is still incomplete. The qualitative data were collected from only one local educational institution, which limits generalisability across cultural settings. The questionnaire responses reported in Section 4.8 were coded by the author alone into descriptive response categories; no second coder or inter-rater reliability check (e.g., Cohen's kappa) was used, so these results should be read as an illustrative first-pass analysis rather than a fully validated thematic analysis. Finally, since the translation and pedagogical adaptation of Quranic concepts carries an interpretive component, it is

scientifically necessary to acknowledge the existence of other exegetical and pedagogical approaches within the Islamic tradition itself.

A further limitation is the relative homogeneity of the sample, reflected in recurring response patterns across bachelor-level participants. Future research might purposefully seek greater disciplinary or institutional diversity to test whether these patterns hold across more varied educational contexts.

The limited scope of the study to higher education creates the need to explore the model's applicability in primary and secondary school settings. These limitations clearly shape the scientific directions necessary for the next stages of the study. In particular, longitudinal studies are needed that measure the long-term impact of this framework on students' moral judgment and AI usage habits. Replication of the model in different cultural contexts, including in societies without a Muslim majority, and comparative analysis with other ethical models will further increase the scientific weight of the study.

As a particular priority, it is necessary to investigate the applicability of the Fitrah-Amal model to students who are far from Islamic culture. While the model will have cultural resonance in Islamic geography, how non-Muslim students will approach this moral vocabulary is still an open question. In this sense, the development of parallel frameworks that draw on other cultural traditions, such as Confucianism, Ubuntu, or Christian virtue ethics, would be a very interesting and promising approach. Studies that compare the impact of these ethical models with different cultural roots on students' use of artificial intelligence can make a fundamental contribution to the global discourse on ethical problems in the digital age.

5.4. Future Research

The most important next step is empirical pilot testing of the framework in actual classrooms. A proposed study design involves an intervention group using the Fitrah-Amal framework and a control group using standard AI literacy approaches, measuring outcomes including moral reasoning scores, academic integrity indicators, and the social value of student outputs. In the medium term, adaptation studies in diverse cultural contexts — including cross-religious dialogue with Christian, Buddhist, and Ubuntu pedagogical traditions — would strengthen the framework's cross-cultural validity. In the longer term, the framework opens the possibility of developing AI tools that are specifically designed to support moral development — a "Spiritual Mirror" AI that draws students toward greater moral awareness, rather than simply providing answers.

A pilot study is planned with 30 students enrolled in the 'Artificial Intelligence and Society' course at Khazar University in an upcoming semester. Half will form an intervention group utilising the framework's prompt templates, rubrics, and service-learning project format; the other half will use a standard AI literacy approach. Outcomes will include pre- and post-moral reasoning scores using an adapted version of Rest's Defining Issues Test (DIT-2), academic integrity indicators, social impact scores of student projects as assessed by community partners, and qualitative data from reflective journals and semi-structured interviews. This study will provide the first empirical test of the framework's effectiveness.

6. CONCLUSION

The integration of education with artificial intelligence brings with it a rich and practical set of tools that teachers can apply in their daily lessons. However, the future landscape of this technological advancement will be shaped not only by the technical power of algorithms, but also by the spiritual foundations that govern the process. The "Fitrah-Amal" model brings to the educational environment the treasure trove of Islamic wisdom that has been filtered through the ages, adapting it to the complex challenges of the digital age.

The divine principle that stands at the heart of this philosophical approach — "Every soul is a pledge of what it has earned" (Surah Al-Muddathir, 74:38) — gives us a vital warning in the era of digital transformation. In a situation where artificial intelligence performs cognitive tasks for us, the steps that humans take and the choices they make themselves are of even greater critical importance. The "Fitrah-Amal" paradigm recommends that students base their relationship with artificial intelligence on moral intent. The student should perceive this technology not as a mold that artificially replaces the thinking process, but as a tool that stimulates personal development. Thus, in a future dominated by algorithmic systems, the student manages to strengthen his character.

Ultimately, by uniting students around these moral values, teachers fulfill a mission that no artificial intelligence can replace. They do not simply transmit information, but educate spiritually formed individuals who have wisdom, integrity, and the ability to benefit society. Technology can be only a tool of education, but educating and guiding a person is a quality that only a human teacher can form.

Declarations

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An earlier version of the empirical findings presented in Section 4.8 was presented at the 11th International CEO Congress on Communication, Economics, Organization and Social Sciences (June 2025, Portalegre, Portugal) and published in the conference proceedings (Author 2024). The present manuscript represents a substantially new theoretical contribution, with the conference findings constituting approximately 10% of the current work.

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE

Verbal informed consent was obtained from all 54 participants prior to their involvement in the questionnaire. Participants were informed that participation was voluntary, that responses would be used for research purposes only, and that their identities would remain anonymous.

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COMPETING INTERESTS

The author declares none.

DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

The empirical data cited in Section 4.8 of this manuscript are based on findings previously presented at the 11th International CEO Congress on Communication, Economics, Organization and Social Sciences (June 2025, Portalegre, Portugal) and published in the conference proceedings: The Role of Artificial Intelligence in Education: Advancing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in Education (pp. 182–191). ISBN: 978-625-95577-6-2. This overlap is limited strictly to the interview data reported in Section 4.8; the Fitrah-Amal al-Salih theoretical framework, the literature review, and all pedagogical strategies, prompt templates, and assessment tools presented elsewhere in this manuscript are entirely new and did not appear in the conference paper. The presented manuscript uses these empirical findings as supporting evidence (approximately 10% of the paper) within a completely new theoretical framework. Estimated new content: over 85%. This represents the first submission of this work to an international English-language peer-reviewed journal.

ETHICS DECLARATION

This study was approved by the Ethics Research Committee of Khazar University, Baku, Azerbaijan (protocol number 7-2025/2026, dated 7 April 2026). All procedures involving human participants were conducted in accordance with the ethical standards of the institutional research committee and with the 1964 Declaration of Helsinki and its later amendments, as well as with comparable ethical standards for social science research.

Verbal informed consent was obtained from all 54 individual participants included in the study. Participants were informed that participation was voluntary, that responses would be used for research purposes only, and that their identities would remain anonymous.

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