Internalization of Akhlak Values in Islamic Education: Al-Ghazali's Perspective for Addressing Moral Crisis

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Abstract

The moral crisis among the younger generation has become a major challenge in contemporary Islamic education, as reflected in the increasing cases of violence, bullying, and drug abuse among adolescents. Although many studies have explored moral education from conceptual and empirical perspectives, limited research has systematically reconstructed classical Islamic ethical thought to address contemporary moral challenges shaped by digitalization and rapid social change. In particular, the moral philosophy of Al-Ghazali has rarely been formulated into an integrative framework for modern Islamic education. This study aims to reconstruct Al-Ghazali's concept of moral internalization and examine its relevance in responding to the moral crisis among the younger generation. Using a qualitative library research method, this study analyzes classical texts of Al-Ghazali and relevant scholarly literature through a descriptive-analytical approach. The findings indicate that moral internalization through character education, moral habituation, exemplary conduct (uswah hasanah), and tazkiyatun nafs provides a conceptual framework for strengthening students' moral development. This study contributes theoretically by offering a reconstructed model of Al-Ghazali's moral framework that is adaptable to contemporary Islamic educational contexts.

Keywords: *Al-Ghazali; Islamic Education; Internalization of Morals; Moral Crisis*

Abstrak

Krisis moral di kalangan generasi muda telah menjadi tantangan utama dalam pendidikan Islam kontemporer, sebagaimana tercermin dalam meningkatnya kasus kekerasan, perundungan, dan penyalahgunaan narkoba di kalangan remaja. Meskipun banyak penelitian telah mengeksplorasi pendidikan moral dari perspektif konseptual dan empiris, penelitian yang terbatas telah secara sistematis merekonstruksi pemikiran etika Islam klasik untuk mengatasi tantangan moral kontemporer yang dibentuk oleh digitalisasi dan perubahan sosial yang cepat. Secara khusus, filsafat moral Al-Ghazali jarang dirumuskan menjadi kerangka kerja integratif untuk pendidikan Islam modern. Studi ini bertujuan untuk merekonstruksi konsep internalisasi moral Al-Ghazali dan meneliti relevansinya dalam menanggapi krisis moral di kalangan generasi muda. Dengan menggunakan metode penelitian kepustakaan kualitatif, studi ini menganalisis teks-teks klasik Al-Ghazali dan literatur ilmiah yang relevan melalui pendekatan deskriptif-analitis. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa internalisasi moral melalui pendidikan karakter, pembiasaan moral, perilaku teladan (uswah hasanah), dan tazkiyatun nafs memberikan kerangka kerja konseptual untuk memperkuat perkembangan moral siswa. Studi ini memberikan kontribusi teoretis dengan menawarkan model rekonstruksi kerangka moral Al-Ghazali yang dapat diadaptasikan ke dalam konteks pendidikan Islam kontemporer.

Kata kunci: *Al-Ghazali; Internalisasi Moral; Krisis Moral; Pendidikan Islam;*

Introduction

The moral crisis among younger generations has become a central concern in contemporary education, particularly in the context of character formation (Aisyah & Fitriatin, 2025). Various social indicators reveal an increasing trend of deviant behavior associated with the erosion of moral norms and character values. One of the most visible manifestations is bullying in educational environments. Data reported by UNICEF indicate that approximately 41% of adolescents aged 15 experience bullying at least once a month, while 45% of respondents aged 14–24 report having experienced cyberbullying. In addition, two out of three adolescents aged 13–17 acknowledge having experienced at least one form of violence in their lifetime (Darwin et al., 2024). These findings illustrate that the moral challenges faced by young people today extend beyond physical spaces and are increasingly influenced by digital interaction and social transformation.

In the Indonesian context, the situation appears even more alarming. Research shows that around 40% of school-aged children in Indonesia have experienced bullying, a figure that exceeds the global average of approximately 30% (Munira et al., 2023). This condition indicates that schools, which ideally function as institutions for character development, still face significant difficulties in preventing immoral behavior. In addition to violence, another major concern is the growing prevalence of drug abuse among adolescents. National survey data report that approximately 1.73% of Indonesians aged 15–64, or more than 3.3 million individuals, are involved in drug abuse, with an increasing trend observed in recent years (Alfarezel, 2025; Humas BRIN, 2025). These patterns suggest that the moral crisis among young people is not merely an individual problem but reflects broader social and educational challenges.

Furthermore, demographic and social data strengthen the urgency of addressing this issue. Statistics from the Indonesian Central Bureau of Statistics show that in 2023 the number of children in Indonesia reached approximately 88.7 million, representing nearly one-third of the country's total population. This demographic structure indicates that the moral and educational development of children will significantly influence the future of society. However, recent findings from the National Survey on Children's Life Experiences and Health (SNPHAR) reveal that one in two adolescents aged 13–17 has experienced at least one form of violence during their lifetime (KPAI Public Relations, 2025). These realities highlight a structural imbalance in the current educational paradigm, which often prioritizes cognitive achievement while paying insufficient attention to moral and spiritual development. In this regard, Islamic education offers a

strong ethical foundation for character formation, particularly through the moral philosophy of Al-Ghazali, which emphasizes the internalization of values through habituation, exemplary conduct, and tazkiyat al-nafs (spiritual purification).

In this context, the ethical framework of Al-Ghazali offers an important perspective for addressing contemporary moral challenges. Al-Ghazali's ethics does not merely emphasize cognitive understanding of moral values but focuses on tazkiyat al-nafs (purification of the soul), through which moral virtues are internalized and naturally reflected in behavior. From this perspective, education aims not only to transmit knowledge but also to cultivate character through moral habituation, exemplary conduct, and spiritual development, allowing ethical values to become an integral part of one's personality. Therefore, revisiting Al-Ghazali's thought is relevant for strengthening character education in response to the increasing trends of moral decline, weakened self-control, and the erosion of ethical values among younger generations.

Several studies in the past five years have emphasized that moral education from the perspective of Al-Ghazali remains an important concern in contemporary Islamic education. Hadziq and Abror (2025) argue that Al-Ghazali's character values integrate moral, intellectual, and spiritual dimensions to support the development of a holistic educational civilization (Hadziq & Abror, 2025). Similarly, Mujiburrohman and Pramono (2025) highlight that moral values can be effectively internalized through exemplary behavior and habituation models that shape students' conduct (Mujiburrohman & Pramono, 2025). Indana and Mustofa (2024) further conclude that Al-Ghazali's educational thought remains highly relevant for addressing moral challenges in the knowledge society (Indana & Mustofa, 2024). while Hidayati et al. (2025) emphasize that morality constitutes the core objective of Islamic education aimed at forming a complete and balanced human personality (Ashri Hidayati et al., 2025). In addition, Azizah and Abidin (2025) underline the importance of early value inculcation as a preventive strategy to address the moral crisis among younger generations. (Azizah & Abidin, 2025)

Recent state-of-the-art studies have also examined the relevance of Al-Ghazali's ethical thought in contemporary educational contexts. Sabariah et al. (2024) argue that the role of teachers as moral exemplars and spiritual guides, as emphasized in Al-Ghazali's educational philosophy, significantly influences the internalization of moral values and character formation among students in the digital era (Sabariah et al., 2024).

Similarly, Huda et al. (2022) show that character education based on moral habituation, exemplary conduct, and the integration of intellectual and spiritual development can strengthen school culture and reduce deviant behavior (Huda et al., 2022). Furthermore, Hasyim (2024) demonstrates that integrating the concept of tazkiyat al-nafs (spiritual purification) in character education can enhance students' self-control, spiritual awareness, and social responsibility in responding to moral challenges among younger generations. (Hasyim, 2024)

Despite the growing body of research on moral education from the perspective of Al-Ghazali, several limitations remain in the existing literature. Previous studies have primarily examined Al-Ghazali's ethical values and their relevance to character education, particularly through approaches such as teacher exemplification, moral habituation, and the strengthening of students' spirituality. However, these studies generally focus on normative interpretations or partial educational practices and rarely relate Al-Ghazali's moral philosophy to the broader dynamics of contemporary moral crises shaped by digitalization and rapid social change. Moreover, little attention has been given to reconstructing Al-Ghazali's concept of moral internalization into a systematic and applicable framework for contemporary Islamic education. Therefore, this study seeks to address this gap by reconstructing the concept of moral internalization in Al-Ghazali's ethical thought and proposing an integrative framework that connects classical Islamic moral philosophy with the challenges of modern moral education.

Based on the identified research gap, this study addresses the following questions: how can the concept of moral internalization in the ethical thought of Al-Ghazali be understood comprehensively, and how can it be applied to address the moral crisis faced by contemporary Islamic education? In addition, this study explores how these moral values can be systematically internalized through educational processes within Islamic educational institutions. Accordingly, this research aims to (1) examine the concept of moral internalization in Al-Ghazali's ethical thought, (2) analyze its relevance to contemporary moral challenges, and (3) formulate a conceptual model of Islamic education that integrates moral, intellectual, and spiritual dimensions in the development of students' character.

Research Methods

This study employs a qualitative approach using the library research method. Library research involves collecting, examining, and interpreting written sources

relevant to the research topic in order to construct conceptual and theoretical understanding (Ahmad Akbar et al., 2025). his approach is appropriate because the research focuses on exploring and synthesizing the conceptual framework of the internalization of moral values in Islamic education from the perspective of Al-Ghazali. The data sources consist of primary and secondary materials. The primary sources include Al-Ghazali's major works that discuss morality and education, particularly Ihya' 'Ulum al-Din, as well as other relevant writings related to ethical and educational thought. Meanwhile, the secondary sources include scholarly books, peer-reviewed journal articles, and academic publications that discuss Al-Ghazali's moral philosophy, Islamic moral education, and contemporary issues related to moral decline in educational contexts.

The literature selection process was carried out systematically in several stages. First, relevant literature was identified through academic databases and library collections using keywords such as *Al-Ghazali*, *Islamic education*, *moral crisis*, and *internalization of values*. Second, the collected literature was screened based on relevance to the research focus, academic credibility, and its contribution to the discussion of moral education and contemporary moral issues. Third, the selected sources were organized and categorized into thematic groups, such as the concept of morality in Al-Ghazali's thought, methods of moral internalization, and the relevance of these concepts to modern educational challenges. Data collection was conducted through documentation techniques by identifying, classifying, and reviewing texts related to the research focus.

The collected data were analyzed using qualitative content analysis (Hakim & Sariyasin, 2021). through several stages: data reduction, thematic categorization of key concepts, textual interpretation, and synthesis to construct a coherent conceptual framework. To ensure interpretive validity, the study applied source triangulation by comparing interpretations derived from Al-Ghazali's primary works with analyses found in secondary academic literature. This research adopts a descriptive-analytical approach that systematically explains the concept of moral education in Al-Ghazali's thought while examining its relevance to contemporary moral crises. Accordingly, the study seeks to formulate a conceptual framework of moral education from Al-Ghazali's perspective as a philosophical basis for the development of Islamic education in addressing students' moral decline.

Result and Discussion

Al-Ghazali Perspective Internalization Model of Moral Values

The internalization of moral values in Al-Ghazali's thought does not merely aim at the transmission of ethical knowledge but rather at the transformation of inner character so that moral qualities become stable dispositions within the individual. In Al-Ghazali's ethical framework, morality (akhlaq) is defined as a firmly rooted state of the soul that enables a person to perform good actions spontaneously without the need for prolonged deliberation. Therefore, moral education is not limited to cognitive understanding but requires continuous spiritual training (riyadhah), habituation (ta'wid), and disciplined self-control that gradually shape the moral structure of the self (Firdasari & Bakar, 2025). Based on this conceptual foundation, the internalization of moral values in Al-Ghazali's perspective can be formulated as a systematic model consisting of four interconnected stages: moral exemplification, habituation of practice, reflective self-regulation, and spiritual purification. These stages represent a gradual educational process through which external moral norms are transformed into internal ethical dispositions.

The first stage, moral exemplification (al-uswah al-hasanah), emphasizes the role of educators as living moral references whose behavior becomes a concrete model for students. Through observation and imitation, moral values begin to be recognized and practiced in everyday life. The second stage is habituation (ta'wid), which reinforces ethical behavior through continuous repetition until it develops into stable moral habits. Previous studies indicate that repeated practice plays a significant role in shaping moral character and behavioral patterns over time (Suminar et al., 2023). The third stage involves **reflective self-regulation (*muhasabah*)**, a process of conscious self-evaluation that enables individuals to monitor their actions, control negative impulses, and maintain ethical consistency without relying solely on external supervision (Lestari et al., 2024). In this sense, morality is understood as the outcome of a continuous process that integrates cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions rather than as an instant moral state. (Munawarsyah et al., 2024)

From a theoretical perspective, this model can be critically related to several contemporary frameworks of moral and educational development. The process of habituation in Al-Ghazali's thought shares similarities with the concept of habitus, which describes how repeated practices and social experiences generate durable dispositions that guide behavior spontaneously (Hanum et al., 2025). However, while

habitus is primarily understood within a sociological framework emphasizing structural influences on human action, Al-Ghazali's concept emphasizes intentional spiritual discipline and ethical consciousness. Likewise, the mechanism of muhasabah resembles the reflective monitoring process found in self-regulated learning theory, which highlights planning, monitoring, and reflective evaluation as central components of adaptive behavior (Kitsantas et al., 2025). Nevertheless, Al-Ghazali's framework goes beyond cognitive regulation by integrating reflective awareness with spiritual purification (tazkiyatun nafs). In this stage, spiritual education becomes the foundation for moral formation, as the purification of the soul enables individuals to develop ethical responsibility that remains consistent even in the absence of social control. (Hafidz & Shihab, 2025)

Furthermore, the final stage of spiritual purification can also be interpreted in relation to the process of value internalization described in self-determination theory, which explains how behavior gradually shifts from external compliance to intrinsic commitment (Syahlimnata et al., 2025). However, unlike psychological models that primarily emphasize motivational processes, Al-Ghazali places the internalization of values within a broader spiritual framework that integrates ethical awareness, self-discipline, and transcendental orientation. Through this synthesis, the internalization of moral values in Al-Ghazali's perspective can be understood as a holistic model of character formation, in which exemplary learning, habituation, reflective self-regulation, and spiritual purification interact dynamically to shape stable moral character. Consequently, moral education is not merely a process of teaching ethical norms but a transformative process that integrates psychological, behavioral, and spiritual dimensions in the formation of human character.

Relevance to the Modern Moral Crisis

Al-Ghazali's model of moral internalisation is also hugely relevant in addressing the contemporary moral issue. Contemporary education is so often based on the achievement of academic success and the development of cognitive competencies, with increased emphasis on the affective and moral aspects of learning remaining somewhat neglected. As such, there is a tendency of having an abyss between cognitive intelligence and maturity characteristic indicated by several deviant behavior among students (Shodikin et al., 2025). Furthermore, the looseness of value education and shortage of model in campus also intensify this problem, with no moral sample students to learn from. (Hadi et al., 2025)

In this one consideration the view of Al-Ghazali is a broader. His emphasis on character formation suggests that success in education is not solely about what people know, but who they are as individuals. The integration of intellectual and spiritual that he has initiated is one of the main reason for humanitarian education at all (Lubis & Rahman, 2025). Further, the virtue-ethical conception of moral character highlights that doing good has to be accustomed to and repeated until it forms the (virtuous) person (Faiz et al., 2022).

Hence, the significance of Al-Ghazali's thought is not only that his educationalizations are with respect to contemporary challenges, rather they have their foundation in universal ethical values. This conception is consistent with the virtue-ethics theory articulated by Alasdair MacIntyre, who insists that virtue cannot be willed into existence in a moment of moral decision but only through repeated participation in the life of a moral community to bring about an established habituation of character. For MacIntyre, virtues are cultivated by acculturations in inherited social traditions and practices that embody particular moral norms that enable individuals to come to act well reasonably free of external coercion due to a character shaped by ethically informed interests; they have been trained (Moosmayer et al., 2025). Thus, For Al-Ghazali, that habituation is constant cultivation of virtues through frequent practice until good character becomes second nature. This renders education a constant place of formation of integrity responsive to context, and real-life situations of the learners; yet always rooted in values that carry the ethical life style and sustainable moral growth.

As a clear example, The degree to which intellectual intelligence fails to bring moral maturity is perfectly clear, for the phenomenon of bullying and verbal violence in schools abundantly proves that fact." Some of the perpetrators have good academic achievements, but have no empathy and self-control, and do not pay attention to spiritual in their relationships with others (Amalia et al., 2026). Thus, in Al-Ghazali's framework, it can be referred to as a failure of religious-ethical application that had not caught dimensions of the purification and reformation-based process. When Al-Ghazali's method is used by the teachers example, imitation on empathic behavior, and routine application of muhasabah, moral values are not only known as rules but also internalized as habituation in an inner disposition which inhibits deviant behavior. This is the sense in which Al-Ghazali has something to offer for today: in his capacity to return us an educational project that responds creatively and constructively to a moral crisis of our time by cultivating human beings who are capable of make ethical decisions

Implications for Contemporary Islamic Education

The internalization model of moral values derived from Al-Ghazali's perspective implies that contemporary Islamic education must move beyond the mere transmission of ethical knowledge toward a structured system of character formation. Practically, this can be implemented through three operational components: value-based curriculum integration, pedagogical modeling, and reflective learning activities. Moral values should be embedded within learning objectives, teaching materials, and evaluation systems so that each subject connects disciplinary knowledge with ethical reflection. In addition, educators function as moral exemplars who demonstrate ethical conduct in classroom interactions, while reflective learning activities such as guided discussions and case analyses encourage students to critically engage with moral issues and internalize ethical values through meaningful learning experiences.

At the institutional level, the internalization of moral values also requires the development of a school culture that systematically supports moral habituation. Educational institutions need to establish routines and social practices that reinforce ethical behavior in daily interactions. This can be implemented through structured programs such as collaborative service activities, peer mentoring, and community-based learning that encourage responsibility, cooperation, and respect among students. Research indicates that a positive religious school culture significantly strengthens students' ability to internalize moral values through continuous social interaction and shared practices(Rohmah & Suwandi, 2025). Within this framework, moral formation occurs through repeated practice and social reinforcement, allowing ethical values to evolve from external rules into internalized behavioral dispositions. Consequently, schools function not only as centers of knowledge transmission but also as environments where moral habits are cultivated through consistent social experience.

Furthermore, contemporary Islamic education must adopt adaptive and technology-supported strategies in order to respond to the diversity of learners and the challenges of the digital era. Inclusive learning approaches are needed to accommodate differences in cultural, social, and economic backgrounds among students (Rozan et al., 2025). In practical implementation, technology can be utilized to expand the scope of moral learning through digital platforms, interactive learning applications, and contextual multimedia resources that present ethical issues relevant to students' real-life experiences (Mardani, 2025). For example, digital storytelling, virtual discussions, and

scenario-based learning can encourage students to analyze moral situations and reflect on ethical decision-making processes. By integrating value-based pedagogy, supportive institutional culture, and technology-enhanced learning, Islamic education can operationalize Al-Ghazali's model of moral internalization in a way that is relevant to contemporary educational contexts. This integrated framework enables Islamic education to address the challenges of moral decline by fostering character development that is both sustainable and responsive to modern social realities.

Conclusion

This study shows that the internalization of moral values in Islamic education from Al-Ghazali's perspective provides a conceptual response to contemporary moral crises among the younger generation, such as bullying, drug abuse, and violence. Central to this perspective is tazkiyatun nafs (purification of the soul), which integrates cognitive, affective, and spiritual dimensions in character formation. Based on the analysis, this study formulates a conceptual model of moral internalization consisting of four interrelated components: moral exemplification, value habituation, reflective self-regulation (muhasabah), and spiritual purification (tazkiyatun nafs). Through these stages, external moral norms gradually transform into internal ethical dispositions, enabling individuals to perform moral actions consistently and spontaneously. This formulation reconstructs Al-Ghazali's thought into a holistic framework of moral education that emphasizes the integration of ethical practice, reflective awareness, and spiritual development.

The study also offers a theoretical synthesis by relating Al-Ghazali's concept of moral habituation with contemporary perspectives that emphasize the role of repeated practice, social modeling, and reflective awareness in character formation. This synthesis highlights that moral education should move beyond cognitive instruction toward processes that cultivate stable moral dispositions. Practically, the findings imply that contemporary Islamic education needs to implement value-based curriculum integration, the strengthening of ethical school culture, and reflective learning practices. In the context of digitalization and rapid social change, these strategies can be supported through technology-based learning environments, such as digital storytelling, interactive ethical discussions, and online collaborative platforms that encourage students to engage critically with moral issues in real-life contexts.

However, this study has several limitations. First, the research is purely conceptual and based on qualitative library research, focusing on the theoretical

reconstruction of Al-Ghazali's ideas rather than empirical investigation. Second, although the study outlines practical implications, the implementation of this conceptual model in contemporary educational settings particularly within digital learning environments has not been empirically examined. Therefore, future research is needed to test and refine this model through empirical studies in Islamic educational institutions, especially to evaluate how technology-mediated learning can support the effective internalization of moral values among students.

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