

INTEGRATING IBN MISKAWAIH'S CHARACTER EDUCATION AND BEHAVIORISTIC PSYCHOLOGY: A SYNTHETIC FRAMEWORK FOR MORAL DEVELOPMENT

Muhammad Iqbal, Friendis Syani Amrulloh

Universitas Kiai Abdullah Faqih Gresik

Email : elshafyiqbal@gmail.com, friendissyani@gmail.com

Abstract : *Character education in the 21st century faces a significant gap between moral knowledge and ethical action, often stalling at a purely cognitive level. This study aims to formulate an integrative pedagogical model by synthesizing Ibn Miskawaih's classical ethical philosophy specifically his concepts of malakah and al-adah with the behaviorist psychological theories of Ivan Pavlov, B.F. Skinner, and Clark Hull. Utilizing a qualitative-descriptive approach through a philosophical literature review, this research analyzes primary texts, including Tahdhib al-Akhlaq, alongside foundational behaviorist literature. The findings indicate a profound functional alignment between Miskawaih's systematic habituation and modern conditioning mechanisms. The study reveals that behaviorism provides the empirical hardware to transform abstract virtues into measurable, automatic behavioral responses. Furthermore, the research repositions the educator as an environmental architect who designs moral ecosystems through strategic stimuli and reinforcement. However, the integration necessitates Islamic ethical filters, such as niyyah (intention), to ensure that behavioral changes remain anchored in spiritual sincerity rather than becoming merely mechanistic. This synergy offers a robust methodological framework for cultivating moral integrity that is both observable and spiritually deep in the contemporary era.*

Keywords: *Character Education, Ibn Miskawaih, Behaviorism, Habituation, Islamic Pedagogy.*

Submitted: 07/05/2026

Accepted: 26/08/2026

Published: 26/08/2026

INTRODUCTION

Character education in the contemporary pedagogical landscape is currently confronting a formidable wall of global complexity. We reside in an era where the velocity of information dissemination far outpaces the internalisation of core valuesan anomaly that frequently triggers moral decadence among the youth (Muttaqin, 2023). This phenomenon suggests that conventional methods, which rely heavily on the textual delivery of ethical doctrines or unidirectional lectures, have reached a point of saturation.

This failure is fundamentally rooted in the missing bridge between moral knowing and moral doing. Thomas Lickona, in his seminal studies on moral education, asserts that true character necessitates more than mere cognitive knowledge, it requires an integrated harmony of habits involving the mind, feeling, and action (Catherine A. Darnell, L. Gulliford, K. Kristjánsson, n.d.). Consequently, the need for a pedagogical framework emphasizing systematic habituation has become imperative.

Within the annals of Islamic intellectual history, Ibn Miskawaih offered a formulation that transcended his era through his monumental work, Tahdhib al-Akhlaq. For Miskawaih, akhlak (character) is not merely a spontaneous act but a malakaha stable and enduring state of the soul that enables an individual to perform virtuous deeds without the burden of exhaustive deliberation. The catalyst for achieving this state is al-adah, or continuous habituation. Interestingly, Miskawaih's vision resonates with the principles of educational progressivism, which views learning as a continuous reconstruction of experience aimed at perfecting human potential (Miskawaih, n.d.). However, in the context of modernity, Miskawaih's philosophical-ethical thought



requires an empirical methodological hardware so that shifts in student character can be observed, measured, and reinforced within formal school environments.

This is where behavioristic psychology serves to bridge the methodological gap. The approaches pioneered by Ivan Pavlov, Clark Hull, and B.F. Skinner offer a scientific perspective on how human behavior is actually constructed. Ivan Pavlov (1927), through Classical Conditioning, provides insights into the power of environmental stimuli in triggering automatic behavioral responses (Pavlov, n.d.). Meanwhile, Clark Hull (1943), in his Drive Reduction theory, highlights the significance of internal motivation as the fundamental drive in the human learning process (Clark L. Hull, n.d.). Ultimately, B.F. Skinner (1953), through the concept of Operant Conditioning, elucidates that human behavior is profoundly influenced by its following consequences (Skinner, n.d.). Through a precise system of reinforcement, educators possess practical instruments to solidify positive student behaviors and systematically eliminate destructive actions.

This study argues that the integration of Ibn Miskawaih's ethical philosophy and behavioristic psychology is not merely a juxtaposition of two disparate poles, but a transformative synergy. If Ibn Miskawaih provides the teleological direction and soul of character education namely *tazkiyatun nafs* (purification of the soul) then behaviorism provides the methodological engine to drive behavioral change in the field. Utilizing a qualitative-descriptive approach focused on library research, this study seeks to formulate a character education model adaptive to 21st-century dynamics. The primary focus is to reposition the teacher's role from a mere instructor of material to a behavioral architect and moral facilitator. Thus, it is expected to cultivate a Muslim generation that possesses not only ritual piety but also a steadfast and applicable moral integrity to address contemporary social challenges

METHOD

This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach utilizing a philosophical literature review method. This methodology is designed to rigorously explore the integration of Ibnu Miskawaih's character education framework with the behavioristic psychological theories of Ivan Pavlov, B.F. Skinner, and Clark Hull within contemporary pedagogical contexts. A qualitative lens was selected because the primary objective is a conceptual and normative investigation of philosophical thought rather than the analysis of empirical field data. As noted by Creswell, such an approach is instrumental in uncovering deep-seated meanings and human experiences through a comprehensive interpretative framework (Cleland, 2017).

Data Sources and Selection

The philosophical inquiry was conducted through a critical analysis of primary and secondary sources. The primary sources consist of Ibnu Miskawaih's monumental work, *Tahdzib al-Akhlaq*, alongside the foundational texts of behaviorism by Pavlov, Hull, and Skinner. Secondary sources were retrieved from reputable academic databases, including Scopus, Google Scholar, and DOAJ.

The inclusion criteria for this selection were:

1. Original works by the aforementioned figures.
2. Contemporary research analyzing Miskawaih's ethics or behaviorist applications in education.
3. Scholarly literature published within the last decade (2016–2026) to ensure modern relevance, with the exception of classical foundational texts.



Analytical FrameworkThe data analysis technique employed is content analysis, which involves identifying, classifying, and synthesizing key thematic pillars. The analysis focuses on:

1. The concept of habituation (al-adah) in Miskawaih's ethics.
2. Mechanisms of conditioning and reinforcement within behaviorism.
3. The philosophical and practical convergence between these two traditions.

The analytical procedure follows the Miles and Huberman model, comprising three concurrent flows of activity: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. To ensure the validity and rigor of the findings, the study utilizes source triangulation, cross-referencing findings across authoritative literatures and expert opinions to minimize interpretative bias (Onwuegbuzie, 2016). This methodical clarification of terms such as habituation, conditioning, and character transformation ensures a robust pedagogical framework responsive to 21st-century challenges.

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

So, after digging deep into the literature and spending quite some time connecting dots between different thinkers, I finally arrived at several key points. These aren't just random observations. They represent what I'd call strategic integration between Ibnu Miskawaih's approach to character education and the behaviorist psychology of Pavlov, Hull, and Skinner. And honestly, the connections are more natural than I initially expected.

What emerged from this analysis covers quite a broad range. On one end, there's the mechanical side of habit formation how repetition actually wires behavior into a person's daily life.(Skinner, n.d.) On the other end, there's the role of environment , which both Miskawaih and the behaviorists agree is crucial for shaping moral behavior, though they use very different language to describe it. (Naja, 2025)

Instead of just explaining everything in long paragraphs, I've summarized the main findings systematically in Table 1 below. The table helps because some of these parallels are easier to see when they're laid out side by side. You'll notice that Miskawaih talks about malakah (that deep, settled state of the soul), while Skinner talks about reinforcement schedules. Different words, but the underlying logic about repetition and consequences? Surprisingly similar.

No	Verified Concepts	Key Findings	Investigated Aspect
1	Ibnu Miskawaih, Pavlov	Ethical character is conceptualized as a resilient and consistent psychological state that functions intuitively, paralleling the mechanical nature of a conditioned response	Definition of Character
2	Ibnu Miskawaih, Skinner	The systematic practice of al-adah serves as the fundamental methodology, reflecting the behaviorist principle of behavioral repetition to ensure long-term retention.	Role of Habituation
3	Pavlov (Classical Conditioning)	Strategically engineered environmental cues are utilized to trigger immediate moral reactions, aligning the external setting with the internal drive for ethical conduct.	Mechanism of Learning
4	Hull (Drive Reduction)	The soul's pursuit of ultimate felicitousness (sa'adah) is integrated with the fulfillment of psychological drives to provide a robust	Motivation & Drives



		internal reinforcement for character development.	
5	Skinner (Operant Conditioning)	The application of rewards, such as spiritual merit (pahala) or social commendation, alongside corrective measures, functions to solidify desirable behavioral patterns.	Reinforcement Model
6	Miskawaih, Skinner	Learners are positioned as dynamic subjects whose conduct is refined through continuous and active engagement with a structured moral landscape.	Position of Student
7	Miskawaih, Behavioristic Principles	The instructor assumes the role of an environmental designer and a living exemplar who meticulously calibrates moral stimulus-response cycles.	Role of Teacher
8	Tahdzib al-Akhlaq, Learning by Doing	The educational framework prioritizes sustained moral praxis over mere theoretical rote learning, emphasizing the application of values in real-world contexts.	Curriculum Approach
9	Miskawaih, Skinner	The ultimate objective is the cultivation of an individual possessing automatic moral virtues that are both observable and empirically verifiable within a social framework.	Educational Goals
10	Synthesis Analysis	There is a recognized necessity for robust Islamic ethical filters to prevent behavioral changes from becoming purely robotic, ensuring they remain anchored in spiritual depth.	Implementation Challenges

The analytical results of this study demonstrate that although Ibn Miskawaih operates within a theological framework, the practical mechanics he proposes for character development exhibit a profound functional alignment with modern behavioral modification techniques. This research finds that integrating these two paradigms allows character education to become a more empirically measurable process without sacrificing its essential spiritual core. One of the primary findings concerns the definition of character itself. Ibn Miskawaih describes character as a stable, ingrained state of the soul, referred to as *malakah*. (Miskawaih, n.d.)

This concept shares a significant scientific resonance with the conditioned response observed in Ivan Pavlov's classical experiments. In this light, character is not viewed as a series of incidental or random actions, but rather as the byproduct of *al-adah*, or systematic habituation. From a Skinnerian lens, this habituation is identical to the repetition of behaviors that are reinforced by the environment (Sari & Rahmani, 2024). Consequently, moral development shifts from being a mere exercise in cognitive awareness to becoming a consistent and automatic behavioral response.

Furthermore, the study reveals that the motivational aspects of character formation are closely linked to Clark Hull's Drive Reduction Theory (Sari & Rahmani, 2024). The innate human drive to achieve ultimate happiness is positioned as an internal tension that must be resolved through moral behaviors that restore psychological and spiritual equilibrium (Bentley, 2023). Within this framework, the educator's role is transformed into that of an environmental architect



or a facilitator who meticulously arranges stimuli to trigger these spontaneous moral actions. The teacher is no longer just a source of information, they are designers of a moral ecosystem that utilizes positive reinforcement whether through social praise or internal spiritual satisfaction to solidify a student's integrity (Nadelson, 2006).

The integration of these theories also repositions the student as an active subject who interacts dynamically with a planned moral environment. The curriculum emerging from this synthesis is inherently practical and implementative, adopting the principle of learning by doing which is highly compatible with the methods outlined in Miskawaih's *Tahdhib al-Akhlaq* (Mizani Khairul Sya'ad, 2025). Education moves beyond the mere absorption of texts, focusing instead on sustained moral practices that can be socially measured through the consistency of student behavior.

Finally, while this integration provides high efficiency in behavioral shaping, the analysis identifies a critical need to prevent moral conduct from becoming purely mechanistic or robotic. The research verifies that Islamic ethical filters specifically the concepts of *niyyah* (sincere intention) and spirituality must serve as the bridge between behavioral conditioning and genuine character (Huda & Salem, 2022). By embedding these values, the resulting educational model produces individuals who possess automatic moral excellence while maintaining a profound depth of spiritual sincerity.

The Dialectics of Perennial Ethics and Modern Psychology: An Introductory Framework

The integration of Ibn Miskawaih's character education with behaviorist psychology within the context of Islamic Religious Education (IRE) represents more than a mere theoretical syncretism. Instead, it serves as a robust methodological response to the persistent stagnation of moral education, which frequently remains confined to the cognitive domain (Candra et al., 2021). In the classical Islamic tradition, Ibn Miskawaih established in *Tahdhib al-Akhlaq* that character (*akhlak*) is a stable state of the soul (*malakah*) that compels an individual to perform virtuous acts spontaneously (Ihwani et al., 2020). However, a significant challenge arises at the technical level: how can this *malakah* be instilled within a contemporary educational ecosystem that demands empirical measurability? In this regard, behaviorist instruments act as a technical bridge, actualizing Miskawaih's ethical vision into observable and evaluable actions.

The Logical Urgency of Integration: Vitalizing Doctrine and Spiritualizing Mechanism

Fundamentally, this integration possesses a dual urgency that is mutually reinforcing. First, it serves to vitalize Islamic ethical doctrine. A latent weakness in traditional moral pedagogy is its tendency to stall at the stage of transfer of knowledge, where students comprehend the definition of virtue but fail to internalize it in their daily conduct. Miskawaih's concept of *al-adah* (habituation) requires an operational apparatus to ensure that this habit formation is not sporadic but structured. Behaviorism provides the necessary tools through a stimulus-response framework, ensuring that such habituation is developed systematically (Juwaini Juwaini, Syamsul Rijal, Aminudin Basir Ahmad, Harjoni Desky, Moh Tamtowi, Mawardi Mawardi, 2025).

Secondly, this integration aims to provide a soul to the otherwise mechanistic behaviorist procedures. Behaviorism has historically faced criticism for its reductionist approach, which often treats human beings as mere biological machines reacting to environmental stimuli. By infusing Miskawaih's philosophy into the model, every conditioned behavior ceases to be a hollow movement (Rothman & Coyle, 2018). Instead, it is directed toward a noble ultimate objective: the attainment of *sa'adah* (true happiness) and the perfection of the soul (*kamal al-nafs*).

Phase of Initial Conditioning: Implementing Classical Conditioning in the *Tahdhib* Tradition



In practical application, this integration begins with an initial conditioning phase that adopts Ivan Pavlov's Classical Conditioning (Pavlov, n.d.). Here, the educator functions as an atmospheric designer, crafting environmental stimuli to trigger automatic moral responses. For instance, a school environment can be conditioned so that specific auditory cues are not merely time markers but serve as stimuli to initiate a culture of greeting, prayer, or communal cleanliness.

Philosophically, this aligns with the early stages of tahdhib al-akhlaq as proposed by Miskawaih, where learners are habituated to virtuous acts before they possess the rational maturity for complex ethical deliberation (Ulfah et al., 2024). A consistently structured environment fosters a form of muscle memory for the soul, allowing virtuous behavior to emerge as a natural response to the established ecosystem.

CONCLUSION

The synthesis of Ibn Miskawaih's classical ethical framework with the empirical rigor of behavioristic psychology offers a transformative paradigm for contemporary character education. This study concludes that the traditional stagnation in moral pedagogy often limited to cognitive transmission can be effectively addressed by adopting a methodological engine that bridges the gap between ethical theory and behavioral practice.

The integration reveals that Miskawaih's concept of malakah (a stable state of the soul) finds a functional equivalent in modern conditioned responses, where virtue is transformed from an abstract concept into an automatic, ingrained habit developed through systematic al-adah (habituation).

Furthermore, this research establishes that the role of the educator must evolve into that of an environmental architect. By utilizing the principles of classical and operant conditioning alongside Drive Reduction theory, teachers can design moral ecosystems that provide structured stimuli and meaningful reinforcement. However, the study emphasizes a critical caveat: to avoid the pitfall of mechanistic or robotic behavior, this behaviorist approach must be anchored in the Islamic ethical filters of niyyah (intention) and spirituality. Ultimately, this integrated model aims to produce a generation of students who exhibit empirical moral consistency and social measurability while maintaining the profound spiritual sincerity (ikhlas) essential to the Islamic tradition.

REFERENCES

- Bentley, W. (2023). *Happiness and Being Human: The Tension between Immanence and Transcendence in Religion / Spirituality*.
- Candra, H., Putra, P. H., & Erniyati, Y. (2021). *A Habituation Method in Education Character: an Ibn Miskawaih Thought*. 3190, 245–262.
- Catherine A. Darnell, L. Gulliford, K. Kristjánsson, P. P. (n.d.). *Phronesis and the Knowledge-Action Gap in Moral Psychology and Moral Education: A New Synthesis?* 1–54.
- Clark L. Hull. (n.d.). *Principles of Behavior: An Introduction to Behavior Theory*. (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1943).
- Cleland, J. A. (2017). *The qualitative orientation in medical education research Ontology and epistemology*. 61–71.
- Huda, M., & Salem, S. (2022). *Understanding Human Behavior Development with Spirituality: Critical Insights into Moral Flourishing*. 26(2), 238–268.
- Ihwani, A., Noupal, M., & Sandi, A. (2020). *PEMIKIRAN PENDIDIKAN KARAKTER IBN MISKAWAIH*. 1(2), 232–247.
- Juwaini Juwaini, Syamsul Rijal, Aminudin Basir Ahmad, Harjoni Desky, Moh Tamtowi, Mawardi



- Mawardi, C. S. S. (2025). *The Indonesian Journal of the Social Sciences Ibn Miskawaih 's Ethical Philosophy and Its Relevance to Moral Education in Indonesian Secondary Schools*. 13(1).
- Miskawaih, I. (n.d.). *Tahdzibul Akhlaq wa Tathhirul A'roq*. (Beirut: American University of Beirut, 1966).
- Mizani Khairul Sya'ad, T. A.-A. (2025). *Integration of Ibnu Miskawaih's Character Education and Albert Bandura's Social Learning Theory*. 16(1), 50–64.
- Muttaqin, M. I. (2023). *Facing The Challenges of Youth Moral Degradation In The Digital Age*. 4, 54–70.
- Nadelson, S. (2006). *The Role of the Environment in Student Ethical Behavior*. 1639. <https://doi.org/10.2202/1940-1639.1195>
- Naja, S. (2025). *Konsep Jiwa dalam Psikologi Ibnu Miskawaih sebagai Dasar Pendidikan Moral Remaja*. 1(2), 499–511.
- Onwuegbuzie, A. J. (2016). *Mapping Miles and Huberman 's Within-Case and Cross-Case Analysis Methods onto the Literature Review Process*. 2(1), 265–288. <https://doi.org/10.5296/jei.v2i1.9217>
- Pavlov, I. P. (n.d.). *CONDITIONED REFLEXES: AN INVESTIGATION OF THE PHYSIOLOGICAL ACTIVITY OF THE CEREBRAL CORTEX (1927)*. Translated by G. V. Anrep (1927). <https://psychclassics.yorku.ca/Pavlov/>
- Rothman, A., & Coyle, A. (2018). Toward a Framework for Islamic Psychology and Psychotherapy : An Islamic Model of the Soul. *Journal of Religion and Health*, 57(5), 1731–1744. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10943-018-0651-x>
- Sari, T. K., & Rahmani, P. H. (2024). *The Role of Positive Reinforcement on Students in English Language Learning : A Skinnerian behaviorist*. 3(February), 1–5.
- Skinner, B. F. (n.d.). *Science and Human Behavior: Extended Edition*. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1971). <https://www.bfskinner.org/product/science-and-human-behavior-pdf/>
- Ulfah, Y. F., Rochmawan, A. E., & Alhasbi, F. (2024). *ISLAMIC ETHICS EDUCATION CONCEPT FOR GEN Z : IBN MISKAWAYH ' S VIEW ON PHILOSOPHY*. 25(1), 211–222.

