

Fostering Self-Regulatory Behaviour through Religious Values: Challenges, Strategies, and the Role of Parents

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ABSTRACT

Self-regulation is a critical skill in moral and behavioural development, encompassing the ability to control thoughts, emotions, and actions in alignment with values and long-term goals. Within the framework of Islamic education, the process of nurturing self-regulation goes beyond behavioural control, emphasizing the development of the soul and character in accordance with divine principles. This study explores the pivotal role of parents in fostering self-regulation through Islamic educational practices, examining the alignment between traditional Islamic methods and modern self-regulation theories. Drawing on Quranic teachings and contemporary research, the study identifies key elements such as reinforcement, role modelling, repetition, and social interaction as essential components of effective self-regulation development. The paper further addresses the challenges parents face, including societal pressures, the dynamic parent-child relationship, the influence of modern technology, and evolving family structures. By integrating Islamic principles with contemporary educational insights, this study highlights a comprehensive approach to nurturing self-regulation, empowering children to navigate life with integrity and purpose while contributing positively to society. This research underscores the importance of parental involvement in shaping morally grounded, self-regulated individuals, emphasizing that such efforts are foundational to achieving both worldly success and spiritual fulfilment.

Keywords: self-regulatory behaviour, religion, parental role, moral development, strategies

INTRODUCTION

The development of moral character in children is a vital aspect of their overall growth and well-being. In Islamic education, nurturing moral self-regulation is of profound significance, with parents playing a central role in shaping their children's moral compass [42]. Rooted in faith and spiritual development, Islamic moral education focuses on cultivating virtues, ethical behaviour, and noble character, as exemplified by the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) [42].

Self-regulation, an essential skill for moral and behavioural development, requires systematic guidance, particularly from parents. Research indicates that self-regulation in children is not a product of natural maturation but rather develops through parental support and intervention ([17], [35]). Islamic teachings emphasize this role of parents in fostering moral self-regulation within the home environment [21].

An effective approach to moral development combines the efforts of schools, communities, and families. However, parents remain the primary educators, responsible for instilling Islamic values and moral discipline in their children. Islamic parenting education significantly contributed to family resilience, emphasizing the integration of faith-based practices such as Quranic storytelling, family prayer times, and community engagement, which strengthened moral discipline [9]. Similarly, early interventions grounded in Islamic parenting principles enhanced children's self-regulated learning by implementing structured home routines and fostering collaborative discussions on ethical decision-making [43]. In addition, parents who regularly engaged

their children in faith-based play and reflection saw a marked improvement in children's self-discipline, emotional control, and problem-solving abilities. This finding demonstrates that routines infused with Islamic teachings foster both cognitive and emotional self-regulation in early childhood. Moreover, the integration of family religious rituals, such as collective du`a and storytelling of Prophetic lessons, strengthened resilience and empathy among children [6].

Suyarov highlights the multidimensional impact of Islamic practices on children's cognitive, emotional, and social development. For example, regular Quranic recitations, daily prayer routines, and moral storytelling activities were found to enhance discipline and empathy, building stronger family bonds and resilience [39].

The findings from the Western perspectives align in some areas. For instance, Sanders et al. highlighted that parenting interventions that foster goal setting, self-monitoring, and emotional regulation have shown significant positive impacts on children's cognitive and emotional outcomes, similar to findings in Islamic education contexts [33]. Moreover, a study by Chen et al. emphasized the importance of self-regulation measures in educational and home settings, showing that structured routines and positive reinforcement improve behavioural consistency and resilience in children across cultures [14].

These findings illustrate those interactive methods in Islamic parenting, such as guided storytelling and moral goal-setting activities, enhance self-regulation. Activities such as joint prayer sessions and structured community Quranic classes create nurturing environments that reinforce a sense of belonging, accountability, and spiritual growth [39]. This aligns with Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory, which emphasizes the importance of role modelling and social reinforcement in developing self-regulatory behaviours.

In today's increasingly complex world, the ability to self-regulate, strategize, and maintain strong moral values is crucial for sustained success [12]. Religious guidance further enhances self-control, helping individuals avoid sinful and immoral acts that displease Allah SWT. This aligns with the Qur'anic command in Surah Al-Hujurat, verse 6:

"O you who have believed! Protect yourselves and your families from the Hellfire whose fuel is men and stones (idols); the Hellfire is guarded by fierce and powerful angels who do not disobey Allah in what He commands them and who do as they are commanded."

This verse underscores the parental responsibility of safeguarding their family's moral and spiritual well-being, ensuring the development of righteous individuals who contribute positively to society and achieve ultimate success in this world and the hereafter. Amana et al. emphasize the importance of cultivating virtues such as sabr (patience) and qabalah (contentment), which align with self-regulation principles and guide children away from materialistic tendencies while reinforcing spiritual resilience [6].

DEFINITION OF SELF-REGULATION

Self-regulation is widely defined as a metacognitive process in which individuals monitor their thoughts, evaluate their performance, and plan strategies to achieve their goals [11]. It involves the ability to control emotions, thoughts, and behaviours to remain focused, manage impulses, and make conscious decisions aligned with one's values and long-term objectives [20]. At its core, self-regulation integrates cognitive, metacognitive, and motivational processes that enable individuals to adaptively manage their actions and emotions in the pursuit of personal success ([28], [21]). This process is often iterative, involving trial-and-error strategies and continuous effort to overcome failures and explore alternative paths toward achieving goals.

Carver and Scheier highlight the close relationship between self-regulation and self-control, describing it as a feedback process where individuals transform goals into actionable steps, adjusting tasks based on their evolving needs [13]. Similarly, Bandura emphasizes the role of self-efficacy in self-regulation, arguing that individuals' beliefs about their ability to influence outcomes through their actions directly affect their motivation, emotions, and behaviour [10]. Zimmerman and Schunk further explain self-regulation as comprising three processes: self-observation (monitoring one's performance), self-judgment (evaluating performance against a standard), and

self-reaction (experiencing satisfaction or dissatisfaction based on the evaluation) [45].

The Western researchers complement this view by emphasizing cognitive and emotional regulation as key components of self-regulation. Chen et al. identified that comprehensive self-regulation frameworks in education incorporate feedback loops that support emotional resilience and adaptive learning [14]. Sanders et al. expanded this by highlighting that interventions fostering parental role modelling and problem-solving significantly impact the self-regulatory behaviours of both parents and children [33].

In the context of Islamic education, self-regulation extends beyond behavioural control to encompass spiritual refinement and moral responsibility. Suyarov notes that regular Islamic practices, such as daily prayers and Quranic memorization, foster not only discipline but also an increased sense of moral accountability [39]. It refers to individuals' ability to monitor, control, and direct their moral and religious behaviour in accordance with Islamic teachings ([35], [4]). Guided by the Quran and Sunnah, self-regulation fosters moral awareness and encourages individuals to align their actions with faith-based principles. This process includes self-reflection, repentance, and continuous improvement, as exemplified in Surah Al-Maidah, verse 39:

"But whoever repents after his wrongdoing and reforms his conduct, indeed, Allah will turn to him in mercy. Indeed, Allah is Forgiving and Merciful."

Islam emphasizes that success is holistic, encompassing both worldly and spiritual components. Self-regulation enables individuals to fulfil their responsibilities, control their actions within their capacity, and strive for balanced success in this life and the hereafter. Surah Al-Baqarah, verse 286 reinforces this by stating:

"Allah does not charge a soul except [with that within] its capacity."

Nevertheless, the Islamic and Western scholars share similar viewpoints when describing self-regulation as maintaining emotional and cognitive balance to promote positive adaptation, self-efficacy, and well-being ([5], [12]). Positive self-assessment plays a critical role in this process, as self-acceptance fosters gratitude and motivates individuals to fulfil their potential. The Quran further encourages this perspective in Surah Al-Dhuha, verses 3-5, which highlight Allah SWT's blessings and guidance toward eventual success:

"(That) your Lord has neither forsaken you nor hates you... And indeed, your Lord will give you (success and happiness in this world and the Hereafter) until you are pleased."

In conclusion, self-regulation in Islam involves controlling one's attitudes, emotions, and behaviours to align with Islamic principles. It serves as a guiding process for achieving both worldly and spiritual goals, ultimately preparing individuals for success in this life and the hereafter.

RELIGION AND SELF-REGULATION

Self-regulation in Islam extends beyond controlling impulses or managing behaviour; it is a holistic process of nurturing the soul and character to align with the will of God. As the Qur'an states in Surah Ash-Shams, verse 9:

"He has succeeded who purifies it (the soul), and he has failed who corrupts it."

This verse underscores the importance of purifying the soul as a foundation for moral development. The balance of the soul, anger, and intellect is central to forming a stable personality ([19], [25]). Imam al-Ghazali further emphasizes that faith strengthens the soul, fostering positive attitudes and behaviours, whereas weak faith weakens the moral foundation ([1], [2]).

In line with this, Musa proposed four methods to nurture good morals: learning through lesson, making it a habit, observation, and advice [18]. These methods share notable parallels with Zimmerman and Cleary's self-regulation framework, which highlights elements like reinforcement, repetition, role models, and social interaction [46].

Learning Through Lesson vs. Positive and Negative Reinforcement

Musa's method of learning through lesson involves providing children with knowledge of religious principles, the Quran, and Hadith. This process ensures that children are not only exposed to theoretical concepts but also encouraged to internalize these teachings and apply them in daily life ([22], [30]). Similarly, Zimmerman and Cleary emphasize positive and negative reinforcement as key to self-regulation. Positive reinforcement, such as rewards or praise, motivates individuals to repeat desirable behaviours, while negative reinforcement helps avoid undesirable outcomes [46]. Sanders et al. have shown that reward-based systems can improve children's emotional regulation by reinforcing prosocial behaviours [33].

For instance, teaching a child to pray regularly by rewarding their commitment aligns with positive reinforcement, while explaining the consequences of neglecting prayer serves as a form of negative reinforcement. Both approaches aim to instil self-discipline and a sense of accountability, reflecting how lessons in Islamic education reinforce self-regulatory behaviours.

Making It a Habit vs. Repetition of Good Behaviour

Musa's second method, making it a habit, highlights the importance of consistency and practice in moral education. In Islam, regular acts like prayer, fasting, and charity foster discipline, self-control, and a deep connection to God ([29], [24]). For example, the daily observance of the five daily prayers trains individuals to manage their time, focus their thoughts, and maintain self-discipline over their actions.

This mirrors Zimmerman and Cleary's focus on repetition of good behaviour as a core component of self-regulation. Repeated practice strengthens habits over time, ensuring that behaviours become automatic [46]. The Islamic emphasis on virtuous habits through continuous religious practice exemplifies how habit formation leads to long-term self-regulation. Suyarov observed that repeated engagement in religious rituals also nurtures resilience by reinforcing moral goals [39].

Through Observation vs. Parents as Role Models

Observation plays a critical role in Musa's third method, where children learn by imitating their role models, particularly parents and other influential figures. Parents who consistently demonstrate Islamic values—such as honesty, patience, and kindness—provide children with a tangible example of moral conduct ([35], [44]). For instance, when children observe their parents' giving charity, they internalize the value of generosity.

This aligns with Zimmerman and Cleary's emphasis on parents as role models in developing self-regulation. Observational learning, or modelling, allows children to acquire self-regulatory behaviours by witnessing how adults manage their emotions, control impulses, and make ethical decisions [46]. Chen et al. also highlights the role of symbolic models, such as community leaders or teachers, in shaping children's self-regulation [14]. Both perspectives emphasize that role models shape a child's capacity to internalize and implement positive behaviours.

Through Advice vs. Social Interaction.

Musa's final method, through advice, involves verbal guidance, discussions, and counselling to help children navigate moral dilemmas. Parents and educators play a crucial role in providing constructive feedback, encouragement, and wisdom, enabling children to make ethical decisions and regulate their conduct ([32], [35]). For instance, advising a child on how to handle peer pressure strengthens their ability to make independent, moral choices.

Similarly, Zimmerman and Cleary emphasize the role of social interaction in self-regulation. Meaningful dialogue and feedback from significant figures—such as parents or teachers—help children reflect on their actions, understand consequences, and improve their decision-making processes [46]. Chen et al. emphasize that collaborative discussions improve emotional resilience and reinforce moral alignment [14]. Both approaches recognize that guidance and interaction are essential for fostering autonomy and moral reasoning.

THE ROLE OF PARENTS IN BUILDING SELF-REGULATION SKILLS

The Islamic education process implemented by parents plays a critical role in nurturing the self-regulation of morality in children [26]. Parents are responsible for instilling Islamic values and behaviours from an early age, as emphasized in Surah al-Tahrim, verse 6:

"O you who believe! Protect yourselves and your families from a Fire whose fuel is people and stones."

This verse highlights the parental responsibility of guiding children toward righteousness. Zimmerman and Cleary outline four elements of self-regulation—social interaction, modelling, reinforcement, and repetition of behaviour—which align closely with Islamic approaches to moral education [46]. These elements highlight the connection between Islamic teachings and modern self-regulation theory.

Social interactions

Social interaction is vital for developing self-regulation skills as children learn through feedback and guidance from their environment [35]. Zimmerman and Cleary stress that feedback from interactions strengthens self-regulation [46]. Similarly, Musa's fourth method, "through advice," mirrors this element, where parents provide verbal guidance and discussions to foster autonomy and decision-making [18]. Sanders et al. also show that structured interactions within community settings can reinforce resilience and enhance self-awareness [33].

In the Islamic perspective, the community's role in supporting moral development is emphasized. A strong religious environment significantly influences children's education and parenting patterns [22]. For instance, frequent visits to places of worship provide parents with support, stability, and opportunities to interact with their children, strengthening bonds and nurturing self-regulation ([7], [31]).

Mason et al. highlight that while parents provide guidance early on, their role diminishes as children master self-regulation and become more independent ([27], [34]). Praise for good behaviour reinforces positive habits and helps children feel accountable for their actions [31]. This comparison demonstrates that Islamic advice methods align with Zimmerman's notion of feedback-driven social interaction.

Parents as models

Observational learning, where children imitate adult behaviour, is another critical pathway for developing self-regulation [35]. Zimmerman and Cleary identify "parents as role models" as a core element, which aligns directly with Musa's third method, "through observation" [18]. Chen et al. supports the role of symbolic models, such as teachers and peers, in shaping self-regulatory practices [14].

In Islam, parents serve as living examples of moral conduct, providing children with role models for virtuous behaviour. For example, encouraging children to observe and participate in daily prayers teaches discipline and consistency. Parents who model strong religious commitment, such as prioritizing congregational prayers, demonstrate the value of self-regulation and inspire children to develop similar habits ([32], [44]).

Studies by Bornstein et al. found that highly religious parents positively influence their children's social competence and academic success while reducing behavioural problems [7]. This highlights the role of parents as moral exemplars, demonstrating that observational learning enhances self-efficacy, perseverance, and emotional regulation [20].

Positive and negative reinforcement

The concept of reinforcement—positive or negative—is central to Zimmerman and Cleary's self-regulation framework. In Islamic parenting, Syed Hussin emphasizes the *targhib* (encouragement through rewards) and *tarhib* (warnings or punishments) approach [40]. Chen et al. similarly shows that reinforcement strategies improve emotional resilience when applied consistently [14]. While reinforcement can effectively shape behaviour, misconceptions often arise between negative reinforcement and punishment [36].

Flora explains that positive reinforcement increases desirable behaviour, such as praising a child for completing prayer, while negative reinforcement removes an undesirable stimulus, like turning off an alarm to wake up earlier [16]. Misunderstanding these concepts can lead to overly controlling parenting, which may increase behavioural issues despite parents' intentions [7].

To avoid this, parents must carefully balance reinforcement strategies. For example, praising children for good behaviour fosters internal motivation, while time spent with children can prevent negative influences ([35], [46]). This aligns with Zimmerman and Cleary's view that reinforcement—whether positive or negative—strengthens self-regulatory skills by encouraging goal-oriented behaviour.

Repetition of Good Behaviour

Repetition is a powerful tool for internalizing self-regulation. Zimmerman and Cleary emphasize the importance of repeated practice in forming self-regulatory habits [46]. Similarly, Musa's second method, "making it a habit," highlights the Islamic approach of consistent practice to reinforce noble qualities [18]. Chen et al. note that habits formed through repetition can lead to automatic, resilient behaviours [14].

In Islam, repeated actions such as performing the five daily prayers build discipline and moral strength. Tate suggests that behaviours practiced continuously for a minimum of three weeks can become ingrained habits [41]. For instance, parents who consistently teach children to tidy their rooms or practice honesty instil habits that last into adulthood ([38], [3]).

As children mature, their ability to self-regulate increases, reducing the need for parental intervention. By the time children reach adolescence, they are expected to manage their attitudes and responsibilities independently, such as completing homework or organizing study spaces [46]. This comparison shows how repeated behaviours, reinforced through parental guidance, build lifelong self-regulation skills.

OVERCOMING CHALLENGES IN NURTURING SELF-REGULATORY BEHAVIOUR AMONG CHILDREN

One significant challenge faced by parents is the pressure from societal expectations. Parents often feel compelled to conform to cultural norms and external standards, which may prioritize obedience and external control over fostering intrinsic motivation and self-discipline in children [23]. This societal pressure can lead parents to overlook the importance of allowing their children to develop self-regulation skills at their own pace.

Another challenge arises from the dynamic nature of the parent-child relationship. As children grow older, parents must adapt their parenting style to balance nurturing a close relationship with granting independence and fostering self-reliance. This adjustment can become particularly challenging during adolescence, as children begin asserting their own identities and values. Failing to strike this balance can lead to either over-controlling behaviour, which undermines intrinsic motivation, or overly permissive parenting, which may lack sufficient boundaries and guidance ([5], [15]).

Additionally, the fast-paced nature of modern life often makes it difficult for parents to dedicate the time and attention necessary for nurturing self-regulation. Stress, competing priorities, and mental health challenges can impair parents' ability to provide consistent guidance or serve as effective role models ([35], [15]). For families in poverty or unstable environments, limited resources further constrain opportunities for fostering self-regulation [20].

The changing structure of modern families also presents challenges. Dual-income households and single-parent families may have less time for direct interaction with children, which can hinder the development of self-regulation skills. Children in such households may lack the consistency and emotional support needed to build strong self-regulatory capacities [5].

Modern technology and media pose additional challenges. Children are exposed to a constant barrage of stimuli, including social media, games, and online content, which can distract from self-regulatory development. Peer pressure further complicates this issue, as children may be influenced to engage in behaviours that undermine

self-regulation [5]. Parents often struggle to find the right balance between permitting technology use and setting limits to encourage mindfulness and discipline.

Cultural and religious beliefs can also shape how parents approach self-regulation. In some cases, religious-based parenting may be perceived by children as overly controlling, potentially leading to behavioural problems if not balanced with love and understanding [23]. However, Islamic teachings also provide valuable guidance for integrating moral and spiritual development into parenting practices.

To address these challenges, parents can incorporate Islamic principles and modern educational practices into their approach to fostering self-regulation. One effective strategy is to emphasize moral reasoning and internalized values. Islamic teachings prioritize the development of integrity and ethical decision-making as central to personal growth. By focusing on these aspects, parents can encourage children to act out of intrinsic motivation rather than relying solely on external rewards or punishments.

The Islamic tradition's emphasis on self-reflection and mindfulness can further support self-regulation. Practices such as dhikr (remembrance of God), du'a (supplication), and contemplation help children develop self-awareness and emotional regulation. Parents can model these practices in daily life, showing their children how to regulate emotions and make thoughtful decisions rooted in faith and self-control ([37], [5]).

Balancing structure and autonomy is another key strategy. Parents must set clear boundaries and provide consistent guidance while allowing children to make choices and learn from their experiences. Over-controlling parenting stifles independence, while permissive parenting may fail to instil discipline. A balanced approach ensures that children develop the skills to navigate challenges independently while feeling supported ([5], [15]).

Parents should also be mindful of the influence of technology and media. By setting limits on screen time and encouraging alternative activities, such as reading, physical exercise, or engaging with community programs, parents can create an environment that fosters mindfulness, focus, and self-regulation.

CONCLUSIONS

Self-regulation is a crucial aspect of child development, influencing future success, emotional well-being, and moral behaviour. While parents play a pivotal role in nurturing self-regulation, they face numerous challenges, including societal pressures, modern lifestyles, evolving family structures, and technological distractions. These challenges can be particularly complex within the context of Islamic education, where moral and spiritual development are also emphasized.

To overcome these obstacles, parents can draw upon Islamic teachings to promote intrinsic motivation, moral reasoning, and self-discipline. By incorporating practices like self-reflection, mindfulness, and consistent moral guidance, parents can help children internalize values that guide their decision-making and behaviour. Moreover, balancing structure with autonomy ensures children develop independence while remaining grounded in ethical principles. The integration of Islamic principles and modern approaches creates a comprehensive framework for fostering self-regulation, ensuring children grow into morally upright, self-disciplined, and successful individuals in both this world and the hereafter.

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