

RECONSTRUCTING DIGITAL ETHICS IN ISLAMIC EDUCATION THROUGH AZ-ZARNUJI'S TA'LIM AL-MUTA'ALLIM

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Abstract

Digital cultural transformation has changed the way students learn, communicate, and develop character. While this transformation offers new learning opportunities, it also creates ethical challenges, including misinformation, hate speech, cyber-violence, digital plagiarism, and the weakening of adab in academic interaction. This study focuses on reconstructing the principles of learning ethics in Az-Zarnuji's *Ta'lim al-Muta'allim* into a digital ethics framework for Islamic education. Specifically, it examines five key principles: sincerity of intention, careful selection of teachers and learning environments, wara' or moral caution, disciplined time management, and respect for the dignity of knowledge. This research employs a qualitative library-based method. The primary source is *Ta'lim al-Muta'allim*, while secondary sources include scholarly works on Islamic education, digital ethics, digital literacy, and digital citizenship. The data are analyzed through critical reading, thematic categorization, conceptual synthesis, and the mapping of classical ethical values into contemporary digital-ethics competencies. The findings indicate that Az-Zarnuji's ethical principles can be reconstructed into a framework of "digital adab," consisting of academic integrity, information prudence, communication ethics, disciplined digital time use, and responsibility for preserving the dignity of knowledge. This framework can be applied in Islamic Religious Education, school culture, family guidance, and the governance of educational technology use. Thus, Islamic education is positioned not merely to adapt to technological change but also to provide moral direction for shaping an ethical digital civilization.

Keywords: Az-Zarnuji; Digital adab; Digital ethics; Islamic education; *Ta'lim al-muta'allim*.

INTRODUCTION

The wave of digital cultural transformation has not merely moved learning from physical classrooms to virtual spaces; it has also reshaped the authority of knowledge, reconfigured teacher-student relationships, and influenced how learners form identity. In this context, Islamic education faces a double challenge: preserving the normative core of adab while also designing forms of moral habituation that make sense within today's digital information ecology. Information overload, virality, anonymity, and the attention economy accelerate the spread of misinformation and sharpen social polarization, making ethical problems—such as hate speech, cyber-violence, and aggressive communication—part of many students' everyday experience (Feriana, Mulyana, & Rido, 2025; Rahman, Khomairohtusshiyamah, Hikmah, & Baharun, 2025). For this reason, "digital learning" cannot be discussed only in terms of tools, platforms, or instructional effectiveness; it must also be examined through the ethical lens that shapes the character of digital civilization.

Recent scholarship in Islamic education shows active efforts to adapt through online learning strategies and the integration of technology. Studies on Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers' use of e-learning during the pandemic indicate that digital models can sustain instructional continuity. Yet, technical success does not automatically translate into successful character formation unless it is grounded in values and supported by ethical governance (Surawan

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& Anshari, 2022). At the same time, internet-based learning has been shown to strengthen students' self-directed learning in Islamic education, signaling a shift from a strong reliance on teachers toward greater learner autonomy (Rohmah, Khasanah, Mubarok, & Miftachurrachman, 2025).. This shift is promising, but it also carries risk when autonomy is not framed by *adab*, integrity, and digital responsibility.

Within the classical tradition of Islamic education, Az-Zarnuji offers a highly practical framework for learning ethics: how to purify intention, choose teachers, manage time, protect the dignity of knowledge, and cultivate an environment that supports spiritual maturity (Az-Zarnuji, 2009). Its relevance becomes even clearer in the digital age, where “knowledge” is no longer confined to teacher-led transmission but circulates through search engines, social media, and AI-driven systems. At this point, *adab* is no longer an optional add-on; it serves as moral infrastructure to prevent knowledge from devolving into manipulation, image-making, or symbolic violence (Abbas, Rochmawan, & Astoko, 2024).

Research on the implementation of kitab learning and character strengthening suggests that *adab* values can be sustained through orderly learning traditions and culturally grounded schooling (Nurhidin, 2022). Studies focusing on methods for understanding *Ta'lim al-Muta'allim* in pesantren settings further show that classical text instruction can be pedagogically refined to improve comprehension without losing its ethical spirit (Sholihah, Hamid, & Syaifuddin, 2026; Tsabit, Asrori, & Rusman, 2022). In higher education, applying *Ta'lim al-Muta'allim* values to strengthen Islamic moral character demonstrates that Az-Zarnuji's text can be translated into context-specific guidance programs (Febiyana & Shohib, 2025). However, because the digital ecology is open, spans multiple authorities, and is easily prone to bias and conflict, a reconstruction model is needed—one that maps *adab* principles into operational digital-ethics competencies (Khodafi, Zulaili, & Sa'adah, 2024).

Previous studies have generally examined *Ta'lim al-Muta'allim* in relation to character education, pesantren-based learning traditions, moral formation, and the strengthening of Islamic values in formal and non-formal education. These studies are important because they show the continuing relevance of Az-Zarnuji's thought in shaping students' ethics. However, they have not sufficiently examined how the textual principles of *adab* in *Ta'lim al-Muta'allim* can be critically reconstructed into a framework of digital ethics. More specifically, previous research has not yet mapped Az-Zarnuji's concepts of intention, teacher selection, *wara'*, honoring knowledge, and time discipline into digital citizenship competencies such as information literacy, communication ethics, academic integrity, digital safety, and digital well-being.

The research gap addressed in this article lies in the absence of a clear analytical model that connects the textual ethics of *Ta'lim al-Muta'allim* with contemporary digital-ethics competencies. Existing studies have discussed Az-Zarnuji's thought mainly as a source of character education, learning motivation, teacher–student ethics, and pesantren pedagogical tradition. Meanwhile, studies on digital citizenship and digital literacy generally rely on modern educational frameworks and rarely engage with classical Islamic pedagogical texts. Therefore, what has not been sufficiently explored is how Az-Zarnuji's classical concepts of *adab* can be reconstructed through a critical textual reading into an operational framework for digital ethics in Islamic education (Mochizuki & Vickers, 2024). This article positions itself within that gap by offering a model of “digital *adab*” that links classical Islamic learning ethics with information literacy, communication ethics, academic integrity, digital safety, and digital well-being.

The novelty of this study lies in reconstructing *Ta'lim al-Muta'allim* as “digital *adab*” and operationalizing it into a competency map, a set of learning experience designs, and observable indicators of ethical media behavior that can support the development of an ethical digital civilization (Az-Zarnuji, 2009; Riina, Stefano, & Yves, 2022).

The emergence of religious dictatorship or oligarchy that aims to establish theocratic control is a result of inadequate understanding of Theo-humanistic ethics and contextual-integrative methodology in Islamic studies, together with its associated tools. Additionally, there is

disagreement between academics who support critical freedom and power, which is frequently repressive, because there is no precise and contextual articulation and no distinction made between responsibilities in the political and religious spheres. The secularism that Turkey has experienced in the past can teach other Muslim nations valuable lessons. Similarly, the detrimental effects of political marginalisation on religious beliefs in Western nations, as demonstrated in the New Order eras of France and Indonesia.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach using Norman Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis framework. This method was chosen because the study focuses on a critical reading of Az-Zarnuji's *Ta'lim al-Muta'allim*, rather than on general library-based materials (Zed, 2008). The text is analyzed as an Islamic pedagogical discourse that constructs the values of adab, learning ethics, teacher-student relations, and moral responsibility in the pursuit of knowledge. Therefore, the primary object of this study is limited to the text of *Ta'lim al-Muta'allim*, while other sources are used only as supporting materials to examine its relevance to contemporary digital ethics (Az-Zarnuji, 2009).

The analysis follows Fairclough's three-dimensional model of Critical Discourse Analysis, namely text, discursive practice, and social practice. At the textual level, the study identifies vocabulary, concepts, and meaning structures related to the principles of adab, including sincerity of intention, teacher selection, respect for knowledge, wara' or moral caution, time discipline, and students' moral responsibility. At the level of discursive practice, the study examines how these values are constructed, communicated, and transmitted within the tradition of Islamic education. At the level of social practice, these principles of adab are connected to issues in digital education, such as information literacy, communication ethics, academic integrity, digital safety, and digital well-being. Fairclough's model is used because it views language as a social practice closely related to values, ideology, and power relations in society (Fairclough, 2007, 2013, 2023; Sarangi & Coulthard, 2014).

Data were collected through close reading of *Ta'lim al-Muta'allim*, thematic note-taking, and conceptual mapping. The main unit of analysis is the textual segment containing principles of learning adab. Secondary sources are used in a limited way to strengthen the contextual discussion, particularly studies on digital transformation, Islamic education, digital citizenship, and digital competence, including the DigComp framework (Mochizuki & Vickers, 2024; Rahman et al., 2025; Surawan & Anshari, 2022). Data analysis was conducted through Fairclough's three stages: description, interpretation, and explanation. The description stage examines linguistic elements in the text; the interpretation stage explains the production of adab meanings within the Islamic educational tradition; and the explanation stage reconstructs classical adab values into the concept of digital adab relevant to Islamic education in the digital era (Riina et al., 2022).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Adab as the Moral Infrastructure of Knowledge in Az-Zarnuji's *Ta'lim al-Muta'allim*

Reconstructing Islamic education through *Ta'lim al-Muta'allim* begins with a crucial clarification: adab is not simply etiquette. It functions as an epistemic tool that shapes whether knowledge becomes beneficial for the learner and constructive for society. For Az-Zarnuji, knowledge elevates human dignity, yet its blessing and social impact depend on the sincerity of intention, perseverance, and a disciplined relationship with teachers and learning environments (Az-Zarnuji, 2009). In the digital era, this insight becomes even more urgent. Information is abundant, but without adab it can fuel intellectual arrogance, polarization, and the instrumental use of knowledge for harmful ends (Munandar, 2023; Nugraha et al., 2025).

This moral infrastructure can be traced directly to Az-Zarnuji's emphasis that knowledge must be pursued with proper intention and ethical discipline. In *Ta'lim al-Muta'allim*, he states that the seeker of knowledge should intend learning for God's pleasure, the hereafter, the removal of

ignorance from oneself and others, and the preservation of religion. This textual statement shows that learning is never value-neutral; it is framed by moral orientation before it becomes intellectual achievement. In the context of digital education, this principle becomes the foundation of digital adab because students must not use knowledge merely for visibility, self-display, or algorithmic recognition, but for benefit, truthfulness, and responsibility.

Sincere intention is the natural starting point. In Az-Zarnuji's view, seeking knowledge is tied to worship and public benefit—not status or display (Az-Zarnuji, 2009). The theme of intention is therefore not an abstract virtue but a controlling ethical principle. Az-Zarnuji's instruction on purifying intention can be reconstructed into digital learning practices such as ethical source attribution, avoiding plagiarism, refusing to manipulate information, and orienting digital production toward public benefit. In this sense, intention becomes the inner regulator of digital behavior. Yet digital spaces reward visibility: likes, views, and algorithmic recognition can quietly push learning toward performance. Because digital culture changes how values are absorbed and enacted, inner orientation must become a pedagogical foundation so that learning does not slide into image competition (Feriana et al., 2025). A "straight" intention can be operationalized through habits of goal reflection, ethical source attribution, and a sense of knowledge as trust (*amanah*) when creating or sharing content (Nugraha et al., 2025).

Adab also organizes the teacher–student relationship and the choice of learning environments. In Az-Zarnuji's tradition, the teacher is not only a transmitter of material but a guardian of learning quality and moral formation (Az-Zarnuji, 2009). Az-Zarnuji's discussion on choosing teachers, companions, and learning environments indicates that knowledge is shaped by the authority and moral quality of its sources. This principle is highly relevant to digital learning, where students encounter multiple authorities such as online preachers, influencers, websites, artificial intelligence tools, and social media communities. Thus, the classical instruction to choose trustworthy teachers can be reconstructed as source curation, credibility checking, and participation in healthy digital learning communities.

Today's digital ecology introduces new authorities—educational influencers, online communities, and internet-based learning systems that encourage autonomy (Rohmah et al., 2025). As a result, "choosing teachers and environments" must be reconstructed into the ability to curate sources, select healthy learning communities, and remain alert to biases and hidden interests behind digital content. A strong school culture—including the disciplined tradition of kitab learning—has been shown to foster orderly, value-driven learning habits (Nurhidin, 2022). Its digital parallel is the creation of an ethical virtual classroom culture through discussion norms, comment ethics, and moderation mechanisms (Munandar, 2023).

The ethical core of digital adab is closely tied to *wara'* and protecting the dignity of knowledge. *Wara'* refers to moral caution and self-restraint from what undermines the blessing of learning (Az-Zarnuji, 2009). In digital practice, this becomes a restraint in information and communication: not forwarding unverified claims, avoiding doxxing, rejecting hate speech, and defending academic integrity against plagiarism. When hate speech becomes part of school-related digital life, the online sphere becomes a battleground over values and reputation (Rahman et al., 2025). Digital adab is therefore needed as a moral shield that protects community dignity.

Time management and perseverance also face a new enemy: the attention economy and constant distraction. Az-Zarnuji highlights time discipline and persistence as conditions for success in seeking knowledge (Az-Zarnuji, 2009). Internet-based autonomy can grow when self-discipline is cultivated (Rohmah et al., 2025). Digital learning adab, then, include training to manage distraction, rebuilding deep-reading habits, and practicing "attention discipline" so that technology serves learning rather than fragments it.

Reconstructing Adab into Digital Information and Communication Ethics

Translating Az-Zarnuji's adab into the digital sphere requires formulating digital adab as ethical habits across three domains: managing information, managing communication, and

managing digital selfhood. Digital citizenship frameworks emphasize responsible participation, literacy, and awareness of the consequences of online actions. In Islamic education, this is strengthened by *amanah* and moral-spiritual accountability embedded in adab itself (Az-Zarnuji, 2009).

The reconstruction of digital information and communication ethics is grounded in Az-Zarnuji's principle of *wara'*, namely moral caution in seeking and using knowledge. In *Ta'lim al-Muta'allim*, *wara'* is presented as a condition for the blessing and usefulness of knowledge. This principle can be extended to the digital sphere as caution before sharing information, restraint from harmful speech, avoidance of plagiarism, and refusal to circulate unverified content. Therefore, *wara'* becomes a textual basis for digital information ethics and communication ethics.

In information management, digital adab centers on verification and credibility literacy. The spirit of caution and the protection of the dignity of knowledge require learners to resist quick acceptance or impulsive sharing without checking (Az-Zarnuji, 2009). Pedagogically, this can be translated into fact-checking routines, source critique exercises, and curated reference assignments. Research on PAI e-learning suggests that digital learning requires more than moving materials online; it must reshape how students relate to sources (Surawan & Anshari, 2022). In this sense, information literacy is not merely a technical skill—it becomes part of adab.

In communication management, digital adab emphasizes dialogic ethics, dignified language, and rejection of verbal violence. Studies on how schools handle hate speech indicate that digital spaces demand ethically governed public communication that protects the community (Rahman et al., 2025). From an adab perspective, online discussion spaces should be treated like a *majelis ilmu*—a learning forum whose honor must be preserved. Disagreement should become a path to stronger understanding, not a stage for humiliation.

In managing digital selfhood, digital adab intersects with privacy, security, integrity, and well-being. Competency frameworks for citizens include safety, data protection, and the impact of technology on well-being (Riina et al., 2022). In Az-Zarnuji's framework, these concerns align with self-control, moral caution (*wara'*), and guarding honor (Az-Zarnuji, 2009). Digital privacy can be understood as ethical boundary-keeping and trustworthiness, while digital integrity includes academic honesty and the ethics of using technology in learning.

Integrating Digital Adab into Islamic Education Curriculum and Pedagogy

Digital adab will remain rhetoric unless it is embedded into learning outcomes, learning experiences, and assessment practices. DigComp illustrates how digital competence can be broken down into information literacy, communication, safety, and problem-solving (Riina et al., 2022). Yet Islamic education needs a “moral soul” anchored in Az-Zarnuji so that digital competence does not drift away from moral orientation, *amanah*, and adab (Az-Zarnuji, 2009).

Learning experiences are most effective when built around authentic digital-ethical problems and paired with the habituation of dialogic adab. Problem-based learning, known for cultivating critical thinking, can be used to explore cases such as misinformation, plagiarism, cyberbullying, and comment-section conflict. This helps students solve real problems while weighing moral consequences and human dignity (Cholik Cholik, Riyanto, bin Che'Rus, & Sriantini, 2022; Nikolitsa-Winter, Mauch, & Maalouf, 2019). In online classrooms, teachers should not be reduced to technical facilitators. They function as living models of digital adab through how they write messages, respond to criticism, enforce discussion norms, and guide reflection on learning intentions (Surawan & Anshari, 2022).

Internet-based autonomy must be trained alongside self-discipline. While internet learning can support self-directed learning in Islamic education (Baharuddin, Rosyida, Irawan, & Utomo, 2022), autonomy without adab risks shallow learning and passive drift with the information stream. For this reason, attention discipline, screen-time management, learning journals, and goal reflection are practical ways to translate Az-Zarnuji's adab into digital habits (Az-Zarnuji, 2009).

The competency map below is derived from the textual themes found in *Ta'lim al-Muta'allim*, particularly intention, teacher selection, *wara'*, honoring knowledge, and time discipline. These themes are not treated as isolated moral advice, but as pedagogical categories that can be translated into digital-adab competencies. Therefore, the table functions as an analytical bridge between Az-Zarnuji's classical learning ethics and contemporary digital education practices.

The following table maps Az-Zarnuji's adab principles to digital-adab competencies, sample learning activities in PAI, and observable indicators for assessment.

Az-Zarnuji's core adab value	Reconstructed as digital adab	Sample learning activities in PAI	Observable behavioral indicators
Sincere intention in seeking knowledge	Learning oriented to public benefit and trust (<i>amanah</i>)	Intention reflection before a digital project; ethical source attribution practice	Correctly cites sources; avoids unethical "viral chasing"
Choosing teachers and learning environments	Source curation; selecting healthy learning communities	Curating educational accounts/channels; discussing source quality	Can justify source choice; avoids toxic communities
<i>Wara'</i> and the dignity of knowledge	Information caution; academic integrity	Verification drills; plagiarism case discussions	Does not share unverified content; produces original work
Honoring the learning forum (<i>majelis</i>)	Communication ethics; anti-hate speech	Ethical debate simulations; moderated class forums	Critiques without degrading others; avoids verbal violence
Time discipline and perseverance	Attention discipline; digital well-being	Distraction-management journals; device-use reflections	Manages screen time; stays focused on learning goals
Moral responsibility of knowledge	Digital social responsibility	Anti-bullying campaigns; educational content projects	Produces constructive content; shows empathy and responsibility

The table illustrates how Az-Zarnuji's classical adab values can be transformed into measurable digital ethics competencies. Sincere intention is translated into responsible learning orientation, while the selection of teachers and learning environments becomes the ability to curate credible sources and participate in healthy digital communities. *Wara'* is reconstructed as caution in verifying information and maintaining academic integrity, whereas honoring the *majelis* becomes ethical communication in online discussions. Time discipline is translated into attention management and digital well-being, while the moral responsibility of knowledge becomes digital social responsibility.

This framework connects classical Islamic learning ethics with practical behaviors required in digital education, such as citing sources properly, avoiding misinformation, rejecting hate speech, managing screen time, and producing constructive digital content. The mapping also emphasizes that digital adab should be assessed through portfolios and performance-based tasks, not merely through knowledge tests. This is because the main goal is not only cognitive understanding, but the formation of dignified digital behavior as a lived habit.

A School–Family–Community Ecosystem for an Ethical Digital Civilization

Digital adab will not last if it is taught only in classrooms, because family practices, peer cultures, and platform architecture shape students' digital lives. Islamic education reconstruction, therefore, needs to extend into the governance of the wider school–family–community ecosystem. Digital cultural transformation shows that school-community relationships and religious values

continuously renegotiate in the face of social change (Feriana et al., 2025). Az-Zarnuji's emphasis on choosing learning environments can be expanded to include building safe, healthy, and ethical learning ecosystems—both offline and online (Az-Zarnuji, 2009).

In the family sphere, parenting strategies are decisive for shaping digital habits. Islamic parenting strategies emphasize character formation through value-based nurturing (Pramesti & Jinan, 2025). In terms of digital adab, families can establish shared agreements about device use, model verification habits, cultivate empathetic communication, and guide so that self-discipline grows as a habit—not merely as a rule (Abdurrahman, Nurwahida, & Samsuddin, 2024; Az-Zarnuji, 2009).

At the school level, safe culture and non-violence must adapt to the migration of harm into digital spaces. Anti-violence programs in pesantren cultures highlight the importance of consistent policy and habituation (Setyowati & Dartim, 2025). Digitally, this extends to group-chat ethics, screenshot-sharing ethics, safe reporting mechanisms, and anti-hate speech education that uphold human dignity (Mochizuki & Vickers, 2024; Nikolitsa-Winter et al., 2019).

In the sphere of digital communities and institutional public communication, schools need strong communication literacy. Managing hate speech and building a positive public image requires accurate, non-reactive, verification-based communication procedures (Sulianta, 2024). In adab terms, this is the protection of institutional honor and the dignity of knowledge, so that official school information does not become part of the misinformation ecosystem (Az-Zarnuji, 2009; Hidayat & Suwanto, 2020).

The table below offers a practical set of ecosystem indicators for monitoring the development of digital adab across schools and families.

Ecosystem domain	Digital <i>adab</i> focus	Cultural rules / policies	Documentable evidence of implementation
Online classes and group communication	Language ethics; anti-verbal violence	Communication rules; teacher moderation; educative sanctions	Comment- <i>adab</i> rubric; student reflections
School information literacy	Verification; accuracy	Verification procedures before sharing; fact-check training	Fact-check portfolios; source-curation tasks
Academic integrity	Knowledge as trust; anti-plagiarism	Citation policy; ethics of using learning technologies	Originality reports; writing process journals
Digital well-being	Time management; mental health	Device-free quiet hours; distraction education	Screen-time journals; family learning contracts
School-parent relationships	Parenting synergy	Parenting forums; digital communication guidelines	Minutes; parenting modules; habit surveys

The table explains that the implementation of digital adab requires support from the wider educational ecosystem, not only from classroom instruction. In online classes and group communication, digital adab focuses on language ethics and the prevention of verbal violence. This can be implemented through communication rules, teacher moderation, and educative sanctions, while its evidence can be seen in comment-adab rubrics and student reflections. In the area of school information literacy, the main focus is verification and accuracy. Schools can establish procedures for checking information before it is shared and provide fact-checking training, with evidence such as fact-check portfolios and source-curation tasks.

Academic integrity is also an important part of digital adab because knowledge must be treated as a trust or amanah. This can be strengthened through citation policies and ethical guidelines for using learning technologies, while implementation can be documented through originality reports and writing process journals. Digital well-being focuses on time management and mental health, which can be supported through device-free quiet hours and distraction education. Evidence may include screen-time journals and family learning contracts. Finally, school-parent relationships are needed to create parenting synergy. Parenting forums and digital communication guidelines can help align school and family values, while meeting minutes, parenting modules, and habit surveys can serve as evidence of implementation. Thus, digital adab becomes an ecosystem-based practice involving schools, teachers, students, and families.

CONCLUSION

This study shows that Az-Zarnuji's *Ta'lim al-Muta'allim* can be reconstructed as a framework of digital adab for Islamic education. The key principles of sincerity of intention, respect for knowledge, teacher and source selection, wara', and disciplined time management can be translated into digital-ethics competencies, including information literacy, communication ethics, academic integrity, digital safety, and digital well-being. This reconstruction positions Islamic education not only as an institution that adapts to technological change, but also as a source of moral guidance for responsible digital life. However, this study has limitations. It is based on textual analysis of *Ta'lim al-Muta'allim* and supporting literature, so it does not yet provide empirical evidence from classroom, school, or pesantren implementation. The proposed digital adab framework also remains conceptual and needs further testing in real educational settings. Future research may examine the implementation of digital adab in Islamic schools, madrasahs, and pesantren through classroom observation, teacher interviews, or student surveys. Further studies may also develop assessment instruments to measure students' digital adab and evaluate its impact on information literacy, online communication, academic integrity, and digital well-being.

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