

Reconstruction of Al-Ghazali's Thought on Language and Education: An Analysis of Educational Hermeneutics and Its Implications for Contemporary Arabic Pedagogy

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ABSTRACT

This study examines Al-Ghazali's thought on language and education and explores its relevance within contemporary Arabic language pedagogy. Departing from the tendency to position Al-Ghazali merely as a moral authority, this research situates his ideas within a broader epistemological framework that integrates language, ethics, and cognition. The study aims to critically reinterpret Al-Ghazali's concepts and assess their potential contribution to addressing the limitations of instrumentalist approaches in modern language teaching. This research employs a qualitative-descriptive method with a conceptual and philosophical approach, relying on library research. Primary sources include Al-Ghazali's major works, while secondary sources consist of contemporary studies in linguistics and language pedagogy. Data are analyzed through interpretive and critical analysis to identify key concepts and their possible contextual transformation. The findings reveal that Al-Ghazali's perspective on language emphasizes ethical intentionality (*niyyah*), disciplined speech (*adab al-kalām*), and the inseparability of knowledge and moral formation. These principles offer a critical lens to evaluate contemporary Arabic language teaching, which often prioritizes communicative efficiency over interpretive depth and ethical awareness. However, the study also finds that Al-Ghazali's framework cannot be directly applied to modern educational contexts due to differences in historical, epistemological, and institutional settings. This study concludes that Al-Ghazali's thought is best understood as a reflective and critical resource rather than a prescriptive pedagogical model. Its relevance lies in enriching the epistemological foundation of language education, particularly by reintroducing ethical and reflective dimensions into language learning. Nevertheless, any attempt to integrate these ideas requires careful reinterpretation and adaptation to ensure compatibility with contemporary educational demands.

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Introduction

Language has long been a central concern in both philosophy and education, not merely as a tool of communication but as a medium through which knowledge, meaning, and values are constructed and transmitted. In the broader landscape of the philosophy of language, debates have

revolved around whether language functions primarily as a representational system (as in classical and structuralist traditions) or as a social and pragmatic activity shaping human understanding and interaction. Similarly, in educational theory, language is viewed not only as an instrument for delivering content but also as a formative force that shapes cognition, identity, and moral consciousness. (Nabillah Amin Faris, 2023). Within this broader discourse, the thought of Al-Ghazali occupies a distinctive position. Unlike purely formal or structural approaches to language, Al-Ghazali conceptualizes language (*lisān*) as an ethical-spiritual act that reflects the inner state of the human being. In his magnum opus *Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn*, language is not treated as a neutral medium but as a morally charged practice closely linked to intention (*niyyah*), truthfulness, and the purification of the soul (*tazkiyat al-nafs*). This perspective situates Al-Ghazali within a broader philosophical tradition that integrates epistemology, ethics, and pedagogy, where knowing, speaking, and acting are inseparable dimensions of human development. Educational literature that consistently interprets Al-Ghazali's thought asserts that the aim of education is to cultivate knowledgeable and morally upright individuals; this is relevant for designing Arabic language instruction that is not only communicative but also character-building. (Ullah Sheikh, 2019)

Nevertheless, in the context of contemporary learning, Arabic is taught through communicative, task-based, and digital literacy approaches. Then a fundamental issue arises: how to align language skills with the ethical values that are the goals of Islamic education? Al-Ghazali's thought provides a normative foundation that the purpose of education is *tazkiyat al-nafs* (purification of the soul) and the development of the ideal human being, so ideally, the teaching of Arabic integrates cognitive, affective, and ethical aspects. (Syarifah Dahlana, 2023)

From the standpoint of educational philosophy, Al-Ghazali's framework challenges the dominant modern tendency to separate cognitive achievement from moral and spiritual formation. Contemporary language education—particularly in Arabic language teaching—has been heavily influenced by communicative, task-based, and skill-oriented approaches that emphasize linguistic competence and functional communication. While these approaches have contributed significantly to improving language proficiency, they often operate within an instrumental paradigm that marginalizes ethical and value-based dimensions of learning. This creates a conceptual gap between language as a technical skill and language as a vehicle for meaning, identity, and moral formation. (Ullah Sheikh Prestige Academy & Abid Ali, 2019)

Research on Al-Ghazali largely focuses on the philosophy of education, objectives, and curriculum. The modern emphasis on integrating cultural and linguistic knowledge in Arabic language teaching aligns with Al-Ghazali's holistic educational approach, indicating that his educational principles can inform contemporary language teaching methodologies. Although Al-Ghazali did not explicitly discuss language teaching, his emphasis on comprehensive education and the moral role of the teacher can be seen as relevant to contemporary language teaching practices. (Azwar et.al 2024) Existing studies tend to stop at the normative level and have not translated Al-Ghazali's principles of speech ethics into practical learning strategies, such as oral assessment rubrics, communication-based task designs, or the integration of digital literacy in the Arabic language classroom. This creates a gap that needs to be filled through critical and applied studies.

The relevance of Al-Ghazali's thought becomes increasingly significant in the context of contemporary Arabic language pedagogy. Current challenges—such as declining intrinsic motivation, overemphasis on grammatical formalism, and the disconnection between language

learning and students' value systems—indicate the limitations of purely technical approaches. In this regard, Al-Ghazali's emphasis on *adab al-kalām* (ethics of speech), the role of the teacher as a moral exemplar (*murabbī*), and the orientation of knowledge toward meaningful and ethical purposes provides a robust pedagogical foundation. (Ullah Sheikh, 2019). Jannah (2023) Therefore, revisiting Al-Ghazali's thought is not merely a historical exercise but a conceptual and pedagogical necessity. By situating his ideas within the wider debates of philosophy of language and education, this study seeks to demonstrate that his framework remains relevant as a critical resource for rethinking Arabic language teaching. It offers a holistic paradigm that bridges linguistic competence with ethical formation, thereby addressing contemporary educational challenges while preserving the deeper purposes of language learning. (Kholil Chuyari, 2024)

The main question that arises is: What is Al-Ghazali's concept of language and education, and what is its relevance to contemporary Arabic language teaching? This article aims to: 1. Analyze Al-Ghazali's thoughts on language and education. 2. Connect Al-Ghazali's principles of speech ethics with contemporary Arabic teaching strategies. This study is expected to enrich the discourse on Arabic language pedagogy by incorporating the dimension of speech ethics (*adab al-kalām*) as a measurable learning outcome, alongside linguistic aspects. Practically, this study can produce teaching materials and performative assessment models that can be applied in Arabic language classes, both in madrasahs and universities. Thus, Arabic language teaching can be directed not only at speaking ability but also at speaking with proper manners and purposes, in accordance with Al-Ghazali's vision of holistic education.

Arabic Language Education in the Perspective of Al-Ghazali

Imam Al-Ghazali was a prominent scholar in the Islamic world, possessing very profound thoughts regarding the concept of education. For Al-Ghazali, education is not limited to the transmission of knowledge, but is also a primary means for the purification of the soul (*tazkiyatun nafs*) and the formation of virtuous character. Al-Ghazali emphasized the inseparable unity between knowledge (*'ilm*) and practice (*'amal*). He believed that theoretical knowledge must be accompanied by practical application, guided by moral values. This principle underscores the importance of aligning actions with the knowledge acquired to achieve ethical and spiritual growth. Etiam in interdum quam, vitae hendrerit nunc. Phasellus suscipit tempus ante. Nunc vel suscipit arcu, in auctor nisl. Nullam consequat magna nec nisi convallis pulvinar. Cras nisi lacus, iaculis nec nisi at, condimentum vehicula lorem. Donec molestie mi non purus gravida sagittis. Curabitur metus augue, maximus eget quam ac, fermentum maximus turpis. (Kirabae, 2023)

In the learning process, Al-Ghazali believes that the role of a teacher is very important. A teacher is not merely a transmitter of knowledge, but also functions as a guide in spirituality. Therefore, a teacher should demonstrate commendable behavior and serve as a role model for children. From Al Ghazali's Perspective on Education, among them :

1. Educational Goals

Al-Ghazali played an important role in the field of Islamic education. He emphasized that education is the most essential aspect of human life. This view is elaborated in depth in his famous work, *Ihya' Ulumuddin*, which is supported by evidence from the Qur'an, the Prophet's Sunnah, and the consensus of scholars (*ijma'*).

According to Al Ghazali, there are three main objectives of education. (Ronzon et al., 2025):

- a) Scientific aspect, aims to encourage people to enjoy thinking, actively conduct research, and sharpen their knowledge, thereby becoming intelligent and creative individuals.
- b) The spiritual aspect aims to guide humans to be virtuous, ethical, and resilient.
- c) The aspect of divinity aims to guide believers to attain true happiness both in this world and in the hereafter.

Based on the three aspects above, Al Ghazali concluded that the aims of education include shaping students into individuals who actively learn, are able to fully develop their potential, and consistently uphold virtuous morals grounded in divine values.

2. Educational Methods

In the Educational Method offered by Al Ghazali, there are three concepts, including. (Ronzon et al., 2025):

- a) The basic principles of study methods include: focusing oneself to the maximum, understanding the purpose of the knowledge, and studying it gradually from simple to more complex concepts
- b) The basis of teaching methods includes: observing students' thinking abilities, explaining lesson material clearly, delivering lessons from concrete to abstract concepts, and using a gradual approach in presenting the material
- c) The basic teaching methods include; presenting practice question sessions, providing advice and understanding, and protecting students from negative environmental influences by creating a positive and enjoyable learning atmosphere.

3. Arabic Language Education

Language teaching and learning is the process of developing linguistic competence, including skills in listening, speaking, reading, and writing. In practice, language teaching and learning activities must consider the communicative needs of learners so that they are able to use the language functionally in real life. The communicative approach in language learning is relevant because it emphasizes the use of language in meaningful and interactive social contexts. It also encourages learners to reflect on their learning experiences and strategies, helping them become more independent and effective language users. (Delgado-Crespo et al., 2020)

As for the methods in teaching the Arabic language, they include:

- a) Grammar-Translation Method (Thariqah al-Qawa'id wa al-Tarjamah). Focuses on mastering grammar and translating texts. Suitable for beginners who want to understand the structure of the Arabic language systematically.
- b) Direct Method (al Tahriqah al-Mubasyarah). Teaching the Arabic language directly without the mediation of the mother tongue, emphasizing the use of the language in the context of daily communication.
- c) Reading Method. Emphasizes the ability to read and understand Arabic texts, often used in teaching at secondary schools.

- d) The Audiolingual Method (al-Thariqah al-Sam'iyah al-Syafahiyah). It develops listening and speaking skills through repetitive exercises and frequently used sentence patterns.

Method

This study applies a qualitative descriptive analysis method, which is an approach that focuses on the use of narratives and verbal descriptions to elaborate on and explain the data obtained. The qualitative descriptive research method is a method used to discover knowledge or theories from previous research through books, national and international journals. In the review process, the researcher looks for similarities, identifies differences, provides insights, summarizes, and combines them into new ideas. In addition, this study refers to a factual historical philosophical approach, which focuses on examining the thoughts of a figure, in this case, a philosopher. Although general in nature, this approach has its uniqueness because it presents conceptions from the perspective of a particular subject, thereby enabling a new understanding of the nature of humans in general. (Waruwu, 2024)

This article uses a library research method, which is a data collection method by understanding and studying theories from various literatures related to the concept of Arabic language education according to Al-Ghazali's perspective, as well as Al-Ghazali's own writings. (Fadli, 2021) ,The primary data was obtained based on written references such as books, journals, and scholarly works that discuss Al-Ghazali's thoughts on character education. After the data was collected, a selection process was carried out to filter information that is relevant and supports the focus of this research.

Result

Al-Ghazali's full name is Abu Hamid Ibn Muhammad Ibn Ahmad Al Ghazali. Al Ghazali's nickname is believed to come from the word "ghazzal," which means "weaver" because his father worked as a wool thread weaver. In addition, the name of Al Ghazali's birthplace village, "ghazalah," also comes from the word "al-ghazalah," a name that the people associated with his father's occupation. (Badriyah, 2021) Al Ghazali was born in the year 450 AH or 1058 AD in a city called Thus, Khurasan, in the Islamic Republic of Iraq. Al-Ghazali was an educator, philosopher, and religious scholar widely known for his works in the fields of philosophy, theology, and mysticism. He became a well-known figure in the Western world during the Middle Ages, referred to as 'Algazel'. (Ellethy, 2020)

In Islam, Al-Ghazali is a prominent and highly respected Islamic philosopher, so he was given the title (Hujjatul Islam), which means defender of Islam, due to his devotion to religion and society. Al-Ghazali was highly skilled in many fields. As a philosopher, Sufi, and educator, Al-Ghazali wrote a number of works aimed at reviving religious teachings. Generally, these works were intended to purify the hearts of Muslims from misguidance and to protect them from threats from both within Islam and from the West (Oriental). He was given the title Hujjat al-Islam for his contributions in guiding and training defense against attacks. (Abd Rahman & Yucel, 2016)

The Dimensions of Language according to Al-Ghazali

Al-Ghazali views language not merely as a tool for communication, but as an expression of human thought and heart, as well as a medium for conveying religious and moral values. In this context, language has both an outward (exoteric) and inward (esoteric) aspect. He emphasizes the importance of intention and sincerity in the use of language, as stated in Ihya' 'Ulumuddin:

Every word should always be accompanied by honesty of intention and noble purpose, for speech is a reflection of the purity of the heart. (Al-Ghazali, 2005: 91)

This view aligns with the modern linguistic concept that sees language as a social and psychological activity, consistent with Halliday's view on the ideational, interpersonal, and textual functions of language. Thus, humans build an understanding of the world and themselves while simultaneously constructing social relationships through language. (Riska & Pah, 2025)

The Implications of Al-Ghazali's Thought on Language Education

Al-Ghazali emphasizes the importance of the educational and transformative functions of language in education. He believes that language teaching should not merely focus on knowledge transfer, but also on character building and the purification of the soul (*tazkiyatun nafs*) [3]. In this context, Arabic teachers are required to serve as role models in both speech and action, as conveyed in Al-Ghazali's message:

“An educator must possess manners before knowledge, for manners are the crown of knowledge”. (Al-Ghazali, 1937: 58)

This principle reinforces the emphasis on the importance of values-based language learning, as developed by (Badri & Al-Attas 2015) in the Integrated Knowledge Approach. This is highly relevant in facing the challenges of the digital and global era, when language learning often gets trapped in purely cognitive aspects.

The Urgency of Integrating Spiritual and Ethical Values in Arabic Language Teaching

In contemporary education, one major challenge is creating language learning that can balance linguistic abilities with the character development of students. Through his works, Al-Ghazali emphasizes the importance of integrating spiritual and moral dimensions in every teaching and learning process. By cultivating the habit of learning not only to increase knowledge but also to demonstrate a pure heart, according to Pierre Bourdieu's Habitus theory, behavioral patterns, or habitus, are formed and shape the social environment. Habitus is a structure shaped by social conditions. Habitus itself is a mindset embedded in individuals and influences their decisions and actions in daily activities. (Nur et al., 2025)

Contemporary studies by Said Alwi, Syukran, and Mutia Sari found that Arabic teaching materials containing spiritual and ethical dimensions have been proven to enhance learning motivation, strengthen the internalization of religious values, and build communicative-moral competence. This supports the notion that students involved in value-based language learning have higher levels of empathy, honesty, and discipline compared to conventional approaches. (Alwi et al., 2024)

The Relevance of Al-Ghazali's Thought for Contemporary Arabic Language Teaching

The transformation of contemporary Arabic language teaching must take into account:

1. Strengthening Internal Motivation

The concept of intentionand the sincerity (ikhlas) advocated by Al-Ghazali can be applied by fostering internal motivation in students to learn Arabic, not merely external motivation for example, exam scores.(Jenuri et al., 2025)

2. Contextual and Meaningful Learning

The integration of ethical and spiritual values into the curriculum and experiential learning methods makes learning more contextual, meaningful, and applicable. Integrating Islamic values into lesson plans, such as using the Qur'an and Hadith, can help build students' character and moral strength. Methods such as analogy, dialogue, and exemplification are effective in instilling these values into the curriculum. (Listyono et al., 2018)

3. The Role of Teachers as Role Models

Arabic language teachers are expected to serve as role models academically, spiritually, and morally, not merely as instructors of technical material. Effective teaching methods are very important. Traditional teacher-centered approaches are still common, but there is a push to use more interactive and student-centered methods to improve language skills. (Zaki et al., 2024)

4. Penguatan Literasi dan Critical Thinking

Al-Ghazali emphasizes the importance of critical, analytical, and reflective thinking in learning. This can be actualized through exercises in discourse analysis, interpretation, and open discussion in Arabic language learning. Reflective practice can be integrated into the curriculum through various methods such as reflective essays, videos, and online blogs. These methods encourage students to actively engage in the learning process and articulate their thoughts and interpretations.(Chan & Wong, 2023)

More details about Al-Ghazali's Thoughts on Language and Education: Their Relevance to Contemporary Arabic Language Teaching will be presented in the table below.

Table 1.1: Al-Ghazali's Thoughts: Their Relevance to Contemporary Arabic Language Teaching

Aspect	The Thoughts of Al Ghazali	Relevance in Contemporary Arabic Language Teaching
Learning Objectives	Education to draw closer to Allah	Arabic is taught not only for academic purposes, but also for spirituality and understanding the Qur'an
Teaching Method	The balance between theory and practice	Integration between rules (nahwu-sharf) and communication (muhadatsah)
Study Ethics	Courtesy before Knowledge	Building students' character before language competence
The Role of Language	Language as a means of knowledge	Arabic becomes a way to understand revelation and Islamic culture

The Use of Technology	Not explicit, but suppressing the right intention	Technology is used to expand preaching and education, not just for entertainment.
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1. Learning Objectives

In the view of Imam Al-Ghazali, the main purpose of education is to draw closer to Allah SWT. For him, knowledge is not merely a tool to seek worldly status, but a means to attain spiritual happiness. Education that does not lead a person to the recognition of God is considered incomplete. Al-Ghazali emphasized that knowledge must be oriented towards tazkiyatun nafs (purification of the soul) in order to cultivate noble character. Teaching Method. (Ahmad & Abdullah, 2023)

Mastery of Arabic is essential for accurately interpreting the Qur'an and Hadith. Scholars emphasize that proficiency in Arabic is necessary to avoid misinterpretations and to grasp the true meanings of these texts. (Shah, F. A. 2016). In a modern context, this means that learning Arabic should instill values of spirituality, religiosity, and Islamic character, not just communicative competence.

2. Teaching Method

Al-Ghazali emphasizes the balance between theory and practice in the learning process. According to him, knowledge that is only studied without being applied will not be beneficial. He rejects a dry cognitive approach without moral implementation. Teachers are expected to embody the principles they teach and demonstrate them through their actions. (Syahrizal, 2021)

In modern Arabic teaching, this principle can be applied by integrating mastery of rules (nahwu–sharf) with communication skills (muhadatsah). This means that grammar learning should not be separated from the practice of speaking, listening, reading, and writing. This model is known as the integrative-communicative approach, where theory and practice go hand in hand to achieve meaningful communicative competence.

3. Study Ethics

One of the important legacies of Al-Ghazali's thought is the principle of 'etiquette before knowledge.' He emphasizes that the blessings of knowledge depend on the purity of the heart and respect for the teacher. Al-Ghazali believed that knowledge without proper conduct can mislead and corrupt. He emphasized that knowledge must be based on strong morals and ethics to achieve the right goals. (Usman et al., 2024)

In the context of modern Arabic language teaching, this principle is very relevant. Before students master language skills, they need to possess learning virtues such as patience, perseverance, and respect for teachers. Character education must serve as a foundation so that language competence not only produces fluent communicators but also learners with good character.

4. The Role of Language

Al-Ghazali views language as a means of gnosis, namely a tool to know Allah and understand His revelation. Language is a medium of spiritual communication that connects humans with God and with one another. He considers that words and meanings have an inner dimension that must be understood deeply. This mystical approach emphasizes the experiential and spiritual dimension of revelation, indicating that language plays a role in conveying the essence of the indescribable divine encounter. (Erdoğan & Eryücel, 2024)

In Arabic language learning, this perspective emphasizes that language is not merely a system of sounds and structures, but also a gateway to understanding the culture, values, and spirituality of Islam. Therefore, the teaching of Arabic should not be trapped in linguistic formalities, but should be directed towards fostering awareness of the divine meaning behind every word and sentence.

5. The Use of Technology

Al-Ghazali indeed lived long before the digital era, so he did not explicitly address technology. However, the principles he taught remain relevant: the right intention is the foundation of every action. In a modern context, the use of technology in education should be guided by the intention of da'wah, character building, and the expansion of knowledge, not merely entertainment or shallow information consumption. Promoting digital literacy among students and educators is essential to ensure they can navigate the digital landscape responsibly and ethically. (Atabik et al., 2024)

In contemporary Arabic language learning, technologies such as YouTube, learning applications, and digital media can be used to enrich students' learning experiences. However, as Al-Ghazali's message suggests, teachers need to guide the use of technology so that it remains within the framework of Islamic values and sincere intentions.

Discussion

From the results of research on Al-Ghazali's perspective on the concept of language and education, this discussion no longer stops at a normative description of Al-Ghazali's thoughts, but rather attempts to construct it analytically so that it has theoretical exploratory power in addressing contemporary Arabic language pedagogy problems. This study argues that Al-Ghazali's thoughts on language and education need to be repositioned not merely as a normative moral framework, but as a critical epistemological lens to rethink contemporary Arabic language pedagogy.

Researchers argue that Al-Ghazali's thoughts on language and education need to be repositioned not merely as a normative moral framework, but as a critical epistemological lens to re-evaluate contemporary Arabic language pedagogy. Rather than treating it solely as a source of value inspiration, this discussion reconstructs these thoughts into three interconnected analytical domains, namely: Language as a maker of meaning (linguistic dimension), language as an ethical act (ethical dimension), and language as a cognitive-reflective process (cognitive dimension). Through this reconstruction, Al-Ghazali's thought is placed in critical dialogue with the dominant paradigms in modern language education. The details are as follows:

1. Language as a Shaper of Meaning (Linguistic Dimension)

According to Al-Ghazali's perspective, language is seen as an act that connects outward expression (*lafz*) and inward meaning (*ma'nā*), where speech not only reflects structure but also intention and understanding. This perspective places language within a hermeneutic framework that emphasizes the depth of meaning, not just the surface form.

Critically, this perspective challenges two dominant ones in contemporary language pedagogy. First, the formalistic paradigm, more specifically in the approach to language rules in translation, which reduces language to mastery of structures often detached from meaning and context. Second, the modern communicative approach, although it has addressed aspects of language function, still tends to remain within an instrumentalist paradigm, where language is positioned as an effective communication tool without adequate attention to depth of interpretation.

a. Formalistic Paradigm

Formalism was born in Russia as a reaction to the 19th-century positivist movement that paid attention to biographical "evidence." Besides being a reaction to the positivist movement, the birth of formalism also coincided with the development of a tendency to reject traditional approaches that always focused on the relationship of

literary works with the disciplines of history, psychology, and sociology. (Manshur, 2019) Or based on its fundamental principle, the structuralist paradigm tends to focus on internal structures and often separates texts or phenomena from external contexts (history, author, or social situation) to find the underlying abstract structure, in other words, always connecting with the implied meaning in an expression.

Russian formalism was an important literary movement in the early 20th century that opposed the prevailing tendency in Russia to interpret literature as an expression of emotion or the worldview of society. Instead, the movement focused on the intrinsic nature of literary texts, emphasizing their form, structure, and techniques rather than their social or emotional content. (Бережная, 2022) The main figures of this school are Shklovsky, Tynjanov, and Jacobson (although Tynjanov eventually changed his mind). What is interesting about this school is that they are not a homogeneous and cohesive group. Their views differ from one another. They emphasize that a living science cannot be tied to a number of truths. They do not want to formulate several universally applicable theories a priori, but rather based on a number of analyses of principles that are only temporarily valid. These Russian formalists are regarded as the founders of modern literary science.

Based on the principle of formalism, borrowing Saussure's term, language has two signs, namely the signifier and the signified. The signifier has a temporary aspect and produces a diachronic chain. Diachronic refers to the linear and sequential relationship of words within an utterance, while synchronic refers to the overall systematics that exist at a particular time. (Eagleton, 1986:96) Combinations that originate from sequential interdependent relationships, Saussure called them syntagmatic ("almost all linguistic units depend on what precedes or follows in the uttered sequence"), whereas relationships within the system as a whole are called paradigmatic (i.e., "inflectional paradigms" of inflection systems, declensions, synonyms, and so on that are inferred and substituted by words in syntagmatic combinations).

b. Instrumental Paradigm

The instrumental paradigm views language purely as a tool (instrument) for conveying messages effectively and efficiently. Its main focus is on the practical function of language: how language is used to transmit information, achieve communication goals, and ensure that messages are clearly understood, rather than on how meaning is deeply formed, critically interpreted, or connected to a broader socio-cultural context. (Tirta, 2021)

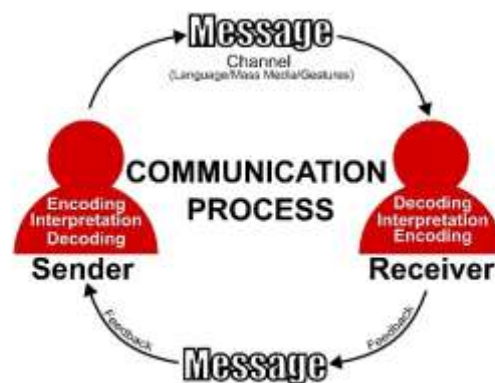
In other words, this paradigm tends to reduce language to merely a neutral and technical communication tool. Within this framework, the success of language learning is measured by the ability to convey messages effectively, while deeper dimensions of meaning such as intentionality, ethics, and self-transformation tend to be ignored. Language is no longer understood as a medium for knowledge formation, but merely as a means of information transmission.

The instrumental paradigm in language does not originate from a single figure, but rather is the result of the accumulation of thoughts from a number of linguists and psychologists who place language within a functional, structural, and behavioral framework. In the early modern linguistic tradition, Ferdinand de Saussure's thinking provided an important foundation by viewing language as a system of signs that is structured and can be analyzed objectively. Although Saussure did not directly formulate

the instrumental paradigm, his emphasis on the stable system of language and the internal relations between its elements paved the way for approaches that see language as something that can be 'used' technically.

This idea was then reinforced by the behavioristic approach represented by Leonard Bloomfield and B.F. Skinner. Within this framework, language is understood as a form of behavior that emerges through stimulus and response mechanisms. Language is no longer seen as a complex mental process, but rather as a habit that can be shaped through practice and repetition. Consequently, aspects of meaning that are subjective and interpretive tend to be neglected, as they are considered not empirically observable. (Asem Shehadeh Saleh Ali, Nur Fatimah Amran, 2025)

From this instrumentalist paradigm, it contrasts with Al-Ghazali's view, which states that utterances not only reflect structure but also intention and understanding. Then the question arises, why is interpretation important? First, eliminating ambiguity. Ambiguity: Many conflicts occur not because of ineffective language, but due to the failure to interpret the meaning behind the words. Second, Criticism: Without deep interpretive ability, a person easily falls into propaganda or information manipulation, as they only accept the literal (surface) meaning without being able to dissect the layers of meaning beneath it. The explanation of the diagram is as follows:



2. Language as an Ethical Act (Ethical Dimension)

Among the contributions of Al-Ghazali's thought is al-kalam, which views language as an ethical act governed by intention (niyyah), sincerity, and responsibility. From this perspective, speech is not neutral, but rather full of values and reflects the moral condition of the speaker.

This idea contradicts the dominant paradigm in Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), which tends to use language within the framework of effectiveness, accuracy, and success in interaction, without explicitly considering the ethical dimension. As a result, modern pedagogy has the potential to produce learners who are communicatively competent, but not necessarily ethically aware in their use of language. In various literatures, CLT is seen as one of the main solutions to address these issues because it offers learning experiences oriented toward communication and interaction. The implementation of CLT involves various activities such as role play, information gap, interview tasks, and problem-solving activities designed to create natural and meaningful communication situations. Littlewood's (2004) study shows that task-based activities within the CLT framework are capable of improving learners' communicative competence through the use of to improve students' communicative competence through the spontaneous use of language in certain social contexts. Students are encouraged to engage in

dialogue, discussion, and negotiation of meaning so that they not only memorize language forms but also understand the pragmatic functions of language in various situations. This approach provides an important foundation for progressively and sustainably developing speaking skills. (Zhakarsya, 2026)

This condition indicates a gap between communication ability and moral responsibility. Al-Ghazali's framework offers a critical intervention by redefining language competence as inherently ethical. However, the integration of ethics should not stop at the normative level. The main challenge is to operationalize ethical values into concrete and measurable pedagogical practices. To realize this, special attention is needed in language teaching, for example:

- a. development of communication rubrics based on ethics (for example, honesty, politeness, responsibility in discourse)
- b. task-based learning such as ethical debates, interactive dialogues, and role-play in real-life contexts
- c. integration of pragmatic competencies such as politeness strategies and language ethics.

Through this approach, Al-Ghazali's thinking contributes to the formation of ethical communicative competence, which is the integration of communication effectiveness and moral awareness.

3. Language and Cognition – Reflective (Cognitive Dimension)

Al-Ghazali asserts that the functionality of language is closely related to the process of thinking (tafakkur), reflection, and the formation of knowledge ('ilm), and also that language is not only a representative of thought, but also a tool to shape it.

This perspective aligns with the constructivist approach in modern education, which emphasizes active learning and higher-order thinking skills. The literature on the epistemology of constructivism in the philosophy of science is vast and dynamically evolving. Constructivist thought introduced by Jean Piaget and developed by Vygotsky, along with critical reflections from philosophers of science such as Thomas Kuhn, forms the main foundation for the development of modern learning theories. Constructivism also inspires the emergence of various innovative pedagogical approaches, such as collaborative learning models, problem-based learning, progressive formative assessment, and the application of digital technology in learning. (Sinring & Kamaruddin, 2026)

However, in practice, modern pedagogy often focuses solely on the cognitive aspect technically, without integrating reflective and ethical dimensions. In contrast, Al-Ghazali offers a more holistic epistemology, where cognition is not separated from reflection and moral awareness. This provides a conceptual foundation for reconstructing Arabic language learning as a process of intellectual and personal formation, not merely the mastery of skills.

4. Relevance in Contemporary Arabic Language Teaching

According to Al-Ghazali, language should not be mastered merely in its formal aspects, such as pronunciation or grammar, but its meaning must be understood deeply. Al-Ghazali's emphasis on a profound understanding of words is highly relevant in religious practice, where shallow knowledge can lead to misinterpretation and improper application of faith. (Weinrich,

2020) Therefore, in education, he emphasizes the need for language teaching that does not stop at memorizing words, but truly encourages students to understand the meaning, purpose, and philosophical values behind the statements. (González-quiñones, 2025)

In his view on education, Al-Ghazali argued that true education involves the cultivation of the heart (qalb), soul (ruh), and intellect ('aql), aimed at achieving holistic spiritual development in accordance with divine purposes. (Faqihuddin et al., 2025) Pendidikan menurutnya harus mencakup tiga aspek utama: intelektual (kognitif), psikis (afektif), dan fisik (psikomotorik). Dalam proses pendidikan, ia menekankan pentingnya metode keteladanan (uswah hasanah) dari guru kepada murid. Konsep guru sebagai panutan didukung oleh gagasan bahwa siswa belajar melalui identifikasi, imitasi, dan pembelajaran peran. (Krivokapic, 2018)

Al-Ghazali's thoughts on contemporary Arabic language teaching are still strongly felt today. Amid the challenges of globalization and the development of modern science, Arabic learning often gets trapped in just technical-linguistic aspects, such as training in reading, writing, and grammar, while the aspects of meaning and instilling spiritual values receive less attention. Al-Ghazali's ideas emphasize the importance of teaching Arabic not only as a means of communication but also as a vehicle for understanding the essence of Islamic teachings and internalizing moral values. Integrating Islamic values into the learning plan using methods such as analogy, dialogue, encouragement and admonition, as well as exemplary modeling, can effectively build students' character. (Listyono et al., 2018) Therefore, in the current practice of teaching Arabic, a holistic and integrative approach is needed, one that balances language mastery, understanding of meaning, and character development.

Furthermore, Al-Ghazali also highlights the importance of stages in the learning process. This means that contemporary Arabic language instruction should ideally be designed in stages, starting with memorization, followed by understanding, then application, and finally habituation in daily life. This concept is relevant to modern learning approaches that prioritize student-centered learning, where students actively construct knowledge according to their abilities. Learning Arabic is not only about mastering grammar but also about understanding cultural context. Teachers integrate cultural knowledge, including customs, beliefs, and social systems, into their teaching to enhance students' communicative competence. (Eldin, 2015) An Arabic teacher, in this context, acts as a facilitator who not only teaches grammar but also guides students in understanding the linguistic context and the values it contains.

The influence of Al-Ghazali's thought on the world of education, particularly in the teaching of the Arabic language, lies in his emphasis on the integrity of the learning process that involves intellectuality, morality, and spirituality. This reflects that effective language learning is learning that not only focuses on skills but also on meaning and ethics. Therefore, the relevance of Al-Ghazali's ideas is very important to be used as a reference in the modern era, so that the teaching of Arabic does not lose its Islamic spirit and aims to develop individuals who are knowledgeable, ethical, and faithful.

Conclusion

This study has demonstrated that Al-Ghazali's thought on language and education offers not merely a normative moral framework, but a rich epistemological perspective that integrates linguistic, ethical, and cognitive-reflective dimensions. However, it is crucial to emphasize that these ideas emerged within a specific historical, intellectual, and spiritual context—namely the classical Islamic tradition, where language was inseparable from religious knowledge, moral discipline, and the cultivation of the soul.

In contrast, contemporary Arabic language pedagogy operates within a fundamentally different paradigm shaped by modern linguistics, educational psychology, and globalized learning environments. Approaches such as communicative language teaching, task-based learning, and digital literacy prioritize functional competence, learner autonomy, and measurable outcomes. Therefore, the relationship between Al-Ghazali's framework and modern pedagogy should not be understood as a direct application, but rather as a critical-dialogical engagement.

The findings suggest that Al-Ghazali's concepts—such as *adab al-kalām*, intention (*niyyah*), and the integration of knowledge and ethics—can serve as a reflective lens to critique the limitations of instrumental and formalistic approaches in contemporary language education. Nevertheless, the transferability of these ideas remains inherently limited. His framework does not provide ready-made pedagogical models applicable to modern classrooms, particularly in contexts shaped by technological advancement, diverse learner needs, and secular educational structures.

Accordingly, any attempt to integrate Al-Ghazali's thought into contemporary Arabic language teaching must involve processes of reinterpretation, adaptation, and contextualization. This includes translating ethical principles into measurable pedagogical practices, aligning them with modern learning theories, and negotiating their relevance within pluralistic educational settings.

In conclusion, the significance of Al-Ghazali's thought lies not in its direct implementation, but in its capacity to expand the epistemological horizon of language education—reframing language not only as a tool of communication, but as a site of meaning-making, ethical responsibility, and reflective awareness. At the same time, this study acknowledges that such a reconstruction remains partial and open-ended, requiring further interdisciplinary inquiry to bridge the gap between classical Islamic intellectual heritage and the demands of contemporary pedagogy.

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