

## Shaping the character of gen Z students: Actualization of the teachings of kitab ayyuhal walad in moral education in pesantren

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### ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze the actualization of the teachings of the *Ayyuhal Walad* book by Imam Al-Ghazali in the character building of Generation Z students in the pesantren environment. The main focus of this research is to identify the moral values taught in the *Ayyuhal Walad* book, analyze the relevance of these values in the context of the lives of Gen Z students, describe the form of actualization or real implementation in the daily lives of students in pesantren. This research uses a qualitative approach with a type of *library research* combined with observation, interviews, and documentation at Muhammadiyah Boarding School Bantul 1 (MBS Muhiba), Yogyakarta. The main data comes from the book *Ayyuhal Walad* and is strengthened by field data from the activities of the santri in the pesantren. The results showed that the moral values in the book of *Ayyuhal Walad* are very relevant and can be applied in the context of Gen Z santri education. There are six main forms of actualization: morals in worshipping Allah, morals towards fellow humans, morals in studying, morals of educators, morals towards teachers, and guarding oneself from despicable morals. All of these values have been implemented in the daily activities of students in the pesantren, such as the discipline of worship, respect for teachers, a culture of helping, and habituation of manners and honesty. This boarding school has succeeded in actualizing moral character education for gen Z students contained in the book *Ayyuhal Walad*. Besides, it must be balanced with supervision and evaluation processes in the form of sanctions for students who violate and appreciation for students who obey the rules. So that the moral and character values that are instilled can run systematically and organized.

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## Introduction

Generation Z, born between 1997-2012, is now the majority of students in various pesantren in Indonesia. This generation, which grew up in the digital era, has characteristics that differ significantly from previous generations, including high dependence on technology, preference for visual and interactive learning, more direct communication patterns, and pragmatic tendencies in absorbing information (Tuada & Raihani, 2025). This condition creates new challenges for traditional educational institutions such as pesantren in character building efforts based on Islamic spiritual values. Pesantren as the oldest Islamic educational institution in Indonesia has played a vital role in shaping the nation's character for centuries. However, rapid social transformation and

the penetration of digital technology have fundamentally changed the educational landscape. Gen Z students come to pesantren with a mindset that has been shaped by exposure to social media, global popular culture, and an instant mindset that is different from previous generations of students (Amri et al., 2025)

Education is an integral part of human life. From the time a person is born until he closes his age, he will continue to experience various forms and situations of education throughout his life. (Bima Praditya et al., 2022). In the context of Islamic education, morals play a very significant role, both in theory and practice (Sofwan Nashiruddin MZ, 2024). Thus, education and morals cannot be separated. Moral education is the soul of Islamic education. Achieving a perfect character is the main goal of education (Munirah, 2017). Morals cover all aspects of human life, both in relationships with Allah SWT known as *Hablum Minallah* and in interactions with fellow humans or *Hablum Minannas*, which includes social, political and economic fields. (Bima Praditya et al., 2022)

At this time Indonesia is faced with the reality that shows the deterioration of the character of the nation's children marked by negligence in worship, the rampant dressing that does not fit the norms of decency, promiscuity, waning manners, and the erosion of a sense of brotherhood and unity (Hapsari, 2024). Moreover, Generation Z lives side by side with globalization so that it is not uncommon to have a personality that imitates a culture from outside. Pop culture or K-pop and so on (Chonista et al., 2022). In addition, educational institutions experience a number of phenomena, including students who like to insult, speak dirty and enslave their friends (santri-pondok) this illustrates the erosion of ethics and moral dimensions (Baharuddin & Esa Nur Wahyuni, 2015). Here, Islamic religious education, especially religious attitudes, plays an important role in aspects of life, both at home, at school and in the community. Many other cases also occur in today's millennial generation. This is certainly a concern for parents, not a few parents entrust pesantren as educational spaces that are expected to be the center of character cultivation. With the hope that they will grow into smart and moral individuals, gain broad insight into norms or good behavior (Adila & Darmaningrum, 2023). Especially in the pesantren environment which is known as an Islamic values-based educational institution.

*Kitab Ayyuhāal-Walad* is a book that presents moral values and was written by an international Muslim scholar and philosopher based on the Qur'an and Sunnah. The moral teachings formulated by al-Ghazali are a reflection of these two main foundations, compiled based on realistic works of his day. This makes his thoughts not only religious and rational, but also on real experiences that are practical and realistic in life. (Suryadarma & Haq, 2015)

This work contains valuable advice from the Hujatul Islam addressed to his students, including discussions on intellectual treasures and character building. The teachings contained in the book have high relevance to be implemented in the context of education as well as in the practice of daily life. This is very important to learn and serve as a reference for santri moral education in everyday life, so that they can understand and apply how to behave and have good morals (Ayyubi, 2020)

In this book, Imam Al-Ghazali uses character education values and methods of moral education (personality) in the form of prescriptive advice, providing real examples of the application of noble morals (Mushoffa Zain & Manik, 2023). Morals or behavior is an important aspect that is inherent in the individual. Every action, whether directly visible or not, becomes a reflection and measure to assess one's personality and true character. Therefore, moral education is seen as a means to instill moral values sourced from the Qur'an, sahih hadith, books, and interpretations of scholars (Rambe et al., 2023)

From various books on character education and moral education, researchers are interested in discussing the book *Ayyuhal Walad* by Imam Ghazali. Although the size of the book is relatively small, the contents of this book are very valuable because they contain advice and advice on character education which is very useful and relevant to Islamic education. Therefore, this book is very suitable to be applied in education in Indonesia. This is reinforced by several studies that examine Imam Al-Ghazali's thoughts on Islamic education have relevance to millennial children today (Lestari, 2020). This book is one of the legacies of Islamic literature which is full of moral and

spiritual values, but its existence has not been studied contextually in the reality of modern moral education, especially in the daily lives of santri (Mushoffa Zain & Manik, 2023)

Several previous studies have discussed moral and character education in the book of Ayyuhal Walad. However, these studies only focus on the moral and character values contained in the book in general, not specifically examining how the actualization of these teachings can be optimized for the character building of Gen Z students. In fact, an in-depth understanding of this is very important to ensure that pesantren remains relevant and effective in carrying out its mission as a creator of noble generations in the digital era. Therefore, the researcher seeks to make reforms through this study, in a Muhammadiyah pesantren located in Bantul, Yogyakarta. The researcher wants to relate the moral values contained in the *Ayyuhal Walad* book to the daily activities of students in the pesantren, how the implementation of the moral concept in *Ayyuhal Walad* is reflected in the daily life of students in the pesantren. Muhammadiyah Boarding School Bantul 1 (MBS MUHIBA), Yogyakarta has approximately 60 students. Through boarding school activities, it aims to form a good and noble personality. Thus, the benchmark for the success of education in pesantren in addition to being good at religious knowledge, also lies in its morals (Damanhuri, 2015)

This research is expected to provide a comprehensive understanding of the concept of morals taught in the book *Ayyuhal Walad* by Imam Al-Ghazali, and how these values can be implemented in the daily lives of santri in the pesantren environment. By examining the relevance of moral teachings in the book to the practice of moral education, this research also aims to explore spiritual, ethical, and character building values that are contextual to the needs and challenges of pesantren life today.

## Method

This research uses a qualitative approach, a qualitative approach is research that emphasizes data collection that is not in the form of numbers and uses qualitative analysis in data exposure, data analysis and conclusion making. The type of research that researchers do is *library research*. Namely research conducted by collecting information and data from various materials in the library such as books, articles, previous research results, and various related journals. The data source in this study is the book of *Ayyuhal Walad* as the object of research.

The data collection used in this research is observation, interviews, and documentation. First, involved observation (*participant observation*), researchers make direct observations and are involved with the daily activities of people who are the source of research data, so that the data obtained will be more complete, sharp and know at the level of meaning of every behavior that appears (Sugiyono, 2019). Second, interviews, researchers interviewed directly ustadz, ustadzah and also some students to obtain direct perspectives from several parties related to this research. Third, the documentation technique carried out by researchers is to collect documents and literature that are relevant to the topic discussed.

## Result

### Short Biography of Imam Al Ghazali

Imam Al-Ghazali (*radhiyallahu 'anhu*) is an accomplished Islamic thinker who has earned the title among Muslims as *Hujjatul Islam*, which is the proof of the truth of Islam. He is not only famous among Muslims but also among non-Muslims. His vast knowledge, experience, expertise in Sufism and spiritual formation have characterized his excellence. His full name is Muhammad bin Muhammad Abu Hamid Al-Ghazali Al-Thosi, born in the village of Ghazalah, the city of Thos, a city in northern Iran. He was born in the middle of the fifth century Hijriyah (450 AH/1058 AD) (Abd Rahman & Yucel, 2016). He was born into a poor but strong religious family. Because his parents died when he was a child, the bitter bitterness of the hardships he experienced in his search for knowledge as a child gave a lot of meaning to his life in old age (Lidia Artika et al., 2023)

Imam Ghazali studied with several scholars, namely Sheikh Ahmad Ar-Razakani (Thos), Abu Nasr Al-Isma'ili (Jurjan), Imam Al Haramain Al-Juwaini (Naisabur). After gaining knowledge in several countries Imam Ghazali returned to his hometown to educate his students in a madrasa and hut that he founded. Until he was called into the presence of Allah on (14 Jumadil Akhir 505H) at his residence (Al-Ghazali, 2018)

### **Kitab Ayyuhal Walad by Imam Al Ghazali**

Kitab Ayyuhal Walad is a book written by Imam Al-Ghazali in response to a letter sent by a student who loved him very much, but was worried about his future. In the letter, the student asked Imam Al-Ghazali to write a letter containing a special advice written for his student. Although he was sure that the content of the letter was already in his book. But Imam Al-Ghazali generously answered his student's letter and gave him some very expensive advice.

If we observe the meaning of the letter he wrote, then we will find that he was very sincere in giving his advice, bringing advice in subtle language that touches the heart so that sometimes it can flow tears and make a very deep impression on the reader so that it brings a change in life. Although the letter was originally addressed specifically to the student, its content and content are needed by all levels of society, young or old, teacher or student. Because the letter written by Imam Al-Ghazali is very important for those who want to establish ideals in an effort to achieve happiness in the world and the hereafter (Al-Ghazali, 2018). The content of the book *Ayyuhal Walad* consists of various kinds of commands and prohibitions written by Al-Ghazali clearly. The book consists of twenty-four pieces of advice, but researchers only focus on discussions or advice related to morals.

### **Advice in the Book of *Ayyuhal Walad* Related to Morals**

First, morals in worshipping Allah. Mentioned in the book *Ayyuhal Walad*, there are 3 essence of *ubudiyah*, namely: keeping the laws of sharia, being pleased with qadha and qadar, seeking Allah's pleasure even though it is not according to your will. From these 3 things can be taken several points, namely: *First*, the nature of ikhlas. Ikhlas is to make all deeds for Allah alone and your heart does not feel happy about their praise nor do you care about their reproaches. *Second*, worship based on sharia. The essence of all knowledge is to know how to perform obedience and worship to Allah ta'ala, obeying worship is following the rules and avoiding prohibitions. Because knowledge and deeds that are not in accordance with shara' are in vain. Third tawakkal, which is to entrust completely to Allah ta'ala that what has been destined for you must reach you even though all the creatures in this nature try to prevent it from you and vice versa (Oktavia Puri, Ahmad Sayuti, 2022). *Third*, multiply night worship. Imam Sufian At-Tsauri said that when the night began, he called from under the arsh "Let the Abidin wake up immediately", so they woke up and prayed a lot (Khaliq, 2017).

Second, morals towards fellow human beings in the book of *Ayyuhal Walad* mentioned that the science of Sufism has two elements. First istiqomah behave well to humans, second behave well to all creatures. In the book it is also mentioned that there are four things that must be abandoned so that the knowledge that is in you does not become a misfortune on the Day of Judgment. The four things are: Do not quarrel with someone, do not advise others when we have not practiced it, do not associate with wrongdoers, do not accept gifts (bribes) from wrongdoers.

Third, morals in studying. Imam Ghazali argues that in improving the values of religious character education in children who are studying, the first is to straighten the intention. it is important to correct the intention in every action and only expect the pleasure of Allah Ta'ala, not others. If the intention in seeking knowledge is only to seek wealth or self-satisfaction, then the child will experience loss (Halimah, 2018). Respect teachers, practice the knowledge gained, prioritize learning fardhu 'Ain knowledge such as religious knowledge, don't ask a lot of questions, do a lot of charity, especially in *Dzauqi* knowledge, namely knowledge that is not obtained through words or writing, only obtained through actions (Al-Ghazali, 2018).

Fourth, the character of the educator. Mentioned in the book there are several traits that a good teacher should have including: First, an educator is not crazy about the world to pursue rank. Second, a teacher should be taught by a murshid who has extensive knowledge. Third, successfully educating himself before becoming a teacher by talking little, eating little, sleeping little, praying a lot, giving alms a lot, fasting a lot. Fourth Having noble morals as a way of life such as patience, diligent worship, polite, tawadhu', a lot of knowledge, shame, keeping promises, calm disposition, firm stance, careful in all matters (Basith, 2022) .

Fifth, morals towards teachers in the book *Ayyuhal Walad* states that when students meet a *Mursyid* teacher, namely a teacher who is smart again pious imitating the morals of the Rosulullah, they should maintain some manners, namely, do not like to argue and fight words in front of the teacher, obey the teacher's orders to do what the teacher tells them, accept the teacher's advice inwardly and outwardly (Maghfirrotun, 2022) .

Sixth, Keeping oneself from despicable morals there is advice on 8 things contained in the book *Ayyuhal walad*, namely leaving long debates, always paying attention to the advice received, not associating with the authorities, not accepting bribes, living only for Allah SWT, having a sense of sympathy and empathy, applying the knowledge possessed, and not hoarding wealth just for *riya'*.

## Discussion

### Actualization of Moral Education for gen Z students in Daily Life in the Boarding School

First, morals in worshiping Allah. Believing and having faith in Allah SWT is a fundamental basis in Islam that needs to be understood as certain knowledge. There are manners in worship which are the reason for the acceptance of charity (Al-Ghazali, 2018) . *First*, the nature of sincerity, sincerity is the main key in worship, where all acts of worship are solely intended for Allah SWT not others (Hidayah et al., 2023) . Pesantren is an environment created on the basis of sincerity, all actions are based on sincerity. Sincerity in getting along, advising each other in goodness, sincerely obeying the rules of the boarding school, students who are initially at home can have freedom when in the boarding school must obey all the rules that exist, this is not an easy thing. Like having to wake up early for tahajud prayers, having to deposit memorization of the Qur'an every day and so on. Sincerity in leading and being led, sincerity also in educating and being educated. *Second*, worship based on the sharia in the Qur'an and As-sunnah. Santri perform five daily prayers even 30 minutes before prayer time they are already in the mosque to memorize the Qur'an, sunnah prayers, fasting based on guidance and not deviate from existing teachings. *Third*, tawakkal. in the pesantren the ustadz and ustadzah always instill the character to their students to try if they have the will the results are surrendered by Allah. If you want to get good grades in exams, study hard, if you want to memorize smoothly, multiply *Muroja'ah*, if you want to become a rich person, work hard, nothing is instant, everything must be obtained with effort and hard work so that with this, students do not easily underestimate something and make a responsible person. Fourth, multiply night worship, tahajud prayer has become a routine program every day at MBS MUHIBA Yogyakarta boarding school, every 3 o'clock they wake up to carry out tahajud prayers in congregation, even they have woken up themselves without being awakened, this is proof of the success of the cottage program to instill a sense of love for God.

Second, morals towards fellow humans. Sufism has two elements. First *istiqomah* behave well to humans, second behave well to all creatures (Al-Ghazali, 2018) . Pesantren in which there are many children who come from various regions, have many differences in nature, culture, way of speaking (Marzuki, 2009) . In reality, Generation Z is very vulnerable to exposure to globalization. In the research of Sirajul Fuad Zis et al with the title "Changes in Communication Behavior of the Millennial Generation and Generation Z in the Digital Age" is that in terms of communication it has changed the meaning and values of communication itself such as ignoring the person being spoken to so that it creates a sense of disappointment or anger when interacting because it remains



engrossed in *its* gadget so that it triggers negative potential if the message at the time of speaking is misinterpreted or does not get a good response. For this reason, in order to maintain a peaceful relationship (Zis et al., 2021). For this reason, in pesantren huts it is forbidden to bring electronic gadgets such as gadgets and so on, not anti-globalization but to avoid addiction to playing gadgets so that they are more focused on gaining knowledge. As Gen Z students are educated to familiarize themselves with several things: When meeting friends, *ustadz*, *ustadzah* start by saying greetings and shaking hands, lowering their gaze if they are being advised. If you need help, start with the words "Please" and "Thank you". Respecting the other person by not ignoring them. Visiting and praying when a friend is sick. Grieve if someone else is hit by a disaster. Reprimand with polite language when others make mistakes. Provide help to friends who are in trouble. In addition, there are four prohibitions mentioned in the book so that existing knowledge does not become a misfortune on the Day of Judgment. First, the prohibition of quarreling reflects the importance of maintaining *ukhuwah islamiyah* and a harmonious atmosphere among students. Second, not advising others before practicing it is a reminder for students not only to be good at theory, but also to be an example in action. Third, staying away from bad friends is in line with the principle of maintaining personal integrity and a clean environment from negative influences. Finally, not accepting bribes from wrongdoers emphasizes the importance of maintaining honesty and sincerity in all aspects of life. In practice, Gen Z students tend to be able to adjust even though there are some who are still in the adjustment stage and have not fully done some of the things written above.

Third, morals in studying. The blessing of knowledge lies in its manners. As a generation Z that lives side by side with technology, although they are not allowed to bring electronics when learning, they adjust to technological advances so that they are not bored and can still keep up with technological developments. Besides continuing to exist following the times, Islamic values are still instilled. Some of the things that students usually do in studying at school: Sincerely straighten the intention for Allah alone, Pray before studying, Respect teachers, Practice the knowledge gained in daily life. As the hadith mentioned by Rosulullah "The most painful person on the Day of Judgment will be a scholar who does not benefit him by Allah for his knowledge" 450 (الغزالي, C.E.). Examples in daily life of *santri* are always careful in acting small things that are always considered: eating and drinking while sitting using the right hand, reading prayers before starting everything, maintaining manners to elders and loving younger ones, and much more. Not asking a lot of unimportant questions. Like the advice of Imam Ghazali, what is your question is already written in my book, so look for it there. And writing half of it is forbidden because it is the knowledge of *Dzauqi*, meaning that not all knowledge can be obtained by speaking and writing, such as the knowledge of *Dzauqi* which can only be obtained through deeds. Prioritizing religious knowledge before other sciences to learn.

Fourth, the morals of educators. The teachers at the boarding school usually apply good morals to their students. So that students become good role models when in pesantren, including: giving examples first to instill understanding to students, always smiling and spreading kindness, assertive authority, diligent worship, *tawadhu'*, broad-minded, keeping promises. However, educators are the main center in shaping the character of students as a whole (Permana et al., 2023).

Fifth, morals towards teachers. Giving greetings first when meeting the teacher. Greetings are a form of respect given to teachers as a sign of respect and awareness of the role of teachers in education. Not arguing with the teacher when in front of him or not asking questions with the aim of arguing. Imam al-Ghazali emphasized that a student must be respectful to his teacher and not debate him, especially when in front of others (Al-Ghazali, 2018). Not busy asking him for proofs (arguments) in every issue even if he knows the teacher's mistakes. Bowing when passing in front of him. Bowing is an act of showing respect and love for the teacher. Bowing is a form of respect given to the teacher as a sign of respect and awareness of the teacher's role in education.

Sixth, keep yourself from despicable morals. Limited access to electronic use in the cottage can minimize students to see content that is not of quality so that it can prevent bad influences on students. Forms of education taught to Generation Z students include, First, not fighting with

friends. Gen Z students tend to be expressive and open, but need to be directed to maintain ethics in their relationships. Students are encouraged to resolve differences of opinion by deliberation or through the help of ustadz/ustadzah, avoid arguing or insinuating each other, especially in public places such as rooms, classes, or mosques. Second, not being tyrannical. such as bullying friends, santri are taught that bullying, whether physical (hitting, pinching), verbal (insulting, mocking), or social (ostracizing) is an act of tyranny, not making "seniority" that corners younger friends, santri are invited to maintain their words and attitudes towards friends, and help if they see someone being tyrannized. Third, do not advise people when they do not do it. Santri are taught the importance of being an example before advising others, advising must be with knowledge and exemplary, not just words, avoiding hypocritical attitudes or "omdo" (just talk). Fourth, not associating with people who are unjust. Santri are taught not to accept gifts or bribes from unjust people. Such as refusing any reward if the goal is for us to help violate the rules of the hut. Santri are taught to maintain trust, even though there are no cameras or strict supervision, but there is Allah who sees us wherever we are.

## Conclusion

Gen Z students have extraordinary potential to be quick to catch, eager to learn, and easy to direct. In a pondok environment with minimal digital distractions, they have a great opportunity to grow up with strong and independent morals. Contextual, realistic, and relevant moral education will make them not only smart in knowledge, but also form good akhlaq characters in their daily lives in accordance with Islamic law. Based on the results of the research that the researchers have described above "Shaping the character of gen Z students: Actualization of the teachings of the book of *Ayyuhal Walad* in moral education in pesantren", it can be concluded as follows, this research shows that the concept of morals taught in the *book of Ayyuhal Walad* by Imam Al-Ghazali is very relevant and can be actualized in the daily life of students in pesantren. There are six important points that become the focus of actualization, namely:

First, morals in worshipping Allah. Among them are emphasizing sincerity in every deed, obedience to the sharia sourced from the Qur'an and As-Sunnah, the spirit of tawakkal after trying, and the habituation of night worship such as tahajud prayer as a form of love for Allah. Second, morals towards fellow humans. Among them are behaving well to everyone, maintaining ukhuwah islamiyah, not bullying, not arguing unethically, not accepting bribes, and staying away from friends who behave badly. Third, morals in studying. Among them are straightening the intention because of Allah, praying before studying, respecting teachers, not asking many unimportant questions, practicing the knowledge gained, and prioritizing religious knowledge as a foundation. Fourth, the morals of educators. Among them, educators become role models in worship, are polite, keep promises, tawadhu', firm but gentle, and convey knowledge with compassion and exemplary. Fifth, morals towards teachers. Among them, students are taught to say greetings, lower their gaze, not argue, not argue in public, and always show respect and politeness. Sixth, guarding oneself from despicable morals. Among them are avoiding quarrels, getting used to deliberation, not being unjust, not being hypocritical, refusing bribes, and maintaining honesty and integrity in everyday life.

At Muhammadiyah Boarding School Bantul 1 (MBS Muhiba) Yogyakarta, the implementation of these values has been running well through the daily activities of students who reflect the teachings in the book *Ayyuhal Walad*. *Kitab Ayyuhal Walad* is an important reference in shaping the character of Gen Z students, especially in the context of pesantren education which emphasizes moral development. Besides, it must be balanced with supervision and evaluation processes in the form of sanctions for students who violate and appreciation for students who obey the rules. So that the moral and character values instilled can run systematically and organized. The actualization of Imam al-Ghazali's teachings is an effective solution in facing the moral challenges of modern times. With the values of sincerity, adab, and spiritual responsibility, pesantren form a generation that is not only intellectually intelligent, but also morally and spiritually strong.

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