

Moral Education Based on Rationality and Spirituality: An Examination of Muhammad Abduh's Thought in the Context of Islamic Education in the Digital Era

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Abstract

This study aims to examine Muhammad Abduh's thought on moral education based on the integration of rationality and spirituality and to contextualize its relevance to Islamic education in the digital era. The research employs a qualitative library research method with a character-study approach, using primary and secondary sources related to Muhammad Abduh's educational reform, Islamic moral education, and digital ethics. Data were collected through documentation and analyzed using descriptive-analytical and interpretive methods. The findings show that Abduh's thought offers a balanced educational paradigm in which reason functions as an instrument of critical reflection, while spirituality becomes the ethical foundation of moral action. In the digital context, this synthesis is relevant for developing students who are intellectually critical, spiritually grounded, ethically responsible, and capable of navigating digital disruption. The study concludes that Abduh's educational vision remains significant for reconstructing Islamic moral education in contemporary digital society.

Keywords: *Akhlak; Rationality; Spirituality; Muhammad Abduh; Islamic Education*

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Introduction

Islamic education has a fundamental mission to shape human beings who are not only intellectually competent but also morally and spiritually mature. In the Islamic tradition, moral education cannot be separated from the cultivation of reason, the heart, and social conduct. *Akhlak* is not merely formal obedience to religious norms. It is the manifestation of inner awareness that emerges from rational understanding, faith, and social responsibility (Zannatunnisya et al., 2024). In this context, Muhammad Abduh's thought becomes significant because he positions education as a path for the renewal of the Muslim community. Abduh is known as an Egyptian scholar, thinker, and reformer who sought to revitalize Islamic teachings and institutions so that they could respond to the challenges of modernity without losing their religious foundation (Muhammad Rasyid Ridho, 2025).

Islamic education now faces a new reality marked by the digitalization of life. Students live within an information ecosystem that is fast, open, and often ethically unfiltered. Social media, artificial intelligence, viral culture, and information overload shape the thinking patterns and behavior of the digital generation. On the one hand, technology opens broad access to knowledge. On the other hand, it also presents risks such as moral disorientation, shallow reflection, weakened communicative etiquette, and reduced spiritual sensitivity. Therefore, moral education in the digital era must be developed through a paradigm that is neither anti-technology nor passively submissive to digital logic (Suwahyu, 2022).

The main problem in contemporary Islamic education is the persistence of a dichotomous tendency between rationality and spirituality. Rationality is often understood merely as a cognitive domain, while spirituality is narrowed to individual ritual experience. As a result, moral education tends to stop at the memorization of values, moral advice, or symbolic obedience. It has not fully developed students' ability to critically assess ethical issues. Yet digital challenges require students to practice *tabayyun*, evaluate information, protect data integrity, avoid hate speech, and take responsibility for their digital footprints (Falasipatul Asifa, 2018).

Another problem is the weak integration between Islamic values and digital literacy. Many educational institutions have adopted digital tools, but their use often remains technically oriented rather than ethically grounded. Technology is used as a learning medium, but it has not always become a space for the formation of digital morality. In this context, Islamic education needs a conceptual framework that can operationally connect faith, reason, knowledge, and action. Several recent studies emphasize that Islamic education in the digital era must integrate moral values, spirituality, digital literacy, and social responsibility so that students do not merely become skilled users of technology, but also become morally responsible participants in digital spaces (Yusuf, 2011).

The gap between theory and practice appears in the fact that moral education normatively emphasizes the importance of etiquette, faith, and spiritual values, while classroom practice still provides limited space for critical dialogue, analysis of digital cases, and habituation of media ethics. At this point, Muhammad Abduh's thought becomes relevant because his ideas on Islamic education reject intellectual stagnation, encourage the use of reason, remain open to modern science, and stay rooted in religious orientation.

The urgency of this study lies in the need to reformulate Islamic moral education so that it becomes responsive to the digital era. Examining Muhammad Abduh is important because his thought presents a synthesis between rationality and spirituality. This synthesis can serve as a conceptual foundation for moral education that does not merely teach right and wrong normatively, but also trains students to think critically, act responsibly, and develop transcendental awareness in facing the complexity of digital life.

Literature Review

The study of moral education based on rationality and spirituality requires an integrative reading of three main domains: the concept of moral education, rationality in Muhammad Abduh's thought, and spirituality as the ethical foundation of Islamic education. These three domains do not stand separately. They shape one another. Morality requires rationality so that values are not accepted passively and dogmatically. Conversely, rationality requires spirituality so that it does not fall into instrumentalism, relativism, or intelligence without moral direction. In the digital era, the relationship among these three elements becomes increasingly important because students encounter realities that are complex, rapidly changing, and filled with ethical issues (Nurhuda, 2022).

1) Moral Education in Islamic Education

Moral education in Islam is a process of character formation that guides human behavior in accordance with the values of tawhid, justice, trustworthiness, compassion, and social responsibility. *Akhlak* is not understood merely as outward politeness, but as an inner quality that directs human action in relation to Allah, other human beings, nature, and the self. Therefore, moral education cannot rely solely on moral lectures. It must address moral knowledge, affective awareness, behavioral habituation, and institutional exemplarity (Usman & Umar, 2021).

In the digital era, the scope of moral education has expanded. Previously, morality was mostly discussed within the spaces of family, school, and physical society. Today, morality must also be applied in virtual spaces. Concepts such as *amanah*, *tabayyun*, *iffah*, justice, and *ihsan* need to be translated into digital behavior, such as refraining from spreading hoaxes, avoiding cyberbullying, protecting privacy, respecting differences, and taking responsibility for produced content. Studies on Islamic character education in the era of disruption show that the integration of morality and digital literacy can develop spiritual awareness, ethical reasoning, and responsible digital behavior (Rezwandi, Ahmad Fikri, 2025).

2) Rationality in Muhammad Abduh's Thought

Muhammad Abduh occupies an important position in the history of Islamic reform because of his courage in placing reason as a central instrument for understanding religion, education, and social reality. He did not reject tradition. Rather, he rejected blind imitation that weakens intellectual vitality. For Abduh, the decline of the Muslim community was not caused only by political factors or colonialism, but also by internal weaknesses such as intellectual stagnation, the dichotomy of knowledge, and the lack of courage to pursue reform. Therefore, Islamic education must be directed toward forming individuals who are capable of critical thinking, open to knowledge, and firmly grounded in religious principles (Rohman, 2016).

Abduh's ideas sought to reform the aims, system, methods, and curriculum of Islamic education toward a more rational, modern, and open orientation. Studies of Abduh's

educational thought also position him within a religious-rational framework because he connects the orientation of salvation in the hereafter with success in worldly life. Thus, Abduh's rationality is not secular rationality that detaches itself from revelation. It is religious rationality that positions reason as a means to understand, actualize, and contextualize Islamic values (Mawardi, 2025).

3) Spirituality as the Ethical Foundation of Education

Spirituality in Islamic education functions as the center of value orientation. It forms the awareness that knowledge, technology, and human action must be directed toward public benefit and accountability before Allah. Without spirituality, education risks producing individuals who are intelligent but lack etiquette, technologically skilled but weak in empathy, intellectually critical but morally fragile. Therefore, moral education must nurture students' spiritual dimension through the strengthening of faith, worship, self-reflection, role modeling, and awareness of *ihsan*.

Spirituality also functions as a mechanism of self-control. Students need to understand that digital space is not a value-free space. Every post, comment, information search, and virtual interaction is part of moral action. Studies on strengthening spiritual values and morality in the digital era emphasize the importance of religious education in building a strong moral foundation, teaching digital ethics, and involving schools, families, and communities in character formation. Thus, spirituality is not an escape from modernity. It is an inner force that directs human beings to use technology meaningfully and responsibly (Khoirurrijal et al., 2023).

Methods

This study uses a qualitative method with library research and a character-study approach. The formal object of this research is the concept of moral education based on rationality and spirituality, while its material object is Muhammad Abduh's thought contextualized within Islamic education in the digital era. The data sources consist of primary sources in the form of Muhammad Abduh's works and ideas concerning Islamic reform, rationality, tawhid, and education, as well as secondary sources in the form of books, journal articles, and contemporary studies on moral education, Islamic education, digital ethics, and educational reform (Sukmadinata, 2009).

Data were collected through documentation, namely by tracing, reading, classifying, and recording literature relevant to the research theme. The data analysis technique used descriptive-analytical and interpretive analysis. Descriptive analysis was used to explain Muhammad Abduh's main ideas, while interpretive analysis was used to identify their conceptual relevance to Islamic education in the digital era. Data validity was ensured through source triangulation, critical intertextual reading, referential adequacy, and argumentative consistency among concepts, literature data, and the current context of digital education (Matthew B. Miles, A. Michael Huberman, 2014).

Result and Discussion

The findings show that Muhammad Abduh's thought can be read as a conceptual foundation for moral education that balances rationality and spirituality. In this context, rationality is not understood as the freedom of reason detached from revelation, but as the human capacity to understand, assess, and consciously actualize religious values. Spirituality

is also not understood narrowly as formal rituality, but as tawhidic awareness that guides human moral orientation. The synthesis of both produces moral education that is reflective, critical, and transformative.

- a. First, moral education based on rationality in Abduh's perspective emphasizes the importance of liberating students from moral blind imitation. Moral blind imitation occurs when students merely follow rules without understanding the ethical reasons behind them. In educational practice, this appears in moral learning that only contains prohibitions and commands, but provides little space for dialogue, questioning, and case analysis. Yet the digital era presents moral situations that are not always simple. For example, students must be able to distinguish between criticism and insult, information and hoax, freedom of expression and violation of privacy, as well as entertainment and exploitation. Therefore, moral education needs to develop ethical reasoning through discussion, case studies, reflection, and moral decision-making.
- b. Second, moral education based on spirituality in Abduh's thought directs students so that every action is grounded in transcendental awareness. This awareness is important because digital technology often creates the illusion of anonymity, as if actions in virtual space have no moral consequences. Spirituality reminds individuals that they remain responsible for their words, intentions, and actions, both in physical and digital spaces. In this context, the concept of *ihsan* becomes important. Students are guided to behave well not merely because they are supervised by teachers or systems, but because they possess the awareness that Allah knows every action. Therefore, digital moral education cannot be limited to rules for using devices. It must build inner awareness of trustworthiness, etiquette, and responsibility (Abrianto, 2023).
- c. Third, Abduh's thought is relevant for overcoming the dichotomy between religious knowledge and modern science. In Islamic education, this dichotomy often causes morality to be separated from technology, as if ethics belongs only to religious subjects while technology belongs only to technical skills. Yet the digital era requires the integration of both. Students should not only be taught how to use digital devices. They must also understand the values that regulate their use. Contemporary studies show that Islamic education needs to integrate character values, spirituality, students' social experiences, and digital media in a directed way in order to produce a generation that is intellectually, emotionally, and spiritually intelligent.

Table 1. Synthesis of Moral Education Based on Muhammad Abduh's Rationality and Spirituality

Dimension	Conceptual Meaning	Implementation in Islamic Education in the Digital Era
Rationality	The ability to use reason to understand religious teachings and social reality	Discussions on digital ethics, hoax analysis, reflection on social media cases, strengthening information literacy
Spirituality	Awareness of tawhid, ihsan,	Digital self-reflection, habituation of

	and responsibility before Allah	media etiquette, strengthening trustworthiness and <i>tabayyun</i>
Moral Education	Formation of behavior based on knowledge, faith, and moral awareness	Integration of moral values into technology-based learning
Digital Era	A new space of interaction, information, and identity formation	Digital moral learning, data ethics, responsibility for digital footprints
Educational Aim	Forming individuals who are knowledgeable, faithful, critical, and civilized	Graduates who are intelligent, religious, adaptive, and socially responsible

Abduh's thought offers a direction for reconstructing the curriculum of moral education. The curriculum should not merely contain normative materials on praiseworthy and blameworthy morals. It also needs to include current issues such as social media ethics, artificial intelligence, digital plagiarism, comment culture, data privacy, content consumption, and public responsibility. Within Abduh's paradigm, a good curriculum is one that activates reason while cultivating the soul. Therefore, moral education materials need to be developed contextually so that students can connect Islamic values with the real problems they face.

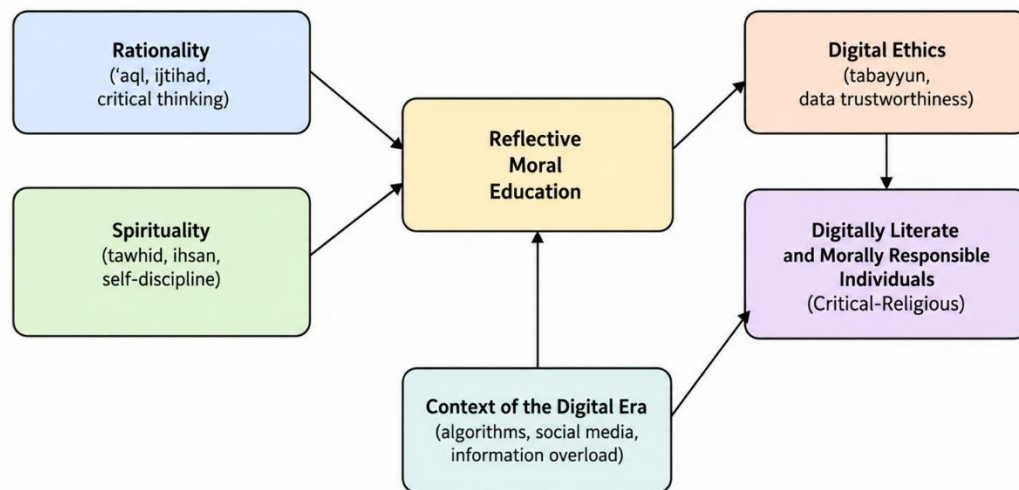
The method of teaching morality needs to shift from an indoctrinative method to a reflective-dialogical method. Teachers do not only serve as transmitters of norms. They also act as facilitators in the formation of moral awareness. Students need to be invited to reason why an action is considered good or bad, what impact it has on themselves and others, and how Islam views the issue. This approach is in line with Abduh's spirit of educational reform and openness to knowledge. In practice, teachers can use viral case studies, moral decision-making simulations, ethical debates, reflective journals, and Islamic value-based digital literacy projects.

Moral education in the digital era requires an institutional ecosystem. Moral values will not be effective if they are taught only in the classroom but are not reflected in school culture, technology-use policies, teacher role modeling, and collaboration with parents. Therefore, Islamic educational institutions need to formulate digital ethics guidelines that are not merely administrative, but also pedagogical in value. For example, schools can develop codes of conduct for social media use, anti-cyberbullying policies, digital *tabayyun* training, and the habituation of positive content production. Studies on Islamic character education in the era of disruption emphasize that teacher professionalism, institutional culture, and community collaboration are important factors in maintaining the integration of morality and digital literacy (Harahap et al., 2024).

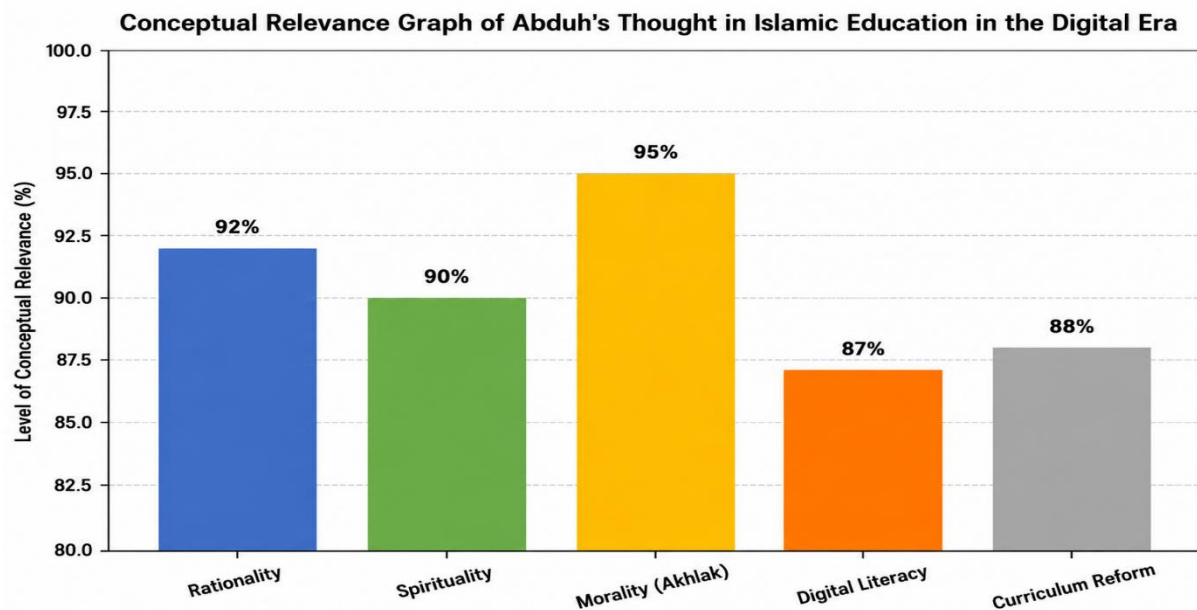
The model of moral education based on rationality and spirituality can be mapped into three stages. The first stage is moral knowing, in which students understand moral concepts, textual evidence, values, and rational reasons behind good behavior. The second stage is moral-spiritual reflection, in which students engage in self-reflection and connect digital actions with responsibility before Allah and other human beings. The third stage is moral action, in which students practice morality in digital life through concrete behavior such as filtering information, maintaining respectful language, respecting privacy, and producing beneficial content.

Figure 1. Conceptual Model of Moral Education Based on Rationality and Spirituality

Model of Moral Education Based on the Rationality and Spirituality of Muhammad Abduh



*Principle of synthesis: reason guides, spirituality strengthens,
morality is manifested in responsible digital actions.*



Based on this synthesis, moral education from Muhammad Abduh's perspective must not be reduced to static formal morality. It must be understood as a process of forming human beings who possess clarity of reason, spiritual depth, and moral courage to face the changes of the age. In the digital era, morality is not only reflected in polite behavior in the classroom. It is also reflected in how a person searches for information, writes comments, shares content, uses artificial intelligence, respects the rights of others, and maintains academic integrity (Panggabean et al., 2024).

Thus, the relevance of Abduh's thought lies in its ability to bridge tradition and modernity. He did not teach rejection of progress, but he also did not allow progress to proceed without values. Islamic education that follows this spirit will be able to produce students who

are not only adaptive to technology, but also possess moral awareness to direct technology toward public benefit. This is the core of moral education based on rationality and spirituality: reason is used to understand reality, revelation is used to provide direction, and morality becomes the concrete expression of both in digital life (Ismaraidha et al., 2024).

Conclusion

This study shows that Muhammad Abduh's thought has strong relevance for the development of Islamic moral education in the digital era. The integration of rationality and spirituality becomes an important foundation for forming students who are critical, religious, and responsible.

1. Muhammad Abduh positions reason as an important instrument for understanding religion and social reality.
2. Spirituality functions as a moral foundation so that rationality does not lose its ethical direction.
3. Moral education needs to be developed reflectively, not merely normatively and through memorization.
4. The digital era requires the expansion of morality into information ethics, social media, privacy, and digital responsibility.

Abduh's thought can serve as a foundation for reconstructing Islamic education that is integrative, critical, spiritual, and relevant to contemporary challenges.

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