

	Journal of World Thinkers E-ISSN: xxxx-xxxx Vol.2, No.2, 2025, pp. 147-160 DOI: https://doi.org/10.61455/jwt.v2i02.592	
Received January 01, 2025	Revised July 07, 2025	Accepted August 28, 2025



K.H. Imam Zarkasyi's Educational Thought and Its Relevance for the Young Generation

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Abstract

Objective: This research aims to analyze the Islamic educational thinking of KH Imam Zarkasyi and examine its relevance for the younger generation in the digital era. The focus of the research is directed at educational values that are able to answer the challenges of technological development and social change. **Theoretical framework:** This research is based on the concept of holistic Islamic education that emphasizes the balance between religious science and general science. This framework also prioritizes character building, discipline, independence, and leadership as the main goals of education. **Literature review:** Previous research has discussed the thoughts of KH Imam Zarkasyi in the context of Islamic boarding school modernization and the development of Islamic education. However, studies that relate his thinking to the needs of the younger generation in the digital era are still limited. **Methods:** The research uses a qualitative approach with the library research method. Data was collected from books, journals, and related literature sources, then analyzed using content analysis techniques. **Results:** The results of the study show that KH Imam Zarkasyi's thinking remains relevant in shaping the character, discipline, independence, responsibility, and leadership of the younger generation. These values support readiness to face the challenges of the digital era and globalization. **Implications:** The findings of the study show that the concept of KH Imam Zarkasyi's education can be used as a reference in the development of Islamic education that is adaptive to the changing times. The values offered remain in line with Islamic principles. **Novelty:** The novelty of this research lies in the analysis of the relevance of KH Imam Zarkasyi's educational thinking in answering the challenges of the young generation in the digital era. This research fills the limitations of previous studies that have not specifically addressed this aspect.

Keywords: kh imam zarkasyi, education, young generation, character, modern islamic boarding school.

INTRODUCTION

Research on the educational thought of K.H. Imam Zarkasyi has generally focused on the history of Pondok Modern Darussalam Gontor, curriculum development, language education, leadership, and character formation. Existing studies consistently acknowledge his significant contribution to the modernization of Islamic education through an integrated system that combines religious values, intellectual development, discipline, and moral cultivation. However, most previous research remains descriptive and institutional, emphasizing educational management and pesantren traditions rather than examining the contemporary relevance of his ideas for addressing the challenges faced by today's younger generation. Consequently, there is still limited scholarly attention to how Imam Zarkasyi's educational philosophy can be reconstructed as a conceptual framework for developing resilient, ethical, and globally minded Muslim youth in the digital era [1].

This research is important because contemporary young people encounter increasingly complex challenges, including moral degradation, identity crises, digital misinformation, consumerism, declining social responsibility, and weakening national and religious values. These conditions demand an educational paradigm that not only develops cognitive competence but also strengthens character, leadership, independence, discipline, and social commitment. K.H. Imam Zarkasyi's educational thought offers a holistic approach by integrating intellectual excellence, spiritual maturity, and practical life skills within a balanced educational system. Reexamining his ideas can provide valuable insights for designing innovative educational strategies that remain relevant to current social transformations. Furthermore, this study contributes to enriching contemporary Islamic educational theory by contextualizing Imam Zarkasyi's philosophy within the needs of modern youth while supporting the development of responsible, tolerant, and globally competitive future generations capable of contributing positively to sustainable national development [2].

Islamic education has an important role in shaping a generation that not only excels in intellectual aspects but also has good morals and character. In the midst of technological developments and increasingly rapid globalization, the young generation faces various challenges, such as declining moral values, low discipline, and the negative influence of digital media. Therefore, an educational concept is needed that is able to balance the mastery of science with the formation of Islamic character and values [1]. One of the Indonesian Islamic education figures who has made a great contribution to the development of the education system is KH Imam Zarkasyi. He is known as one of the founders of Pondok Modern Darussalam Gontor, which succeeded in combining religious education and general education in one integrated system. Through his thoughts, KH Imam Zarkasyi emphasized the importance of personality formation, discipline, independence, leadership, and mastery of foreign languages as a provision to face the times. The educational concept he developed was not only oriented to the transfer of knowledge, but also to the formation of the character and mentality of students [2][3].

KH Imam Zarkasyi's educational thinking is still a reference in the development of Islamic education in Indonesia. The various values that he instilled, such as sincerity, simplicity, Islamic ukhuwah, and responsibility, remain relevant in facing the challenges of modern education. These values are important to form a young generation that has integrity, independence, and can compete at the national and global levels without losing their Islamic identity [3].



Figure 1. KH. Imam Zarkasyi

Source: <https://bit.ly/4gFwP3b>

Although there have been many studies that discuss the role of KH Imam Zarkasyi in the modernization of Islamic boarding schools, studies on the relevance of his educational thinking for the younger generation in the digital era still need to be developed. Therefore, this research focuses on the analysis of KH Imam Zarkasyi's Islamic educational thinking and its relevance in answering the challenges faced by the young generation today. Thus, this research is expected to contribute to the development of Islamic education in accordance with the needs of the times while still being based on Islamic values [4].

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Concept of Islamic Education

Islamic education is a comprehensive human development process that includes spiritual, intellectual, moral, and social aspects based on Islamic teachings. The purpose of Islamic education is not only to master knowledge, but also to form noble morals and devotion to Allah SWT. According to Islamic education experts, education must be able to balance the needs of this world and the hereafter so as to produce people who are knowledgeable, faithful, and noble in character [5].



Figure 2. Trimurti, Founder of Pondok Darussalam Gontor

Source: https://id.wikipedia.org/wiki/Imam_Zarkasyi

KH Imam Zarkasyi's Educational Thoughts

KH Imam Zarkasyi is one of the figures of Islamic education reform in Indonesia who is known for his contribution to the development of the education system at Pondok Modern Darussalam Gontor. His educational thinking emphasizes the integration between religious

science and general science, so that students have a broad insight without abandoning Islamic values. In addition, he placed character formation as the main goal of education [6].

In the view of KH Imam Zarkasyi, education does not only take place in the classroom, but also through daily life in the pesantren environment. Therefore, he implemented an education system that emphasized discipline, independence, responsibility, leadership, and mastery of foreign languages as a means of self-development and da'wah [7].

The Young Generation in the Digital Era

The development of information technology has brought great changes in the lives of the younger generation. Ease of access to information provides many benefits, but it also presents various challenges, such as declining social interaction, moral crisis, misuse of digital media, and low discipline. This condition requires an educational model that is able to form character while equipping the younger generation with the ability to face the times [8].



Figure 3. Pondok Modern Darussalam Gontor

Source: <https://bit.ly/4f0Jw7w>

Previous Research

Several previous studies have shown that the thought of KH Imam Zarkasyi has had a great influence on the development of modern Islamic education in Indonesia. These studies generally discuss the modernization of Islamic boarding schools, the Gontor education system, and the educational values applied by KH Imam Zarkasyi. The results of the study show that the educational concept he developed succeeded in forming students who are independent, disciplined, and have leadership skills [9].

However, most of the research still focuses on the pesantren education system in general. Studies that specifically analyze the relevance of KH Imam Zarkasyi's educational thinking to the challenges of the younger generation in the digital era are still relatively limited. Therefore, this research was conducted to examine more deeply how the educational values developed by KH Imam Zarkasyi can be applied in answering the needs and challenges of today's young generation [10].



Figure 4. KH Imam Zarkasyi and KH Ahmad Sahal, among the Trimurti founders of the Gontor Ponorogo Islamic Boarding School

Source: <https://bit.ly/4vfCn8t>

Frame of Mind

This research departs from the assumption that the challenges faced by the younger generation in the digital era require education that not only emphasizes the academic aspect, but also character building. KH Imam Zarkasyi's educational thinking, which emphasizes discipline, independence, leadership, and balance between religious science and general science, is seen as relevant to answer these challenges. Therefore, this study analyzes the educational values of KH Imam Zarkasyi and its relevance in forming a young generation that has morals, integrity, and is able to face the times [11].

METHODOLOGY

Types and Approaches to Research

This study uses a type of qualitative research with a library *research* approach. This approach was chosen because the research focuses on the study of KH Imam Zarkasyi's Islamic educational thought obtained through various written sources. Literature research allows researchers to understand, analyze, and interpret the educational concepts put forward by KH Imam Zarkasyi and their relevance for the younger generation in the digital era [12].

Table 1. Research Design

Research Components	Description
Types of Research	Qualitative Research
Research Approach	Library <i>Research</i>
Research Object	KH Imam Zarkasyi's Islamic Education Thoughts and Their Relevance for the Young Generation
Primary Data Sources	Books, writings, and documents that discuss the thoughts of KH Imam Zarkasyi
Secondary Data Sources	Scientific journals, articles, theses, and literature related to Islamic education
Data Collection Techniques	Documentation
Data Analysis Techniques	Content Analysis
Data Validity Techniques	Triangulation Source

Data Source

The data sources in this study consist of primary data and secondary data.

1. Primary Data

Primary data was obtained from works that discussed the thoughts of KH Imam Zarkasyi, both in the form of books, writings, and documents related to the concept of education that he developed at Pondok Modern Darussalam Gontor.

2. Secondary Data

Secondary data were obtained from scientific journals, articles, theses, and various literature relevant to Islamic education, the thoughts of KH Imam Zarkasyi, and the issues of the younger generation in the digital era.

Data Collection Techniques

The data collection technique used in this study is the documentation technique. The researcher collected a variety of literature related to the research object, then identified, classified, and recorded data relevant to the focus of the research.

Table 2. Stages of Data Analysis

Stages	Activities
1	Collecting literature relevant to the thoughts of KH Imam Zarkasyi
2	Read and understand the content of the data source.
3	Identifying the main concepts of KH Imam Zarkasyi's education
4	Segment data based on research themes
5	Analyzing the relevance of KH Imam Zarkasyi's thoughts to the younger generation
6	Conclude and compile research results.

Data Analysis Techniques

Data analysis was carried out using the content analysis method. This technique is used to identify, understand, and interpret the main ideas in the educational thought of KH Imam Zarkasyi. The analysis process is carried out through several stages, namely:

1. Collect and read relevant sources.
2. Identify the main concepts in the educational thinking of KH Imam Zarkasyi.
3. Classify data based on themes related to Islamic education and the younger generation.
4. Analyze the relevance of these concepts to the condition of the young generation in the digital era.
5. Draw conclusions based on the results of data analysis

Table 3. Research Focus

Research Focus	Indicator
KH Imam Zarkasyi's Educational Thoughts	Integration of religious and general sciences
Character Education	Discipline, sincerity, simplicity, responsibility
Independence	Self-management and decision-making skills
Leadership	Organizational spirit and leadership ability
Relevance for the Younger	Ability to deal with the digital age, globalization, and moral

Data Validity

To maintain the validity of the data, this study uses the source triangulation technique, which involves comparing various sources of different literature to obtain valid and reliable data. In this way, the results of the research are expected to be able to provide an objective picture of the Islamic education thought of KH Imam Zarkasyi and its relevance for the younger generation.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Research Results

Based on the results of the literature analysis, it was found that KH Imam Zarkasyi's Islamic educational thinking was oriented towards the formation of human beings who were knowledgeable, noble in character, independent, and able to adapt to the development of the times. The concept of education developed not only to emphasize the mastery of religious knowledge, but also general knowledge as a provision for facing modern life [13].

KH Imam Zarkasyi views education as a process of character formation that is carried out thoroughly through learning activities, habituation, and example. In practice, he instills the values of discipline, sincerity, simplicity, Islamic ukhuwah, independence, and responsibility in students. These values are the main foundation for forming a strong personality [14].

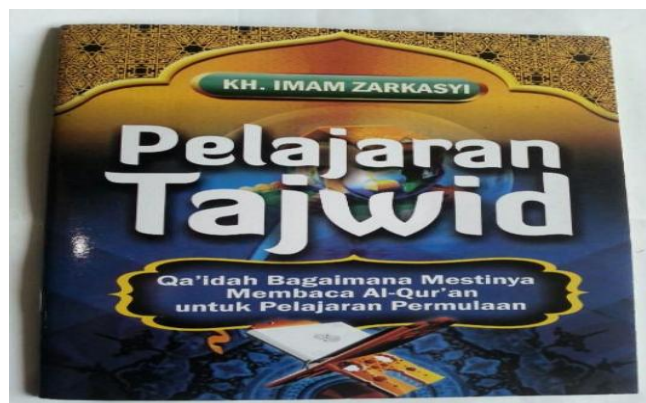


Figure 5. Tajweed textbook by KH. Imam Zarkasyi

Source: <https://bit.ly/4p6BfTb>

In addition, KH Imam Zarkasyi emphasized the importance of mastering foreign languages, especially Arabic and English, as a means of broadening knowledge and improving science. He also instilled a spirit of leadership through various organizational activities and character building that are integrated into daily life [15].

The results of the study show that the educational values developed by KH Imam Zarkasyi are still relevant to the needs of the current young generation, especially in facing the challenges of technological development, globalization, and social change that are taking place very quickly.

Discussion

Character Education as the Foundation of the Young Generation

One of KH Imam Zarkasyi's main ideas is to make character education the core of the educational process. According to him, the success of education is not only measured by academic ability, but also by the quality of students' morals and personalities [16]. This

thought is relevant to the current condition of the young generation, who are facing various moral challenges due to the influence of digital media and the unlimited flow of information. Values such as honesty, responsibility, discipline, and sincerity are important provisions for the younger generation in facing modern life. With a strong character, the younger generation will be able to use technology wisely and avoid behavior that is contrary to religious values [17].

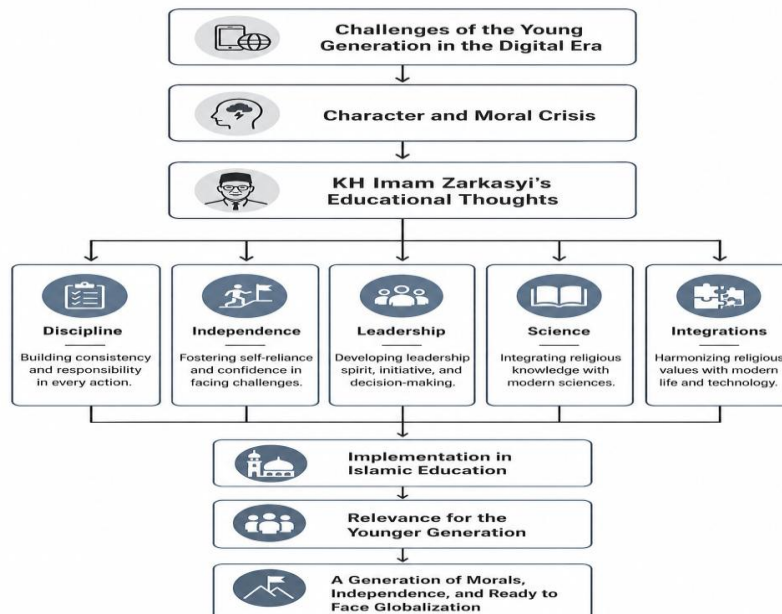


Figure 6. The concept of education KH. Imam Zarkasyi

Independence and Leadership in Education

KH Imam Zarkasyi emphasized that education must be able to produce individuals who are independent and have a leadership spirit. Through various organizational activities and boarding life, students are trained to make decisions, work together, and be responsible for the tasks given [18].

In the digital era, leadership skills and independence are indispensable competencies. The younger generation is required to be able to adapt to change, think creatively, and solve various problems independently. Therefore, the concept of KH Imam Zarkasyi's education still has high relevance in forming quality human resources [19].



Figure 7. KH. Imam Zarkasyi delivering a tausiyah in front of the students

Source: <https://bit.ly/4g6q9Lh>

Integration of Religious and General Sciences

KH Imam Zarkasyi's thoughts also emphasized the importance of a balance between religious science and general science. According to him, the two should not be separated because they have complementary roles in human life [20]. This concept is very much in line with the needs of today's young generation, who are required to master science and technology without losing spiritual values. With this integration, students are expected to be able to become intellectually intelligent individuals while having a strong moral foundation [21].

The Relevance of KH Imam Zarkasyi's Thought in the Digital Era

The development of digital technology provides many opportunities as well as challenges for the younger generation. The ease of access to information is often accompanied by the emergence of various problems, such as the misuse of social media, declining communication ethics, and identity crises [22]–[25].

In this context, KH Imam Zarkasyi's educational thinking offers solutions through the cultivation of character values, discipline, independence, and responsibility. These values can be a guideline for the younger generation in utilizing technology positively and productively. Thus, KH Imam Zarkasyi's educational thinking remains relevant as one of the models of Islamic education that is able to answer the challenges of the times without abandoning Islamic values [26]–[29].

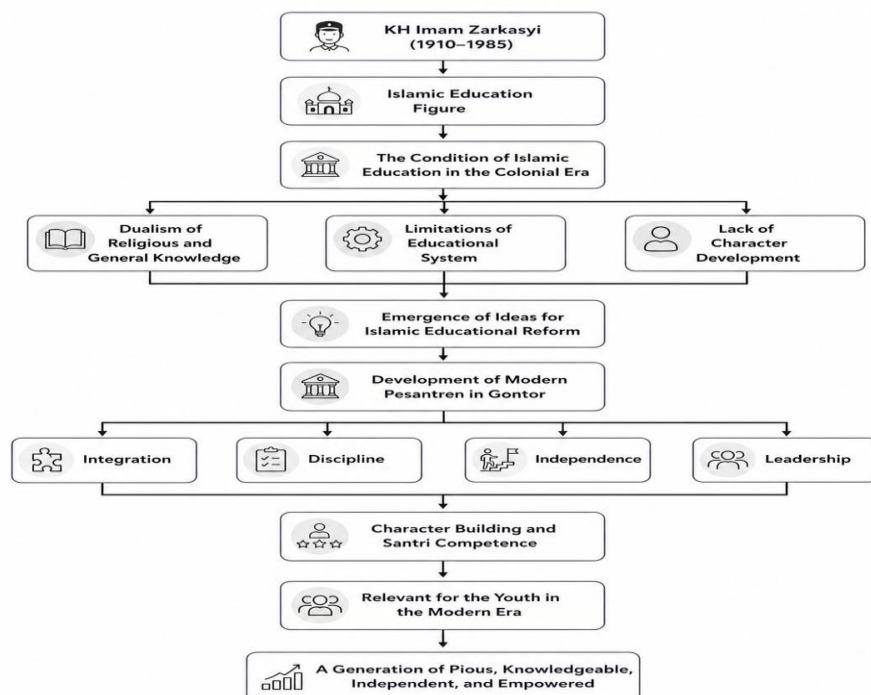


Figure 8. Background of KH. Imam Zarkasyi

Analysis of KH Imam Zarkasyi's Islamic Education Thought and Its Relevance for the Young Generation.

KH Imam Zarkasyi's Islamic educational thinking is one of the models of educational reform that has succeeded in integrating Islamic values with the needs of modernity. As one of the founders of Pondok Modern Darussalam Gontor, he views education as not just a process of knowledge transfer, but a means of forming a whole human being who has

intellectual intelligence, spiritual maturity, and strong character [30]–[33]. This perspective suggests that education must produce individuals who are not only knowledgeable but also have noble morals and the ability to adapt to the changing times.

One of the main aspects of KH Imam Zarkasyi's thought is the integration between religious science and general science. He rejected the dichotomy of science that separates religious knowledge from modern knowledge. According to him, the two fields of knowledge complement each other in forming a balanced human being. Analysis of this idea shows that the integrative concept is very relevant to the needs of 21st-century education, which requires students to have academic competence as well as a strong moral foundation. Thus, education not only produces graduates who are intellectually intelligent, but also socially and spiritually responsible [34]–[37].

In addition, KH Imam Zarkasyi places character education as the core of the entire educational process. Values such as discipline, sincerity, simplicity, responsibility, independence, and leadership are instilled through habituation in daily life. This approach suggests that character is not enough to be taught theoretically, but must be formed through experience and example. In the context of today's young generation, who are facing challenges in the form of moral crises, abuse of digital media, and declining social ethics, the concept of character education developed by KH Imam Zarkasyi has very high significance [38]–[41].

Furthermore, the education system implemented in Gontor shows the importance of the educational environment as a means of personality formation. Education lasts for twenty-four hours through a variety of academic, organizational, and boarding life activities. This model creates a more effective process of internalizing values compared to classroom-focused learning. Therefore, the success of education, according to KH Imam Zarkasyi, is not only measured through academic achievement, but also through the quality of students' character [42], [43]. Overall, KH Imam Zarkasyi's educational thinking offers a holistic Islamic education paradigm. Its relevance remains strong in facing the challenges of the digital era because it is able to balance the mastery of science, life skill development, and character formation, which is the main foundation for the younger generation in facing the dynamics of globalization and technological developments.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the research, it can be concluded that KH Imam Zarkasyi's Islamic education thinking has a significant contribution to the development of Islamic education in Indonesia. The concept of education that he developed emphasized the balance between religious science and general science, as well as character formation as the main goal of education. Values such as discipline, sincerity, simplicity, independence, responsibility, and leadership are important foundations in forming students with noble and competitive character. The results of the study also show that KH Imam Zarkasyi's educational thinking is still very relevant for the younger generation in the digital era. Various challenges faced by the younger generation, such as the negative influence of social media, moral crises, and rapid social change, can be faced through the application of the educational values that he teaches. Education that is not only oriented to the academic aspect, but also to the formation of character and the strengthening of Islamic values, is an important need in facing the development of the times. Therefore, the concept of KH Imam Zarkasyi's education can be used as one of the references in the development of Islamic education that is adaptive to technological advances and globalization without abandoning Islamic identity and values. His thinking shows that holistic education is able to produce a young generation that is knowledgeable, moral, independent, and ready to face future challenges. From a theoretical perspective, this study emphasizes the relevance of integration between da'wah communication theory, new media theory, and framing analysis in understanding the dynamics of contemporary da'wah. Social media is no longer just a tool for distributing

messages, but a space for the construction of meaning that shapes the audience's perceptions, attitudes, and religious identities. The implication is that da'wah and da'wah institutions need to develop digital literacy competencies, visual communication strategies, and online interaction management so that da'wah remains effective in the midst of a fast and competitive flow of information. Overall, the transformation of digital da'wah is a necessity in the context of a networked society. Methodological adaptation is the key so that Islamic values can be conveyed in a relevant, communicative, and far-reaching way without losing the essence of its teachings.

Acknowledgments

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Author Contribution

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Conflicts of Interest

All authors declare no conflict of interest.

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