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Ikhtiar and Tawakkul in the Qur'an: An Exegetical Study of Shaykh Nawawi al-Bantani's *Marah Labid*

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Abstract

This study examines *ikhtiar* (human effort) and *tawakkul* (reliance on Allah) in the Qur'an through Nawawi al-Bantani's *Marah Labid*. It addresses the persistent tendency to separate active effort from spiritual surrender, which may produce either excessive self-reliance or passive fatalism. The study employed qualitative library research using thematic exegesis supported by *tahlili* analysis of Surah al-Ra'd [13]: 11, Surah Ali 'Imran [3]: 159, and Surah al-Talaq [65]: 3. *Marah Labid* served as the primary source, while classical and contemporary exegetical, theological, and relevant scholarly works provided secondary data. The data were analyzed descriptively and interpretively by identifying key meanings, comparing related interpretations, and synthesizing their theological implications. The findings demonstrate that Nawawi al-Bantani presents *ikhtiar* and *tawakkul* as complementary principles. *Ikhtiar* requires moral reform, careful planning, consultation, and the use of lawful means, whereas *tawakkul* directs the heart to rely fully on Allah after earnest effort. Human action therefore operates within the law of causality, while its final outcome remains subject to divine will and measure. This integration rejects both anthropocentric self-sufficiency and religious fatalism and provides an ethical foundation for responsibility, optimism, patience, spiritual resilience, and a balanced Muslim work ethic in contemporary life.

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Introduction

The development of globalization, digitalization, and technological disruption in the twenty-first century has generated numerous conveniences in human life. These advances have accelerated access to information, increased productivity, and created new opportunities in education, the economy, and communication. Modernization, however, has produced not only material change but also existential and spiritual challenges. An increasingly rational, competitive, and materialistic orientation may displace awareness of God from personal and social life. Under these conditions, individuals may become alienated from spiritual values, lose a sense of meaning, and struggle to find an inner foundation when confronting rapid and uncertain change (Berger, 1967/1990; Taylor, 2007). The fluid and continually changing character of modern life also destabilizes social relationships, employment, and individual identity, leaving people more vulnerable to pressure and anxiety about the future (Bauman, 2000).

The demands for productivity and success in modern society have also shaped a worldview that positions human beings as the principal determinants of their own destiny. Success is frequently understood as the direct result of intelligence, capital, managerial ability, strategy, and hard work. A work ethic originally intended to promote progress may become an excessive orientation toward material achievement when it is not accompanied by an awareness of human limitations (Weber, 2001). Within this perspective, *ikhtiar* is treated as an autonomous power unrelated to Allah's will. When planning and effort fail to produce the expected outcome, individuals may lack a spiritual basis for accepting failure. Such conditions can generate emptiness, anxiety, stress, and difficulty in finding meaning in experiences that diverge from personal expectations (Frankl, 2006).

Alongside the tendency to attribute success entirely to human capacity, some religious interpretations reduce *tawakkul* to passive surrender. *Tawakkul* is sometimes invoked to justify inadequate planning, limited effort, or an unwillingness to improve one's circumstances. This understanding resembles fatalism, which assumes that human beings have no meaningful role in determining their actions or transforming their lives. In Islamic theology, however, divine will does not eliminate human responsibility to undertake effort, or *kasb*, according to one's capacity (Nasution, 1986). When separated from *ikhtiar*, *tawakkul* can foster passivity, weaken the work ethic, and disregard the divinely established law of causality. *Tawakkul* therefore cannot mean abandoning effort; it is the heart's reliance on Allah after a person has employed the means permitted by Islamic law (Al-Qaradawi, 1996).

These two tendencies reveal an artificial separation between *ikhtiar* and *tawakkul*. On the one hand, *ikhtiar* may be pursued while disregarding Allah's involvement and will, leading individuals to rely entirely on their own capacity. On the other hand, *tawakkul* may be understood as surrender without effort, producing passivity toward life's challenges. The Qur'an does not present the two principles as contradictory. *Ikhtiar* represents human responsibility to employ the potential, abilities, knowledge, and opportunities bestowed by Allah, whereas *tawakkul* is an inward disposition that entrusts the final outcome to Him. The Qur'anic understanding of *tawakkul* requires concrete effort and does not legitimize passivity in confronting life's problems (Setiawan & Mufarihah, 2021). *Ikhtiar* and *tawakkul* thus form an integrated relationship between human action and spiritual dependence on Allah.

Proper *tawakkul* does not eliminate planning, effort, or responsibility. It encompasses trust in Allah's assistance, earnest engagement in constructive action, and readiness to accept the outcome after effort has been exerted. Psychological measurement of *tawakkul* indicates that the construct comprises trust in Allah, constructive effort, and acceptance of outcomes that are not entirely subject to human control (Gondal et al., 2022). These findings demonstrate that *tawakkul* is not synonymous with fatalism. A person who practices *tawakkul* must still employ available abilities and take necessary action without treating material means as the sole object of dependence. This attitude establishes a balance between diligence in work and awareness that the final outcome remains within Allah's decree.

The integration of *ikhtiar* and *tawakkul* is also relevant to psychological well-being. Exclusive reliance on personal capacity can intensify pressure when outcomes do not match expectations. *Tawakkul*, by contrast, creates space for accepting circumstances beyond human control without removing the responsibility to strive. Research involving Muslim adults indicates that *tawakkul* mediates the relationship between religious orientation and stress by helping individuals understand that human effort remains within Allah's care and decree (Gondal et al., 2023). In educational contexts, hope and *tawakkul* are negatively associated with academic stress. Individuals who sustain hope and entrust the results of their effort to Allah are better able to manage academic pressure (Husnar et al., 2017). These findings confirm that *tawakkul* can support psychological resilience when combined with purposeful *ikhtiar*.

The relationship between *ikhtiar* and *tawakkul* is grounded in several Qur'anic verses. Surah al-Ra'd [13]: 11 affirms that Allah does not change the condition of a people until they change what is within themselves, thereby establishing human responsibility for transformation through the reform of belief, attitude, and action. Surah Ali 'Imran [3]: 159 presents a clear sequence of gentleness, forgiveness, seeking pardon, consultation, firm resolve, and *tawakkul*. This structure indicates that *tawakkul* follows deliberation and decision-making. Surah al-Talaq [65]: 3, meanwhile, states that Allah is sufficient for those who rely on Him and that everything has been determined according to a measure. Together, these verses describe the relationship among change, planning, action, surrender, and divine decree.

These verses should be examined through an exegetical work closely connected to the Islamic scholarly tradition of the Indonesian Archipelago. One important source is Shaykh Nawawi al-Bantani's *Marah Labid li Kashf Ma'na al-Qur'an al-Majid*. Shaykh Nawawi was a prominent scholar from the Archipelago who occupied an important position in the intellectual networks of the Haramain. His works remain widely studied in Indonesian Islamic educational institutions and *pesantren*. In *Marah Labid*, Qur'anic verses are explained through an integration of linguistic analysis, inter-verse relationships, jurisprudence, theology, *qira'at*, and spiritual values. This approach allows *ikhtiar* and *tawakkul* to be understood not only as theological doctrines but also as moral and practical guidance for human life (Al-Bantani, 1997).

Studies of *Marah Labid* demonstrate that Shaykh Nawawi's interpretation extends beyond the general meaning of verses to consider variants of *qira'at* and their theological and legal implications. Analyses of legal verses in *Marah Labid* show that these recitational variants influence how Shaykh Nawawi explains the meaning and implications of a verse

(Rohman et al., 2024). This characteristic also appears in his interpretation of Surah al-Talaq [65]: 3, particularly in his discussion of variant readings of the phrase concerning the fulfillment of Allah's decree. His explanation reinforces the understanding that *tawakkul* entails trust in Allah's power without eliminating the human obligation to employ means consistent with Islamic law.

Previous studies have examined *tawakkul* from Qur'anic and Islamic psychological perspectives. Qur'anic scholarship emphasizes that *tawakkul* must be accompanied by effort, vigilance, and adherence to Islamic law, particularly under conditions of risk and uncertainty (Setiawan & Mufarihah, 2021). Psychological research has developed an instrument for measuring *tawakkul* and demonstrated that it includes active effort and acceptance of outcomes (Gondal et al., 2022). Other studies have identified its role in reducing stress among Muslim adults and university students (Gondal et al., 2023; Husnar et al., 2017). Research on *Marah Labid*, meanwhile, has primarily addressed its exegetical characteristics, use of *qira'at*, and interpretation of legal verses (Rohman et al., 2024).

These studies provide an important basis for understanding *tawakkul* as both a theological and psychological concept. Existing scholarship, however, tends to discuss *ikhtiar* and *tawakkul* separately, examine *tawakkul* in a particular context, or analyze the methodology of *Marah Labid* without focusing on the relationship between the two concepts. Few studies have integrated Shaykh Nawawi's interpretations of Surah al-Ra'd [13]: 11, Surah Ali 'Imran [3]: 159, and Surah al-Talaq [65]: 3 to clarify the limits of human responsibility, the use of outward means, inward dependence on Allah, and acceptance of His decree. This limitation demonstrates the need for a study that connects *ikhtiar* and *tawakkul* within a coherent exegetical framework.

In response to this gap, the study asks how Shaykh Nawawi al-Bantani interprets *ikhtiar* and *tawakkul* in Surah al-Ra'd [13]: 11, Surah Ali 'Imran [3]: 159, and Surah al-Talaq [65]: 3, and how the integration of these concepts is relevant to modern life. It aims to analyze the construction of *ikhtiar* and *tawakkul* in *Marah Labid*, identify the relationship between human effort and Allah's decree, and explain its implications for the work ethic and spiritual resilience. The study's novelty lies in integrating the interpretation of these three verses into a framework that positions *ikhtiar* as outward and moral human activity and *tawakkul* as an inward orientation that does not depend absolutely on material means. This framework contributes to scholarship on Qur'anic exegesis in the Indonesian Archipelago and offers a theological foundation for cultivating Muslims who are active, responsible, optimistic, and spiritually steadfast amid life's uncertainties.

Method

This study employed a qualitative library research design because its objects consisted of ideas, interpretations, and theological constructions contained in written sources. A qualitative approach enabled an in-depth understanding of the relationship between *ikhtiar* and *tawakkul* in Shaykh Nawawi al-Bantani's interpretation rather than its measurement through numerical data. The study also adopted an intellectual-biographical approach to situate his interpretation within his scholarly orientation and exegetical methodology. This approach permits the systematic analysis of a scholar's thought through his principal works (Creswell, 2013; Harahap, 2006; Moleong, 2018; Sugiyono, 2022). The

library research design was appropriate for the textual analysis of *Marah Labid* and the relevant exegetical, theological, and psychological literature.

The primary source was Shaykh Nawawi al-Bantani's *Marah Labid li Kashf Ma'na al-Qur'an al-Majid*, particularly his interpretation of Surah al-Ra'd [13]: 11, Surah Ali 'Imran [3]: 159, and Surah al-Talaq [65]: 3 (Al-Bantani, 1997). The verses were selected for their connection to three central elements of the study. Surah al-Ra'd [13]: 11 explains human responsibility for change; Surah Ali 'Imran [3]: 159 demonstrates the relationship among consultation, firm resolve, and *tawakkul*; and Surah al-Talaq [65]: 3 affirms Allah's sufficiency and His decree over every condition. Secondary sources included classical and contemporary exegetical works, books on Islamic theology and exegetical research methods, and journal articles concerning *tawakkul*, *ikhtiar*, the characteristics of *Marah Labid*, and the psychological implications of religious belief. These sources were selected according to their relevance, traceable publication details, the academic authority of their authors or publishers, and their contribution to the analysis of the three verses.

Data were collected through documentation by identifying, reading, recording, and classifying source passages related to *ikhtiar*, *tawakkul*, causality, consultation, divine decree, and human responsibility. The collection process comprised identifying the focal verses, compiling Shaykh Nawawi's explanations, grouping units of meaning by theme, and comparing them with supporting sources. Data trustworthiness was maintained through source criticism and cross-checking *Marah Labid* against comparative exegetical works and relevant scholarship. The study used thematic exegesis (*mawdu'î*) to integrate the three verses under the theme of *ikhtiar* and *tawakkul*, followed by *tahlili* analysis of each verse's vocabulary, context, inter-verse relationships, *qira'at* variants where applicable, and theological content (Mustaqim, 2019). The data were then analyzed descriptively and interpretively through reduction, presentation, comparison, and conclusion drawing. The interpretations were synthesized to formulate the relationship between outward human effort, inward dependence on Allah, and contemporary work ethics and spiritual resilience.

Results

The findings demonstrate that Shaykh Nawawi al-Bantani's interpretations of Surah al-Ra'd [13]: 11, Surah Ali 'Imran [3]: 159, and Surah al-Talaq [65]: 3 form a theological construction integrating *ikhtiar* and *tawakkul*. *Ikhtiar* is positioned as the human responsibility to reform oneself, evaluate available options, employ outward means, and act earnestly. *Tawakkul* is the inward disposition of entrusting the final outcome to Allah after all obligations of effort have been fulfilled. These three verses constitute the study's central analytical corpus.

Interpretation of the Verses on *Ikhtiar* and *Tawakkul* in *Marah Labid*

The first basis for *ikhtiar* appears in Surah al-Ra'd [13]: 11, particularly in the following divine statement:

لَهُ مُعَقَّبَاتٌ مِّنْ بَيْنِ يَدَيْهِ وَمِنْ خَلْفِهِ يَحْفَظُونَهُ مِنْ أَمْرِ اللَّهِ إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يُغَيِّرُ مَا بِقَوْمٍ حَتَّى يُغَيِّرُوا مَا بِأَنْفُسِهِمْ
وَإِذَا أَرَادَ اللَّهُ بِقَوْمٍ سُوءًا فَلَا مَرَدَّ لَهُ وَمَا لَهُم مِّنْ دُونِهِ مِنْ وَالٍ

Meaning: "For each person there are successive angels before and behind, guarding them by Allah's command. Indeed, Allah does not change the condition of a people until they change what is within themselves. If Allah wills harm for a people, it cannot be averted, nor do they have any protector besides Him." (Q.S. al-Ra'd [13]: 11).

This verse affirms that changes in a community's condition are related to changes undertaken by the community itself (Kementerian Agama Republik Indonesia, 2019). Surah al-Ra'd [13]: 11 has no specific, reliably authenticated occasion of revelation that restricts its application to a particular event. Its message may therefore be understood as a general principle of *sunnatullah* governing transformation in human life (Al-Suyuti, 1985; Al-Wahidi, 1991).

In *Marah Labid*, Shaykh Nawawi explains that Allah does not change a people's condition of security and blessing until they change what is within themselves by abandoning gratitude. When gratitude and obedience are replaced by disbelief, denial, or disobedience, a formerly favorable condition may deteriorate. Conversely, the interpretation also indicates that improvement must begin with the renewal of faith, moral awareness, and human conduct (Al-Bantani, 1997).

The analysis shows that *ikhtiar* in Shaykh Nawawi's interpretation is not limited to physical or material effort. It begins internally with faith, gratitude, intention, and a willingness to reform oneself. This internal change must subsequently be manifested in concrete action. Social transformation is therefore determined not only by material development but also by the moral reform that underlies individual and collective conduct.

This interpretation positions the law of causality as part of *sunnatullah*. Human beings are responsible for changing attitudes, increasing knowledge, improving conduct, and employing the potential bestowed by Allah. The scope of *ikhtiar*, however, does not grant humanity absolute control over outcomes. When Allah has decreed a condition as the consequence of negative human change, no other power can annul His decree (Al-Bantani, 1997).

Shaykh Nawawi's interpretation corresponds with those of other exegetes. A people's condition is connected to changes in their deeds, obedience, and conduct. Blessings may be preserved while people maintain obedience but may be transformed into adversity when obedience is replaced by disbelief and transgression (Al-Qurtubi, 2006; Al-Tabari, 2000). In contemporary contexts, this transformation also encompasses changes in mindset, character, knowledge, and commitment to building a better life (Al-Zuhayli, 2009; Shihab, 2002).

The second basis appears in Surah Ali 'Imran [3]: 159:

فَبِمَا رَحْمَةٍ مِّنَ اللَّهِ لِنْتَ لَهُمْ وَلَوْ كُنْتَ فَظًّا غَلِيظَ الْقَلْبِ لَانْفَضُّوا مِنْ حَوْلِكَ فَاعْفُ عَنْهُمْ وَاسْتَغْفِرْ لَهُمْ
وَشَاوِرْهُمْ فِي الْأَمْرِ فَإِذَا عَزَمْتَ فَتَوَكَّلْ عَلَى اللَّهِ إِنَّ اللَّهَ يُحِبُّ الْمُتَوَكِّلِينَ

Meaning: "By Allah's mercy, you [Prophet Muhammad] were gentle with them. Had you been harsh and hard-hearted, they would have dispersed from around you. Therefore, pardon them, ask forgiveness for them, and consult them in important matters. Once you have resolved upon a course of action, place your trust in Allah. Indeed, Allah loves those who place their trust in Him." (Q.S. Ali 'Imran [3]: 159).

This verse concerns the Battle of Uhud, when some archers abandoned their assigned positions. Although their error contributed to the Muslims' defeat, Prophet Muhammad was instructed to remain gentle, forgive his Companions, seek forgiveness for them, and involve them in consultation. Once consultation had produced a decision and resolve had been established, the Prophet was instructed to rely on Allah (Al-Suyuti, 1985).

This sequence demonstrates that *tawakkul* does not replace planning. Before placing trust in Allah, a person must evaluate circumstances, listen to the views of others, make a decision, and implement it earnestly. Consultation constitutes intellectual and social *ikhtiar*, while firm resolve connects planning with the implementation of action.

Shaykh Nawawi explains that *tawakkul* does not entail abandoning all planning or effort. If *tawakkul* meant disregarding planning, the command to consult others in the same verse would be meaningless. Its essence is to attend to observable causes without allowing the heart to depend on them absolutely. The believer's heart remains reliant on Allah's protection and assistance (Al-Bantani, 1997).

This explanation distinguishes between outward and inward domains. Outwardly, human beings must employ knowledge, experience, consultation, strategy, energy, and means permitted by Islamic law. Inwardly, they must not regard these means as the absolute determinants of success. Such means are part of *ikhtiar*, while the final outcome remains subject to Allah's will.

Consultation, planning, and the execution of decisions do not contradict *tawakkul*. On the contrary, the proper use of causes forms part of its completeness. The Messenger of Allah consulted his Companions despite his prophetic status, demonstrating that the strength of faith does not remove the need for rational consideration and careful planning (Al-Qurtubi, 2006; Ibn Kathir, 1999). Employing causes is a human obligation, while the heart's dependence remains directed toward Allah (Al-Alusi, 1994; Al-Zuhayli, 2009; Shihab, 2002).

The third basis appears in Surah al-Talaq [65]: 3:

وَيَرْزُقُهُ مِنْ حَيْثُ لَا يَحْتَسِبُ وَمَنْ يَتَوَكَّلْ عَلَى اللَّهِ فَهُوَ حَسْبُهُ إِنَّ اللَّهَ بَالِغُ أَمْرِهِ قَدْ جَعَلَ اللَّهُ لِكُلِّ شَيْءٍ قَدْرًا

Meaning: “And He will provide for them from sources they could never imagine. Whoever places their trust in Allah, He is sufficient for them. Indeed, Allah accomplishes His purpose. Allah has appointed a measure for everything.” (Q.S. al-Talaq [65]: 3).

Shaykh Nawawi explains that those who practice *tawakkul* trust Allah in every circumstance they encounter. Allah is sufficient as helper and protector in all their affairs. Such sufficiency does not mean that people may abandon work and passively await assistance. *Tawakkul* emerges after human beings have fulfilled their obligations and employed the means permitted by Islamic law (Al-Bantani, 1997).

Shaykh Nawawi's interpretation also discusses *qira'at* variants in the phrase stating that Allah fulfills His purpose. The genitive construction (*idafah*) emphasizes that Allah executes His decree. A reading with *tanwin* and the accusative form indicates that Allah realizes what He wills for all creation, whereas the nominative form emphasizes that Allah's governance and decree are certainly operative and fulfilled (Al-Bantani, 1997).

These recitational differences do not alter the fundamental principle that Allah's will is fulfilled. Human beings may formulate plans and anticipate outcomes, but their knowledge and capacities remain limited. *Tawakkul* cultivates awareness that many elements of life lie beyond human control. This awareness does not extinguish effort; rather, it prevents the assumption that outcomes can be determined solely through human ability.

The phrase *qad ja'ala Allahu li kulli shay'in qadra* also indicates that every condition possesses a measure and limit established by Allah. Neither hardship nor ease occurs outside His knowledge and decree. In Shaykh Nawawi's interpretation, difficult and favorable circumstances each have their respective temporal limits. Human beings should therefore not lose hope when confronting failure, economic pressure, or unresolved life problems.

This interpretation is consistent with the view that Allah's sufficiency does not always take material form. It may appear as a solution, endurance, inner tranquility, renewed strength to continue striving, or provision from an unexpected source. Trust in Allah's sufficiency must nevertheless be accompanied by work, the pursuit of livelihood, and the use of means prescribed by Islamic law (Al-Qurtubi, 2006; Ibn Kathir, 1999).

An Integrative Construction of *Ikhtiar* and *Tawakkul* and Its Implications

The synthesis of the three verses demonstrates that *ikhtiar* and *tawakkul* form a unified sequence of action. Surah al-Ra'd [13]: 11 positions internal change as the foundation of *ikhtiar*. Surah Ali 'Imran [3]: 159 presents its operational form through consultation, firm resolve, and implementation. Surah al-Talaq [65]: 3 positions *tawakkul* as confidence in Allah's sufficiency, assistance, and decree after effort has been exerted.

This construction comprises four stages. The first is reforming one's internal condition through faith, intention, gratitude, and moral orientation. The second is

identifying and employing available outward means. The third is making a decision and acting upon it earnestly. The fourth is entrusting the outcome to Allah and accepting His decree without abandoning subsequent evaluation and renewed effort.

These findings correspond with the following hadith of Prophet Muhammad:

اٰخِرُ صُنْ عَلٰى مَا يَنْفَعُكَ، وَاسْتَعِزْ بِاللّٰهِ، وَلَا تَعْجِزْ

Meaning: “Strive for what benefits you, seek Allah’s assistance, and do not give in to weakness” (Sahih Muslim, no. 2664).

The hadith presents three elements consistent with the construction of *ikhtiar* and *tawakkul* in *Marah Labid* (Muslim ibn al-Hajjaj, n.d.). The command to strive for what is beneficial establishes the obligation of *ikhtiar*. The command to seek Allah’s assistance expresses *tawakkul* and spiritual dependence. The prohibition against weakness rejects a fatalistic interpretation that uses divine decree as a reason for inaction.

Ikhtiar in *Marah Labid* has moral and operational dimensions. Its moral dimension includes the reform of faith, gratitude, obedience, and inward orientation. Its operational dimension includes planning, consultation, the use of knowledge, professional competence, and concrete action. These dimensions are complementary: moral awareness without action produces no change, while action without a moral foundation may lose direction.

Tawakkul likewise has two dimensions. The first is the heart’s refusal to depend absolutely on material means. The second is confidence that Allah is sufficient and that His decree will be fulfilled. *Tawakkul* does not deny the law of causality; it positions causes as means rather than autonomous powers. Human beings must employ causes to the fullest extent without making them the sole basis of conviction.

Failure to integrate these concepts produces two extremes. The first is *ikhtiar* without *tawakkul*, which arises when intelligence, capital, power, strategy, or hard work is regarded as the absolute determinant of success. Theologically, absolute dependence on personal capacity creates an anthropocentric orientation and may approach implicit polytheism because means are treated as though they possessed autonomous power. Psychologically, such individuals become vulnerable to pressure when outcomes diverge from their plans and to arrogance when success is achieved.

The second extreme is *tawakkul* without *ikhtiar*. This position reduces *tawakkul* to passive surrender and disregards planning, consultation, hard work, and evaluation. Such an understanding contradicts *sunnatullah* and the structure of Surah Ali ‘Imran [3]: 159, which places consultation and firm resolve before *tawakkul*. Proper *tawakkul* does not abandon effort; it entrusts the outcome to Allah after human responsibility has been fulfilled (Al-Bantani, 1997; Al-Qaradawi, 1996).

Integrating *ikhtiar* and *tawakkul* creates a balance between responsibility and acceptance. Human beings are responsible for their intentions, processes, choices, planning, and quality of effort, but they do not bear the burden of ensuring that every outcome conforms to their desires. This distinction allows individuals to work to the best of their ability without becoming excessively attached to results.

Psychologically, *tawakkul* may function as a means of managing pressure after effort has been made. Individuals continue to solve problems, evaluate circumstances, and select

appropriate actions without continually burdening themselves with elements beyond their control. This process corresponds with the concept of *coping*, namely cognitive and behavioral efforts to manage demands perceived as taxing an individual's resources (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Entrusting the outcome to Allah may also reduce excessive worry about the future when accompanied by realistic and responsible action (Daradjat, 1982; Leahy, 2005).

With respect to the work ethic, the findings indicate that *tawakkul* does not negate *tadbir*, or planning. The consultation prescribed in Surah Ali 'Imran [3]: 159 may be implemented through information gathering, risk analysis, consideration of alternatives, allocation of responsibility, and evaluation before a decision is executed. The quality of *ikhtiar* must therefore be manifested in measured, professional action appropriate to human capacity (Al-Bantani, 1997; Al-Qattan, 2000).

When confronting economic problems and life's uncertainties, the concept *li kulli shay'in qadra* cultivates awareness that every difficulty has a particular measure and limit. This awareness does not encourage passive waiting; it sustains optimism so that individuals continue to work, innovate, evaluate, and seek solutions. They do not readily surrender because they believe that hardship neither persists without limit nor lies outside Allah's governance.

The findings therefore demonstrate that *ikhtiar* and *tawakkul* in *Marah Labid* establish a balance between outward and inward dimensions. Outwardly, human beings are obliged to pursue change, employ causes, consult, plan, and act. Inwardly, they place their hope in Allah, acknowledge their limitations, and entrust the final outcome to His decree. This construction rejects both *ikhtiar* that excludes Allah and *tawakkul* that eliminates human responsibility. Its psychological, professional, and ethical implications extend the exegetical findings to resilience, the work ethic, and optimism in times of crisis.

Discussion

Shaykh Nawawi al-Bantani's understanding of *ikhtiar* and *tawakkul* emerged within the Islamic scholarly tradition of the Haramain, where exegesis, jurisprudence, theology, and Sufism intersected. Networks connecting scholars of the Indonesian Archipelago and the Middle East cultivated an intellectual orientation that balanced adherence to Islamic law, the use of reason, and inward spiritual formation. Within this tradition, Muslims are required to employ legitimate means before entrusting the outcome to Allah. Shaykh Nawawi's rejection of fatalism therefore continues a scholarly tradition that maintains a balance between effort and surrender (Azra, 2013; Universitas Islam An Nur Lampung, 2022).

The interpretation of Surah al-Ra'd [13]: 11 indicates that changes in human conditions are related to changes undertaken by human beings themselves. Shaykh Nawawi associates the preservation of blessings with gratitude and obedience and their loss with moral deterioration into disbelief and transgression. *Ikhtiar* therefore encompasses not only physical work but also the reform of faith, mindset, morality, and conduct. Inward transformation directs outward action, while concrete action embodies this awareness (Al-Bantani, 1997).

This interpretation corresponds with the view that social transformation is connected to human deeds and conduct. Blessings may be preserved through obedience but may

change when moral and religious values are abandoned (Al-Qurtubi, 2006; Al-Tabari, 2000). In modern life, transformation also requires advances in education and knowledge, character development, and the capacity to manage social life. Potential bestowed by Allah cannot generate progress unless it is manifested in purposeful effort (Al-Zuhayli, 2009; Shihab, 2002). Social transformation thus requires not only policy, economic resources, and technology but also honesty, responsibility, gratitude, and justice.

Surah Ali 'Imran [3]: 159 clarifies the form of *ikhtiar* by placing consultation, firm resolve, and implementation before *tawakkul*. This sequence indicates that Islam recognizes the importance of deliberation, planning, and decision-making. *Tawakkul* does not replace these processes but accompanies them so that human beings do not depend absolutely on their own capacity and strategy (Al-Bantani, 1997). Planning is not a sign of weak faith; it is part of human responsibility. Strategy remains a means rather than the absolute determinant of the outcome.

This view is consistent with classical interpretations that regard the use of causes as part of *tawakkul*. The Prophet's consultation, preparation, and action demonstrate that strong faith does not eliminate the obligation to assess circumstances and employ available means. Abandoning causes is not a higher form of *tawakkul*; it may represent a failure to fulfill responsibility (Al-Alusi, 1994; Al-Qurtubi, 2006; Ibn Kathir, 1999). Proper *tawakkul* is the heart's dependence on Allah after a person has exerted effort according to their capacity and Islamic law (Al-Qaradawi, 1996).

These findings reinforce previous research showing that *tawakkul* must be accompanied by concrete action, prudence, and adherence to established rules. It cannot justify abandoning effort when facing illness, economic problems, or uncertainty (Setiawan & Mufarihah, 2021). Psychologically, *tawakkul* also includes constructive effort, trust in Allah, and acceptance of outcomes that cannot be controlled completely. *Tawakkul* is therefore not passive surrender but a religious disposition that continues to encourage responsible action (Gondal et al., 2022).

Surah al-Talaq [65]: 3 completes this relationship by affirming that Allah is sufficient for those who rely on Him. According to Shaykh Nawawi, Allah's sufficiency does not eliminate the obligation to work and seek solutions. The promise applies to those who practice God-consciousness and exert effort, not to those who wait without acting (Al-Bantani, 1997). The discussion of *qira'at* in *Marah Labid* further affirms that Allah's decree will certainly be fulfilled. Recitational variants reveal not merely linguistic differences but also the certainty of divine will and the limitations of human capacity (Rohman et al., 2024).

The explanation of *qadar* in this verse cultivates a balanced attitude toward hardship. Every condition has a measure, duration, and limit known to Allah. Difficulty need not be regarded as permanent, while success should not be viewed as entirely within human power. This awareness generates optimism accompanied by effort. Human beings must seek solutions, evaluate their actions, and improve their strategies without losing hope when outcomes do not yet correspond to their expectations.

Integrating the three verses establishes a clear distribution of responsibility. Human beings are responsible for intention, self-reform, the selection of means, planning, decision-making, and the earnestness of their effort. They cannot, however, ensure that every circumstance unfolds according to their will. *Tawakkul* enables people to accept this

limitation without diminishing their perseverance. It is therefore not weakness but an acknowledgment that the final outcome lies within Allah's power.

An imbalance between *ikhtiar* and *tawakkul* may produce two extremes. *Ikhtiar* without *tawakkul* arises when intelligence, capital, technology, status, and professional competence are regarded as the absolute determinants of success. This dependence may displace awareness that causes operate only with Allah's permission and lead individuals to treat their own capacities as autonomous powers (Al-Bantani, 1997; Al-Qaradawi, 1996). Psychologically, this attitude may intensify pressure when results diverge from expectations and generate arrogance when success is achieved. *Tawakkul* teaches that success should be met with gratitude and failure with evaluation without the loss of hope (Daradjat, 1982).

Conversely, *tawakkul* without *ikhtiar* arises when destiny is invoked to evade responsibility, reject planning, and legitimize indolence. This understanding contradicts Surah Ali 'Imran [3]: 159, which places consultation and resolve before *tawakkul*, and Surah al-Ra'd [13]: 11, which connects transformation with human action. If normalized socially, fatalism may weaken education, the work ethic, innovation, and a community's capacity to solve problems (Al-Bantani, 1997).

In psychological life, *ikhtiar* and *tawakkul* help individuals confront pressure by combining problem-solving with spiritual acceptance. *Ikhtiar* is directed toward what can still be changed, while *tawakkul* assists in accepting what lies beyond human control. Acceptance without action may become avoidance, whereas action without acceptance may generate prolonged anxiety (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Research further indicates that *tawakkul* is associated with lower stress and can help individuals manage pressure without neglecting their obligations (Husnar et al., 2017).

The integration is also relevant to employment, organizations, and economic life. *Tawakkul* does not negate planning, data collection, competence development, the distribution of responsibility, risk analysis, or evaluation. These are all components of *ikhtiar*, while *tawakkul* prevents success from producing arrogance and failure from destroying motivation (Al-Bantani, 1997; Al-Qattan, 2000). In economic matters, *tawakkul* should be manifested through financial evaluation, the pursuit of new opportunities, skill development, and responsible decision-making. *Tawakkul* sustains optimism, whereas *ikhtiar* prevents optimism from becoming passive waiting.

At the social level, integrating *ikhtiar* and *tawakkul* may cultivate a community that is both active and humble. *Ikhtiar* promotes progress in education, knowledge, the economy, social services, and governance, while *tawakkul* prevents progress from distancing humanity from awareness of Allah. *Tawakkul* must not be used to accept poverty, injustice, or underdevelopment without efforts toward reform. Surah al-Ra'd [13]: 11 instead affirms a collective responsibility to transform social conditions through moral reform and social action.

Shaykh Nawawi's contribution lies in assigning causes their proper position. They must be employed because they form part of *sunnatullah*, but they must not be regarded as possessing autonomous power. This study demonstrates the relationship between *ikhtiar* and *tawakkul* through three complementary stages: Surah al-Ra'd [13]: 11 establishes the foundation for personal and social reform; Surah Ali 'Imran [3]: 159 explains planning and action; and Surah al-Talaq [65]: 3 provides a spiritual basis for

accepting outcomes and Allah's decree. This framework extends previous research that has generally addressed *tawakkul* within particular contexts or from a psychological perspective.

Ikhtiar and *tawakkul* in *Marah Labid* thus constitute a balanced orientation toward life. *Ikhtiar* prevents *tawakkul* from becoming fatalism, while *tawakkul* prevents *ikhtiar* from becoming excessive confidence in human capacity. This balance is relevant to the work ethic, decision-making, resilience under pressure, and social responsibility. Nevertheless, these psychological, economic, and social benefits are interpretive implications of the exegetical findings and require field research to establish their broader application.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that *ikhtiar* and *tawakkul* in Shaykh Nawawi al-Bantani's *Marah Labid* are complementary dispositions. Surah al-Ra'd [13]: 11 establishes that transformation begins within human beings through the reform of faith, gratitude, and conduct. Surah Ali 'Imran [3]: 159 emphasizes consultation, decision-making, and earnest effort before reliance on Allah, while Surah al-Talaq [65]: 3 confirms that the final outcome remains subject to His will. *Ikhtiar* therefore means exerting one's best effort according to one's capacity, whereas *tawakkul* means entrusting the outcome to Allah. Together they establish a balanced orientation: active effort without forgetting Allah and spiritual surrender without abandoning responsibility.

This study is limited to three Qur'anic verses and adopts *Marah Labid* as its sole primary source. Future research should compare Shaykh Nawawi al-Bantani's views with other exegetical works from the Indonesian Archipelago and include additional verses and hadith concerning *ikhtiar* and *tawakkul*. Field research is also needed to examine how these values are practiced in everyday life, including education, employment, economic activity, and responses to life pressures.

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