

Rethinking *Ta'zim* and the Ethical Limits of Educational Authority through *Phronesis* in Educator Student Relationships

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ABSTRACT

Respect for educators remains important in educational relationships, yet it becomes ethically problematic when interpreted as absolute obedience that places educators' actions beyond moral evaluation. This study examines how *ta'zim* can retain its educational significance while establishing ethical limits on educational authority through the Aristotelian concept of *phronesis*. The study employed qualitative, library-based philosophical inquiry, using *Ta'lim al-Muta'allim* and *Nicomachean Ethics* as primary texts and relevant educational scholarship as secondary literature. The analysis involved description, interpretation, and critical normative evaluation. The findings show that *ta'zim* is better understood as a relational virtue connecting learners' respect with educators' moral responsibility. *Phronesis* provides a normative basis for evaluating authority through educational purpose, proportionality, learners' dignity and well-being, and character formation. Violence justified through discipline or respect represents a failure of practical wisdom rather than an inherent consequence of *ta'zim*. This framework offers a conceptual basis for ethically responsible educational authority while requiring further empirical examination across educational settings.

Penghormatan kepada pendidik tetap penting dalam hubungan pendidikan, tetapi menjadi persoalan etis ketika dimaknai sebagai kepatuhan absolut yang menempatkan tindakan pendidik di luar evaluasi moral. Penelitian ini mengkaji bagaimana ta'zim dapat mempertahankan makna pendidikannya sekaligus menetapkan batas etis otoritas pendidikan melalui konsep Aristotelian phronesis. Penelitian menggunakan kajian filosofis kualitatif berbasis kepustakaan dengan Ta'lim al-Muta'allim dan Nicomachean Ethics sebagai teks primer serta literatur pendidikan yang relevan sebagai sumber sekunder. Analisis dilakukan melalui tahap deskripsi, interpretasi, dan evaluasi normatif kritis. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa ta'zim lebih tepat dipahami sebagai kebajikan relasional yang menghubungkan penghormatan peserta didik dengan tanggung jawab moral pendidik. Phronesis memberikan dasar normatif untuk menilai otoritas berdasarkan tujuan pendidikan, proporsionalitas, martabat dan kesejahteraan peserta didik, serta pembentukan karakter. Kekerasan yang dibenarkan melalui disiplin atau penghormatan merupakan kegagalan kebijaksanaan praktis, bukan konsekuensi inheren dari ta'zim. Kerangka ini menawarkan dasar konseptual bagi penggunaan otoritas pendidikan yang bertanggung jawab secara etis dan masih memerlukan pengujian empiris dalam beragam konteks pendidikan.

Keywords: educational authority, *phronesis*, *ta'zim*, violence in education, virtue ethics

Introduction

Educational authority is an inherent dimension of educational practice because educators do more than transmit knowledge; they guide learning (Dilek et al., 2025; Giroux, 1986; Neiman, 1986; Smolentseva, 2023), establish behavioral expectations, evaluate performance, and make decisions that influence students' development (Almelhes, 2025; Han et al., 2025). Such authority derives its legitimacy not merely from the formal position occupied by an educator but from the educational purposes that its exercise is expected to serve, including students'

intellectual, social, and moral development. Education, in this sense, cannot be reduced to the transmission of knowledge, as it also involves processes of socialization and the formation of students as subjects capable of positioning themselves responsibly within social and moral life (Biesta, 2020). A tension nevertheless exists between the ideal function of educational authority and the possibility of its misuse in practice. Authority intended to provide guidance may become a means of demanding compliance when the educator's status is considered sufficient to justify actions toward students. Violence between educators and students demonstrates that educational relationships may become sites of conflict when discipline and authority are not accompanied by adequate moral judgment (Fauzi, 2017; Jadwiszczak et al., 2025; Longmuir et al., 2025). The central problem, therefore, is not whether authority is necessary in education, but how pedagogically justified authority can be distinguished from an exercise of power that has exceeded the moral purposes of education.

This tension becomes particularly significant within educational traditions that regard respect for educators as an important component of character formation. Within Islamic education, one prominent expression of this orientation is *ta'zim*, which receives important articulation in Az-Zarnuji's *Ta'lim al-Muta'allim*. Broadly understood, *ta'zim* refers to a form of respect that extends beyond formal courtesy and concerns the learner's moral disposition toward knowledge, those who teach it, and the process through which knowledge is acquired. Educational values associated with *Ta'lim al-Muta'allim* position proper conduct, respect for knowledge, and appropriate relationships with educators as important dimensions of students' formation (Asnimar et al., 2022; Rahmadi & Hamdan, 2023). Within this orientation, *ta'zim* possesses pedagogical significance because respect may cultivate humility, receptiveness to guidance, commitment to learning, and recognition of scholarly authority. A conceptual tension nevertheless emerges between *ta'zim* as a virtue of respect and practices in which respect is interpreted as an obligation to obey. When these two meanings are treated as interchangeable, the educator's status may become difficult to subject to moral evaluation, while students may lose the space necessary to distinguish educational guidance from exercises of authority that undermine their well-being.

Previous studies have predominantly emphasized the constructive dimensions of the educational values contained in *Ta'lim al-Muta'allim*. Asnimar et al. (2022), for example, discuss educational methods from Az-Zarnuji's perspective, while Suryani et al. (2023) examine students within the educational framework developed in *Ta'lim al-Muta'allim*. Research on pesantren traditions also indicates that practices of respect surrounding students' relationships with religious authority possess distinctive social and moral meanings within their educational experience (Syihabuddin et al., 2023). This literature is important because it demonstrates that respect for educators should not be treated as inherently detrimental to students. On the contrary, respect may contribute to character formation and the ethics of learning. The predominant normative orientation of these studies, however, leaves a different but fundamental question insufficiently addressed: does respect have moral limits when educational authority is exercised in ways that may humiliate, coerce, or harm students? Recognition of the educational value of *ta'zim* does not establish that every action undertaken by a person occupying an educational position possesses moral legitimacy. The unresolved issue is therefore not whether *ta'zim* has educational value, but under what ethical conditions it can remain a virtue without being transformed into a justification for absolute obedience. This question places *ta'zim* not only within Islamic educational scholarship but also within

broader educational debates concerning authority, discipline, students' dignity, and educators' moral responsibility.

Addressing this question requires a conceptual distinction among respect, obedience, authority, and domination. Respect within an educational relationship does not necessarily negate authority, just as the existence of authority does not necessarily produce violence. Education requires guidance, correction, rules, evaluation, and, under certain circumstances, restrictions on students' behavior. The ethical difficulty arises when the success of educational action is measured primarily by the production of compliance without examining how that compliance is obtained or how the means employed affect students' development. Contemporary Aristotelian accounts of character education do not reduce moral development to behavioral conformity with prescribed rules but connect virtue with the capacity to act well through appropriate moral judgment (Athanassoulis, 2024a; Carr, 2024; Curren & Park, 2024). Discipline that secures compliance through fear therefore cannot simply be equated with educational action that contributes to character formation. From this perspective, *ta'zim* needs to be understood as a relational virtue in which respect acquires educational meaning through the reciprocal responsibilities embedded in pedagogical relationships: students are expected to respect educators, while educators are morally responsible for exercising their authority in ways consistent with educational purposes. Such an interpretation allows respect to be preserved without rendering authority immune from ethical evaluation.

Aristotelian virtue ethics, particularly the concept of *phronesis* or practical wisdom, offers a relevant framework for such an evaluation. Broadly conceived, *phronesis* refers to the capacity for practical judgment concerning what ought to be done in concrete circumstances, meaning that morally appropriate action cannot be determined solely through possession of rules or abstract knowledge of the good. Its relevance to education lies in the fact that educators continually encounter situations requiring contextual judgment: when correction is necessary, how misconduct should be addressed, what degree of sanction is proportionate, and how authority can be maintained without damaging the pedagogical relationship. Scholarship concerning *phronesis* and professional ethics in teaching identifies practical wisdom as an important capacity through which educators recognize morally salient features of situations and integrate competing considerations in determining an appropriate course of action (Kristjánsson, 2024). Neo-Aristotelian discussions of education similarly highlight the importance of virtue and practical judgment in connecting character with concrete educational action (Brunsdon, 2024; Kristjánsson, 2022). In the present study, *phronesis* is therefore not conceptualized as a fixed set of external rules determining what educators may or may not do. Instead, it functions as a normative capacity for evaluating the purposes, contextual appropriateness, proportionality, and consequences of authority, thereby enabling a distinction between discipline that continues to serve educational purposes and coercive conduct that has lost its pedagogical legitimacy.

Although scholarship on *ta'zim* and *phronesis* provides important conceptual foundations, these bodies of literature have largely developed along separate lines. Studies of *Ta'lim al-Muta'allim* have primarily examined proper conduct, character, discipline, and respect within the pursuit of knowledge (Asnimar et al., 2022; I. Suryani et al., 2023), whereas educational scholarship on *phronesis* has more commonly addressed virtue, moral judgment, and professional decision-making (Athanassoulis, 2024b; Kristjánsson, 2022, 2024; Yacek & Jonas, 2025). Their intersection as a means of evaluating the ethical limits of educational authority remains insufficiently elaborated. The present study occupies this conceptual space by rejecting

two simplifying assumptions. First, it does not presume that *ta'zim* causes violence, since such an assumption would overlook the moral and pedagogical significance of respect within Islamic educational thought. Second, it does not regard educational authority as inherently repressive, since guidance and legitimate authority remain necessary dimensions of educational practice. Instead, this study advances the position that the moral legitimacy of authority depends on how it is exercised in concrete circumstances. Bringing *ta'zim* into dialogue with *phronesis* therefore makes it possible to conceptualize respect as a relational virtue whose educational legitimacy is sustained only when authority remains responsive to pedagogical purpose, proportionality, students' dignity, and the moral consequences of educators' actions.

Against this background, the present study aims to rethink *ta'zim* and the ethical limits of educational authority through *phronesis* within educator–student relationships. More specifically, it examines how *ta'zim* can be preserved as a relational virtue without being reduced to absolute obedience and how *phronesis* can provide a normative basis for evaluating educators' actions when respect encounters coercive or violent practices. By bringing Az-Zarnuji's educational thought into dialogue with Aristotelian virtue ethics, the analysis develops an account of educational authority grounded in moral responsibility, practical wisdom, proportionality, pedagogical purpose, and respect for students' dignity. The article proceeds by examining *ta'zim* and educational authority, developing *phronesis* as a framework for moral judgment, and subsequently evaluating violence as a possible distortion of the pedagogical relationship. Through this analysis, the study is expected to demonstrate that the central ethical problem lies neither in respect nor in authority itself, but in the absence of practical wisdom required to determine the appropriate limits of their exercise. Its contribution therefore extends beyond a reinterpretation of *ta'zim* within Islamic education by offering a broader conceptual framework for understanding how educational authority can remain a legitimate element of pedagogical relationships without being exempted from moral evaluation.

Methods

This study employed a qualitative, library-based philosophical inquiry to examine the ethical relationship among *ta'zim*, educational authority, and *phronesis*. The qualitative orientation was adopted because the study emphasized the interpretation of meanings, concepts, and arguments contained in textual sources rather than the measurement of variables or statistical generalization (Sugiyono, 2023; Suhirman et al., 2026). A philosophical approach was selected because the study did not seek to measure the prevalence of particular educational practices or establish empirical causal relationships; rather, it sought to clarify concepts, examine their normative implications, and construct an ethically defensible account of educational authority. Conceptual inquiry is particularly appropriate when educational problems require the clarification of meanings, assumptions, and relationships among concepts rather than the aggregation of empirical findings (Lourie & McPhail, 2024). The material object of the study was *ta'zim* as articulated in Az-Zarnuji's *Ta'lim al-Muta'allim*, particularly in relation to respect for educators, knowledge, and the ethical conduct of learners. Its formal object was Aristotelian virtue ethics, with particular emphasis on *phronesis* as practical wisdom concerned with context-sensitive moral judgment. The primary textual sources were therefore *Ta'lim al-Muta'allim* and Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, while secondary sources consisted of scholarly books and peer-reviewed journal articles addressing Islamic educational ethics, *ta'zim*, Aristotelian virtue ethics, *phronesis*, professional ethics in teaching, educational authority, character education, and violence in educational relationships. Secondary literature was

selected on the basis of its direct conceptual relevance to the research question, its capacity to clarify or critically interpret the primary texts, and its contribution to positioning the argument within contemporary educational scholarship. Recent academic literature was prioritized for the contemporary discussion, while older works were retained when they represented primary texts or conceptually significant sources that could not appropriately be replaced by more recent publications.

The documentary materials were examined through three interconnected analytical stages: description, interpretation, and critical evaluation. The descriptive stage reconstructed the principal meanings of *ta'zim* and *phronesis* within their respective intellectual contexts without initially treating the two concepts as equivalent. Passages concerning respect for teachers, knowledge, learner conduct, and educational relationships in *Ta'lim al-Muta'allim* were examined alongside Aristotelian discussions of practical wisdom, moral judgment, appropriate action, and the relationship between virtue and human flourishing. The interpretive stage subsequently identified points of conceptual convergence and tension between the two traditions, with particular attention to the distinction between respect and absolute obedience, as well as between legitimate educational authority and domination. At this stage, contemporary educational scholarship was used as an interpretive context rather than as evidence for attributing concepts retrospectively to either Az-Zarnuji or Aristotle. This distinction was maintained to avoid collapsing historically and philosophically distinct traditions into a single conceptual framework. The analysis therefore employed a dialogical comparison: *ta'zim* was interpreted on its own educational terms before being placed in conversation with *phronesis*. Such a procedure is consistent with conceptual approaches in educational research in which concepts function as analytical resources for examining complex educational problems (Lourie & McPhail, 2024). It also recognizes that *phronesis* involves deliberation about what is morally appropriate for particular persons and circumstances rather than the mechanical application of universal prescriptions (Eriksen & Strumińska-Kutra, 2022).

The final stage involved critical normative evaluation of educational authority, particularly when respect for educators is invoked to justify coercive or violent conduct. *Phronesis* was operationalized as an evaluative lens rather than treated merely as a theoretical label. Four interrelated considerations guided the analysis: the educational purpose of an action, its proportionality to the concrete situation, its implications for the dignity and well-being of the student, and its consistency with the broader aim of cultivating good character rather than securing compliance through fear or coercion. This formulation reflects contemporary accounts of Aristotelian practical wisdom in professional teaching ethics, in which *phronesis* functions as an integrative capacity for recognizing morally salient features of particular situations and adjudicating among competing considerations in professional judgment (Kristjánsson, 2024). On this basis, the analysis did not assume in advance that *ta'zim* legitimizes violence or, conversely, that every exercise of educational authority constitutes domination. Instead, each claim was evaluated according to whether the exercise of authority remained compatible with the educational purposes attributed to the pedagogical relationship and with the practical wisdom required to determine appropriate action in context. The resulting interpretation was then compared with contemporary scholarship on educational ethics and authority to identify areas of convergence, tension, and conceptual extension. Because the study was philosophical and text-based, its conclusions are offered as normative and conceptual arguments rather than empirical generalizations about all educators, students, pesantren, or Islamic educational institutions.

Result

Ta'zim as a Relational Virtue in Educational Relationships

The analysis of *Ta'lim al-Muta'allim* indicates that *ta'zim* occupies a fundamental position in the relationship among learners, educators, and knowledge. Respect for educators does not function as an isolated rule of courtesy detached from the learning process; rather, it forms part of an ethical orientation that shapes how learners position themselves in the pursuit of knowledge. Within this framework, respect for educators is associated with respect for the knowledge they transmit, receptiveness to guidance, seriousness in learning, and the ability to conduct oneself appropriately within an educational relationship. The meaning of *ta'zim* therefore extends beyond formal compliance with rules or externally observable forms of etiquette. It operates at the level of disposition by shaping learners' attitudes toward learning and toward those who perform a pedagogical role within that process. This finding indicates that *ta'zim* derives its educational value not merely from its capacity to generate compliance, but from its role in establishing the moral conditions under which the pursuit of knowledge can proceed through humility, openness to guidance, and recognition of the educational relationship.

This interpretation further indicates that *ta'zim* is more appropriately understood as a relational virtue than as a unilateral obligation imposed upon learners. Its relational character is important because respect acquires educational meaning through the purpose and quality of the relationship it helps to establish. Learners are expected to respect educators and remain receptive to their guidance, yet this expectation does not position educators as holders of authority independent of educational purposes. Educators' authority acquires meaning precisely because it is connected to their responsibility to guide learners toward intellectual and character development. *Ta'zim* therefore establishes a relationship containing two interconnected dimensions: learners' recognition of pedagogical authority and educators' moral responsibility in exercising that authority. Such a relationship differs from a structure of power concerned solely with securing obedience from a subordinate party because the legitimacy of both positions remains connected to the educational purposes underlying the relationship.

On this basis, the analysis demonstrates that *ta'zim* does not inherently eliminate learners' moral agency or grant educators unlimited legitimacy. Respect can coexist with the capacity to evaluate whether a particular action continues to serve a pedagogical purpose. Indeed, when *ta'zim* is maintained as a relational virtue, moral responsibility becomes internal to its operation. Learners have an ethical responsibility to respect educators, while educators simultaneously bear a responsibility to ensure that their authority is exercised for learners' educational development. This finding produces a more specific interpretation of *ta'zim*: respect is not the ultimate objective of the educational relationship but a moral condition that enables that relationship to pursue educational goods. The educational significance of *ta'zim*, consequently, should not be determined by the degree to which learners submit to educators, but by the extent to which respect sustains a relationship oriented toward knowledge, character formation, and learners' development.

From Respect to Absolute Obedience: The Ethical Ambiguity of Ta'zim

The analysis further identifies a significant conceptual boundary between respect and absolute obedience. At the behavioral level, the two may appear similar because respect for educators is frequently expressed through willingness to receive guidance, observe rules, or comply with particular decisions. Their moral structures, however, are substantially different.

Respect allows educators' actions to remain intelligible and assessable in relation to the educational purposes they are intended to serve, whereas absolute obedience tends to treat the educator's position as sufficient justification for action. This transition generates the central ethical ambiguity surrounding interpretations of *ta'zim*. When respect becomes an obligation to obey without considering the nature, purpose, proportionality, and consequences of educators' actions, *ta'zim* no longer functions solely as a virtue supporting learning. It becomes capable of serving as a normative basis for insulating educational authority from moral evaluation.

This ambiguity becomes particularly visible when educators' authority is detached from the purposes that provide its legitimacy. Correction, discipline, rules, and restrictions on learners' behavior may constitute legitimate dimensions of educational practice and do not in themselves indicate domination. The ethical difficulty arises when such actions are regarded as justified merely because they are performed by an educator. Under these conditions, the source of legitimacy shifts from pedagogical purpose to the status of the person exercising authority. This shift has an important consequence: the question of whether an action is educationally defensible may be replaced by the question of whether the learner has obeyed the educator. The analysis identifies this change in orientation as the point at which a pedagogical relationship becomes vulnerable to transformation into a relationship of domination. Authority then ceases primarily to function as a condition that enables education and may instead become a means of preserving compliance with the authority holder.

This finding addresses the first research question by demonstrating that *ta'zim* can be preserved as an educational virtue without being translated into absolute obedience. The boundary lies in whether respect continues to perform a pedagogical function. As long as respect supports openness to knowledge, receptiveness to guidance, character formation, and a responsible educational relationship, *ta'zim* continues to operate as a relational virtue. When respect is invoked to remove the possibility of morally evaluating educators' actions, however, it moves toward a form of obedience that is ethically distinct from *ta'zim* as a virtue. The issue therefore cannot be resolved by simply opposing respect to disobedience. What is required is a distinction between respect that strengthens pedagogical relationships and obedience that removes the moral limits of authority. This distinction allows the educational significance of *ta'zim* to be retained without positioning educators beyond moral responsibility.

Phronesis as the Ethical Boundary of Educational Authority

The analysis of Aristotelian virtue ethics indicates that *phronesis* provides a normative basis for determining how educational authority should be exercised in concrete circumstances. Educational authority does not operate under entirely uniform conditions. Educators encounter different learners, different forms of misconduct, different educational needs, and situations requiring responses that cannot always be determined through the application of general rules. Knowing that an educator possesses the authority to provide direction or impose discipline is therefore insufficient to determine whether a particular action is morally appropriate. What is required is the capacity to judge what should be done, how it should be done, to what extent, for whom, and for what educational purpose. It is within this context that *phronesis* assumes its central function. Practical wisdom connects the possession of educational authority with the moral judgment necessary to ensure that its exercise remains oriented toward educational purposes.

Operationalizing *phronesis* within the analysis produced four interrelated considerations. First, an exercise of authority must possess an intelligible educational purpose, so that action is

not undertaken merely to demonstrate power or secure submission. Second, the action must satisfy proportionality, meaning that the form and intensity of the response should correspond to the concrete educational situation. Third, it must take seriously the dignity and well-being of the learner, because learners' development constitutes a fundamental justification for pedagogical authority. Fourth, the action must remain consistent with the formation of good character, rather than merely producing externally compliant behavior through fear or coercion. These considerations do not operate as a mechanical checklist. Their relationship requires practical judgment because an action may possess an educational intention while remaining disproportionate, or it may successfully produce compliance while simultaneously undermining a learner's dignity. *Phronesis* therefore functions as an integrative capacity through which morally relevant considerations are weighed together in determining appropriate action within particular educational circumstances.

The findings consequently reveal a complementary relationship between *ta'zim* and *phronesis*. *Ta'zim* explains why respect for educators and recognition of their authority possess educational value, whereas *phronesis* explains how that authority must be exercised if it is to retain moral legitimacy. Because they perform different functions, *phronesis* does not replace *ta'zim*, just as *ta'zim* cannot substitute for the need for moral judgment. Bringing the two into dialogue instead establishes a clearer ethical boundary: the educator's position may confer pedagogical authority, but that position does not in itself guarantee the moral correctness of every action undertaken. The legitimacy of action remains subject to evaluation in relation to its purpose, context, proportionality, and consequences for learners. The ethical boundary of educational authority, therefore, does not consist in eliminating educators' authority but in requiring that such authority be exercised through practical wisdom.

Violence as a Failure of Phronesis in the Exercise of Educational Authority

The preceding framework provides a basis for evaluating violence justified in the name of respect for educators. The analysis does not indicate that *ta'zim* inherently contains or produces violence. The problem emerges when *ta'zim* is detached from its relational character and interpreted as an obligation requiring learners to accept educators' actions without moral evaluation. Under such conditions, violence may be rationalized not because it possesses a defensible educational value but because it is performed by a person occupying a position of authority. This shift fundamentally alters the function of respect. *Ta'zim*, initially oriented toward supporting learners' relationships with knowledge and educators, can be transformed into a mechanism for shielding the exercise of authority from criticism. Violence in this context is therefore more appropriately understood as a distortion of *ta'zim* than as an inherent consequence of the concept itself.

When evaluated through *phronesis*, violent conduct reveals failures across several interconnected dimensions. Violence loses its connection with educational purpose when pain, humiliation, intimidation, or fear becomes a principal instrument for securing compliance. It may also demonstrate a failure of proportionality when the form or intensity of a response exceeds what can reasonably be justified by the educational circumstances. At the same time, actions that humiliate or harm learners conflict with consideration for their dignity and well-being, because persons whose development should constitute the purpose of education are reduced to objects of control. Furthermore, compliance produced primarily through fear raises a fundamental problem for character formation, since outwardly orderly behavior does not necessarily indicate the development of learners' moral understanding or agency. Viewed

through these four considerations, the ethical problem of violence therefore lies not simply in the severity of an action but in the failure to integrate purpose, proportionality, dignity, and character formation into educational judgment.

This finding addresses the second research question by positioning *phronesis* as the normative boundary governing the exercise of educational authority when respect encounters coercive or violent practices. It does not imply that every form of correction, sanction, restriction, or discipline constitutes violence, nor does it require educators to relinquish their authority when learners' conduct requires intervention. Rather, the distinction lies in the quality of practical judgment underlying the exercise of authority. Authority remains morally defensible when it is directed toward educational purposes, exercised proportionately, attentive to learners' dignity and well-being, and conducive to character formation. Viewed in relation to the preceding findings, a sequential conceptual relationship therefore emerges: *ta'zim* establishes the ethical significance of respect for educators and knowledge; educational authority provides legitimate scope for pedagogical direction; and *phronesis* determines how and within what limits that authority may be responsibly exercised. Violence represents a distortion of this relationship when authority becomes detached from practical wisdom and respect is transformed into obedience without moral evaluation. Violence committed in the name of *ta'zim* can therefore be understood as a failure of *phronesis*, not because educational authority is inherently problematic, but because authority has been exercised without adequate moral judgment concerning the purposes, means, proportionality, and consequences of action. The findings thus preserve the educational significance of *ta'zim* while establishing that respect for educators cannot function as an automatic justification for every exercise of educational authority.

Discussion

The educational meaning of *ta'zim* becomes clearer when it is understood as a relational virtue, rather than simply as an obligation requiring learners to obey their educators. This distinction matters because *ta'zim* concerns more than visible expressions of respect. It also concerns the kind of moral relationship that connects learners, educators, and knowledge. From this perspective, educators deserve respect not simply because they occupy a higher position within an educational hierarchy, but because they carry responsibilities for teaching, guidance, intellectual development, and character formation. This reading remains consistent with previous studies of *Ta'lim al-Muta'allim*. Asnimar et al. (2022), for instance, show that Az-Zarnuji's educational thought addresses not only methods of education but also the relationship between teachers and learners and the moral qualities expected of educators. Suryani et al. (2023) likewise highlight the importance of personality, conduct, and moral formation in Az-Zarnuji's conception of learners. The present study develops this discussion in a different direction. If learners have a moral responsibility to respect their teachers, the educational relationship cannot end with obligations imposed upon learners. Educators who receive such respect also bear responsibility for how they treat those entrusted to their guidance. *Ta'zim*, therefore, should not create a one-sided relationship between those expected to show respect and those entitled to receive it. Its educational meaning becomes stronger when learners' respect is accompanied by educators' moral responsibility. In this sense, *ta'zim* can be understood as a relational virtue because its meaning is shaped by the responsibilities embedded within the educational relationship itself.

The issue becomes more difficult when respect for teachers is treated as equivalent to an obligation to obey them under all circumstances. Studies of Az-Zarnuji understandably give considerable attention to courtesy, discipline, seriousness in seeking knowledge, and respect for teachers as important aspects of learners' formation. Suryani et al. (2023) , for example, show that the learner described in *Ta'lim al-Muta'allim* cannot be separated from the personal and moral qualities expected in the pursuit of knowledge. To some extent, obedience is clearly necessary in education. Learners need to follow rules, accept correction, and respond to guidance when learning requires it. The difficulty begins when obedience is justified not by an educational reason but simply by the status of the person issuing the instruction. A learner who follows guidance because it serves a recognizable educational purpose occupies a different moral position from a learner who believes that no action of an educator may be questioned. In the latter situation, the boundary between respect and absolute obedience begins to disappear. *Ta'zim* therefore needs to be interpreted carefully. Respecting an educator does not require treating every action of that educator as morally correct, just as critically evaluating an educator's action does not necessarily amount to disrespect. The present study does not reject *ta'zim*, but places limits on how it may reasonably be interpreted. It retains educational value when it helps learners develop an appropriate relationship with knowledge, remain open to guidance, and cultivate character. When it is used to prevent moral evaluation of educators' actions, however, respect moves beyond its educational function and risks becoming a justification for unrestricted authority.

This distinction cannot be separated from the question of educational authority. Education does require authority. Teachers need to establish rules, provide direction, correct mistakes, evaluate learning, and sometimes restrict particular forms of student behavior. The issue, therefore, is not a choice between education with authority and education without it. The more important question concerns how authority is exercised and what makes its exercise educationally legitimate. Mammadov and Schroeder (2023) provide useful empirical context for this issue. Their meta-analysis of 179 independent samples from 153 studies found positive relationships between autonomy support and several learning outcomes, particularly autonomous motivation, behavioral engagement, and students' self-beliefs. This does not mean that supporting learners' autonomy requires teachers to abandon structure or guidance. Rather, it suggests that learners' agency can be respected while educators continue to organize and direct the learning environment. What changes is the manner in which authority is exercised. Teachers may still guide the learning process without treating learners merely as objects expected to comply with their wishes. Applied to *ta'zim*, this means that respect for teachers can coexist with recognition of learners as moral subjects. Educators retain legitimate authority, but that legitimacy cannot rest on their position alone. It also depends on the purposes for which authority is used and the manner in which it is exercised. The more useful question, then, is not whether educators possess authority, but when the exercise of that authority remains pedagogical and when it begins to become domination.

It is at this point that *phronesis* becomes particularly useful. Not every educational problem can be resolved by referring to a rule that specifies what teachers may or may not do. The situations educators encounter are often more complicated than this. An intervention that is appropriate for one learner may not be appropriate for another, even when their behavior appears similar. Kristjánsson (2024) describes *phronesis* in professional teaching ethics as the capacity to recognize the moral features of a particular situation, weigh different considerations, and decide what should be done under concrete circumstances. This helps

explain why educational authority requires practical wisdom. The analysis developed in this study identifies four considerations that are particularly important when educators exercise authority: educational purpose, proportionality, learners' dignity and well-being, and character formation. These considerations are not intended as a mechanical formula. A teacher may have a legitimate reason to reprimand or sanction a learner, but a legitimate purpose does not automatically make every form of sanction appropriate. The seriousness of the problem, the learner's circumstances, the manner of intervention, and its likely consequences still need to be considered. *Phronesis* therefore changes the ethical question from simply asking, "Does the teacher have the right to do this?" to asking, "Is this the right thing to do for this learner in these circumstances?" The difference may appear subtle, but it is significant. The first question begins with possession of authority, whereas the second requires accountability for how authority is used. In this sense, *phronesis* can provide an ethical boundary for *ta'zim* without diminishing respect for educators.

This interpretation also helps explain why violence cannot be justified simply because it is intended to discipline learners. The present study provides no basis for treating *ta'zim* itself as a cause of violence. Establishing such a direct relationship would oversimplify a much more complex educational tradition. A different problem arises, however, when the language of respect, obedience, or discipline is used to justify conduct that harms or humiliates learners. Empirical research provides relevant context here. Visser et al. (2022), in their meta-analysis of school corporal punishment, found that corporal punishment was associated with externalizing and internalizing problems as well as poorer school performance. Mammadov and Schroeder (2023), by contrast, report a different pattern for autonomy-supportive approaches, particularly in relation to motivation, engagement, and students' self-beliefs. Neither study directly examines *ta'zim*, and neither can establish that *ta'zim* causes or prevents violence. Their relevance lies elsewhere. They help illustrate why obtaining compliance cannot by itself demonstrate that an educational intervention is sound. A learner may remain silent out of fear, follow an instruction because of a threat, or stop misbehaving to avoid punishment. Such responses may produce immediate compliance, but they do not necessarily indicate moral understanding. If education is also concerned with learners' capacity to understand reasons, regulate themselves, and assume responsibility for their actions, compliance produced through fear cannot serve as the sole measure of educational success. From this perspective, violence represents a failure of *phronesis* when educators lose sight of proportionality, disregard learners' dignity and well-being, or replace character formation with behavioral control through fear.

Read together, these findings suggest that *ta'zim* can retain its educational significance without being understood as absolute obedience. At the same time, *phronesis* offers a basis for determining the limits within which educational authority can be exercised legitimately and responsibly. Bringing these ideas together constitutes the main theoretical contribution of this study, but it does not mean that *ta'zim* and *phronesis* are identical concepts. They emerged from different intellectual traditions and perform different conceptual functions. In this study, *ta'zim* helps explain why respect for teachers and knowledge matters within an educational relationship, while *phronesis* helps evaluate how the authority accompanying that relationship should be exercised. This division of functions is also consistent with Asnimar et al. (2022), who show that Az-Zarnuji's educational thought places expectations not only on learners but also on the moral qualities of educators. From another intellectual tradition, Kristjánsson (2024) demonstrates why ethical judgment in teaching cannot always be reduced to following rules, since educators must respond to particular situations that require judgment. Bringing these

perspectives into conversation has practical implications for teacher education. Prospective teachers need more than knowledge of what is formally permitted or prohibited. They also need opportunities to learn how to read situations, understand learners' circumstances, consider whether a response is proportionate, and anticipate the consequences of their decisions. Educational authority, in this sense, does not need to depend on the ability to make learners fearful or submissive. It has a stronger basis when learners can see that authority is exercised fairly, reasonably, and for recognizable educational purposes.

There are, however, limits to what can be concluded from this study. As a text-based philosophical inquiry, it does not provide empirical evidence of how all teachers, *kiai*, *ustadz*, *santri*, or students understand and practice *ta'zim* in everyday educational settings. Pesantren and Islamic educational institutions are also far from uniform. The meaning and practice of *ta'zim* may vary according to institutional traditions, local cultures, generations, learners' ages, leadership patterns, and educational experiences. Bringing *ta'zim* into dialogue with *phronesis* also involves concepts that emerged from different historical and intellectual traditions. *Phronesis* is therefore used here as a dialogical and evaluative resource, not as evidence that Az-Zarnuji himself employed an Aristotelian framework. Maintaining this distinction is important if philosophical dialogue is not to become historical equivalence. Future research should consequently bring these arguments into empirical settings. Interviews with teachers, *kiai*, *ustadz*, *santri*, and students could show how they themselves understand the boundaries between respect, obedience, discipline, and violence. Ethnographic observation and comparative studies across educational institutions could also reveal how *ta'zim* is practiced under different conditions. The four considerations proposed in this study, namely educational purpose, proportionality, learners' dignity and well-being, and character formation, also require examination in practice. Such work would make it possible to determine whether a framework combining *ta'zim* and *phronesis* can actually help educators maintain authority and discipline without compromising learners' dignity, agency, well-being, and moral development.

Conclusion

This study shows that *ta'zim* retains an important educational value when it is understood as a relational virtue rather than as a demand for absolute obedience to educators. Respect for educators acquires ethical meaning when it is accompanied by educators' responsibility to exercise their authority in ways that serve educational purposes and support learners' development. The central issue in educator learner relationships, therefore, lies neither in respect nor in authority itself, but in how both are understood and exercised. Within this framework, *phronesis* provides an ethical basis for evaluating educational authority through consideration of educational purpose, proportionality, learners' dignity and well-being, and character formation. Violence justified in the name of discipline, obedience, or *ta'zim* should not be understood as an inherent consequence of respect for educators. Rather, it reflects a failure of practical wisdom when authority is exercised without adequate moral judgment and when securing compliance takes precedence over the educational purposes that authority is expected to serve.

The contribution of this study lies in bringing *ta'zim* in Az-Zarnuji's educational thought into dialogue with *phronesis* in Aristotelian virtue ethics without treating the two as equivalent concepts. This dialogue offers a way to preserve respect for educators and legitimate educational authority while also recognizing moral limits on how that authority may be exercised. In practical terms, the framework suggests that educators' authority need not be

sustained through fear or submission, but through the wise, proportionate, and responsible exercise of professional judgment. This perspective may inform teacher education, professional ethics, and disciplinary practices in educational settings. Since the present study is philosophical and text-based, further research is needed to examine how the boundaries between respect, obedience, discipline, and violence are understood in the lived experiences of educators and learners. Empirical studies across different educational contexts could also examine the practical relevance of educational purpose, proportionality, learners' dignity and well-being, and character formation as ethical considerations in educators' decision-making.

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