

Al-Ghazali's thought in Islamic education philosophy: its relevance for basic education

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze Al-Ghazali's thought in Islamic education philosophy and its relevance to contemporary basic education. The research focuses on Al-Ghazali's educational epistemology, its Sufistic-ethical-integrative character, and its practical implications for student character formation. The method used is library research with a philosophical-hermeneutic approach, which involves reading, interpreting, and contextualizing Al-Ghazali's classical texts particularly *Ihyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn* and *Ayyuhā al-Walad* within the framework of modern basic education needs. The findings indicate that Al-Ghazali's thought emphasizes education as a means of moral perfection through the integration of intellect, heart, and behavior. The methods he proposes include role-modeling (*uswah*), habituation (*ta'wīd*), admonition (*mau'izah*), self-reflection (*muhāsabah*), and the control of base desires. In the context of contemporary basic education, these ideas are relevant to concepts of character building, reflective education, and holistic learning models, as emphasized in Indonesia's *Kurikulum Merdeka* (Emancipated Curriculum). However, a limitation of Al-Ghazali's thought is its lack of attention to modern science and technological literacy. Therefore, integrating Al-Ghazali's Sufistic-ethical thought with contemporary pedagogy—such as humanistic, constructivist, and holistic education approaches—is necessary to develop a basic education model that balances morality, spirituality, and 21st-century competencies.

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Introduction

Basic education is a fundamental stage in the course of human development. During this phase, children are introduced to the world of knowledge while simultaneously being taught moral, social, and spiritual values that will equip them for life (Ixfina & Rohma, 2025). Consequently, basic education is often referred to as the foundation of life, as success at this stage significantly influences success at subsequent educational levels. However, the reality of basic education in Indonesia reveals serious challenges. Various international surveys, such as the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), place Indonesian students' literacy and numeracy skills at a relatively low position compared to other countries (PISA, 2023). Furthermore, emerging social phenomena among elementary school-aged children indicate that our education system has not yet fully succeeded in performing its primary function. These phenomena include a rise in bullying cases data from the Indonesian Education Watch Network (JPPI) in 2024 recorded 573 cases of violence in educational

environments, including bullying, with an increasing trend from 91 cases in 2020, to 142 cases in 2021, 194 cases in 2022, and 285 cases in 2023 (Hoirunnisa, 2024). Other issues are a decline in respect for teachers and parents (Muntuan, 2023; Wiyati & Sutanto, 2024; Wonggor et al., 2025), and signs of a character crisis. In other words, education still tends to be oriented towards the cognitive aspect, while the affective and spiritual dimensions have not received proportional attention.

Within this framework, Islamic education philosophy can serve as an important source of inspiration for reorienting basic education. Islamic education philosophy speaks not only of the transfer of knowledge but also emphasizes the importance of moral cultivation, the instilment of ethical values, and the formation of a balanced personality integrating intellect, psyche, and spirituality (Basori, Pasaribu, & Amalya, 2025). Among the central figures in the Islamic tradition who paid profound attention to educational matters is Abu Hamid Al-Ghazali (1058–1111 AD). Al-Ghazali's thought possesses a distinctive character that integrates rational, ethical, and Sufi dimensions into a single educational framework. This is reflected in his works, such as *Ihya' Ulumuddin* and *Ayyuha al-Walad* (Mumtaz, 2025).

Based on these problems, this research seeks to highlight two main issues. First, how Al-Ghazali formulated his thoughts within Islamic education philosophy, particularly concerning his proposed concepts of educational objectives, the role of the teacher, curriculum, and teaching methods. Second, how the relevance of Al-Ghazali's ideas applies to contemporary basic education, which now faces multidimensional challenges moral, social, and intellectual. By formulating the problem into these two main foci, this research is expected to explore not only the historical and normative aspects of Al-Ghazali's thought but also its practical contributions to the context of basic education in Indonesia.

In line with this research focus, the primary objective to be achieved is to comprehensively describe Al-Ghazali's thoughts on Islamic education philosophy and then to analyze their relevance to contemporary basic education. Therefore, this study intends not only to enrich the academic discourse on classical Islamic thinkers but also to offer practical implications for developing a more integral and holistic basic education. The findings of this study are expected to serve as a reference for educators, policymakers, and education stakeholders in formulating strategies for basic education that focus not only on the mastery of academic competencies but also emphasize the formation of children's morality, character, and spirituality.

Studies on Al-Ghazali's thought in the field of education have, in fact, been extensively conducted. Several studies highlight Al-Ghazali's contributions to building an Islamic education paradigm based on morality and spirituality. For instance, research by Hidayati (2025) emphasizes the importance of the concept of *tazkiyatun nafs* (purification of the soul) in Islamic education as the core of character formation. Meanwhile, a study by Muryati (2024) affirms Al-Ghazali's view of the teacher's role as a model figure who functions not only as an instructor but also as a moral guide. On the other hand, research by Maghriza & Nursikin (2024) compares Al-Ghazali's thought with that of Ibn Sina, finding that Al-Ghazali's Sufi-oriented approach emphasizes moral and spiritual dimensions more than Ibn Sina's rationalism. From these various studies, it is evident that Al-Ghazali's thought has made significant contributions to Islamic education theory. However, most of these studies remain descriptive and have not yet extensively linked his ideas directly to the context of contemporary basic education, particularly in Indonesia.

It is on this basis that the present study becomes crucial. By examining Al-Ghazali's thought through the lens of Islamic education philosophy and linking it to the real problems faced by contemporary basic education, this research is expected to find a meeting point between classical ideas and modern needs. This study is not only academically relevant but also strategic in the effort to build a paradigm for basic education that is character-oriented, integrity-based, and remains adaptive to the demands of the 21st century. Consequently, the relevance of Al-Ghazali's thought can be actualized as an alternative solution in building a generation that is intelligent, ethical, and globally competitive.

Research Methods

This research employs a qualitative approach, specifically a library research design (Salam, 2023). All data were obtained through a literature review, encompassing both the primary works of Al-Ghazali and secondary sources such as books, journal articles, and previous research findings relevant to the topic of education. The primary works of Al-Ghazali used as references are *Ihya' Ulumuddin*, *Ayyuha al-Walad*, *Al-Munqidz min al-Dhalal*, along with other writings containing his ideas on knowledge, teachers, and education.

Data analysis was conducted using the content analysis method, combined with a philosophical hermeneutics approach (Mayring, 2021). Content analysis was used to identify key concepts in Al-Ghazali's thoughts on education, while philosophical hermeneutics was employed to understand the meaning of these thoughts within Al-Ghazali's historical context and to interpret their relevance to contemporary basic education challenges (Palmer, 2022).

To ensure data validity, this study utilizes source triangulation by comparing Al-Ghazali's ideas across various primary texts with interpretations from modern scholars and researchers. Through this method, the research is expected to yield a comprehensive and holistic understanding of Al-Ghazali's thought and its contributions to modern basic education.

Results and Discussion

1. A Brief Biography of Imam Al-Ghazali

Abu Hamid Muhammad bin Muhammad al-Ghazali al-Tusi, better known as Imam Al-Ghazali, was born in Tus, a city in Khurasan (present-day Iran), in 450 AH/1058 CE and died in 505 AH/1111 CE. He was one of the greatest scholars, philosophers, theologians, and Sufis in Islamic history. The title "*Hujjatul Islam*" (Proof of Islam) was bestowed upon him due to his remarkable intellectual ability in integrating the knowledge of Islamic law (*sharia*), philosophy, and Sufism (Putri & Nurhuda, 2023).

Al-Ghazali received his early education in his hometown before continuing his studies in Jurjan and Nishapur. In Nishapur, he studied under Imam al-Haramain al-Juwaini, a prominent scholar of Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*) and theology (*kalam*). His intelligence allowed him to quickly excel among his peers, earning him a high position. After his teacher's death, Al-Ghazali was invited to Baghdad by Nizam al-Mulk, the vizier of the Seljuk Dynasty, to teach at the Nizamiyya Madrasah, the most prestigious educational center of its time (Daenuri, 2021).

However, at the peak of his academic career, Al-Ghazali experienced a spiritual crisis. He felt an inner emptiness despite having mastered various disciplines. This condition led him to abandon his position and embark on a Sufi path for nearly ten years, traveling to Damascus, Makkah, Madinah, and finally returning to Tus. It was from this spiritual journey that his monumental work, *Ihya' Ulumuddin* (The Revival of the Religious Sciences), emerged, which sought to unify the dimensions of jurisprudence, ethics, and Sufism (Faza, 2022).

Al-Ghazali's works span various fields of knowledge, including philosophy (*Maqashid al-Falasifah* - The Aims of the Philosophers; *Tahafut al-Falasifah* - The Incoherence of the Philosophers), theology (*al-Iqtisad fi al-I'tiqad* - The Moderation in Belief), Sufism (*Ihya' Ulumuddin*, *al-Munqidh min al-Dhalal* - The Deliverer from Error), and education (*Ayyuha al-Walad* - O Child!). Through his ideas, Al-Ghazali emphasized that knowledge must not be separated from ethics and spirituality. For him, the ultimate goal of education was to draw humans closer to God through the formation of noble character, not merely to acquire rational knowledge (A. Rahman et al., 2025).

His thought has had a profound influence, not only in the Muslim world but also in the West. George Makdisi noted that Al-Ghazali was one of the figures who contributed to the development of educational methods and medieval philosophy. In the context of education, he affirmed the importance of the teacher's role as a moral exemplar and spiritual guide, and emphasized the urgency of educating children from an early age through the habituation of ethics and discipline. Thus, Al-Ghazali is remembered not only as a theologian or Sufi but also

as an educator who successfully formulated an integrative educational paradigm, one that remains relevant for addressing the problems of basic education in the contemporary era (Daenuri, 2021).

2. Al-Ghazali's Thought in Islamic Education Philosophy

The thought of Al-Ghazali (1058–1111 CE) holds a central position in the history of Islamic education philosophy (Ali, Sa'ad, & Anwar, 2025). He lived during the golden age of Islamic civilization, a time when knowledge, Greek philosophy, and Sufism converged in a dynamic intellectual space. Within this context, Al-Ghazali emerged as a thinker who sought to synthesize reason, revelation, and spiritual experience (Nurdiana, 2025). This is reflected in his monumental works such as *Ihya' Ulum al-Din*, *Ayyuha al-Walad*, and *Mizan al-'Amal*. For him, education is not merely the transfer of knowledge, but a process of soul purification (*tazkiyatun nafs*), character formation, and a path toward true happiness in both this world and the hereafter (Isbah & Sihono, 2025). Consequently, his ideas on education can be examined through four main dimensions: the aims of education, the concepts of teacher and student, curriculum and knowledge, and educational methods.

According to Al-Ghazali, the ultimate aim of education is to attain happiness in this world and the hereafter (*sa'adah*) (Al-Ghazali, 2021). He asserted that knowledge must not stop at the intellectual dimension but must give rise to righteous deeds (*amal saleh*) (Al-Ghazali, 2024a). In *Ihya' Ulum al-Din*, he writes:

العلم بلا عمل جنون، والعمل بلا علم لا يكون

Translation: "Knowledge without action is madness, and action without knowledge is impossible." (Al-Ghazali, 2024b).

This quotation demonstrates that the orientation of Islamic education, according to Al-Ghazali, is never neutral but is always linked to moral and spiritual transformation. Education serves as a means for *tazkiyatun nafs*, the purification of the heart from blameworthy traits and the simultaneous formation of noble character (Khusnadi, Yusuf, & Setiawan, 2022). This constitutes the fundamental difference between the concept of Islamic education and modern secular education, which often emphasizes only cognitive competencies and pragmatic skills. Furthermore, Al-Ghazali assigns a special status to the teacher in the educational process. In *Ayyuha al-Walad*, he asserts:

فالمعلم والشيخ هو المرشد إلى طريق الله تعالى، والمبين لمزالق النفس، ومكامن الشيطان

Translation: "The teacher and the guide are the ones who show the way to God Almighty and warn [the student] of the soul's treachery and the snares of Satan." (Al-Ghazali, 2024b)

For Al-Ghazali, a teacher is not merely an instructor (*mu'allim*) who transfers knowledge, but also an educator (*murabbi*) who nurtures morality, and a spiritual guide (*mursyid*) who leads the student on the spiritual path. Therefore, the teacher's role is broader than just delivering subject matter; they must become a living example (Mujrimin & Ali, 2025). Meanwhile, the student is required to possess *adab* (etiquette), which encompasses obedience, humility, and respect towards the teacher (Al-Ghazali, 2025). Imam Al-Ghazali emphasized that knowledge will not be beneficial without *adab*; *adab* is a prerequisite for knowledge to bear fruit, even though he did not literally state that '*adab* takes precedence over knowledge' (Al-Ghazali, 2010). This affirms that the teacher-student relationship in Islam is spiritual and ethical, not merely transactional as is often the case in modern education. Al-Ghazali further classifies knowledge into two main categories, defining the scope of what must be learned:

وأما فرض العين فهو علم العبد بما لا بد له منه في قوام دينه، وأما فرض الكفاية فهو ما يحتاج إليه في قوام الدنيا كالطب والحساب

Translation: "As for *fardhu 'ain* (individual obligation), it is the knowledge that a servant is obliged to know to uphold his religion. Whereas *fardhu kifayah* (communal obligation) is the knowledge required to manage worldly affairs, such as medicine and arithmetic." (Al-Ghazali, 2018).

From this, it is evident that Al-Ghazali structured an educational curriculum that avoids the dichotomy between religious and worldly sciences. He viewed religious knowledge as the moral and spiritual foundation, while rational and practical sciences have their place insofar as they serve the common good (*maslahat*). Thus, his curriculum is integrative, encompassing spiritual, intellectual, and social dimensions, and ensures that all knowledge is directed towards closeness to God without neglecting worldly needs. This concept is profoundly relevant to the contemporary discourse on integrative-holistic education (Dewa, Lathifah, & Indra, 2023; Madhar, 2024).

The educational methods proposed by Al-Ghazali do not solely emphasize the rational aspect but also integrate moral and spiritual dimensions. First, role-modeling (*uswah*) is the primary key, where a teacher must be able to embody the morals they teach. A teacher is not sufficient to merely convey knowledge theoretically; they must also become a living figure in real behavior, so that students can learn through observation and emulation. Al-Ghazali asserts:

حال المعلم في نفس الصبي أرسخ من قوله، وإنما ينطبع في القلب من الأعمال ما يرى بالأعين أكثر مما يسمع بالأذان

Translation: "The state of a teacher makes a more lasting impression on the student than their words; indeed, what is etched upon the heart is more often what the eye sees than what the ear hears."

Second, habituation (*ta'wīd*) serves as a vital instrument in the process of internalizing values. According to Al-Ghazali, good character is not formed instantly but through consistent, repeated practice, so that positive habits become ingrained in the student's soul. In the *Iḥyā'*, he emphasizes:

الصبي أمانة عند والديه، وقلبه الطاهر جوهرة ساذجة خالية عن كل نقش وصورة، وهو قابل لكل ما نقش، ومائل إلى كل ما يمال به إليه

Translation: "A child is a trust placed upon his parents. His pure heart is a precious jewel, devoid of any engraving or form; it is receptive to every engraving and inclined towards whatever it is directed."

Furthermore, admonition (*mau'izhah*) plays a significant role in touching the student's heart. Verbal education delivered with wisdom and gentleness can cultivate inner awareness and motivate them towards goodness. According to Al-Ghazali:

النصيحة شفاء ولكن لا يصلح لكل قلب، ولا بد أن تكون برفق ولطف ووقت مناسب

Translation: "Admonition is a medicine, but it is not suitable for every heart; it must be

given with gentleness, compassion, and at the right time."

Next, self-examination (*muhasabah*) or introspection is a method directed at ensuring the student continuously evaluates their actions, weighing what aligns with divine law and what deviates from it. Al-Ghazali states:

نبغي للمؤمن أن يحاسب نفسه كما يحاسب الشريك شريكه والتاجر شريكه

Translation: "A believer should hold himself to account just as a partner holds his partner to account and a merchant [scrutinizes] his capital."

Simultaneously, Al-Ghazali places the controlling of base desires (*hawa nafsu*) as a moral foundation that must not be neglected. For him, educational success does not only produce individuals who are intellectually intelligent but also those capable of restraining worldly passions. As he emphatically states:

أعدى عدوك نفسك التي بين جنبيك، فمن قهرها فقد انتصر، ومن غلبته فقد انكسر

Translation: "Your greatest enemy is your [own] soul that is between your two sides; whoever subdues it triumphs, and whoever is subdued by it is ruined."

Collectively, these methods demonstrate that Islamic education philosophy, according to Al-Ghazali, emphasizes the holistic formation of character through the integration of intellect, heart, and behavior. Thus, education does not stop at the mastery of cognitive knowledge but progresses towards the realization of *al-insan al-kamil*, the perfect human who is balanced in intellect, spirituality, and morality.

3. Philosophical Analysis

The epistemology of education according to Al-Ghazali cannot be separated from the broader framework of Islamic philosophical epistemology. For Al-Ghazali, the sources of knowledge encompass reason, revelation, and intuition (*kasyf*). Reason plays an important role in analyzing, classifying, and weighing truth. However, reason alone is insufficient due to its limitations in comprehending the unseen and metaphysical realms. Therefore, revelation is regarded as the highest source of knowledge and the criterion for absolute truth. Furthermore, Al-Ghazali emphasizes the dimension of intuition or *kasyf*—an inner unveiling obtained through the purification of the soul and closeness to God. Thus, Al-Ghazali's epistemology demonstrates a synthesis of rationality, spirituality, and transcendence, distinguishing it from modern Western epistemology, which tends to emphasize the rational-empirical alone.

The character of education stemming from this epistemological view is Sufistic, ethical, and integrative. The Sufistic character is evident in Al-Ghazali's emphasis on *tazkiyatun nafs* (purification of the soul), *muhasabah* (self-reflection), and the controlling of base desires as fundamental educational aims. The ethical character is realized in the orientation towards character formation as the core of the entire teaching-learning process. Meanwhile, the integrative character is seen in Al-Ghazali's endeavor to combine intellectual, moral, and spiritual dimensions, ensuring that education does not become trapped in the mere transfer of cognitive knowledge but is directed towards forming a whole and balanced *insan kamil* (perfect human). In *Ihyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn* (Al-Ghazali, 2018), he emphasizes:

العلم بلا عمل جنون، والعمل بلا علم لا يكون

Translation: "Knowledge without action is madness, and action without knowledge cannot

exist.”

This quotation demonstrates the integration of knowledge, ethics, and spirituality in Al-Ghazali's educational vision. When compared to other thinkers, Al-Ghazali occupies a distinct space. Ibn Sina (Avicenna), for instance, emphasized a rationalistic-empirical epistemology, where knowledge is acquired through sensory observation and subsequently processed by the intellect to attain universal understanding (Momeni, 2021). Education within Ibn Sina's framework places greater emphasis on the development of intellectual and scientific potential, thus exhibiting a more scientific and philosophical character. Meanwhile, Al-Farabi stressed a political-philosophical approach, viewing education as a means to form ideal citizens in accordance with the vision of *al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah* (the Virtuous City) (Edelbay, 2023). Consequently, the fundamental difference lies in their central emphasis: Ibn Sina focuses on the rational aspect, Al-Farabi on the political-philosophical, while Al-Ghazali centers on the ethical-spiritual. However, Al-Ghazali's distinct strength is his ability to present an integration of reason, revelation, and intuition. As a result, education does not merely produce intelligent individuals or ideal citizens, but a perfected personality (*pribadi paripurna*) who is close to God and beneficial to society.

Philosophically, Al-Ghazali's thought is relevant for addressing the problems of contemporary education, which often falls into the dichotomies of science versus religion, morality versus knowledge, and academic competence versus character integrity. Through his epistemological approach, Al-Ghazali teaches that true education must engage the whole of the human being (intellect, heart, and action), for only through this can humanity attain true happiness in this world and the hereafter.

4. The Relevance of Al-Ghazali's Thought to Basic Education

Al-Ghazali's thought in education philosophy holds strong relevance for addressing the challenges of contemporary basic education, particularly in the Indonesian context. First, regarding the aims of basic education, Al-Ghazali emphasizes the importance of *tazkiyatun nafs* (purification of the soul) as the foundation for forming *al-Insan al-Kamil* (Al Mahmudi & Bungsu, 2025). This aligns with the orientation of modern basic education, which prioritizes character formation, not merely cognitive achievement (Maharani, Subroto, Fany, Nurhasanah, & Nova, 2025). Character education from Al-Ghazali's perspective stresses the integration of moral, spiritual, and intellectual aspects, which serves as the groundwork for students to develop into whole persons (Zamhariroh, Azis, Nata, Fahmi, & Salik, 2024).

Second, concerning the role of the teacher, Al-Ghazali asserts that a teacher is not merely a conveyer of knowledge but also a moral exemplar (*uswah*) (Muhammad, Khumaidi, & Inzah, 2025). In *Ayyuha al-Walad*, he states (Al-Ghazali, 2024a):

فالمعلم والشيخ هو المرشد إلى طريق الله تعالى، والمبين لمزالق النفس، ومكامن الشيطان

Translation: “The teacher and the guide are the ones who show the way to God Almighty and warn [the student] of the soul's treachery and the snares of Satan.”

This principle is highly relevant to the paradigm of basic education in Indonesia, which positions teachers as “character educators,” not merely “curriculum instructors.” Third, the relevance of Al-Ghazali's educational methods can be observed in elementary school teaching practices. The concept of habituation (*ta'wīd*) can be translated into habituation programs such as daily literacy movements, the practice of simple acts of worship (prayers, *Duha* prayers, charity), and discipline (Lestari, Windri, & Sari, 2025). The concept of role-modeling (*uswah*) is reflected in character education models based on role-modeling, where teachers are required to demonstrate behavior consistent with the values they teach (Djamaluddin, Winarso, & Sumarna, 2025). Meanwhile, the concept of self-examination (*muhasabah*) can be adapted into reflective learning activities such as journaling, self-assessment, or group

discussions about daily moral experiences (Kosim et al., 2025). In this way, basic education not only builds academic ability but also sharpens self-awareness and social responsibility.

Fourth, regarding the curriculum aspect, Al-Ghazali's idea of integrating religious and rational sciences finds its relevance in the holistic education approach championed by Indonesia's *Kurikulum Merdeka* (Independent Curriculum). The *Kurikulum Merdeka* seeks to blend students' cognitive, affective, and psychomotor aspects by providing a broader space for project-based learning and character strengthening (Siboro, Samosir, Ananta, Lumbantoruan, & Sinaga, 2025). The integration of religious values and science, as emphasized by Al-Ghazali, can strengthen the vision of this curriculum, enabling basic education to produce students with broad knowledge, noble character, and spiritual awareness.

Thus, Al-Ghazali's thought is not merely a classical heritage but an actual guide for formulating a model of basic education that balances intellect, morality, and spirituality. This demonstrates that classical Islamic educational ideas can synergize with modern educational policy, particularly in building an education system oriented toward the wholeness of the human being.

5. Critical Discussion

Al-Ghazali's thought in Islamic education philosophy has a primary strength in the aspects of morality and children's character education. The Sufi orientation he offers through concepts like *tazkiyatun nafs*, *uswah*, *ta'wīd*, and *muhāsabah* aligns with the needs of contemporary basic education, which emphasizes character education. In the context of the moral crisis and ethical degradation faced by many young people today, Al-Ghazali's thought can serve as both a normative and practical solution to return education to its primary function: forming human beings with noble character. As Fazlur Rahman (2024), asserts, "Islamic education in its essence is moral education," which is in harmony with Al-Ghazali's Sufi orientation.

However, Al-Ghazali's thought also has limitations. As a figure who lived in the medieval period, his focus was predominantly on moral and spiritual dimensions, while aspects of modern science, technology, and 21st-century skills are not adequately accommodated. This kind of critique is voiced by Madjid (2019), who stated that classical Islamic thought is "often trapped in normative repetition without rational recontextualization." This view indicates that although Al-Ghazali's thought remains valuable, it requires actualization to suit the challenges of modern education.

Therefore, a synthesis between Al-Ghazali's Sufi thought and contemporary pedagogical approaches is necessary. Philosophically, Al-Ghazali's emphasis on the integration of intellect, heart, and morality can be combined with humanistic (Carl Rogers), constructivist (Piaget, Vygotsky) educational theories, and the concept of holistic education. As Nasr (2009) emphasized, "Islamic education should not separate between the sacred and the profane, but must reintegrate them into a holistic worldview." This integration allows for the emergence of a basic education model that builds not only cognitive intelligence but also emotional, spiritual, and social intelligence.

Thus, Al-Ghazali's thought remains relevant for contemporary basic education, particularly in the aspects of morality and character formation. However, it must be recontextualized to address the demands of literacy, numeracy, science, and technology. Through a synthetic approach, the classical Islamic heritage does not merely become a romanticism of the past but can serve as an ethical foundation that inspires educational renewal in the global era.

6. Practical Implications

Al-Ghazali's thought offers tangible implications for the practice of basic education in the contemporary era. First, at the level of the elementary school teacher, the concepts of role-modeling (*uswah hasanah*) and habituation (*ta'wīd*) taught by Al-Ghazali can be applied in daily interactions with students. The teacher acts not only as a conveyer of material but also

as a moral figure who influences children's behavior through their attitude, speech, and life habits. In this context, the teacher's role aligns with Lickona's view of character education, which emphasizes the role of models in shaping children's moral values (Lickona, 2009; Yanuardianto, 2021).

Second, at the level of the basic education curriculum, there needs to be an emphasis on integrating character building based on Islamic ethics. Indonesia's *Kurikulum Merdeka* (Emancipated Curriculum) already provides space for strengthening the *Profil Pelajar Pancasila* (Pancasila Student Profile), which emphasizes the dimensions of faith, piety to the One and Only God, and noble character (Alhudawi, Simatupang, & Khairuddin, 2023; Mokorowu, Katuuk, Tarusu, & Pangkey, 2023; Ulwiyah & Ilahiyah, 2025). This is in line with Al-Ghazali's idea of *tazkiyatun nafs* as the basis of moral education. Therefore, strengthening Islamic religious education in elementary schools should not be solely oriented towards cognition (memorizing verses and theory), but also towards the practice of habituation, value internalization, and self-reflection.

Third, at the level of educational policy, Al-Ghazali's thought encourages a balance between the demands of 21st-century competencies (literacy, numeracy, creativity, collaboration, and technology utilization) and the formation of morality and ethics. This is important given the many criticisms of modern education systems that tend to overemphasize cognitive aspects. As emphasized by Tilaar (2004), Indonesian education needs to be directed towards building the whole person, who is not only intellectually intelligent but also has moral integrity and a strong personality.

In conclusion, the implementation of Al-Ghazali's thought in basic education can be achieved through learning strategies based on role-modeling and habituation, strengthening a character curriculum based on Islamic ethics, and formulating educational policies that integrate the mastery of modern knowledge with the formation of noble character. Such an educational model will produce a young generation that is not only academically intelligent but also possesses a mature and resilient personality to face global challenges.

Conclusion

Al-Ghazali's educational thought provides a fundamental contribution to the discourse of Islamic education philosophy, particularly concerning the aim of education as a means of forming noble character and attaining happiness in this world and the hereafter. Al-Ghazali asserted that education should not be oriented solely towards cognitive aspects or knowledge transfer, but must function as an instrument for *tazkiyatun nafs* (purification of the soul) and the development of a perfected personality. This perspective affirms the Sufi and ethical dimensions that are the core of his educational paradigm. In the context of contemporary basic education, Al-Ghazali's ideas remain relevant, particularly in terms of character formation, the integration of knowledge, and the role of the teacher as a moral exemplar. Basic education should not only be an arena for strengthening literacy and numeracy but also a strategic space for instilling values of discipline, responsibility, and spirituality. Thus, Al-Ghazali's thought aligns with the orientation of modern character education, which emphasizes habituation, role-modeling, and reflection as primary methods for value internalization.

However, a limitation of Al-Ghazali's thought lies in its lack of attention to the development of modern, technology-based science. While profoundly important, the dominant focus on ethical and Sufistic aspects needs to be complemented by contemporary pedagogical approaches that emphasize 21st-century competencies, such as critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, and digital literacy. This is crucial to ensure that basic education does not only produce students of noble character but also individuals capable of competing in a complex global world. As a recommendation, it is necessary to integrate Al-Ghazali's Sufistic thought with modern educational approaches that are humanistic, constructivist, and holistic. The basic education curriculum can accommodate moral and spiritual values based on Islam while simultaneously developing intellectual and technological capabilities. In this way, basic education will be able to produce a generation that is balanced in intellectual

intelligence, spiritual depth, and moral fortitude, in accordance with both the ideals of national education and the demands of the 21st-century global era.

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