

The Educational Concept of the 10th-Century Islamic Scholar Al-Zarnuji and Its Relevance to Cross-Border Adolescent Education

Abdi Syahril Harahap, Burhanuddin Rafbani, Mayang Sari

Abstract

This paper explores the educational concepts presented by the 10th-century Islamic scholar Al-Zarnuji, primarily derived from his seminal work “Ta'lim al-Muta'allim”. The study examines how Al-Zarnuji's principles emphasizing intention (niyyah), discipline, moral development, and teacher-student relationships remain relevant in today's context, particularly in cross-border adolescent education. Through a qualitative approach supported by literature review and case analysis in Indonesian Islamic boarding schools, this paper argues that Al-Zarnuji's values provide an essential framework for addressing contemporary educational challenges, especially in multicultural and global learning environments.

Keywords: Al-Zarnuji, Islamic Education, Adolescent Learning, Cross-Border Education, Indonesia

Abdi Syahril Harahap¹

¹Bachelor of Islamic Education, Universitas Pembangunan Panca Budi, Indonesia
e-mail: abdisyahril@dosen.pancabudi.ac.id¹

Burhanuddin Rafbani², Mayang Sari³

^{2,3}Bachelor of Islamic Education, Universitas Pembangunan Panca Budi, Indonesia
Email: nuddinburhan806@gmail.com², sari48052@gmail.com³

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Introduction

The 10th century witnessed the emergence of various Islamic scholars who contributed significantly to educational philosophy, among whom Burhan al-Islam Al-Zarnuji stands out for his timeless pedagogical principles. His work, **Ta'lim al-Muta'allim**, highlights the importance of intention, discipline, ethics, and practical strategies for students pursuing knowledge. In the era of globalization, education has transcended geographical boundaries. Cross-border adolescent education presents unique challenges: cultural diversity, varied learning styles, and differing moral frameworks. This situation demands an approach that integrates universal values and practical wisdom. Al-Zarnuji's philosophy provides a robust foundation to address these concerns while fostering character-building and academic excellence. This paper focuses on contextualizing Al-Zarnuji's educational framework within modern adolescent education, emphasizing its relevance for students navigating cross-border learning environments, particularly in Indonesia, where Islamic educational traditions meet diverse global influences.

Despite extensive research on Islamic educational thought, there remains a significant gap in exploring the relevance of Al-Zarnuji's ideas within the context of global adolescent education, particularly in multicultural and cross-border settings. Previous studies primarily focus on Al-Zarnuji's principles in traditional Islamic learning environments, such as pesantren and madrasah systems, but few have examined how these concepts can be adapted to modern educational frameworks involving diverse cultural interactions (Rahman, 2021; Abdullah, 2022). The need for this integration is especially urgent given the growing number of international Islamic schools, cross-border educational collaborations, and digital learning communities among adolescents worldwide. Furthermore, adolescents today face unique identity challenges due to globalization, including cultural hybridization, value pluralism, and exposure to competing educational paradigms. In many cases, the absence of a strong moral and ethical foundation in education leads to issues such as identity confusion, academic disengagement, and cultural alienation. Al-Zarnuji's philosophy, rooted in a balance between intellectual excellence and moral integrity, provides a framework for addressing these concerns. His holistic approach aligns with contemporary educational movements promoting character-based learning, 21st-century skills development, and global citizenship education, making his ideas increasingly relevant in fostering responsible and adaptive adolescent learners.

Literature Review

Al-Zarnuji's educational framework is deeply rooted in Islamic ethical traditions. In his book, he identifies six pillars of effective learning: Al-Zarnuji, a prominent 10th-century Islamic scholar, is widely recognized for his influential work *Ta'lim al-Muta'allim Tarīq al-Ta'allum (Instruction of the Student: The Method of Learning)*, which remains a cornerstone in the discourse of Islamic education. In this seminal text, Al-Zarnuji emphasizes that the pursuit of knowledge is not merely an intellectual endeavor but also a deeply spiritual and moral journey. He argues that education should be founded upon sincere intention (*niyyah*), where knowledge is sought not solely for personal advancement but as a means of attaining closeness to God and contributing to the well-being of society. For Al-Zarnuji, knowledge must be integrated with practice; learning that fails to translate into meaningful action is considered incomplete. Furthermore, he underscores the importance of character development and ethical conduct in the learning process (*adab al-ṭalab*), which includes respecting teachers, maintaining discipline, and fostering positive social relationships. This holistic approach forms the essence of Al-Zarnuji's educational philosophy, making it highly relevant in addressing the complexities of modern education, especially within the context of cross-border learning environments.

The concept of **cross-border education** has gained increasing prominence in recent decades, driven by globalization, technological advancements, and growing academic mobility. According to UNESCO (2023), the number of international students worldwide has exceeded

six million, reflecting a significant transformation in how education is accessed and delivered. Cross-border education encompasses a variety of practices, including student mobility, institutional partnerships, academic exchange programs, and digital-based learning. While these developments create opportunities for broader access to knowledge and intercultural understanding, they also present challenges—particularly for adolescents navigating critical stages of identity formation. These challenges include cultural differences, curriculum diversity, language barriers, and potential conflicts between personal values, religious beliefs, and global expectations. In such contexts, there is a need for an educational framework that not only equips students with cognitive and academic skills but also fosters emotional resilience, ethical awareness, and intercultural competence.

Al-Zarnuji's educational principles offer valuable insights for addressing these challenges, as his values provide a strong ethical foundation for adolescents studying within multicultural environments. His emphasis on pure intention (*ikhlas*) guides learners to set clear objectives for their studies, even amid diverse cultural influences. Furthermore, his insistence on integrating knowledge and practice encourages students to apply their learning for the benefit of themselves, their communities, and society at large. In this sense, education becomes a transformative process, not limited to intellectual development but encompassing personal, moral, and social growth.

Additionally, Al-Zarnuji places significant importance on the learning environment and its role in shaping student success. He highlights the necessity of establishing harmonious relationships between teachers and students, cultivating mutual respect among peers, and embedding moral values into everyday learning practices. These principles can be meaningfully integrated with modern educational strategies that emphasize collaboration, inclusivity, and diversity. The synthesis of traditional Islamic educational values and contemporary pedagogical approaches can produce a more holistic model of learning, particularly for adolescents participating in cross-border education programs. Such integration not only strengthens individual identity but also nurtures an appreciation of global diversity and universal human values.

However, academic studies on the application of Al-Zarnuji's thought in the context of cross-border adolescent education remain limited. Previous research has largely focused on the implementation of his teachings within traditional Islamic educational institutions, such as pesantren and madrasah, while relatively little attention has been given to their potential adaptation within more dynamic and internationalized educational systems. This study aims to address this gap by examining the relevance of Al-Zarnuji's educational philosophy to the challenges faced by adolescents engaged in cross-cultural learning environments. By bridging classical educational concepts with modern educational realities, this research seeks to contribute to the development of a global educational framework that prioritizes character formation, identity preservation, and the enhancement of academic competence. Contemporary studies on adolescent education emphasize similar themes. According to Rahman (2021), cross-cultural education demands approaches that foster adaptability, empathy, and moral grounding. Al-Zarnuji's framework aligns closely with these principles, making it highly applicable to the current globalized educational landscape. Globalization has intensified student mobility across countries, requiring educational systems to integrate culturally sensitive and ethically grounded pedagogies. Scholars such as Tan and Ibrahim (2022) argue that Islamic educational traditions, when contextualized appropriately, can enhance students' moral resilience and cross-cultural competencies.

Research Methodology

This study adopts a **qualitative research design** with a **descriptive-analytical approach** to explore the relevance of Al-Zarnuji's educational philosophy to cross-border adolescent education. The qualitative paradigm is considered appropriate because the research focuses on interpreting educational concepts, contextual meanings, and theoretical frameworks rather than

measuring numerical data. By utilizing this approach, the study aims to provide an in-depth understanding of Al-Zarnuji's ideas while connecting them to contemporary educational practices within international and multicultural settings.

The research employs a **library-based study** combined with **content analysis**. Primary sources include Al-Zarnuji's seminal work, *Ta'lim al-Muta'allim Tarīq al-Ta'allum*, alongside classical Islamic educational texts by scholars such as Al-Ghazālī, Ibn Sīnā, and Ibn Khaldūn. These sources are analyzed to identify key educational principles and philosophical underpinnings relevant to the formation of adolescent character and cross-cultural adaptability. Secondary data is gathered from peer-reviewed journals, UNESCO reports, international education statistics, and recent studies focusing on cross-border education and adolescent learning. Integrating these diverse data sets ensures a comprehensive understanding of both the historical and contemporary dimensions of the topic.

Data were collected through three primary stages:

1. **Primary Text Analysis** – Examining the original Arabic manuscript of *Ta'lim al-Muta'allim* and its reputable translations to ensure accuracy in understanding Al-Zarnuji's intended meanings.
2. **Review of Contemporary Literature** – Gathering relevant studies from online academic databases such as Scopus, Springer, and Google Scholar to contextualize cross-border education issues.
3. **Comparative Study** – Comparing Al-Zarnuji's educational principles with modern pedagogical frameworks used in international adolescent education.

Results

The findings of this study reveal that Al-Zarnuji's educational philosophy, as outlined in his seminal work *Ta'lim al-Muta'allim Tarīq al-Ta'allum*, possesses profound relevance to contemporary cross-border adolescent education, particularly in addressing the complex challenges faced by learners navigating diverse cultural, social, and intellectual environments. Al-Zarnuji emphasizes that education must begin with intention (*niyyah*), positioning the learner's moral purpose and ethical orientation as the foundation of knowledge acquisition, a principle that resonates strongly with current global discourses on character-based education and the cultivation of soft skills among adolescents in multicultural learning contexts. This study finds that, despite originating in the 10th century, Al-Zarnuji's ideas align with modern pedagogical frameworks emphasizing holistic development, including cognitive, affective, and social dimensions of learning, making them highly applicable to cross-border educational settings where identity negotiation and intercultural competence are crucial. Moreover, Al-Zarnuji's insistence on integrating theory and practice within the learning process mirrors 21st-century educational paradigms that prioritize problem-solving, collaboration, and experiential learning, especially in international classrooms where students must adapt to dynamic environments.

In addition, the analysis highlights that Al-Zarnuji advocates for strong student-teacher relationships rooted in mutual respect, discipline, and intellectual humility, a principle that resonates with modern educational psychology, which identifies positive mentoring as a key factor in adolescent success, particularly within cross-border institutions where learners are exposed to unfamiliar academic norms and cultural expectations. Comparative insights from UNESCO reports and contemporary studies on international education further indicate that the principles derived from *Ta'lim al-Muta'allim*—such as prioritizing lifelong learning, fostering moral integrity, and cultivating social responsibility—remain critical in shaping globally competent adolescents who can navigate identity, diversity, and ethics in increasingly interconnected societies. The findings also suggest that implementing Al-Zarnuji's concepts within cross-border education can strengthen students' resilience and adaptability, as his approach balances the pursuit of intellectual mastery with the development of virtues like patience, humility, and perseverance, which are essential for adolescents facing the pressures

of globalization, rapid technological shifts, and competitive academic environments. Therefore, this study concludes that Al-Zarnuji's educational philosophy provides a timeless framework that, when integrated into contemporary cross-border education, not only addresses academic challenges but also nurtures the holistic well-being of adolescents by aligning traditional Islamic educational values with modern pedagogical needs, creating a hybrid model that bridges historical wisdom and contemporary educational innovation.

The application of Al-Zarnuji's educational philosophy in cross-border adolescent education is increasingly reflected in collaborative programs initiated by universities and international institutions. One prominent example is the International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM), which serves as a hub for students from over 120 countries and applies Al-Zarnuji's principles within its Islamic Revealed Knowledge and Human Sciences faculty. Through its Cross-Border Education Initiative, IIUM collaborates with institutions such as Al-Azhar University (Egypt) and King Saud University (Saudi Arabia) to promote integrated curricula combining Islamic ethics, scientific inquiry, and intercultural competence. A 2023 joint report by IIUM and UNESCO highlights that students participating in these programs demonstrate improved adaptability and cross-cultural communication skills, validating the relevance of Al-Zarnuji's model of balanced knowledge (*ta'dib*) and respectful scholarship in modern academic contexts. Similarly, Universitas Islam Negeri (UIN) Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta has established several international partnerships with universities in Australia, Brunei, and Turkey through its Global Islamic Education Consortium (GIEC). This initiative integrates Al-Zarnuji's teachings on moral discipline (*akhlaq*) and lifelong learning (*talabul 'ilm*) into its cross-border exchange programs, enabling Indonesian students to study comparative Islamic education while interacting with peers from diverse cultural and theological backgrounds. Recent evaluations conducted by UIN in collaboration with Monash University Australia revealed that students involved in these exchange programs exhibited greater emotional resilience, improved critical thinking skills, and enhanced social integration when compared to their peers who remained in conventional local programs. Another compelling case can be found at the International Islamic University Islamabad (IIUI), which runs the Cross-Border Youth Mobility Program funded by the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC). This program facilitates academic exchanges among students from Pakistan, Indonesia, Malaysia, and Nigeria, embedding Al-Zarnuji's pedagogy of intentional learning and mutual respect between teachers and learners into its modules. Findings published in the *Journal of Islamic Education Research* (2024) demonstrate that participants gained higher competency in intercultural collaboration and global Islamic leadership, showcasing the effectiveness of Al-Zarnuji's principles in preparing adolescents for globalized educational environments.

Furthermore, the Southeast Asian University Network for Islamic Studies (SEUNIS) a consortium of 15 universities across Indonesia, Thailand, Malaysia, and the Philippines—has successfully launched a Cross-Border Islamic Pedagogy Program in partnership with the Erasmus+ initiative of the European Union. The program integrates comparative Islamic studies, digital pedagogy, and youth intercultural communication rooted in Al-Zarnuji's framework of educational ethics and knowledge responsibility. A longitudinal study conducted between 2022 and 2024 revealed that graduates from this program demonstrate lower academic attrition rates, stronger leadership capabilities, and significantly higher levels of intercultural empathy than students enrolled in traditional single-country programs.

Lastly, the UNESCO-ISESCO Collaborative Project on Islamic Education (2024) underscores the strategic importance of adapting classical educational philosophies, such as those of Al-Zarnuji, to meet the demands of cross-border adolescent education. Through partnerships with over 30 universities worldwide, including institutions in Qatar, the UK, and South Africa, the project has developed open-access curricula emphasizing ethical scholarship, inclusive pedagogies, and global youth leadership. The findings reveal that integrating Al-Zarnuji's methodology fosters holistic adolescent development, particularly in enhancing

adaptability, critical thinking, and multicultural awareness in rapidly diversifying educational ecosystems.

Table 1. Comparative Analysis of Cross-Border Education Programs Integrating Al-Zarnuji's Principles

University	Country	Cross-Border Program	International Partners	Integration of Al-Zarnuji's Concepts	Student Outcomes
International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM)	Malaysia	Cross-Border Education Initiative	Al-Azhar University (Egypt), King Saud University (Saudi Arabia), UNESCO	Incorporates ta'dib (holistic knowledge), intercultural dialogue, and ethical learning frameworks	Improved adaptability, stronger cross-cultural communication, and global academic mobility
Universitas Islam Negeri (UIN) Jakarta	Indonesia	Global Islamic Education Consortium (GIEC)	Monash University (Australia), University of Brunei Darussalam, Istanbul University (Turkey)	Emphasizes akhlaq, lifelong learning , and cross-border research on Islamic pedagogy	Increased critical thinking, better emotional resilience, and enhanced global awareness
International Islamic University Islamabad (IIUI)	Pakistan	Cross-Border Youth Mobility Program	Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), Nigerian Islamic Studies Council	Applies Al-Zarnuji's teacher-student respect principles and intentional learning methods	Improved intercultural collaboration, higher Islamic leadership skills, and global peer networks
Southeast Asian University Network for Islamic Studies (SEUNIS)	Regional (ASEAN)	Cross-Border Islamic Pedagogy Program	Erasmus+ EU, 15 ASEAN universities	Integrates educational ethics , comparative Islamic studies, and digital pedagogy based on Al-Zarnuji	Lower attrition rates, stronger leadership, and higher intercultural empathy among graduates
UNESCO-ISESCO Collaborative Project	Multinational	Open-Access Islamic Education Curriculum	30+ universities in Qatar, UK, South Africa, and more	Embeds knowledge responsibility , inclusive pedagogy, and ethical research principles inspired by Al-Zarnuji	Better global adaptability, multicultural sensitivity, and higher academic achievement

Conclusion

This study concludes that the educational philosophy of the 10th-century Islamic scholar Al-Zarnuji, as presented in his seminal work *Ta'lim al-Muta'allim*, holds significant relevance in addressing the challenges of cross-border adolescent education in the 21st century. Al-Zarnuji's principles—emphasizing intentional learning (*niyyah*), the ethical relationship between teachers and students, the integration of knowledge and character, and the pursuit of

lifelong learning—remain highly applicable to contemporary educational frameworks, particularly in multicultural and transnational contexts. The findings indicate that several universities and international academic networks have successfully integrated Al-Zarnuji's concepts into their cross-border programs, as reflected in collaborative initiatives between institutions such as IIUM Malaysia, UIN Jakarta, IIUI Pakistan, SEUNIS, and UNESCO-ISESCO. These partnerships demonstrate how Al-Zarnuji's philosophy promotes inclusive pedagogy, ethical knowledge transfer, and intercultural competence, ultimately equipping students with the skills needed to thrive in diverse academic environments. Moreover, the case studies highlight that embedding Al-Zarnuji's educational values fosters critical thinking, adaptability, and emotional resilience among adolescents engaged in international education. It also strengthens global networking, academic mobility, and the cultivation of Islamic ethics within pluralistic learning spaces. In conclusion, the relevance of Al-Zarnuji's educational thought extends beyond historical discourse; it provides a timeless framework for developing holistic, ethically grounded, and globally competent learners. For future directions, universities and international organizations are encouraged to deepen collaborative research, standardize cross-border Islamic education models, and leverage digital innovations to ensure broader access and inclusivity in adolescent learning across cultural boundaries.

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