



MORAL DEVELOPMENT AS A REGULATORY STRATEGY FOR NAFS AL-LAWWAMAH: AN ISLAMIC PSYCHOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

Nafs al-lawwamah is an interesting study to discuss. Because the concept of nafs al-lawwamah requires two scientific studies, namely between Islamic psychology and Islamic scholarship. However, with the many concepts in the two disciplines, a study specification is needed so that a detailed and comprehensive study is produced. In addition, seeing the concept of nafs al-lawwamah which is closely related to how individuals can direct their souls in the right direction, training or habituation is needed which is also a study in psychology. One of them is moral development which is one of the concepts of soul development, where this concept describes a blend of psychology and Islamic scholarship. Because of the continuity of the concept of training or mental development of individuals and even certain groups through moral development, the author conducted this research. Therefore, this study aims to find out more deeply about the concept of nafs al-lawwamah, the concept of moral development, the steps for moral development, and the effectiveness of the concept. The method used in this research is a literature study with library research, and the sources used are journals and documents relevant to the study in this research. From the sources obtained, an analysis related to the research objectives was carried out. The results of this study are that it can be seen the steps of moral development will have positive implications for the nafs al-lawwamah, so that it will become a nafs al-mutmainnah.

Keywords: *Moral Development, Nafs al-Lawwamah, Islamic Psychological*

Abstrak

Nafs al-lawwamah menjadi kajian yang cukup menarik untuk dibahas. Sebab konsep nafs al-lawwamah memerlukan dua kajian ilmu yaitu antara psikologi Islam dengan keilmuan Islam. Namun dengan banyaknya konsep dalam dua keilmuan tersebut diperlukan yang namanya spesifikasi kajian sehingga dihasilkan suatu kajian yang sifatnya detail dan komprehensif. Selain itu, melihat konsep nafs al-lawwamah yang berkaitan erat dengan bagaimana individu mampu mengarahkan jiwanya ke arah yang, diperlukan suatu pelatihan atau pembiasaan yang juga menjadi kajian dalam psikologi. Salah satunya adalah pembinaan akhlak yang menjadi salah satu konsep pengembangan jiwa, di mana konsep ini menggambarkan perpaduan antara psikologi dan keilmuan Islam. Oleh karena kesinambungan konsep pelatihan atau pengembangan jiwa dari individu bahkan kelompok tertentu melalui pembinaan akhlak tersebutlah penulis melakukan penelitian ini. Maka dari itu, penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengetahui lebih dalam lagi konsep dari nafs al-lawwamah, konsep pembinaan akhlak, langkah-langkah pembinaan akhlak, dan efektivitas dari konsep tersebut. Metode yang digunakan dalam penelitian ini adalah studi literatur dengan kajian kepustakaan (library research), serta sumber yang digunakan berupa jurnal dan dokumen-dokumen yang relevan dengan kajian dalam penelitian



ini. Dari sumber yang didapat maka dilakukan analisis yang berkaitan dengan tujuan penelitian. Hasil dari penelitian ini adalah dapat diketahui langkah-langkah pembinaan akhlak yang nantinya akan berimplikasi positif pada nafs al-lawwamah, sehingga akan menjadi suatu nafs al-mutmainnah.

Kata Kunci: *Pembinaan Akhlak, Nafs Al-Lawwamah, Psikologi Islam*

A. Introduction

Human beings, as the most perfect of God's creations in terms of both physical form and innate disposition, are entrusted with the role of khalifah fi al-ardh (vicegerent on earth). They are expected to maximize every potential and psychological instrument within themselves, including the ability to control the use of their nafs (Hidayah et al., 2024). Psychologically, the term al-nafs refers to desire, life, soul, and the human self (Sudarmono, 2017). Various scholars have offered interpretations of al-nafs. Ibn Ishaq states that al-nafs means breath or life; Ibn 'Abd al-Barr explains that nafs can mean spirit (ruh) and may also refer to something that distinguishes one from others; and Ibn 'Abbas asserts that within every human being there are two elements of nafs: nafs 'aqliyah, which enables discernment, and nafs ruhiyyah, which constitutes the vital element of life (Rosalina, 2023). Meanwhile, according to M. Quraish Shihab, nafs refers to the human dimension that possesses both good and evil potential and can drive individuals to perform either righteous or wrongful deeds (Andopa et al., 2018).

Explicit reference is made in Q.S. Al-Qiyamah (75:2), which states: (وَلَا أُقْسِمُ بِالنَّفْسِ اللَّوَّامَةِ) "And I swear by the self-reproaching soul." From this verse, it can be understood that Allah will reproach, reckon, and recompense human deeds because of their imperfection in performing good actions and their tendency to accompany them with wrongful deeds under the influence of desire (Iman, n.d.). Functionally, al-nafs is prepared to encourage human beings toward good deeds; however, in the case of al-nafs al-lawwamah, although it possesses a controlling function, it may still occasionally incline toward wrongdoing (Baehaqi & Fahmi, 2025). When al-nafs al-lawwamah falls into evil, individuals often feel guilty and experience remorse (Ripaan, 2023).

Linguistically, the word lawwamah is a noun form analogous to ism fa'il (specifically musyabbahah bi ism al-fa'il), and it carries two meanings: al-'atab, meaning to reproach referring to reproaching oneself for actions that, rationally, are not good and al-ibtā', meaning to feel discomfort or unease toward oneself (Wibowo et al., 2025). Nafs al-lawwamah, or the self-reproaching soul, represents the second level of the soul mentioned in the Qur'an and signifies a stage at which a person begins to recognize mistakes and sins (Zaduna Fiddarain et al., 2023). At this stage, logic and rational faculties are functioning and encourage goodness; in other words, individuals are aware of and regret their mistakes. However, ego and the attraction of wrongdoing may still bind them. Thus, at this level, the nafs remains unstable and easily swayed toward evil,



even though remorse eventually follows (Junaedi et al., 2025). *Nafs lawwamah* reflects a human quality that has emerged but has not yet fully directed behavior toward goodness due to its neutral character, which includes self-introspection, acknowledgment of mistakes, and a tendency toward good deeds (SANTOSO et al., 2020).

The essence of human beings at birth is a state of *fitrah*, purity in both outward and inward aspects. However, as time passes and individuals encounter life processes and various challenges, the human heart may lose its original purity (Suriyati, 2020). Many factors contribute to immoral actions, such as the surrounding environment, the demands of contemporary development, the pursuit of pleasure to satisfy desires, and social interactions (Zakaria et al., 2022). Modernization is considered one of the main factors contributing to moral degradation and the decline of ethical awareness among Muslims. Some consequences of neglecting moral values among the younger generation include disobedience toward parents, lack of etiquette, violence, and the normalization of free sex or sexual violence (Anita Candra Dewi et al., 2023). Other perspectives explain that the complexity of problems arising in this era of globalization includes the ease with which society becomes influenced by foreign cultures, affecting various aspects such as educational mindsets, lifestyles inconsistent with norms, and permissive cultural practices (LGBT, drugs, free association, etc.) (Faiz et al., 2019).

Therefore, the researcher seeks to explore how moral development, based on Islamic literature, can suppress or serve as a control over *nafs al-lawwamah* from the perspective of Islamic psychology. This study aims to examine Islamic textual literature in order to formulate moral development or behavioral guidance arising from *nafs al-lawwamah*. Conceptually, this research is expected to provide a new perspective on character formation through moral development as a means of controlling *nafs al-lawwamah*.

B. Method

This study employs a library research method, which involves collecting data by selecting journals, scientific articles, books, and other literature sources relevant to the research topic (Jamaluddin et al., 2025). The purpose of library research is to provide an in-depth understanding of previous studies, identify research gaps, and guide future research directions (Muhammad Alif, 2023). This literature review offers a critical perspective based on various existing references or secondary data sources (Hadi & Afandi, 2021). Therefore, the stages include determining the topic, searching for literature relevant to the theme, developing arguments, and critically analyzing the selected literature.

C. Results and Discussion

1. The Concept of Moral Development

The term *pembinaan* is derived from the Arabic word *bana*, which means to build, construct, or establish (Julina, 2020). According to the Indonesian Dictionary, *pembinaan*



refers to an effort, action, or activity carried out effectively and efficiently to achieve good results (Br, Juntak Reza Apriyani, Tarihoran Nensi, 2025). It is a deliberate, serious, planned, and consistent effort conducted through guidance, direction, and development of knowledge, skills, and the practice of Islamic teachings so that individuals understand, comprehend, and apply them in their daily lives (Neliwati et al., 2024).

Another view states that the function of development, including supervision and oversight, can be implemented through direct contact and indirect contact approaches (Septiani & Syaifuddin, 2025). The direct approach occurs when the mentor or supervisor conducts guidance face-to-face with those being guided or with program implementers, such as teachers with students, counselors with clients, or parents with their children (Asril, 2021).

Furthermore, development is defined as an educational effort both formal and non-formal carried out consciously, systematically, purposefully, and responsibly in order to foster awareness of the soul (*nafs al-lawwamah*) toward positive directions (Subandi et al., 2024). The functions of guidance and development can strengthen balanced, holistic, and harmonious personality foundations aligned with knowledge and skills according to one's talents and abilities as preparation for a more independent life (Aryani et al., 2022). Subsequently, through personal initiative, individuals are able to add to, enhance, and develop themselves and their environment toward optimal and independent quality and capability (Sri Handayani et al., 2025). Thus, it can be concluded that development is a conscious and directed effort carried out by individuals or groups to nurture the potential within individuals so that it benefits themselves and their surrounding environment.

The term *akhlak* originates from the Arabic word *khuluqun*, meaning character, disposition, habit, or custom, and from *khalqun*, meaning creation or formation. Etymologically, *akhlak* refers to character, custom, temperament, or a system of behavior. Sociologically in Indonesia, the term *akhlak* already carries a positive connotation; therefore, a person who possesses *akhlak* is understood to be someone of good character (Mustafidz azmi & Musayyidi, 2022). Morality (*akhlak*) is a condition or state of a person's soul that motivates them to perform actions spontaneously, without artificiality or deliberate thought, or a deeply rooted inner state characterized by a strong desire that produces continuous actions directly and naturally without the need for reflection (Ma'isyatuts Tsalitsah, 2020). In conclusion, *akhlak* refers to individual behavior that is performed without conscious deliberation because it has become habitual or ingrained as a custom.

2. Moral Development and *Nafs al-Lawwamah*

The development of morality has been examined from various perspectives, including psychological approaches such as learning (Ma, 2013), psychoanalysis, and spirituality or religiosity (Sahin & Unlu, 2021). Contemporary studies on moral development have been strongly influenced by the cognitive developmental approaches



of Jean Piaget and Lawrence Kohlberg. Kohlberg (dalam Berges, 2012) identified several fundamental philosophical issues underlying the study of moral development, including questions regarding the culturally fair definition of moral constructs. Psychologists who study morality or moral formation must address the issue of moral relativism or value neutrality, rooted in the value-laden nature of the terms “morality” and “formation.”

Moral relativism holds that moral values differ across cultures and societies and are therefore not universal (Shimizu et al., 2021). Conceptually, ethical moral relativism differs from descriptive moral relativism because they are supported by different arguments and evidence. Ethical relativism asserts that the fundamental values upheld by different cultures are equally valid, whereas descriptive moral relativism refers to factual differences in moral values held by different cultural groups (Ellemers et al., 2019).

Moral formation encompasses various components, including conscience, moral self, superego, moral character, moral identity (Peng et al., 2024), *cognitive sophistication in moral reasoning, moral sensitivity, prosocial tendencies, and altruistic personality* (Kaßecker et al., 2025). Although elements such as the superego or conscience are frequently discussed in classical psychodynamic theory, they are less explicitly treated as empirical variables in contemporary moral psychology. Modern developmental approaches therefore emphasize the formation of moral character through the internalization of moral norms, cognitive processing of ethical dilemmas (moral reasoning), and identification of the self with moral values (moral identity) (Li et al., 2025). Thus, moral formation can be understood as a long, nuanced, and complex process. It encompasses elements of moral identity, sensitivity, and tendencies that cannot be reduced to a single dimension without considering the interaction among various psychological aspects (Peng et al., 2024).

The concept of *tazkiyat al-nafs* as articulated by Al-Ghazali explains that the soul (*nafs*) constitutes the essential reality of the human being. The soul plays a central role in life and determines a person’s ultimate well-being or misfortune in this world and the hereafter (Nurzaman et al., 2024). Etymologically, *tazkiyat al-nafs* derives from Arabic: *tazkiyah* means purification, while *al-nafs* refers to the soul or the psychological essence of the human being. (Burlian, 2016). Terminologically, it means the purification of the soul (Zakia et al., 2024). A noble person is one who can control his or her desires, as expressed by Ali ibn Abi Talib, who stated, “Whoever cannot control his desires cannot control his thoughts,” and “Conquer your desires, and your wisdom will be perfected” (Raihansyah Athallah et al., 2025). These statements suggest that wisdom and perfect moral character can only be achieved when an individual is able to restrain base desires.

Morality is dynamic in nature because it manifests from the *qalb* (heart), and therefore it can be shaped and transformed through persistent effort, even after it has become habitual (Sumiharsono, 2023). Moral formation may be influenced by internal factors, one of which is control over *nafs al-lawwamah* (Harahap et al., 2024). Through such control, individuals can set aside egoistic impulses, maintain behavioral balance, and regulate their conduct through moral cultivation (Faidah et al., 2024). In conclusion,

moral formation is a conscious and deliberate effort to rebuild and strengthen the human psyche, encouraging consistent positive actions that eventually become spontaneous and habitual without requiring extended deliberation.

The steps in moral formation include performing ritual worship (Ade Alkurnia Putri & Hermanto, 2023), engaging in remembrance (*dhikr*) (Mulyani & Jamal, 2022), practicing contemplation (*tafakkur*), including reflection on death (Dewi Kusuma Ningrum et al., 2024), habituating oneself to virtuous acts and avoiding wrongdoing, embodying divine attributes (identifying oneself with the qualities of God reflected in the *Asmaul Husna*), and supplication (Rustyawati & Anam, 2024).

Morality as a behavioral system can be cultivated through at least two approaches. First, through a stimulus–response mechanism or conditioning process that leads to automatization (Syafi'i et al., 2024) implemented through training, question-and-answer sessions, imitation, and modeling (Darajat & Muhid, 2024). Second, through a cognitive approach involving the theoretical transmission of information, such as preaching, lectures, and discussions (Ependi et al., 2025). Thus, moral formation can be achieved through various methods, including discussion, dialogue, preaching, practice, role modeling, and the habituation of virtuous traits.

3. *Nafs al-Lawwamah* as a Mechanism of Moral Self-Regulation

Classical Islamic literature describes the structure of the soul as dynamic rather than static. In his Sufi framework, Al-Ghazali conceptualizes the *nafs* as developing across a spectrum: *nafs al-ammarah* (the commanding soul), *nafs al-lawwamah* (the self-reproaching soul), and *nafs al-muthmainnah* (the tranquil soul) (Burlian, 2016). Modern semantic studies suggest that *nafs* is not merely a moral entity but represents the integrated existential consciousness of the human being (Wibowo et al., 2025 ; Fiddarain et al., 2023). Conceptually, *nafs al-lawwamah* is not a pathological condition but a crucial phase in moral development a point of reflective awareness where impulses and values conflict. When mapped onto modern psychological concepts:

- a. *Nafs al-ammarah* resembles the concept of the id or impulsivity.
- b. *Nafs al-lawwamah* resembles conscience or the moral self.
- c. *Nafs al-muthmainnah* resembles a self-actualized moral identity.

However, these analogies are not entirely identical. In Islamic thought, *nafs al-lawwamah* includes a theological dimension awareness of accountability before God whereas in modern psychology moral accountability is generally limited to the individual or society. Global research shows that moral identity and moral self-concept function as primary regulators of behavior (Ellemers et al., 2019;Kaßecker et al., 2025; Li et al., 2025; Peng et al., 2024). Studies also integrate cognitive, affective, and conative aspects in moral development. Functionally, *nafs al-lawwamah* resembles moral self-awareness, moral dissonance, guilt-based regulation, and conscience activation.

The key distinction lies in its foundation: Western moral psychology is largely based on social norms, whereas *nafs al-lawwamah* is grounded in divine norms.

Consequently, *nafs al-lawwamah* embodies a double accountability horizontal (social) and vertical (transcendental) which strengthens its regulatory power. From a Sufi perspective, *nafs al-lawwamah* is the arena of conflict between desire and reason (Rosalina, 2023)(Sudarmono, 2017). Psychodynamically, this conflict produces cognitive dissonance, moral anxiety, and self-evaluative emotions. Unlike Sigmund Freud's concept of the superego, which tends to be repressive, *nafs al-lawwamah* is transformative (Berges, 2012). Some scholars also associate this dynamic conflict with neuropsychological theories, particularly the role of the prefrontal cortex in self-control (Ripa'an, 2023). In conclusion, *nafs al-lawwamah* does not merely reproach; it motivates repentance and behavioral reform. Therefore, it can be understood as an integrative moral regulatory system encompassing moral cognition, moral affect, and spirituality.

4. Moral Development as a Systemic Intervention

Moral development through *riyadhah* serves as a form of training to achieve one's aspirations, while *mujahadah* represents earnest striving in pursuing those goals (ILHAM, 2025). Its implementation involves two primary stages: takhalli (emptying oneself of negative traits that may weaken and erode faith) and tahalli (filling oneself with praiseworthy qualities). These stages have been proven effective in shaping noble character, as evidenced by behavioral change, inner peace, increased obedience in worship, and the manifestation of honesty, politeness, humility (*tawadhu'*), contentment (*qana'ah*), and trust in God (*tawakkal*) (Wahyudi, 2018).

The implementation of moral development strategies is also effective in helping individuals regulate *nafs al-lawwamah*, although in practice it can be difficult to apply consistently in daily life (Ripa'an, 2023). Therefore, the author proposes the following approach to address this challenge:

a) Through the Integration of Formal and Non-Formal Education

Formal education functions as an institutional mechanism for structured and disciplined moral development. Moral and religious education, in particular, strengthens individuals' internal control mechanisms (Hafidz et al., 2023). Within formal educational systems, moral formation cannot be separated from the roles of educators and peers (Chen et al., 2021).

Educators, as role models, can help activate *nafs al-lawwamah* as an internal control mechanism that encourages repentance for mistakes and continuous self-improvement (Rosalina, 2023). As mentors, educators facilitate the habituation of moral behavior, making it easier for individuals to internalize ethical values. This process can be observed through gradual improvements in character, stronger personal principles (not easily swayed), and a consistent awareness of living under the presence of Allah (Wahyudi, 2018).

b) The School Peer Environment

The peer environment plays a significant role in shaping individual morality, particularly during adolescence, when individuals are naturally inclined toward



socialization and affiliation with peers (Santrock, 2024). Therefore, moral habituation within the school environment can suppress negative impulses (Rustyawati & Anam, 2024) and contribute to character formation and enhancement (Warsah et al., 2024). Non-formal educational institutions such as Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*) and *diniyah* programs serve as effective means of strengthening control over *nafs al-lawwamah* through habituation, internalization, and spiritual reinforcement, while simultaneously reducing deviant behavior (Hafidz et al., 2023).

In *pesantren* and *diniyah* settings, individuals undergo habituation (*riyadhah*) by consistently practicing behaviors aligned with both social and divine morality. These practices include *talqin* (cultivating awareness that everything within oneself is entrusted by God), repentance bathing, prayer, remembrance (*dhikr*), night prayer (*qiyam al-layl*), and fasting. Through such habituation, individuals are better able to regulate the impulses of *nafs al-lawwamah* and cultivate positive values and traits, enabling them to adapt to modern developments without losing their essential spiritual identity (Afifa & Abdurrahman, 2021)(Mulyani & Jamal, 2022)(Dewi Kusuma Ningrum et al., 2024).

Pesantren and *diniyah* education also facilitate the internalization of moral identity reinforcement, including the application of proper conduct (*adab*), ethics, morality, and knowledge (Peng et al., 2024). This includes respectful interactions among students and toward teachers, *ustadz*, and *kyai*. Moral development through such internalization shapes values, attitudes, and behaviors, ultimately producing high-quality human capital (Warsah et al., 2024).

Furthermore, *pesantren* and *diniyah* education provide spiritual reinforcement through continuous remembrance of Allah (*dhikr*) and self-reflection (*muhasabah*), combined with a strong determination to change and avoid being carried away by negative influences. This strengthens individuals' capacity for self-development (Mulyani & Jamal, 2022). Spiritual reinforcement plays a crucial role in regulating *nafs al-lawwamah*, gradually reducing tendencies toward negative behavior (Ripaan, 2023), and preventing deviant conduct in daily life (Raihansyah Athallah et al., 2025). Thus, spiritual reinforcement enables individuals to direct *nafs al-lawwamah* toward both social morality and divine morality.

D. Conclusion

Based on the research findings, *nafs al-lawwamah* can be understood as a state of the human soul that is prepared to incline toward goodness, yet still tends toward wrongdoing. Therefore, to direct it toward positive outcomes, one essential effort is moral development (pembinaan akhlak). Fundamentally, *nafs al-lawwamah* may be conceptualized as an integrative moral regulatory system encompassing moral cognition, moral affection, and spirituality. Moral development is defined as an effort to reconstruct or revive an individual's psychological and spiritual dimensions through an Islamic psychological approach. Efforts to enhance control over *nafs al-lawwamah* include implementing moral development in a systemic manner. This involves integrating moral



development into both formal and non-formal educational settings. In formal moral education, moral development emphasizes the role of educators as role models and the creation of a school climate aligned with social and divine norms. Meanwhile, in non-formal education, moral development focuses on habituation, the internalization of moral identity, and spiritual reinforcement.

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