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From Purification to Resilience: The Qur'anic Concept of *Tazkiyat al-Nafs* and Its Relevance to Generation Z Mental Challenges in Islamic Boarding Schools

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Abstract

Generation Z students in Islamic boarding schools (pesantren) increasingly face complex mental challenges such as anxiety, emotional instability, and a sense of meaninglessness. These issues are intensified by academic pressures, digital culture, and identity transitions. Addressing such problems requires a Qur'anic framework that provides both spiritual guidance and practical solutions. This study aims to explore the Qur'anic concept of *Tazkiyat al-Nafs* as a spiritual strategy to overcome mental challenges among Generation Z in pesantren, and to evaluate its relevance in fostering resilience, self-discipline, and stable spirituality. Employing Abdul Hayy al-Farmawi's thematic exegesis (Tafsir

Maudhu'i), this research adopts a qualitative case study design at Ma'had Daarul Qur'an Langsa. Data were collected through textual analysis of Qur'anic verses related to purification, struggle (mujahadah), patience, gratitude, sincerity, and piety, complemented by in-depth interviews and direct observation of students and teachers. Data analysis involved reduction, categorization, and thematic interpretation. Findings reveal that Qur'anic principles effectively address Gen-Z mental challenges. Tazkiyat al-Nafs purifies the soul from negative traits; Mujahadah cultivates discipline; patience and gratitude strengthen resilience; while sincerity and piety establish stable spirituality. These practices reduce anxiety, enhance emotional regulation, and restore meaning in students' lives. The Qur'anic concept of Tazkiyat al-Nafs is relevant and applicable to the mental challenges of Generation Z in pesantren. Integrating thematic exegesis into pesantren education is recommended as a holistic approach to reinforce students' mental and spiritual well-being.

Keywords: Tazkiyatun Nafs, Thematic Qur'anic Exegesis, Generation Z, Pesantren, Mental Health

Abstrak

Generasi Z yang menempuh pendidikan di pesantren menghadapi tantangan mental yang semakin kompleks, seperti kecemasan, instabilitas emosi, dan krisis makna akibat tekanan akademik, pengaruh budaya digital, serta transisi identitas. Kondisi ini menuntut pendekatan Qur'ani yang mampu memberikan solusi spiritual sekaligus praktis untuk memperkuat kesejahteraan mental santri. Penelitian ini bertujuan mengeksplorasi konsep Qur'ani Tazkiyat al-Nafs sebagai strategi spiritual dalam mengatasi problem mental Generasi Z di pesantren, serta menilai relevansinya terhadap pembentukan resiliensi, disiplin diri, dan stabilitas spiritual. Penelitian menggunakan pendekatan tafsir tematik (Tafsir Maudhu'i) Abdul Hayy al-Farmawi dengan desain kualitatif studi kasus di Ma'had Daarul Qur'an Langsa. Data dikumpulkan melalui analisis ayat-ayat Qur'an terkait tazkiyah, mujahadah, sabar, syukur, ikhlas, dan taqwa, serta wawancara mendalam dan observasi langsung terhadap santri dan ustadz. Analisis dilakukan dengan teknik reduksi, kategorisasi, dan interpretasi tematik. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa konsep Qur'ani mampu menjadi solusi atas problem mental Gen-Z. Tazkiyat al-Nafs berfungsi sebagai purifikasi jiwa dari sifat negatif; Mujahadah melatih disiplin diri; sabar dan syukur menjadi strategi resiliensi; serta ikhlas dan taqwa membentuk fondasi spiritualitas yang stabil. Praktik ini terbukti menurunkan kecemasan, meningkatkan kontrol emosi, dan memperkuat rasa makna hidup santri. Konsep Qur'ani Tazkiyat al-Nafs relevan dan aplikatif dalam menjawab tantangan mental Generasi Z di pesantren. Integrasi tafsir tematik dengan pendidikan pesantren direkomendasikan sebagai pendekatan holistik untuk memperkuat kesejahteraan mental dan spiritual santri.

Kata kunci: Tazkiyatun Nafs, Tafsir Tematik, Gen-Z, Pesantren, Kesehatan Mental

Introduction

The phenomenon of Generation Z (Gen-Z) in the digital era demonstrates a complex mental landscape, including emotional instability, low resilience to pressure, a tendency toward anxiety, and a shallow search for life's meaning. These conditions are increasingly visible within pesantren (Islamic boarding schools), where students are required to adapt to strict discipline, religious curricula, and tightly regulated social norms. Such challenges call for solutions grounded in Qur'anic values that are capable of harmonizing modern psychological needs with the spiritual foundations of Islam.

The Qur'an, as the guiding framework of Muslim life, emphasizes balance between physical, intellectual, and spiritual dimensions. The concept of tazkiyatun nafs (purification of the soul) becomes a crucial foundation for maintaining this harmony (Hasmiansyah et al., 2021; Heryandi & Surur, 2023). Through tazkiyah, individuals are guided to cleanse themselves of blameworthy traits while cultivating noble qualities such as sincerity (ikhlas), patience, and piety (taqwa). This transformative process is understood as a spiritual journey toward the perfection of the soul, progressing from an-nafs al-ammarah bi al-sū' (the soul inclined to evil), to an-nafs al-lawwāmah (the self-reproaching soul), and ultimately reaching an-nafs al-muṭma'innah (the tranquil soul) (QS al-Shams: 7–10; QS al-A'la: 14–15). Normatively, tazkiyah aims to lead human beings toward Allah's pleasure, shaping individuals of piety and resilience.

Although this ideal condition faces serious challenges in the lived reality of Generation Z, including those pursuing education in pesantren. Growing up amid digital globalization, Gen-Z is marked by high digital literacy, rapid information access, and identity construction through virtual spaces (IDN Research Institute, 2024). While creative and adaptive, they are also prone to anxiety, depression, and identity confusion. These multidimensional challenges are likewise experienced by pesantren students, who, despite living in religious environments, remain connected to global digital currents.

Previous studies have examined tazkiyatun nafs from classical and educational perspectives, such as Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah, al-Ghazali, and Quraish Shihab, highlighting its relevance to moral education, character formation, and mental health (Hasmiansyah et al., 2021; Heryandi & Surur, 2023). More recent works affirm its role in spiritual therapy and mental well-being. Yet, these studies remain largely normative or

theoretical, focusing on moral ideals or general educational implications (Bahari & Rodiyah, 2022; Musrifah, 2019). Despite valuable contributions, there is a lack of interdisciplinary studies that explicitly connect thematic Qur'anic exegesis (Tafsir Maudhu'i) with the lived mental challenges of Generation Z in pesantren. Existing research has not sufficiently integrated Qur'anic textual analysis with empirical field data to explore how Qur'anic principles of purification, struggle, patience, gratitude, sincerity, and piety can be applied as practical strategies for strengthening mental resilience among Gen-Z students.

Conversely, Generation Z in pesantren faces unique challenges, including exposure to digital culture, academic pressure, and the dynamics of identity formation. These factors often manifest in mental issues such as anxiety, spiritual burnout, and inconsistency in religious discipline. Without contextualized Qur'anic guidance, pesantren education risks being perceived as rigid and disconnected from the psychological realities of its students. Therefore, this study seeks to fill that gap by exploring the Qur'anic concept of *tazkiyatun nafs* encompassing mujāhadah, patience, gratitude, sincerity, and piety as a practical and contextual solution for strengthening the mental and spiritual resilience of Gen-Z students in pesantren.

Theories

This study employs Abd al-Hayy al-Farmawi's *tafsir maudhu'i* (thematic interpretation) approach as the primary theoretical framework for examining the Qur'anic concept of *tazkiyatun nafs* and its relevance to the mentality problems of Generation Z in pesantren life. According to al-Farmawi, thematic interpretation is a method of Qur'anic exegesis that seeks to collect all verses related to a particular theme, analyze them comprehensively, and formulate an integrated understanding of the Qur'anic worldview concerning that issue (Al-Farmawi, 2021). Through this method, the Qur'an is understood not merely through isolated verses, but through a holistic framework that emphasizes the unity and coherence of Qur'anic teachings.

Al-Farmawi explains that the *maudhu'i* interpretation method consists of several systematic stages, including determining the theme of discussion, gathering all relevant verses, arranging the verses according to their chronology and contextual relationship,

examining *asbab al-nuzul* (occasions of revelation), analyzing the correlation among verses (*munasabah*), and integrating interpretations from classical and contemporary scholars before drawing comprehensive conclusions (Aisyah, 2024). This approach enables researchers to contextualize Qur'anic teachings within contemporary social realities while maintaining the textual authenticity and theological foundations of the Qur'an. Consequently, thematic interpretation is considered highly relevant for addressing modern social and psychological issues, including the spiritual and mental challenges experienced by Generation Z.

Within the context of this study, the thematic interpretation approach is applied to analyze verses concerning *tazkiyatun nafs*, which refers to the process of purifying the soul from negative traits and cultivating moral and spiritual excellence. The Qur'an repeatedly emphasizes the importance of spiritual purification as the foundation of human success, as reflected in verses such as QS. Al-Syams [91]: 9–10, which states that successful individuals are those who purify their souls, while failure belongs to those who corrupt them. Other verses, including QS. Al-A'la [87]: 14–15 and QS. An-Nazi'at [79]: 40–41, further illustrate that self-control, remembrance of God, and restraint from destructive desires are central aspects of spiritual well-being (Firmansyah & Suryana, 2022). Through al-Farmawi's thematic method, these verses are interpreted collectively to reveal a comprehensive Qur'anic perspective on psychological balance, moral discipline, and spiritual resilience.

The relevance of this framework becomes increasingly significant in understanding the condition of Generation Z, particularly within pesantren environments. Generation Z is widely recognized as a digital-native generation that grows amid rapid technological advancement, social media exposure, information overload, emotional instability, and identity confusion (Research Center for Generation Studies, 2023). These conditions often contribute to anxiety, declining emotional resilience, lack of self-discipline, and weakening spiritual awareness among young people. In pesantren life, such challenges may influence students' learning motivation, social interaction, and moral behavior. Therefore, the concept of *tazkiyatun nafs* is not only understood as an individual spiritual practice but also as a transformative educational framework capable of strengthening mental resilience and character formation among santri.

Furthermore, al-Farmawi's *maudhu'i* interpretation approach allows this study to bridge classical Islamic scholarship with contemporary psychological and social realities. By analyzing Qur'anic verses thematically, *tazkiyatun nafs* can be understood as a holistic process involving emotional control, spiritual awareness, ethical behavior, and psychological maturity. Thus, the Qur'anic concept of soul purification becomes highly relevant in responding to the mentality problems of Generation Z and contributes to the development of spiritually grounded character education within pesantren institutions.

Various previous studies have discussed the concept of Tazkiyatun Nafs from the perspectives of Sufism and classical Qur'anic exegesis. Al-Ghazali, for example, emphasizes three stages of soul purification: *takhallī* (emptying oneself of blameworthy traits), *taḥallī* (adorning oneself with virtuous qualities), and *tajallī* (attaining spiritual illumination) (Afna, 2023; Munir, 2022). Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah underscores the importance of *mujāhadah* earnest struggle against the ego and base desires as the path toward closeness to Allah SWT (Firmansyah & Suryana, 2022). Meanwhile, contemporary exegetes such as Hamka and Quraish Shihab highlight the relevance of *tazkiyah* in modern life, particularly as a form of spiritual therapy for the mental health of Muslims (Dalimunthe, 2015). However, most of these studies still focus primarily on normative, theological, or purely spiritual dimensions, with limited direct engagement with the psychological challenges faced by Generation Z, especially within pesantren contexts (Firmansyah, 2022). On the other hand, studies on Generation Z are largely conducted by psychologists or sociologists, emphasizing this generation's characteristics as digital natives who are pragmatic yet highly vulnerable to anxiety and burnout (Research, 2023).

The transformative process of Tazkiyatun Nafs unfolds through several stages. First, *tazkiyah* itself refers to the purification of the inner self so that one's ultimate aim is to draw closer to Allah through various spiritual disciplines that must be undertaken (Hasmiansyah et al., 2021). Second, *mujāhadah* denotes earnest striving against base desires and personal weaknesses as a prerequisite for spiritual transformation (Heryandi & Surur, 2023; Qisom, 2023). Third, *shukr* (gratitude) entails a profound awareness of Allah's blessings that encourages a positive outlook and protects individuals from despair (Priyatna, 2017). Fourth, *ikhlaṣ* (sincerity) signifies the purification of intention and action solely for Allah, thereby shielding the individual from ostentation (*riyā'*) and

worldly motives (Priyatna, 2017). Finally, taqwā represents the culmination of the entire purification process: a comprehensive consciousness of Allah's presence in every aspect of life, guiding individuals consistently toward goodness (Priyatna, 2017). Together, Tazkiyatun Nafs and its principal pillars constitute a solid spiritual foundation for shaping individuals of integrity, resilience, and readiness to confront the challenges of life.

The primary foundation of the concept of *Tazkiyatun Nafs* is QS. Asy-Shams, verses 7–10, as follows:

“By the soul and the One who proportioned it, and inspired it with its wickedness and its righteousness. Indeed, successful is the one who purifies it, and indeed, failed is the one who corrupts it.”(QS. Asy-Shams, verses 7–10) QS.

Asy-Shams verses 7–10 serve as the primary foundation of the concept of *tazkiyatun nafs* in the Qur'an. The Qur'an then delivers a clear and emphatic assertion: true success is attained only by those who purify their souls through self-discipline, *mujāhadah* (spiritual struggle), and moral refinement; conversely, profound loss befalls those who allow their souls to be corrupted by reprehensible traits (Mirza, 2021). In QS. Al-A'la (87), verses 14–15:

“Indeed, successful is the one who purifies himself, and remembers the name of his Lord and then performs prayer.”(QS. Al-A'la [87]: 14–15).

QS. Al-A'la (87): 14–15 reinforces the concept of *tazkiyatun nafs* by affirming that true success is attained only by those who purify themselves through faith and righteous deeds. The purification of the soul in this verse does not stop at the inner, spiritual dimension alone, but is manifested in concrete acts of worship, namely remembering Allah (*dhikrullah*) and establishing prayer. This verse emphasizes the close interconnection between purity of heart, strength of faith, and consistency in worship as the primary means of attaining inner tranquility. Thus, *tazkiyatun nafs* is not merely a process of avoiding blameworthy traits, but also an active effort to build a strong spiritual relationship with Allah SWT.

Method

This study employs a qualitative case study design to explore the Qur'anic concept of tazkiyat al-nafs (Iphofen & Tolich, 2019; Johnson & Stake, 1996), and its relevance to

the mental challenges faced by Generation Z students in pesantren (Mahmud Fauzi, 2022). The qualitative approach was chosen because it allows for an in-depth exploration of lived experiences, contextual meanings, and spiritual practices that cannot be adequately captured through quantitative measures. The case study design provides a focused lens on one pesantren, Ma'had Daarul Qur'an Langsa, while enabling the integration of textual Qur'anic analysis with empirical field data.

Thematic Qur'anic Exegesis (Tafsir Maudhu'i)

The primary methodological framework is Abdul Hayy al-Farmawi's Tafsir Maudhu'i (thematic exegesis). This approach involves collecting, categorizing, and interpreting Qur'anic verses related to a specific theme, in this case, tazkiyat al-nafs and its associated concepts such as mujāhadah, patience (ṣabr), gratitude (shukr), sincerity (ikhlāṣ), and piety (taqwā). The process includes:

1. Identifying relevant verses across different surahs.
2. Analyzing linguistic and exegetical dimensions of these verses using classical tafsir sources (e.g., Ibn Kathir, al-Ghazali, Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah) and contemporary works (e.g., Quraish Shihab).
3. Synthesizing thematic connections to construct a coherent Qur'anic framework of soul purification and resilience.

This exegetical foundation provides the normative basis for interpreting the lived experiences of Gen-Z students in pesantren.

Research Site and Participants

The field component was conducted at Ma'had Daarul Qur'an Langsa, a pesantren known for its emphasis on Qur'anic memorization, discipline, and character formation. The institution was selected purposively because it represents a typical pesantren environment where Gen-Z students navigate both traditional religious education and modern digital influences. The Participants included:

1. Santri (students): 20 individuals aged 15–22, representing diverse backgrounds within Generation Z.
2. Ustadz/teachers: 5 educators responsible for Qur'anic instruction and student guidance.
3. Pesantren administrators: 2 individuals involved in policy and student welfare.

Purposive sampling ensured that participants were directly involved in the pesantren's educational and spiritual practices, and that they could provide insights into both challenges and coping strategies.

Data Collection Techniques

Data collection combined textual analysis and fieldwork methods:

1. Textual Analysis: Qur'anic verses related to tazkiyat al-nafs were systematically identified and analyzed. Classical and contemporary tafsir sources were consulted to contextualize meanings and interpretations.
2. In-depth Interviews: Semi-structured interviews were conducted with santri, ustadz, and administrators. Questions focused on students' mental challenges, coping mechanisms, and perceptions of Qur'anic guidance. Interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed, and coded thematically.
3. Direct Observation: The researcher observed daily activities, including Qur'anic recitation, prayer routines, study sessions, and informal interactions. Observations provided contextual understanding of how Qur'anic practices are integrated into students' lives.
4. Document Review: Institutional documents such as curricula, student regulations, and spiritual training programs were examined to understand the pesantren's educational framework.

Data Analysis

Data analysis followed a thematic interpretive approach. The raw data from interviews and observations were transcribed and reduced to meaningful units. The codes

were developed around key themes such as anxiety, resilience, discipline, and spirituality. The field data were interpreted in light of Qur'anic verses and tafsir, creating a dialogue between textual norms and lived realities. The findings were cross-validated through multiple sources, interviews, observations, documents, and Qur'anic texts to ensure credibility and reliability. Ethical protocols were strictly observed. Participants provided informed consent, and confidentiality was maintained by anonymizing names and personal details. The pesantren administration approved the research, ensuring alignment with institutional values. Reflexivity was also practiced, with the researcher acknowledging personal biases and maintaining transparency in interpretation.

Result and Discussion

Thematic Tafsir (Tafsir Maudhu'i) Approach

In contemporary developments, the concept of *tazkiyatun nafs* is discussed through a thematic approach (*tafsir maudhu'i*) that is more systematic. In this study, the author employs the Thematic Tafsir method of Abdul Hay al-Farmawi through the following steps:

1. Determining the Problem: Identifying the topic or theme to be discussed.
2. Collecting Verses: Gathering Qur'anic verses related to the topic, whether Makkiyyah or Madaniyyah.
3. Chronology and Asbāb al-Nuzūl: Arranging the verses according to the chronology of revelation, accompanied by knowledge of their occasions of revelation.
4. Correlation (Munāsabah): Understanding the correlation (relationship) of the verses within their respective surahs.
5. Framework of Discussion: Constructing a comprehensive outline.
6. Supplementing with Hadith and Principles: Completing the discussion with Prophetic hadith and principles of tafsir when necessary.

7. Analysis and Conclusion: Examining the verses thoroughly and comprehensively, and drawing conclusions that answer the research problem.

Tafsir maudhu'i is a method of Qur'anic interpretation that takes a specific theme as its central axis by compiling all Qur'anic verses related to that theme and then analyzing them comprehensively in order to produce a holistic conclusion. In this research, this approach is chosen because it is considered the most appropriate for addressing contemporary issues namely, the mentality of Generation Z by referring directly to integrated divine solutions found in the Qur'an.

This study occupies a unique position among existing strands of research. First, it presents a systematic thematic tafsir analysis of the verses on *tazkiyatun nafs*, rather than merely discussing classical Sufi dimensions. Second, it connects the Qur'anic conceptual framework with the empirical reality of Generation Z students in Islamic boarding schools through a qualitative case study approach. This makes the research both distinctive and complementary to previous literature, not only expanding the academic discourse on thematic tafsir but also offering practical relevance in strengthening the mental and spiritual resilience of Generation Z in pesantren.

Tazkiyah in the Qur'an

In the Al-Qur'an, the term tazkiyah is mentioned repeatedly a total of 59 times across 29 surahs 21 occurrences in the form of verbs (fi'l) and 38 in the form of nouns (ism). The word zakā is one of the verbal transformations derived from the root of tazkiyah. Morphologically, tazkiyah is a maṣdar (verbal noun) of the verb sequence zakkā–yuzakkī–tazkiyatan, which conveys the meaning of purification or purification of the soul (Ibn Manẓūr, n.d., vol. 19, p. 77). The trilateral simple past verb (fi'l māḍī sulāthī mujarrad) derived from the same root is zakā–yazkū–zakā'an.

In addition to the term zakā, which denotes purification, there are other Qur'anic terms with closely related meanings, such as ṭahara, qadusa, and sabaha. The semantic proximity among these terms has the potential to cause ambiguity in interpretation if not examined through careful and in-depth analysis.

The selection of the term zakā as a transformation of tazkiyah is closely related to contemporary social phenomena. In the modern era, many individuals experience

psychological and spiritual crises as negative consequences of modernity. Moreover, such crises do not only affect worldly life but also have implications for one's life in the hereafter. This condition can be addressed if human beings are willing to return to authentic religious teachings, one of which is the practice of tazkiyah. The doctrine of tazkiyah has been strongly emphasized by scholars and the pious predecessors (salaf al-ṣāliḥ), particularly among those engaged in the discipline of Sufism. Allah says in Q.S. Al-A'la (87), verses 14–15: Translation: “*Indeed, successful is the one who purifies himself, and remembers the name of his Lord and prays.*” Dr. M. Quraish Shihab, in his commentary Tafsir al-Mishbah, explains that these verses describe the condition of those who turn away from God's reminder, while at the same time portraying a good and blessed end for those who welcome the reminder of Allah and His Messenger. Allah declares that truly successful is the one who earnestly strives to purify himself, consistently remembers his Lord, both inwardly in the heart and outwardly with the tongue and then establishes prayer.

These verses depict that those who benefit from Allah's reminder continually feel His presence within their souls, recognize the majesty and perfection of His attributes, and allow this awareness to be reflected in their attitudes and behavior. Such awareness motivates them to establish a relationship with Allah through supplication, prayer, and other forms of worship this is what is meant by *fa ṣallā*. Linguistically, *ṣalāh* means supplication, signifying a profound awareness of human dependence on Allah and the conviction that only Allah is capable of fulfilling all needs (Shihab, 2002). Meanwhile, Buya Hamka, in his commentary Tafsir al-Azhar, explains that verse 14 emphasizes that true success in life is attained by those who strive to cleanse and purify themselves. This purification includes efforts to distance oneself from all forms of disobedience and sin whether sins related to one's relationship with Allah, such as associating partners with Him, or sins related to fellow human beings, such as oppression and the violation of others' rights. Sins against oneself are also included, such as harboring resentment, envy, and malice. When a person is able to control his desires, he becomes free from various forms of impurity, particularly the impurity of the soul.

As a correction to attitudes of self-purification and unilateral claims of piety, God then revealed QS. An-Najm [53]: 32, which clearly forbids human beings from declaring themselves pure. This verse stresses that only God knows who among His servants is truly

righteous, because His knowledge encompasses all stages of human creation from earth to embryo in the mother's womb. Thus, the verse serves as a warning for humans to remain humble, not to claim purity or salvation for themselves, and to entrust the ultimate judgment of righteousness entirely to Allah SWT (Al-Wāhidī, 1991). M. Quraish Shihab, in his Tafsir al-Mishbah, explains that after the previous verse promises the best reward for those who do good, this verse describes some of their characteristics. They are people who seriously avoid major sins namely, sins for which God and His Messenger have explicitly mentioned punishments, or sins that carry prescribed worldly penalties, such as theft and similar crimes. They also avoid immoral acts that are condemned by sound human nature and reason. As for minor mistakes that they may occasionally commit, these remain within tolerable limits as long as they are not committed deliberately or with an attitude of trivialization.

Piety does not mean rejecting biological needs, but controlling them in accordance with the guidance of the Sharia. Buya Hamka also cites various scholarly opinions regarding the meaning of al-lamam. Some scholars interpret it as minor sins committed unintentionally, while others view it as sins that have already occurred but are immediately regretted and followed by sincere repentance. Buya Hamka leans toward the latter view, because humans often lose self-control when they fall into sin due to the pull of desire. Nevertheless, as long as such acts are accompanied by remorse and sincere repentance, God continues to open the vast door of His forgiveness. Thus, this verse teaches a balance between acknowledging human weakness and the obligation to guard oneself from sinful acts.

Mujāhadah in the Qur'an

The next stage is mujāhadah and self-transformation. The term *mujāhadah* derives from the root *jahada-yujāhidu-jihādan wa mujāhadatan*, which is the verbal noun (*maṣḍar*) of the past verb (*fi'il māḍī*) *jahada*. In the Qur'an, words derived from the root *jihad* appear twelve times in various forms, among them in QS. Āli 'Imrān [3]: 142; QS. an-Nisā' [4]: 95; QS. at-Taubah [9]: 81, 86, and 88; QS. al-Ḥajj [22]: 78; QS. al-'Ankabūt [29]: 6 and 69; QS. al-Ḥujurāt [49]: 15; QS. aṣ-Ṣaff [61]: 11; QS. at-Taubah [9]: 41; and QS. al-Furqān [25]: 52. Etymologically, *mujāhadah* means mobilizing all one's capacity and earnest effort to perform good deeds and to seek the pleasure of Allah. In

other explanations, the term is also understood as seriousness in walking the path of Allah and, in certain contexts, as struggle or warfare. Fundamentally, however, *mujāhadah* always refers to continuous effort without despair one's maximum endeavor to do good as a means of drawing closer to Allah SWT. Rāghib al-Aṣḥānī, in *al-Mufradāt fī Gharīb al-Qur'ān*, explains that *mujāhadah* means exerting all the potential one possesses to confront and resist an enemy. He classifies *jihad* into three forms: (1) striving against an external enemy, (2) striving against the temptations of Satan, and (3) striving against one's own lower desires (*hawā al-nafs*). Thus, *mujāhadah* is not limited to physical struggle, but also encompasses spiritual and moral struggle in the life of a believer. Allah says in QS. al-'Ankabūt [29]: 69: Translation: "And those who strive for Us—We will surely guide them to Our paths. And indeed, Allah is with the doers of good." In *Tafsir al-Mishbah*, Dr. M. Quraish Shihab explains that after condemning the polytheists and warning them of Hell's punishment, this verse turns to praising the believers and promising them ease and happiness. The verse underscores that those who are tested yet refuse to strive (*jihad* and *mujāhadah*), instead following their base desires and becoming absorbed in worldly pleasures, will face humiliation and punishment.

As explained earlier in the interpretation of Sūrat al-Fātiḥah, when the word *hidāyah* (guidance) in the Qur'an appears without the preposition *ilā*, it conveys the meaning of being granted the ability to carry out the guidance. In other words, the guidance intended here is *hidāyah al-tawfīq* guidance that actually leads a person to the goal, not merely pointing out the direction. This is precisely the meaning intended in this verse. The phrase *finā* consists of *fī* ("in/within," implying a container) and the pronoun *nā* referring to Allah SWT. The use of *fī* suggests that the striving undertaken is truly for Allah, as though the effort is placed within the "container" of His care. Thus, the deed is preserved and will bear fruit at the time Allah has determined. The word *subul* is the plural of *sabīl*. In the Qur'an, *sabīl* is often translated as "path," but it differs from *ṣirāṭ*. *Ṣirāṭ* denotes a broad, straight path, always used in the singular and associated with truth, Allah, or His obedient servants. *Sabīl*, however, can be singular or plural and may be attributed to Allah and the righteous, but also to Satan, tyranny, or sinners. This indicates that *ṣirāṭ* is one and always true, whereas *sabīl* may be many some true, others deviant.

All true *subul* ultimately converge upon *aṣ-Ṣirāṭ al-Mustaqīm*. As affirmed in QS. al-Mā'idah [5]: 16, Allah guides those who follow His pleasure through paths of peace,

eventually leading them to the straight path. Hence, *sabīl* refers to the more detailed paths of goodness, while *ṣirāṭ* is the ultimate goal uniting them all. Worship, obedience, and religion as a whole are called *aṣ-Ṣirāṭ al-Mustaqīm*, whereas specific righteous deeds such as charity, striving, pilgrimage, fasting, and seeking knowledge are parts of *sabīlillāh*. Whoever strives sincerely in *mujāhadah*, Allah will guide them through these various *subul*, which ultimately lead to *aṣ-Ṣirāṭ al-Mustaqīm*. The closing of this sūrah harmonizes with its opening, which affirms the inevitability of trials in life and the necessity of striving to face them. Such striving, in essence, benefits the doer himself. The proof is Allah's promise of guidance to paths of peace and happiness and His companionship with those who do good (Shihab, 2002). In *Tafsir al-Azhar*, Buya Hamka explains that Allah ultimately provides guidance and direction to His Messenger and to everyone who devotes their entire being to walking the Prophet's path. His statement, "And those who strive for Us We will surely guide them to Our paths" (QS. al-'Ankabūt [29]: 69), is Allah's guarantee to anyone who sincerely prepares himself to walk in His way. Such people are no longer plagued by doubt or hesitation; their goal is one Allah. Anything that obstructs the journey toward Him is left behind; their resolve becomes firm, and that certainty propels them forward. At the verse's conclusion, Allah again emphasizes that this guidance is accompanied by His companionship: "And indeed, Allah is surely with the doers of good." This shows the close connection between the two parts of the verse. First, every deed and effort must be grounded in sincerity for Allah; without sincerity, the spirit of striving cannot grow.

Fudhail ibn 'Iyād distinguished between *ikhhlās* and *ihsān*: *ikhhlās* is rectifying one's intention from the outset so that all deeds are performed solely for Allah and accompanied by striving; *ihsān* is perfecting those deeds so they conform to the Sunnah of the Prophet ﷺ. Sincerity without struggle is futile, just as deeds that are sincere and earnest but do not follow the Sunnah are incomplete. When faith, sincerity, and *ihsān* unite within a believer, the path that was once dark is illuminated by Allah. The essence of this closing verse of Sūrat al-'Ankabūt is vividly embodied in the life of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ. Although he was not formally educated in the conventional sense and was known as *ummī*, this verse was realized perfectly in his life. He overcame immense obstacles and hardships, ultimately building a great community and conveying Allah's message fully and successfully (Hamka, 1988).

Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb then reproached them for raising their voices near the pulpit of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ, especially on a Friday. After the prayer ended, the matter was conveyed to the Prophet ﷺ for clarification. Shortly thereafter, Allah, Exalted and Glorified, revealed His saying: “Do you make the providing of water to the pilgrims and the maintenance of the Sacred Mosque equal to believing in Allah and the Last Day and striving in the way of Allah? They are not equal in the sight of Allah, and Allah does not guide the wrongdoing people.” (Qur’an, at-Tawbah [9]: 19) This report was also narrated by Imam Muslim through the chain of Hasan ibn ‘Alī al-Ḥalwānī from Abū Tābah. In another narration, Ibn ‘Abbās explained that this verse was revealed concerning the statement of al-‘Abbās ibn ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib. When he was taken captive at the Battle of Badr, he said that although he had not migrated or participated in jihad, he had maintained the Sacred Mosque and provided water to the pilgrims. Thus, the verse was revealed to clarify that such deeds cannot be equated with faith in Allah and the Last Day accompanied by striving in His path. Thus, this verse emphasizes that the nobility of deeds in Islam is not measured merely by ritual or service-related acts, but by firm faith in Allah and the Last Day, proven through sincere striving in His cause. Allah does not equate the status of such people, and He does not grant guidance to those who act unjustly. (Al-Wāḥidī, 1991)

The word *siqāyah*, linguistically, has three meanings. First, it refers to a place where water is available and where people gather to draw water. Second, it means a vessel or container for drinking, such as a cup or glass. Third, it denotes the occupation or duty of providing water to others. It is this third meaning that is intended in this verse. The term refers to a tradition of the Quraysh tribe which, under the leadership and responsibility of al-‘Abbās, involved providing drinks for pilgrims specifically grape juice mixed with water. After the advent of Islam, this duty was approved by the Prophet ﷺ and continued to be carried out by al-‘Abbās.

According to Quraish Shihab, this explanation highlights that Islam preserved beneficial social services, while purifying them from elements of shirk and transforming them into acts grounded in faith and sincerity. Meanwhile, according to Tafsir Al-Azhar by Buya Hamka, verse 19 of Surah at-Tawbah is presented in the form of *istifhām inkārī* (a rhetorical question intended as a denial). This style is used to refute and firmly assert that the two matters being compared are not equal. Allah questions the assumption that

those who provide drinking water to pilgrims and maintain the Sacred Mosque can be equated with those who truly believe in Allah and the Last Day and strive in the path of Allah. Through this rhetorical form, Allah emphasizes that the two groups are by no means equal in His sight. Even before the question is answered, Allah Himself provides the answer by affirming that they are not the same before Him. Several reports explain the circumstances of the revelation of this verse. According to Ibn 'Abbās, the verse is related to events following the Battle of Badr, when al-'Abbās then a captive claimed that although the Muslims had preceded others in migration and jihad, the Quraysh had maintained the Sacred Mosque, provided water for pilgrims, and ransomed captives. This claim was corrected by the revelation of this verse. Therefore, maintaining the Sacred Mosque and providing water to pilgrims attain true nobility only when they are founded upon sincere faith in Allah and the Last Day and manifested through obedience such as prayer, almsgiving, and firm monotheism.

Gratitude (Shukr) in the Qur'an

The term *shukūr* is one of the important concepts in the Qur'an, and its usage is very broad and varied. This word appears repeatedly in different forms and contexts throughout the verses, indicating the depth of its meaning and its significance in Islamic teachings. Overall, the word *shukūr* and its derivatives occur 75 times, spread across 69 verses in 37 chapters of the Qur'an. This relatively high frequency underscores that gratitude occupies a central position in shaping the spiritual attitude and ethical character of a believer. In the Qur'an, the word *shukūr* appears in 18 different derivative forms, reflecting the diversity of subjects, times, and human conditions in expressing gratitude. These forms include variations as verbs, nouns, and adjectives—whether indicating the act of being grateful, commands to give thanks, or the characteristics of those who are grateful. Among them are verb forms such as *shakara*, *asykuru*, *tasykurū*, *tasykurūn*, *yasykuru*, and *yasykurūn*; forms of command and affirmation such as *asykur* and *asykurū*; as well as noun and adjective forms like *shukran*, *shukūran*, *shākir*, *shākirān*, *shākirūn*, *shākirīn*, *shakūrun*, *shakūran*, and *mashkūrān*.

The diversity of these linguistic forms shows that the Qur'anic concept of gratitude is not limited to verbal expression alone. Rather, it encompasses inner attitude, conscious acknowledgment of God's blessings, and concrete manifestation through

actions. Gratitude is understood as an active response of a servant to divine grace, reflected in obedience, spiritual awareness, and the proper use of blessings in accordance with God's will. Thus, the repeated mention of *shukūr* in various forms and contexts affirms that gratitude is an integral and continuous way of life for a Muslim. Gratitude is a deep awareness of acknowledging Allah's blessings, both great and small, and using them in accordance with His will. An attitude of gratitude purifies the heart from greed, envy, and ingratitude, while strengthening closeness to Allah Almighty. Gratitude empowers one to appreciate the brighter side of life. If patience (*ṣabr*) is the fortress of the soul in facing hardship, then gratitude is the light of the soul in times of ease. From the perspective of *tazkiyat al-nafs* (purification of the soul), gratitude functions as a continuous mechanism of inner purification, cleansing the heart from negative traits and nurturing positive potential toward the level of *taqwā* (God-consciousness).

As stated in Qur'an, Surah Ibrahim (14): 7,

Meaning:“(Remember) when your Lord proclaimed, ‘If you are grateful, I will surely increase you [in blessing]; but if you are ungrateful, indeed My punishment is truly severe.’” (QS. Ibrahim, verse 7). Dr. Quraish Shihab explains this verse in his tafsir Tafsir Al-Misbah by stating that the Prophet Muhammad is commanded to remember and convey once again a message previously delivered by the Prophet Moses to his people. That message emphasizes the importance of remembering Allah's blessings and the consequences of human attitudes toward those blessings. Prophet Moses reminded his people that Allah had declared, with emphatic assurance grounded in His absolute power, that if people are grateful, Allah will certainly increase the blessings He has bestowed upon them. This is due to the abundance of Allah's limitless grace, which encourages humans to place great hope in Him by expressing gratitude for every blessing they receive. Conversely, if humans adopt an attitude of ingratitude toward Allah's blessings that is, they deny them and fail to use them in accordance with the will of the Bestower they are under the threat of Allah's painful punishment. This punishment may take the form of diminishing blessings, the loss of favors, or the arrival of various calamities that complicate life. Nevertheless, some scholars hold that this verse is not a direct continuation of Moses' speech, but rather a direct statement from Allah Himself as an expression of His grace toward humanity. Knowledge of this principle is regarded as a

blessing in its own right, because it nurtures optimism and motivates people to strive actively for deeds that lead to increased divine favor.

The verse clearly promises an increase in blessings for those who are grateful, yet it does not explicitly state that punishment will immediately befall those who are ungrateful. What is emphasized is only that Allah's punishment is severe. Thus, the threat should be understood as a warning rather than an immediate certainty. In reality, it is possible that those who deny Allah's blessings may continue to enjoy or even receive additional worldly pleasures as a form of postponement, which in essence constitutes *istidrāj*: a gradual drawing toward destruction without their awareness. This understanding aligns with Allah's warning in Surah al-A'raf (7): 182–183. Dr. Quraish Shihab further explains that the word *ta'adhdhana* used in this verse derives from the same root as *adhān*, meaning an announcement or proclamation made loudly. The morphological pattern of the word indicates emphasis and certainty regarding Allah's promise. He also cites the views of Ibn 'Ashur, and earlier al-Biqā'i, who noted that Moses' message here corresponds with teachings found in the Book of Exodus of the Old Testament.

Allah explains that the people of Prophet Lot also denied the various warnings conveyed to them. As a consequence of their rebellion, Allah sent down a punishment in the form of a violent wind carrying stones, which destroyed them completely. However, this punishment did not befall the family of Prophet Lot who believed. They were saved by Allah at the time of dawn (*sahar*), just before daybreak, as an outpouring of mercy and a favor from Him. This deliverance is explicitly affirmed as Allah's recompense for those who are grateful.

Sincerity (Ikhlaṣ) in the Qur'an

In the Qur'an, the word *ikhlaṣ* and its various derivations are mentioned 31 times. These occurrences are distributed across several different morphological forms. The word *akhlasa* appears twice with different subjects. The form *mukhlis* both in the dual (*muthannā*) and plural (*jam'*) is mentioned twenty times. In addition, the word *khalasa* occurs once, *khāliṣ/khāliṣah* appears seven times, and *astakhlaṣtu* occurs once.

The frequency and variety of the use of *ikhhlās* and its derivatives indicate that the Qur'anic concept of sincerity is neither singular nor narrow. Rather, it reflects diverse forms of practicing sincerity that are adjusted to different contexts, conditions, and human roles. This suggests that sincerity is not merely an inner concept, but also possesses broad practical dimensions in human life. The definition of sincerity as explained in the *Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia* (Indonesian Dictionary) may be understood as one entry point for applying the value of sincerity in daily life. However, the Qur'an itself presents a richer and more contextualized meaning, in which sincerity is not only understood as a pure intention, but also as a way of life manifested in deeds, obedience, and total submission to Allah. Sincerity is the main foundation in the process of *tazkiyat al-nafs* (purification of the soul), because it determines the spiritual value of every human action. Sincerity means purifying one's objective solely for Allah SWT, free from ulterior motives, praise, or worldly gain. Intention (*niyyah*), meanwhile, is the inner direction that guides outward behavior so that it remains aligned with the purpose of worship. Within the framework of *tazkiyat al-nafs*, sincerity is a mirror of the purity of the heart: the more sincere a person is, the cleaner the soul becomes from spiritual diseases such as *riyā'* (showing off), *'ujb* (self-admiration), and *sum'ah* (seeking reputation) (Qisom, 2023).

Purifying intention is the initial step in the struggle (*jihād*) against the ego, because many deeds that appear great outwardly are devoid of value in the sight of Allah if they are not accompanied by sincerity. The Messenger of Allah ﷺ emphasized this in his saying: “*Indeed, actions are judged only by intentions.*” (Narrated by al-Bukhārī and Muslim) (Alfian et al., 2018). Therefore, *tazkiyah* is not merely about increasing the quantity of deeds, but about ensuring that every deed originates from a sound and upright intention. In the context of pesantren education and the mental formation of Generation Z, teaching sincerity and intention helps students understand the meaning of genuineness in learning, worship, and social interaction. Amid a digital culture that often highlights self-image and validation, the value of sincerity becomes a spiritual shield so that students remain oriented toward Allah's pleasure rather than human approval. Therefore, had the People of the Book not followed their desires, they would have easily accepted Islam, because the teachings brought by Prophet Muhammad ﷺ do not contradict the scriptures they hold, but rather perfect and complete them.

Taqwa in the Qur'an

The term *taqwa* and all of its derivational forms appear 258 times in the Qur'an. More specifically, the expression *al-taqwā* is mentioned 15 times without an explicit, direct definition. In addition, commands to observe *taqwa* expressed through various formulations and directed toward different objects occur 85 times. These commands convey a range of meanings, including calls to be mindful of Allah, to guard oneself, to fear Allah, and to protect oneself from anything that may incur His displeasure.

Taqwa functions as self-control and represents the culminating stage and final outcome of the process of *tazkiyat al-nafs* (purification of the soul) (Solehuddin, 2023). It serves as a form of spiritual self-regulation that directs all aspects of human life to remain on the path pleasing to Allah SWT. Linguistically, *taqwa* derives from the root *waqā*, meaning “to guard” or “to protect oneself,” that is, to safeguard one’s heart, thoughts, and actions from anything that may distance a person from Allah (Shihab, 2002). Within the framework of *tazkiyah*, *taqwa* is an indicator of success in cleansing the soul from moral impurities, base desires, and negative tendencies. A person who possesses *taqwa* maintains constant awareness (*murāqabah*) that Allah is always watching, which enables self-restraint, caution, and resistance to the temptations of illusory worldly pleasures. *Taqwa* thus cultivates an internal control system far stronger than external supervision, because it arises from spiritual consciousness rather than social pressure.

The command to practice *taqwa* is repeated twice in this verse. According to Quraish Shihab, this repetition indicates two distinct motivations: first, *taqwa* arising from fear of Allah’s punishment and the urge to perform good deeds; second, *taqwa* stemming from a sense of shame and moral awareness that leads one to abandon negative actions. This emphasis is accompanied by a reminder that Allah is fully aware of all human deeds, no matter how small or when they are performed. The phrase *tuqaddima* (“what one sends ahead”) is understood as a depiction of deeds deliberately prepared to bring benefit in the future, much like someone preparing something before a guest arrives. Hence, the command to “consider what has been sent ahead for tomorrow” is interpreted as a call for continuous self-evaluation. Quraish Shihab cites the view of Thabathaba’i, who likens this process to a worker reviewing his work: if it is good, it

should be perfected; if it is deficient, it should be corrected before the time of evaluation arrives. Thus, every believer is required to engage in *muhāsabah* (self-accountability).

Thematic Tafsir Solutions to the Mentality Problems of Generation Z

Based on the results of observations and in-depth interviews conducted gradually by the author from early June 2024 until early 2025 at *Ma'had Daarul Qur'an Langsa*, it was found that the mentality-related problems of Generation Z students (*santri*) exhibit consistent and ongoing patterns. From the initial observation phase between June and August 2024, caregivers and mentors revealed a growing tendency toward emotional restlessness, spiritual fatigue, and fluctuating learning motivation among some students. This phenomenon was not viewed as a weakness in intellectual capacity, but rather as an indication of a spiritual crisis and an imbalance in life orientation.

Observations throughout February 2025 indicated noticeable behavioral changes. Students who had previously been easily offended or tended to be passive began to show improvements in discipline, independence, and emotional regulation. In an interview on February 12, 2025, a mentor stated that the *tazkiyah* approach “transformed the psychological atmosphere of the pesantren from mere formal obedience into a living spiritual awareness.” In addition, the integration of the values of sincerity (*ikhlas*) and spiritual striving (*mujahadah*) became evident in the students' social lives. Through *ukhuwah* training activities and *halaqah tafakkur* observed throughout March–April 2025, students were trained to help one another, share responsibilities, and cultivate empathy. One mentor, in an interview on April 2, 2025, emphasized that “the strength of *tazkiyah* does not lie in the quantity of memorization, but in the students' ability to remain humble and consistent in doing good.” From follow-up interviews with a moral education teacher in May 2025, it was found that students who actively participated in *dhikr* and *muhāsabah* activities demonstrated more stable learning motivation and increased consistency in worship. Reflective notes written by students in weekly *tazkiyah* journals collected up to mid-2025 mostly expressed feelings of being “more peaceful,” “more self-aware,” and “more capable of controlling emotions.” This confirms that *tazkiyatun nafs* functions not only as spiritual development, but also as a natural self-healing mechanism that strengthens the mental resilience of Generation Z students.

Conclusion

This study concludes that the Qur'anic concept of tazkiyatun nafs holds strong relevance as both a spiritual and psychological framework for addressing the mental challenges of Generation Z in pesantren. Through a thematic (maudhu'i) tafsir approach to verses such as QS. Asy-Syams (7–10), Al-A'la (14–15), Ar-Ra'd (11), and Al-Hasyr (18), it becomes evident that purification of the soul requires synergy between human effort (mujāhadah) and divine guidance. Core values such as patience (ṣabr), gratitude (shukr), sincerity (ikhlaṣ), and piety (taqwā) emerge not only as moral imperatives but also as effective instruments for building resilience, managing anxiety, and strengthening spiritual identity. Field findings at Ma'had Daarul Qur'an Langsa demonstrate that practices such as dhikr, tilāwah, muḥāsabah, and spiritual mentoring foster positive behavioral changes, including greater discipline, emotional stability, empathy, and heightened spiritual awareness. Thus, tazkiyatun nafs can be understood as a form of Islamic mental hygiene that restores balance between intellect ('aql), heart (qalb), and spirit (rūḥ), offering a contextual Qur'anic response to modern psychosocial issues. Based on these findings, pesantren are encouraged to integrate tazkiyah-based practices into their curricula as a holistic model of character education and mental strengthening. Future research should expand this framework to broader contexts of Islamic education, guidance, and counseling, thereby enriching contemporary tafsir discourse and contributing to practical solutions for youth mental health in the digital era.

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