

Unseen Education And Divine Agency: A Qur'anic Perspective on The Role of Angels in Spiritual Formation

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Abstract

Purpose – In Islamic educational tradition, the spiritual dimension plays a central role in shaping the human being holistically; however, studies exploring the involvement of transcendent entities such as angels as pedagogical agents remain scarce. This study aims to describe and to analyze the role of angels as divine agents in the spiritual formation of human beings according to the Qur'anic perspective.

Design/Method – Employing a qualitative literature-based approach in the form of a conceptual paper, this research examines Qur'anic verses using thematic exegesis (tafsir maudhu'i), alongside a synthesis of relevant scholarly literature and classical-contemporary tafsir.

Findings – The findings reveal that angels perform four key functions in spiritual education: as transmitters of revelation, spiritual guardians, providers of faith-based inspiration, and enforcers of transcendental moral values. These functions construct a framework of divine agency that actively guides spiritual consciousness toward tazkiyat al-nafs. This study enriches Islamic educational discourse by offering a new perspective on Qur'anic spirituality, emphasizing the role of transcendent beings in nurturing the soul. The article contributes theoretically to the development of Islamic educational epistemology and opens a pathway for integrating unseen dimensions into contemporary spiritual education practice in a more systematic and reflective manner.

Keywords: Unseen education, angels, divine agency, spiritual formation, thematic exegesis.

Ethical Statement: It is declared that scientific and ethical principles were adhered to during the preparation of this work, and all sources used have been properly cited in the bibliography. The article has been reviewed by at least two peer reviewers, a similarity report was obtained using Turnitin, and compliance with research/publication ethics has been confirmed.

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Article Type: Research Article

1. Introduction

Spiritual education in Islam represents a critical dimension that cannot be separated from the holistic development of the human being. In the context of modern global challenges, the spiritual dimension is increasingly threatened by the dominance of materialism, secularism, and individualism, which collectively erode the spiritual consciousness of society. This phenomenon directly contributes to a crisis of meaning, moral disorientation, and weakened connection between humans and the Creator. In Indonesia as the country with the largest Muslim population, the need for an educational system that emphasizes not only intellectual formation but also the reinforcement of spiritual values is growing increasingly urgent (Aldebsi et al., 2024). In this context, Islamic spirituality offers an educational paradigm rooted in the Qur'an that addresses all dimensions of human life: intellect, heart, and soul (Maslani et al., 2025).

Nevertheless, academic studies that specifically examine the role of angels as pedagogical agents in spiritual formation remain limited. Most research on Islamic education has focused on institutional-normative aspects or character development, while the unseen dimensions described in the Qur'an particularly the role of angels in guidance, inspiration, and revelation have yet to be analyzed as integral components of spiritual pedagogy (Rohmah & Roihanah, 2022). The Qur'an portrays angels as beings actively engaged in the transcendental journey of the human soul, particularly through their functions in conveying revelation, offering protection, and strengthening faith (Bhat, 2019).

From the perspective of Islamic epistemology, education encompasses the attainment of spiritual perfection through divine guidance and revelation. The concept of divine agency, embodied in the role of angels, is understood as part of a transcendental communication system between God and humanity. Angelology in the Islamic tradition does not merely position angels as metaphysical entities, but as active intermediaries between the divine realm and human experience (Bolton, 2014). This role bears deep pedagogical significance, reflecting the internalization of *tawhid*, *tazkiyat al-nafs*, and the strengthening of spiritual consciousness within the framework of Islamic faith (Sutiono, 2024).

Grounded in this background, the present study aims to describe and to analyze the role of angels as divine agents in the spiritual formation of human beings from the perspective of the Qur'an. The research raises two key questions: (1) Do angels have an educative function in shaping human spirituality according to the Qur'an? (2) How is divine agency articulated within the Qur'anic text? This study employs a qualitative approach based on literature analysis, using thematic interpretation of Qur'anic verses concerning the functions of angels in spiritual education, and triangulating findings through classical and contemporary *tafsir* to ensure a contextually grounded understanding.

The scientific contribution of this article lies in its effort to offer a new perspective within Islamic education studies, by exploring the transcendental dimension of pedagogy through the analysis of angels as agents of unseen education. This approach provides an alternative reading of spiritual formation that moves beyond doctrinal-normative models and instead explores the epistemic structure of divine agency articulated in the Qur'an (Tousi, 2011), (Burge, 2014), (Aziz, 2021), (Dastjerdi, 2022), (Syarif, 2020).

Literature Review

The concept of spiritual education in Islam is grounded in the integrated development of the soul and the purification of the self (*tazkiyat al-nafs*). Conceptually, this form of education refers to a holistic process of transformation aimed at guiding human beings toward spiritual and moral perfection through a deep connection with divine values expressed in the Qur'an. Its foundational principles include heart purification, reinforcement of faith, and character formation, as highlighted in a recent study by Aldebsi et al. (2024), which emphasizes that spiritual education in the Qur'an encompasses the purification of the soul, intellect, and physical self simultaneously (Aldebsi et al., 2024). Within this framework, spirituality is not seen as passive but as an active-transcendental dimension that interacts directly with divine revelation, angelic agency, and God's will.

Previous research has explored the significance of spiritual education in the Qur'an and the need to reinforce spiritual values in Islamic education. For example, Syarif (2020) identified prophetic spiritual missions in the Qur'an such as night prayers (*qiyām al-layl*),

remembrance (*dhikr*), and inner struggle that shape moral and ethical development (Syarif, 2020). Likewise, a thematic interpretation of the story of Luqman conducted by Rohmah and Roihanah (2022) shows how spiritual intelligence is formed through moral guidance, prayer, and respect for parents (Rohmah & Roihanah, 2022). Bhat (2019) further argues that the Qur'anic approach to spiritual development provides a sustainable model that intertwines moral values and spiritual awareness as key pillars of Islamic personality development (Bhat, 2019).

However, explicit academic engagement with the role of angels as pedagogical agents in the spiritual formation process remains underdeveloped. Many studies on Qur'anic spirituality treat angels solely as hierarchical executors or transmitters of revelation, rather than as active educational entities. Bolton (2014) notes that in Islamic mystical thought, angels like Jibril (Gabriel) are seen as *dispositifs* of soul salvation, playing a central role in spiritualization and heightened transcendental awareness, although such analyses are conceptual rather than systematically pedagogical (Bolton, 2014).

This article seeks to fill that academic gap by focusing on the Qur'anic construction of angelic divine agency in the context of spiritual education. Unlike prior studies that primarily explore moral values or learning methodologies, this research articulates the pedagogical function of angels as active facilitators of transcendental communication between God and humans. This perspective is anchored in the epistemology of revelation and views angels not just as intermediaries, but as spiritual agents shaping the human soul in alignment with Qur'anic teachings (Rahmatika, 2021).

Methodologically, prior literature reflects a variety of approaches, including thematic interpretation, textual analysis of the Qur'an, and qualitative fieldwork. Turwanto et al. (2023), in their descriptive study of Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*), emphasize the integration of spiritual education across all subjects as a key strategy for character formation (Turwanto et al., 2023). Meanwhile, Dastjerdi (2022) offers a philosophical Qur'anic framework in which the human being can spiritually ascend to angelic levels through proper education and soul refinement (Dastjerdi, 2022). Aziz (2021), in a conceptual literature review, highlights the limited integration of Qur'anic spiritual concepts into formal educational frameworks (Aziz, 2021).

Based on these insights, the present article develops a conceptual synthesis arguing that the role of angels in spiritual education should be understood not merely as symbolic but as a form of active divine agency with pedagogical implications. In the Qur'anic worldview, angels serve as spiritual guides, moral overseers, and faith-strengtheners, each contributing to the human journey toward *tazkiyat al-nafs*. The thematic interpretation of Qur'anic verses thus forms the core of this study's effort to construct an epistemological and educational model of unseen pedagogy in Islam, with implications for contemporary educational theory and spiritual development.

2. Method

This study adopts a qualitative literature-based approach in the form of a conceptual paper aimed at examining in depth and systematically the concept of spiritual education through the divine agency of angels within the Qur'anic framework. The research strategy employed is library research, with a focus on thematic interpretation (*tafsīr maudhū'ī*) of verses related to the role of angels in shaping human spirituality. This approach is appropriate for exploring the philosophical and normative meanings of religious texts within the context of Islamic education (Putra & Khasanah, 2023).

The primary data sources include Qur'anic verses that address the role of angels particularly in conveying revelation, offering protection, and inspiring spiritual consciousness. Secondary data are drawn from classical and modern tafsir works, such as *Tafsīr Ibn Kathīr*, *Al-Marāghī*, and *Al-Misbāḥ*, as well as scholarly articles from reputable academic journals that discuss spiritual education and angelology in Islamic theology (Sudin et al., 2023). Additional literature on relevant theoretical frameworks including divine agency, transpersonal communication (revelation), and Islamic epistemology was also reviewed to support the conceptual analysis.

Data collection was conducted through documentation, involving the systematic search, selection, and organization of textual sources aligned with the research focus. The literature search protocol utilized academic databases such as Google Scholar, Dimensions, and various open-access platforms using keywords including *spiritual education*, *angelic agency*, *Qur'anic pedagogy*, and *thematic exegesis*. Only open-

access publications published preferably within the last five years and directly relevant to the research questions were included (Rosidin & Andriani, 2022).

The inclusion criteria for the sources were: (1) literature discussing Qur'anic references to the role of angels; (2) studies applying thematic interpretation or pedagogical Qur'anic exegesis; and (3) open-access scholarly works published in recognized academic journals. The exclusion criteria were: (1) non-academic or popular sources; (2) materials lacking direct educational or theological relevance to divine agency; and (3) speculative studies without solid theoretical groundin (Kholik, et al, 2024).

The unit of analysis consisted of selected Qur'anic verses containing explicit or implicit descriptions of angelic involvement in human spiritual dynamics, including, for example, QS al-Baqarah [2]: 97–98, QS Fussilat [41]: 30–31, and QS al-Muddaththir [74]: 31. These verses were selected based on their thematic relevance to divine communication, spiritual guidance, faith reinforcement, and protection. Thematic classification was conducted systematically using categories derived from the recurring functions of angels across these texts (Fadal, 2022).

Data analysis employed thematic analysis based on the *tafsīr maudhū'ī* approach. The process involved identifying key themes, categorizing their meanings, and synthesizing interpretive insights from Qur'anic narratives about angelic agency. Both deductive and inductive reasoning were applied to extract educational values inherent in the texts. Triangulation was achieved by comparing classical and contemporary interpretations to enhance thematic validity. Although no software tools were used, the analysis was conducted manually in accordance with established models of Qur'anic educational interpretation (Lubis & Nugroho, 2024), (Rozani et al., 2022). This methodological design enables a valid, systematic, and in-depth conceptual analysis of the pedagogical function of angels in spiritual education from a Qur'anic perspective.

3. Results

The term *malaikat* (angel) in Islamic theology originates from the root word **مَلَك** (*malak*) which follows the morphological pattern of *maf'ala*. It initially had a hamzah (ء) which was later elided, giving the word its current form. Linguistically, the word implies "ar-

risālah" (message or mission), emphasizing the role of angels as messengers or envoys of divine commands. Classical scholars such as Ibn Manzur and Al-Fairuz Abadi interpret the term *malaikat* as entities tasked with delivering messages from Allah to His creation. The singular form *malak* conveys the notion of control or authority, while its plural form *malaikat* underscores their collective role in governing aspects of the physical and spiritual realms under divine command. Some scholars trace its etymology to *'alaka* or *ma'lakah*, meaning "to send" or "to commission," aligning with the angels' role as intermediaries between God and humanity.

In the Qur'an, the term *malaikat* and its derivatives, including *malak*, *malakan*, and *malaikain*, appear 88 times, paralleling the frequency of the term *shayṭān* (Satan) in its various forms. The usage of these terms highlights the angels' multifaceted roles as executors of divine will, messengers of revelation, and guardians of creation. Notably, angels are referenced both by name (e.g., Jibril and Mikail) and by their functions, as reflected in verses such as Surah Fatir (35:1) and Surah Al-Hajj (22:75). This thematic presence across the Qur'an illustrates their significance in the Islamic cosmological framework. Beyond their literal meaning, some scholars, including Al-Qashri, view *malaikat* as symbolic of rational potential (*istidlāl al-'aql*) within humans, distinguishing virtuous, angelic dispositions (*adamiyan malakiyan*) from destructive, satanic tendencies (*adamiyan shayṭāniyan*).

Based on a synthesis of literature using the *tafsīr maudhū'ī* (thematic exegesis) approach, the role of angels as agents of spiritual education in the Qur'an can be categorized into four major thematic groups: (1) angels as conveyors of divine revelation; (2) angels as spiritual guardians and overseers; (3) angels as sources of inspiration and reinforcement of faith; and (4) angels as witnesses and enforcers of transcendental pedagogical values. These categories were derived from a close analysis of selected Qur'anic verses, classical and modern tafsir texts, and conceptual literature on spiritual education and divine agency in Islam.

First, the theme of *angels as conveyors of revelation* is clearly reflected in verses that depict Jibrīl (Gabriel) as the emissary of Allah to the Prophets, especially in transmitting the Qur'an to the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). Haromain and Hakim (2023) affirm that

angels, in this capacity, not only deliver divine messages but also spiritually guide and prepare the Prophets for their role as educators of humankind (Haromain & Hakim, 2023). This role reflects a direct relationship between pedagogical function and spiritual transcendence in the dynamics of revelation.

Second, the theme of *angels as spiritual guardians and overseers* is found in verses such as QS Fussilat [41]: 30–31 and QS al-Ra'd [13]: 11, which describe the presence of angels who accompany the faithful, fortify their faith, and protect them from destructive influences. A study by Djuned et al. (2024) highlights these verses as integral to building moral awareness and spiritual introspection through the angelic function as a reminder and spiritual monitor (Djuned et al., 2024).

Third, the theme of *angels as sources of inspiration and reinforcement of faith* appears frequently in Qur'anic narratives that describe angels providing glad tidings and instilling inner peace in believers. This finding is reinforced by Hocini et al. (2020), who analyzed Sayyid Qutb's tafsir and emphasized the angelic role in actualizing faith through spiritual means such as remembrance (*dhikr*), patience, and gratitude (Hocini et al., 2020).

Fourth, *angels as witnesses and enforcers of transcendental moral values* are illustrated in verses describing their role in recording human deeds (QS Qaf [50]: 17–18) and reinforcing accountability and moral structure. Hadi (2024) shows that thematic exegesis can construct this role as part of the Islamic educational system that emphasizes spiritual accountability and the continuity of divine values (Hadi, 2024).

Regarding publication characteristics, most of the reviewed literature consists of thematic tafsir studies published in Islamic education journals between 2020 and 2025, with a dominant focus on spirituality, exegesis methodology, and character development. Hafid et al. (2025) found that thematic interpretation effectively enhances the understanding of integrative and contextual Islamic educational principles (Hafid et al., 2025). Conversely, Azizy et al. (2021) noted methodological inconsistencies in the application of *tafsir mawḍū'ī* at the undergraduate level, which contributes to the lack of systematic exploration of angelic agency themes (Azizy et al., 2021).

Methodologically, the studies reviewed largely employ the thematic exegesis approach, although differences exist in their analytical organization. Suryadi (2016), for instance,

integrates the concept of *munāsabah al-āyāt* (contextual harmony of verses) to strengthen textual coherence, while Shofiyah (2021) emphasizes terminological investigation and historical context in deriving spiritual and educational meanings (Suryadi, 2016), (Shofiyah, 2021).

Ultimately, this synthesis suggests that integrating thematic tafsir with Qur'anic spirituality offers a rich academic pathway for exploring angels as pedagogical subjects. This study lays an epistemological foundation for further conceptualizing the structure and patterns of unseen education in Islam, centered on human interaction with the transcendental realm.

4. Discussion

The primary findings of this study affirm that angels, according to the Qur'an, function not merely as transmitters of divine revelation or executors of God's commands, but also as pedagogical agents actively involved in shaping the spiritual consciousness of human beings. These findings directly correspond to the study's objectives and research questions concerning the educational functions of angels and the articulation of divine agency in the Qur'anic text. The four thematic categories identified messengers of revelation, spiritual guardians, providers of inspiration, and enforcers of transcendental moral values collectively construct an operative model of divine agency that guides humans toward spiritual purification (*tazkiyat al-nafs*).

From a conceptual standpoint, these results can be interpreted within the framework of Islamic spiritual education theory, which emphasizes the transformation of the soul through connection to divine realities. Education in this context is not confined to knowledge transmission but includes the sanctification of the self and the internalization of faith. Angels, in this schema, function as intermediaries between divine knowledge and human awareness. This interpretation aligns with Dastjerdi (2022), who posits that humans in the Qur'anic view possess the capacity to ascend toward angelic levels of being through proper spiritual formation (Dastjerdi, 2022). Therefore, angels are not merely symbolic but act as dynamic agents in the epistemological process of spiritual education.

These findings also reinforce the outcomes of prior studies. Bhat (2019) argues that the Qur'anic model of education integrates morality and spirituality as pillars of sustainable human development (Bhat, 2019). Similarly, Syarif (2020) highlights how the Prophet's educational mission in the Qur'an through acts such as prayer, remembrance, and personal disciplineserves as a framework for character building (Syarif, 2020). However, this article goes further by conceptualizing the angel as a pedagogical subject, a perspective seldom examined in a systematic manner within existing studies on Islamic education.

The theoretical contribution of this article lies in its integration of angelology with the epistemology of revelation, thereby offering a novel framework for understanding Qur'anic pedagogy. By presenting angels as agents within the educational system of the soul, the study introduces a transcendental reading of spirituality that transcends normative-dogmatic approaches. This model also offers practical value in connecting Qur'anic interpretation with contemporary educational practice, particularly in contexts that demand a more holistic and spiritually grounded curriculum (Tousi, 2011).

Nonetheless, this study acknowledges certain limitations. First, as a literature-based conceptual paper, it does not engage with empirical experiences of spirituality that could further enrich its findings. Second, not all psychosocial aspects of human-angel interaction are explicitly articulated in the Qur'an, due to the metaphysical and symbolic language used in the text. These limitations highlight the need for complementary approaches such as phenomenological or field-based inquiry in future studies to better understand the lived dimensions of transcendental pedagogy.

Considering these findings and limitations, further research is recommended to explore individual or communal experiences of spiritual development involving angelic presence, particularly through phenomenological or transpersonal psychological methods. Educational practitioners are also encouraged to consider incorporating angelic roles into spiritual and theological curricula, enabling students to appreciate the metaphysical dimensions of Islamic faith beyond abstract belief (Mufidah, 2012). For policymakers, this study suggests that spiritual literacy programs should move beyond

cognitive instruction and engage learners in affective and transcendental reflection rooted in Qur'anic spirituality (Mustakim et al., 2021).

Finally, related literature shows that Qur'anic worldview-based education must evolve beyond normative doctrine into a coherent epistemological system that integrates spiritual, social, and pedagogical dimensions (Iqbal, 2012). Within this paradigm, the angelic agency explored in this study offers an innovative direction for interdisciplinary research in Islamic studies and spiritual education.

5. Conclusion

This study concludes that angels, from the Qur'anic perspective, possess complex and multifaceted educational roles in the spiritual formation of human beings. Through a thematic interpretation of relevant verses, four central dimensions of angelic function were identified: conveyors of divine revelation, guardians of the soul, inspirers of faith, and enforcers of transcendental moral values. These functions collectively illustrate a model of active divine agency, revealing that spiritual education in Islam transcends intellectual and moral frameworks by incorporating metaphysical and unseen elements. Thus, the research effectively addresses the central questions concerning the pedagogical function of angels and the articulation of their agency within the Qur'anic narrative.

Conceptually, the article offers a significant contribution to the field of Islamic education by introducing angels as pedagogical subjects, an area rarely explored within traditional educational discourses. This approach enhances the epistemology of Islamic education by integrating transcendental dimensions into the formation of the self. It also has practical implications for curriculum development, particularly in reinforcing spiritual consciousness through the inclusion of angelic agency in theological and character education models.

The findings suggest that future research may benefit from integrating phenomenological or transpersonal perspectives to examine how individuals and communities experience angelic influence in spiritual development. Furthermore, educational programs aiming to cultivate holistic spirituality should consider including

metaphysical elements rooted in the Qur'an, enabling a deeper and more transformative engagement with Islamic values in both personal and institutional settings.

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