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The Relevance of Ibn Miskawayh's Moral Education and Thomas Lickona's Character Education in the Context of Modern Education

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Abstract
Moral and character education requires a framework that connects the formation of inner virtue with the practical conditions of contemporary schooling. This study comparatively examines Ibn Miskawayh's moral education and Thomas Lickona's character education and develops an integrative model for contemporary educational contexts. The study uses qualitative library research with a comparative-interpretive design. Primary sources are Tahdzib al-Akhlaq wa Tathir al-A'raq and Educating for Character, complemented by recent peer-reviewed studies published between 2022 and 2026 on character education, self-regulation, curriculum implementation, and moral development. The analysis focuses on philosophical foundations, educational purposes, moral structures, formation methods, values, and practical implications. The findings show that Ibn Miskawayh conceptualizes morality as the cultivation and balancing of the soul through habituation, self-control, virtue, and the pursuit of al-sa'adah, whereas Lickona conceptualizes character through the integration of moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action within a supportive moral community. The proposed model integrates these perspectives through three mutually reinforcing dimensions: spiritual, psychological, and socio-institutional. Its distinctive feature is a movement from inner moral formation to psychological competence and sustained social practice, supported by role modelling, curriculum integration, reflective practice, and family-community engagement. The model provides a conceptual bridge between Islamic virtue ethics and contemporary character education while remaining open to empirical testing in diverse educational settings.
Keywords: character education; Ibn Miskawayh; Islamic education; moral education; moral psychology; virtue ethics; Thomas Lickona

A. INTRODUCTION

Globalization and digitalization have expanded access to information, communication, and social interaction, while also creating new conditions for moral learning. Contemporary education therefore faces a dual task: developing intellectual competence and cultivating students who can regulate their conduct, respond responsibly to others, and make ethically defensible decisions. Recent research confirms that character education can produce positive outcomes, although its effects vary across program designs and implementation conditions (Brown et al., 2023). Research on self-regulation likewise indicates a meaningful relationship between children's capacity for self-regulation and moral development (Schütz & Koglin, 2023). These findings strengthen the case for character education that treats moral development as more than the transmission of moral rules.

In Indonesia, character formation is embedded in broader educational and curricular agendas, but implementation remains dependent on teacher beliefs, pedagogical practices, school culture, and the coherence of curriculum design (Ma'arif & Rosikh, 2025). A systematic review found that teachers tend to support integrated character education and regard role modelling as an important pedagogical strategy (Muzakkira et al., 2024). Indonesian studies also demonstrate the value of reflective, collaborative, and experiential approaches to character education (Sarkadi et al., 2022; Dami et al., 2023). More recent work shows that local wisdom and community participation can strengthen character formation by connecting educational values with students' cultural environments (Sakti et al., 2024).

Within this context, Thomas Lickona remains influential because his framework connects moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action and translates moral development into practices that can be embedded in school culture. Contemporary scholarship, however, increasingly emphasizes the complexity of character education, including the importance of context, relationships, ethical reflection, and institutional conditions (Berkowitz, 2022; Choo & Chua, 2025). Character education is therefore better understood as a multidimensional process rather than a single instructional technique (Al Faruq et al., 2025).

The Islamic intellectual tradition offers a complementary perspective through Ibn Miskawayh. In Tahdzib al-Akhlaq wa Tathir al-A'raq, moral education is associated with the cultivation and regulation of the soul, habituation of virtuous conduct, control of passions, and attainment of al-sa'adah. His account treats virtue as an internal disposition that becomes stable through disciplined practice rather than as mere compliance with external rules . This spiritual-ethical orientation provides a potentially important complement to contemporary character education, particularly where educational institutions seek to connect moral conduct with inner formation and meaning. Moderation in speech and everyday conduct is a positive and commendable virtue (Maskuri et al., 2020).

Previous studies have generally examined Ibn Miskawayh or Lickona separately, while comparative discussions often remain descriptive. The present study addresses this gap by examining the philosophical and pedagogical intersections of the two frameworks and by translating the comparison into an integrative conceptual model. The model is designed around three dimensions—spiritual, psychological, and socio-institutional—so that inner virtue, moral competence, and institutional practice are treated as mutually reinforcing rather than competing domains.

Accordingly, the study addresses four research questions: (1) How does Ibn Miskawayh conceptualize moral education? (2) How does Thomas Lickona conceptualize character education? (3) What are the principal similarities and differences between the two frameworks in terms of foundations, purposes, values, and methods? and (4) How can their complementary elements be synthesized into a practical integrative model for contemporary education?

B. METHODS

This study employs qualitative library research using a comparative-interpretive design. The design is appropriate because the object of analysis consists of philosophical and pedagogical concepts expressed in primary texts and interpreted through relevant scholarly literature. The analysis does not claim to test the proposed model empirically; rather, it constructs a theoretically grounded model that can subsequently be examined through field-based research.

Primary sources were selected purposively because they represent the central works through which the two frameworks are articulated: Ibn Miskawayh's Tahdzib al-Akhlaq wa Tathir al-A'raq and Thomas Lickona's Educating for Character: How Our Schools Can Teach Respect and Responsibility. Secondary sources consisted of peer-

reviewed journal articles, academic books, and scholarly reports addressing moral education, character education, virtue ethics, moral psychology, self-regulation, curriculum implementation, and Islamic education. To strengthen contemporary relevance, particular attention was given to peer-reviewed literature published from 2022 to 2026, while foundational works were retained when they were indispensable for defining the original concepts.

The literature screening protocol used combinations of the following keywords: "Ibn Miskawayh" and moral education; "Miskawayh" and virtue ethics; "Thomas Lickona" and character education; "moral knowing" and "moral feeling" and "moral action"; "character education" and school culture; "character education" and Indonesia; "Islamic moral education" and character; and "self-regulation" and morality. Relevant literature was identified through major academic search environments and publisher databases, including Google Scholar, Scopus-indexed journal platforms, ScienceDirect, SpringerLink, Taylor & Francis Online, and Frontiers. The search was complemented by backward citation checking of key sources.

Inclusion criteria were: (1) direct relevance to the study's conceptual categories; (2) scholarly publication with identifiable authorship and publication details; (3) peer-reviewed journal articles or authoritative academic books for secondary evidence; (4) publication between 2022 and 2026 for contemporary evidence, except for foundational primary and theoretical works; and (5) sufficient methodological or conceptual information to support interpretation. Exclusion criteria were: (1) duplicate records; (2) publications without a clear scholarly provenance; (3) studies focused on character-related outcomes without conceptual or educational relevance to the research questions; and (4) sources whose claims could not be adequately traced to the original publication.

Data extraction was organized through a comparative matrix. Each source was coded according to six analytical categories: philosophical foundation, educational purpose, conception of morality, formation mechanism, core values, and practical educational implications. The first stage identified propositions within each thinker's framework. The second stage grouped propositions into the analytical categories. The third stage compared convergences and divergences. The fourth stage examined complementarities and formulated the integrative model. The final stage translated the model into operational dimensions and indicators suitable for future empirical implementation.

Content analysis followed an interpretive-comparative procedure informed by Krippendorff's approach. Source triangulation was used by comparing claims across primary texts, established theoretical literature, and recent empirical or review studies. Interpretive consistency was further checked through peer debriefing of the analytical categories and the proposed model, with attention to whether each synthesized element could be traced to evidence in the reviewed literature. Because the study is conceptual, member checking with research participants was not applicable; the corresponding validity strategy was therefore analytical transparency, source triangulation, and peer scrutiny of the coding framework.

C. RESULT & DISCUSSION

C1. Executive Synthesis and Main Scientific Contribution

The comparative analysis indicates that Ibn Miskawayh and Thomas Lickona represent different intellectual traditions but address a common educational problem: how human beings acquire stable moral dispositions and express them in responsible conduct. Ibn Miskawayh begins with the moral formation of the soul, emphasizing balance among its faculties, habituation, self-control, and the pursuit of al-sa'adah. Lickona begins from moral development and educational practice, emphasizing the

interaction of moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action. The convergence is therefore not identity but complementarity.

The principal contribution of this study is the synthesis of the two perspectives into a three-dimensional integrative character education model (Mustofa et al., 2022). The spiritual dimension draws on Ibn Miskawayh's emphasis on inner purification, virtue, self-control, and meaningful moral purpose. The psychological dimension translates moral values into knowing, feeling, reflection, judgement, and action, following Lickona's framework. The socio-institutional dimension embeds these dispositions in curriculum, teacher modelling, school culture, family engagement, and community practice. Recent evidence supports the need for integrated and context-sensitive approaches: character education shows positive but heterogeneous effects (Brown et al., 2023), while Indonesian studies highlight the roles of curriculum integration, experiential learning, local wisdom, and institutional support (Sarkadi et al., 2022; Dami et al., 2023; Sakti et al., 2024).

C2. Philosophical Foundations

Ibn Miskawayh's moral philosophy is grounded in a conception of the human soul in which rational, emotional, and appetitive powers require balance. Virtue emerges when these powers are ordered appropriately under the guidance of reason. Moral education is consequently an ontological and formative process: the learner is expected not merely to know a moral rule but to develop a stable disposition toward good action. The ultimate orientation is al-sa'adah, understood as a form of human flourishing connected with intellectual and spiritual perfection.

Lickona's framework is more explicitly pedagogical and psychological. Character is developed through the interaction of moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action, supported by a moral community in which students repeatedly encounter opportunities to understand, value, and enact good conduct. Contemporary character education research reinforces the importance of institutional and relational conditions, including teacher beliefs, role modelling, and ethical reflection (Muzakkira et al., 2024; Choo & Chua, 2025). The difference can therefore be expressed as a difference of starting point: Ibn Miskawayh prioritizes the formation of the moral self, whereas Lickona gives greater attention to the educational processes through which moral competence becomes observable in social life.

C3. Moral Structure: The Soul and Moral Psychology

In Ibn Miskawayh's framework, moral stability depends on the internal ordering of the soul. Habituation and disciplined practice transform repeated actions into dispositions, while self-control prevents appetitive and emotional impulses from overriding rational judgement. In Lickona's framework, moral development is articulated through three mutually related components: knowing what is right, caring about what is right, and doing what is right. The former is principally virtue-ethical and spiritual; the latter is principally psychological and pedagogical.

The distinction should not be interpreted as a rigid opposition. Research on self-regulation suggests that the capacity to regulate impulses is associated with moral development, providing a contemporary psychological bridge to Ibn Miskawayh's emphasis on self-control (Schütz & Koglin, 2023). The synthesis proposed here therefore treats spiritual self-discipline and psychological self-regulation as related but conceptually distinguishable processes. This distinction prevents the Islamic concept from being reduced to modern psychology while also allowing its educational implications to be articulated in terms that can be empirically investigated.

C4. Purposes of Education: Spiritual Flourishing and Social Responsibility

For Ibn Miskawayh, education ultimately seeks human flourishing through moral perfection and the attainment of al-sa'adah. The educational purpose is therefore inward as well as outward: students should develop a balanced moral personality whose actions express an ordered soul (Arifuddin et al., 2024). For Lickona, character

education seeks individuals who demonstrate respect, responsibility, integrity, and other virtues in relationships and civic life. The emphasis is more explicitly social and institutional.

The integrative interpretation is not that one purpose should replace the other. Rather, the two purposes can be organized hierarchically and functionally: spiritual and ethical formation provides meaning and internal orientation, psychological competence enables moral judgement and action, and social institutions provide repeated opportunities for practice. This formulation is consistent with recent research showing that character education is strengthened when values are integrated into curriculum and lived through relational and experiential practices (Dami et al., 2023; Atabey & Topçu, 2025).

C5. Educational Methods: Habituation, Role Modelling, Reflection, and Institutional Culture

Both thinkers reject the assumption that character can be formed through moral instruction alone. Ibn Miskawayh emphasizes habituation, disciplined practice, and exemplary conduct. Repeated good actions are expected gradually to become stable dispositions. The educator therefore functions not only as a transmitter of knowledge but also as a moral example whose conduct forms part of the learner's environment (Ma'arif et al., 2025).

Lickona similarly places role modelling, moral discussion, school culture, and opportunities for moral action at the centre of character education. Recent evidence supports this broader understanding. Teachers' beliefs are important to implementation, and integrated curricula with role-model pedagogy are repeatedly identified as useful conditions for character formation (Muzakkira et al., 2024). Indonesian studies further suggest that reflective, collaborative, and experiential learning can operationalize character values within ordinary curricular activities (Sarkadi et al., 2022), while systematic review evidence highlights the importance of curriculum, cross-curriculum, experiential learning, and parental involvement (Dami et al., 2023).

The methodological synthesis is therefore a cycle rather than a single technique: value orientation → modelling → guided practice → reflection → repeated action → feedback → habituation. This cycle combines Ibn Miskawayh's concern with internal disposition and Lickona's concern with observable moral practice.

C6. Moral Values: Virtue Ethics and Publicly Relevant Character

Ibn Miskawayh identifies wisdom, chastity, courage, and justice as cardinal virtues associated with the balanced development of the soul. Lickona emphasizes broadly accessible moral values such as respect and responsibility and relates them to the demands of social life. The difference lies primarily in the conceptual grounding of the values rather than in an absolute contradiction between them.

Justice, responsibility, self-control, and respect provide points of convergence through which the two traditions can be translated into contemporary educational practice. In Indonesia, character education can also be contextualized through local cultural resources and religious values without reducing character to a purely cultural or purely individual construct. Evidence from Yogyakarta shows that local wisdom can be integrated into character education while strengthening community engagement and students' awareness of cultural values (Sakti et al., 2024). Research on religious moderation in Indonesian higher education likewise demonstrates the feasibility of embedding spiritual and civic values within curriculum design and evaluation (Mukhibat et al., 2024).

Table 1. Comparative Framework and Practical Implications

Analytical aspect	Ibn Miskawayh	Thomas Lickona	Practical implication
Moral foundation	Virtue ethics; ordered and balanced soul	Moral psychology; knowing, feeling, action	Combine ethical purpose with cognitive-affective-behavioral learning
Primary goal	Moral perfection and al-sa'adah	Responsible, respectful, socially competent character	Define personal flourishing and social responsibility as complementary goals
Formation mechanism	Habituation, self-discipline, rational regulation	Moral reflection, emotional engagement, action, school culture	Use repeated practice supported by reflection and institutional reinforcement
Role of educator	Moral exemplar and guide to self-discipline	Role model, moral educator, facilitator	Assess educator modelling as part of character implementation
Learning environment	Supports cultivation of virtue and self-control	Moral community involving school and family	Build consistent value messages across classroom, school, family, and community
Assessment focus	Dispositions, self-control, consistency of conduct	Moral reasoning, affect, action and responsibility	Use mixed indicators: reflection, observed conduct, self-regulation, prosocial action

C7. Integrative Character Education Model

The synthesis yields a three-dimensional model consisting of spiritual, psychological, and socio-institutional dimensions. The dimensions are sequential in emphasis but mutually reinforcing in practice. The spiritual dimension provides the moral orientation and inner purpose; the psychological dimension converts that orientation into moral knowledge, feeling, judgement, self-regulation, and action; and the socio-institutional dimension sustains these processes through curriculum, teacher modelling, school culture, family engagement, and community participation.

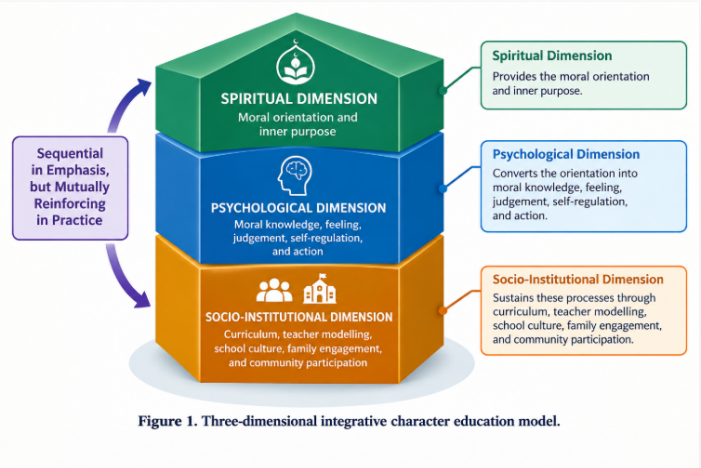


Figure 1. Three-dimensional integrative character education model.

The model contains five operational indicators for future implementation. First, spiritual formation can be indicated through students' understanding of moral purpose, reflective awareness, self-discipline, and consistency between professed values and conduct. Second, psychological formation can be indicated through moral reasoning, empathy, emotional regulation, ethical decision-making, and willingness to act on moral judgements. Third, socio-institutional formation can be indicated through teacher role modelling, curriculum integration, school norms, restorative or reflective practices, and family-community participation. Fourth, the model requires continuity: values introduced in formal instruction should be reinforced through everyday interactions. Fifth, outcomes should be assessed through multiple sources rather than a single self-report measure.

This model is theoretically preferable to treating the two approaches as interchangeable. Ibn Miskawayh contributes a theory of why moral education must transform the inner person; Lickona contributes a pedagogical framework for how

moral knowledge, feeling, and action can be cultivated in educational settings. The socio-institutional dimension provides the conditions through which both can become sustainable. Recent evidence that character programmes have positive but heterogeneous effects also indicates that implementation quality and contextual fit matter when translating conceptual models into practice (Brown et al., 2023; Correa Díaz, 2026).

C8. Contemporary Evidence and Relevance to Indonesia

The relevance of the integrative model becomes clearer when it is compared with recent empirical and review literature. A large meta-analysis found a small but significant positive average effect for character education programmes, while also identifying heterogeneity and possible publication bias (Brown et al., 2023). This cautions against presenting character education as automatically effective and instead directs attention toward programme design, implementation quality, and contextual conditions.

In Indonesia, contemporary research provides several practical anchors for the proposed model. Sarkadi et al. (2022) demonstrate how reflective, engaging, collaborative, and elaborative learning can be used to teach character values. Dami et al. (2023) identify curriculum integration, experiential learning, and parental involvement among the strategies used in character formation. Sakti et al. (2024) show how local wisdom and community involvement can strengthen character education. Mukhibat et al. (2024) demonstrate that spiritual and civic values can be incorporated into higher-education curriculum and evaluated through character-related indicators. These findings support the socio-institutional dimension of the present model while leaving the specifically Ibn Miskawayh-inspired spiritual dimension open for further empirical testing.

The broader Asian context also indicates that character education increasingly requires critical and relational capacities rather than simple moral adaptation. Choo and Chua (2025) identify a shift in Singapore's character education toward ethical criticism and relational approaches. Atabey and Topçu (2025) similarly show that values and character can be developed through engagement with socially and ethically complex issues. These studies reinforce the argument that the proposed model should not be implemented as a fixed list of virtues but as a process in which students interpret values, regulate themselves, deliberate ethically, and act within real social contexts.

The three-dimensional model is therefore best understood as a conceptual architecture rather than a ready-made intervention programme. Its originality lies in connecting the spiritual ontology of classical Islamic virtue ethics with the psychological and institutional mechanisms of contemporary character education. Its practical value lies in providing educators with a structure through which spiritual formation, moral competence, and institutional practice can be designed and assessed together.

C9. Theoretical Implications, Novelty, and Limitations

The study contributes theoretically by demonstrating that classical Islamic moral philosophy and modern character education can be placed in a complementary analytical relationship without collapsing one framework into the other. Ibn Miskawayh provides the ontological and spiritual rationale for character formation, Lickona provides an educational-psychological mechanism for translating values into knowledge, feeling, and action, and contemporary institutional research provides evidence about the conditions required for implementation. The resulting model consequently links three levels of analysis: the moral self, the moral agent, and the moral community.

The novelty of the study rests on three related contributions. First, it moves beyond a descriptive comparison by constructing an integrative model. Second, it explicitly identifies spiritual, psychological, and socio-institutional dimensions and assigns operational indicators to each. Third, it positions the model as a bridge between Islamic

virtue ethics and contemporary evidence on character education, including Indonesian research. The model therefore offers a clearer basis for subsequent empirical research than a purely narrative synthesis.

The study has limitations. It is conceptual and library-based, so the proposed model has not yet been tested for causal effectiveness in classrooms or schools. The contemporary literature is also uneven across educational levels and national contexts, making direct generalization inappropriate. Future research should therefore test the model through mixed-method, longitudinal, or quasi-experimental designs; develop validated measures for the three dimensions; and examine how the model operates across Islamic schools, public schools, madrasahs, and higher-education institutions.

D. CONCLUSION

This study compared Ibn Miskawayh's moral education with Thomas Lickona's character education and found substantial complementarity despite differences in philosophical orientation. Ibn Miskawayh conceptualizes moral education as the cultivation of a balanced and disciplined soul directed toward al-sa'adah, whereas Lickona emphasizes the integration of moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action within a supportive moral community. Their common ground includes habituation, role modelling, value internalization, and the importance of an environment that consistently reinforces moral conduct.

The principal conclusion is that the two frameworks are most productive when integrated rather than treated as alternatives. The proposed model combines spiritual formation, psychological moral competence, and socio-institutional reinforcement. In curriculum design, this means that spiritual and ethical purposes associated with Ibn Miskawayh should be translated into learning experiences that cultivate moral knowledge, emotional engagement, self-regulation, reflection, and action, while school structures and family-community partnerships sustain those practices beyond individual lessons.

The model should nevertheless be treated as a conceptual proposition requiring empirical validation. Its strongest contribution is not the claim that integration is automatically effective, but the provision of a theoretically coherent architecture for investigating how inner moral formation and institutional character education can reinforce one another. Future empirical research should operationalize the three dimensions, examine implementation fidelity, and test student outcomes over time.

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