

## HOLISTIC EDUCATION IN THE PERSPECTIVE OF IMAM AL-GHAZALI'S THOUGHT: The Integration of Intellect, Spirit, and Ethics

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**Abstract:** The moral crisis, ethical degradation, and reduction of spiritual values in the modern education system show that the education process often only emphasizes cognitive achievement, while spiritual and moral development receives less attention. As a result, education produces individuals who are intellectually intelligent but poor in values and lose spiritual direction. This research aims to examine the concept of holistic education in Imam Al-Ghazali's thought which emphasizes the integration of mind, spirit, and ethics as the main foundation for the formation of a complete human being (*insan kamil*). The research method uses a qualitative approach with a literature study through critical analysis of Al-Ghazali's works, especially *Ihya' Ulum al-Din*. The results show that reason acts as a means of searching for truth, spirit as the center of transcendental awareness that leads humans to God, and ethics as the ultimate goal that manifests knowledge in behavior. The integration of the three forms a whole education model that balances intellectual, spiritual, and moral aspects. Al-Ghazali's thinking is relevant to answer the challenges of modern education in forming individuals with knowledge, faith, and noble character.

**Keywords:** Holistic Education, Spiritual Values, Moral Development

**Abstrak:** Krisis moral, degradasi etika, dan reduksi nilai spiritual dalam sistem pendidikan modern menunjukkan bahwa proses pendidikan sering kali hanya menekankan pencapaian kognitif, sementara pembinaan ruhani dan akhlak kurang mendapat perhatian. Akibatnya, pendidikan melahirkan individu cerdas secara intelektual tetapi miskin nilai dan kehilangan arah spiritual. Penelitian ini bertujuan mengkaji konsep pendidikan holistik dalam pemikiran Imam Al-Ghazali yang menekankan integrasi antara akal, ruh, dan etika sebagai fondasi utama pembentukan manusia paripurna (*insan kamil*). Metode penelitian menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan studi kepustakaan melalui analisis kritis terhadap karya-karya Al-Ghazali, terutama *Ihya' Ulum al-Din*. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa akal berperan sebagai sarana pencarian kebenaran, ruh sebagai pusat kesadaran transendental yang menuntun manusia menuju Tuhan, dan etika sebagai tujuan akhir yang memanifestasikan ilmu dalam perilaku. Integrasi ketiganya membentuk model pendidikan utuh yang menyeimbangkan aspek intelektual, spiritual, dan moral. Pemikiran Al-Ghazali relevan untuk menjawab tantangan pendidikan modern dalam membentuk pribadi berilmu, beriman, dan berakhlak mulia.

**Kata Kunci:** Pendidikan Holistik, Nilai-Nilai Spiritual, Pengembangan Moral

## INTRODUCTION

Education is a fundamental process in shaping a complete human being, not only from a cognitive aspect, but also spiritually, emotionally, and morally. In this context, education does not merely function as a means of transferring knowledge, but also as a process of character building and perfecting human potential. Ideal education is education that is able to foster a balance between the intellectual (intellect), spiritual (spirit), and moral (morals) dimensions. This approach is known as holistic education, which is education that develops the full potential of humans in a comprehensive and harmonious manner (Ika et al., 2024). Holistic education not only prepares students to face life in this world, but also equips them with values that lead to true happiness in the hereafter.

However, the development of the modern world, marked by globalization, industrialization, and advances in information technology, has brought about major changes in the orientation of education. Education is now more focused on achieving rationality, efficiency, and material results. The modern education system tends to emphasize academic achievement and professional competence alone, so that spiritual and ethical aspects are often neglected (Rahman, 2019). As a result, there is a gap between intellectual progress and moral maturity. Phenomena such as increasing deviant behavior, low social empathy, and rampant extreme individualism show that education that

emphasizes only cognitive aspects is not enough to shape well-rounded individuals.

This reductive and fragmentary educational trend has caused modern humans to experience an identity crisis and a void in the meaning of life. Many students excel academically but experience spiritual emptiness and moral confusion. In this situation, there is an urgent need to restore the function of education as a process of shaping the whole person, not just training intellectual abilities (Adnan, 2025; Chusyairi, 2024). Therefore, the idea of holistic education has become increasingly relevant and urgent to be studied in greater depth, especially in the context of Islamic education, which places harmony between reason, spirit, and morals at the core of human character formation.

In Islamic scholarship, many great figures have paid attention to the importance of integral education, but among them, Imam Al-Ghazali (1058–1111 AD) is a figure who has had a major influence in formulating an educational framework that harmoniously unites reason, spirit, and ethics. Imam Al-Ghazali, or Abu Hamid Muhammad ibn Muhammad al-Ghazali at-Thusi, known as , was a great scholar, philosopher, and Sufi who devoted his life to seeking truth and improving the moral order of society (Al-Ghazali, 2011). His thoughts are largely expressed in monumental works such as the *Ihya' 'Ulum al-Din* study program, the *Ayyuha al-Walad* study program, and the *Al-Munqidz min al-Dhalal* study program, which explain in depth the relationship between knowledge,

faith, and deeds. For Al-Ghazali, education is not only an intellectual process, but also a spiritual journey towards self-perfection and closeness to Allah (Rahman, 2019).

The educational framework developed by Al-Ghazali places reason as a means of seeking knowledge, the spirit as the center of self-purification, and morals as the manifestation of the values of faith in concrete actions. The integration of these three elements forms a comprehensive educational system that is in harmony with human nature. In Al-Ghazali's view, the ultimate goal of education is not worldly success, but the achievement of the program of study of *sa'adah* (true happiness) that stems from the right relationship between humans and their Lord (Maragustam, 2016). Thus, according to Al-Ghazali, education is a process of purifying the mind and soul so that humans are able to know themselves and know their Lord.

A number of studies have examined the relevance of Al-Ghazali's thinking to the context of contemporary education. Syafanah et al., (2024) states that holistic education in Al-Ghazali's works is highly relevant to modern educational needs, which demand a balance between intellectuality and spirituality. Mumtaza Zamhariroh et al., (2024) found that Al-Ghazali sought to integrate worldly knowledge and religious knowledge and make morals the core of the educational process. Meanwhile, Lilis Maryati & Mardhiyah Agung Wahyuningsih (2020) emphasized that according to Al-Ghazali,

reason is an important tool in seeking knowledge, but it must be guided by the heart and faith so as not to be misleading. Other studies conducted by Yunan et al., (2023) and Shalahudin & Fauzi (2024) reinforce the view that education is not sufficient with cognitive reasoning alone, but also requires a program of *tazkiyatun nafs* (purification of the soul) as a moral and spiritual foundation.

Although various studies have raised the idea of Al-Ghazali's education, most still focus on moral or spiritual aspects separately. A research gap (program study research gap) arises because there have not been many studies that systematically discuss how the integration of reason, spirit, and ethics is applied in the context of modern Islamic education. In fact, the challenges of today's education world demand a paradigm that is able to combine Islamic values with the educational needs of the 21st century. This is where the relevance of studying Al-Ghazali's thoughts becomes even stronger, because his ideas offer a balance between knowledge, values, and spirituality that can be the basis for reconstructing a holistic Islamic educational paradigm.

This research aims to address this need by deeply examining the concept of holistic education in Imam Al-Ghazali's thought, particularly regarding the integration of reason, spirit, and ethics in shaping human personality. The focus of the research is directed at how Al-Ghazali's integrative concept can be adapted and implemented in the context of modern

Islamic education. Thus, this research is not only descriptive-historical in nature towards classical thought, but also reflective-analytical in seeing its relevance to the reality of contemporary education.

Theoretically, this research is expected to contribute to the enrichment of Islamic education discourse, especially in efforts to develop an education model oriented towards spiritual and intellectual balance. Practically, the results of this study can inspire educators, policy makers, and Islamic educational institutions in designing curricula and learning strategies that not only emphasize critical and logical thinking skills but also foster morality, empathy, and spiritual awareness in students. Thus, Islamic education can once again function as a means of forming *insan kamil*—humans who are balanced between knowledge and faith, reason and heart, world and hereafter (Adnan, 2025; Chusyairi, 2024; Putri, 2025).

By highlighting Imam Al-Ghazali's holistic educational thinking, this study is expected to provide a new perspective in the effort to revitalize Islamic education in the modern era. The integration of reason, spirit, and ethics as proposed by Al-Ghazali is not merely a normative idea, but a conceptual offer that can respond to the problems of reductionism in education today. This study is an effort to revive the spirit of Islamic education that is oriented towards the overall perfection of human beings, as well as a reflection that knowledge without morals and spirituality will only give birth to emptiness of meaning and a crisis of humanity.

## METHOD

This research uses a qualitative approach with a library research method. A qualitative approach was chosen because this research is oriented towards a deep understanding of the thoughts of figures, rather than quantitative measurements or statistical comparisons. With this approach, the researcher attempts to interpret the meaning behind Imam Al-Ghazali's ideas on holistic education, especially regarding the integration of reason, spirit, and ethics in the Islamic education system. The method was used because all research data was sourced from relevant written works and scientific literature, both primary and secondary. The choice of this method is also based on the conceptual and philosophical nature of the research, which emphasizes text review, content analysis, and in-depth interpretation of ideas.

This type of research is descriptive qualitative research, as it aims to systematically describe and interpret the structure of Imam Al-Ghazali's thinking in the context of holistic education. The researcher not only describes ideas textually, but also places them in their social, historical, and philosophical contexts. Thus, this study is expected to provide a more complete understanding of the relevance of Al-Ghazali's thinking to the modern Islamic education system.

The data sources in this study are divided into two categories: primary and secondary sources. Primary sources are Imam Al-Ghazali's original works that explicitly discuss education and moral

formation, including the *Ihya 'Ulum al-Din* study program, the *Ayyuha al-Walad* study program, the *Al-Munqidz min al-Dhalal* study program, and the *Mizan al-'Amal* study program. Secondary sources include supporting literature that examines Al-Ghazali's thoughts, such as academic books, journal articles, research results, theses, and dissertations relevant to the themes of holistic education, the integration of knowledge, and the concept of morals in Islamic education. All sources were selected based on their relevance, academic credibility, and topicality.

Data collection techniques were carried out through documentation, namely by identifying, collecting, and examining various written documents related to the research object. The documentation process was carried out systematically by tracing Al-Ghazali's main texts, then recording and classifying the main ideas related to three main dimensions: reason, spirit, and ethics. Next, a comparison was made between Al-Ghazali's ideas and the results of relevant modern literature studies to strengthen the research interpretation.

Data analysis in this study used Miles and Huberman's interactive analysis model, which consists of three stages: data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. In the data reduction stage, the researcher selected and summarized important information from various sources, focusing on the research theme. The data presentation stage was carried out by organizing the results of the study in the form of descriptive and

analytical descriptions that facilitated interpretation. Meanwhile, the conclusion drawing stage was carried out through a process of reflection and synthesis of the meaning of the analysis results to find the core of Al-Ghazali's thoughts on the integration of reason, spirit, and ethics in education.

To maintain the validity and reliability of the data, this study uses source triangulation techniques, namely by comparing and verifying information from various different literature, both from classical and contemporary sources. In addition, a critical evaluation of the credibility of the authors and the context of the publication of the sources was carried out so that the interpretations produced were objective and scientifically accountable. With this research design, it is hoped that the results of the study can provide a comprehensive understanding of the relevance of Imam Al-Ghazali's holistic educational thinking in the development of contemporary Islamic educational theory and practice.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Aspects of Holistic Education from Al-Ghazali's Perspective**

The results of this study indicate that the concept of holistic education in Imam Al-Ghazali's thinking is based on the integration of reason, spirit, and ethics as a unified educational system. These three aspects do not stand separately, but are intertwined to form a complete human being (program studi insan kamil program

studi) who is balanced between intellectual ability, spiritual depth, and moral nobility. For Al-Ghazali, education is not merely a process of transferring knowledge, but also an effort to purify the soul and shape character so that humans are able to achieve happiness in this world and the hereafter.

This concept reflects Al-Ghazali's criticism of educational trends that overly emphasize rationality without balancing it with spiritual values. In the modern context, this phenomenon is in line with criticism of education systems that tend to be pragmatic and oriented towards material results alone. As stated by Rahman (2019), modern education often produces intelligent people who have lost their moral and spiritual direction. Al-Ghazali's view offers a middle ground: education must balance the function of the mind as a tool for thinking, the spirit as a source of spiritual awareness, and ethics as a manifestation of civilized behavior.

First, the study program aspect of reason in Al-Ghazali's education serves as an instrument for the pursuit of knowledge and a determinant of action. Reason is a gift from God that distinguishes humans from other creatures. With reason, humans are able to understand the essence of life and recognize the truth. However, Al-Ghazali rejects the excessive glorification of reason as developed in Greek philosophy or modern rationalism. According to him, reason that is not guided by spiritual values will easily go astray, giving rise to intellectual arrogance and scientific egoism.

therefore, education must make reason a tool that is directed towards seeking the ultimate truth, not merely a tool for achieving worldly achievements. In the context of contemporary Islamic education, this can be interpreted as the need for integration between modern science and religious values so that students are not trapped in the secularization of science (Rahmadi, 2022; Usman, 2017).

Second, the program of study, the aspect of the spirit, is the deepest dimension in Al-Ghazali's holistic education. The spirit is the center of spiritual awareness that guides humans to know their God. Through the spirit, humans have an awareness of the essence of themselves as weak creatures who depend on Allah. Therefore, according to Al-Ghazali, education must foster the program of tazkiyatun nafs (purification of the soul) so that the knowledge gained becomes a light that guides humans towards truth. In his work *Ihya 'Ulum al-Din*, Al-Ghazali explains that true knowledge is meaningless without a pure heart and sincere intentions. This concept is in line with humanistic theory in modern education, which emphasizes the affective dimension and inner experience of students (Fatimah et al., 2022). However, Al-Ghazali goes further by placing the spiritual dimension as the source of moral orientation and the purpose of human life.

Third, the study program aspect of ethics is the culmination of the entire educational process. For Al-Ghazali, the ultimate goal of knowledge is *akhlak*. Knowledge that does not result in good

behavior is merely dead knowledge. Therefore, true education must be able to shape character and behavior that reflect faith. This view is highly relevant to the challenges of education today, where moral degradation, hedonism, and a crisis of empathy have become widespread social problems (Manshuruddin et al., 2021). Al-Ghazali emphasized that the success of education is not measured by the amount of knowledge mastered, but by the extent to which that knowledge changes human behavior and morals. Thus, ideal education must produce individuals who are not only academically intelligent but also possess noble character.

The integration of reason, spirit, and ethics forms the framework of an integrative-transformative study program. Reason functions as a means of rationality, spirit becomes the source of divine consciousness, while ethics becomes the tangible manifestation of both in social life. The three create a balance between the cognitive, affective, and psychomotor dimensions of students. In modern , Al-Ghazali's educational model can be viewed as a system that combines intellectual quotient (IQ), emotional quotient (EQ), and spiritual quotient (SQ) programs into a harmonious whole (Asari, 2012).

When linked to the reality of Islamic education today, Al-Ghazali's thinking has transformational value. Modern Islamic educational institutions such as madrasas and religious colleges need to re-internalize the spirit of holistic education so as not to be trapped in the dichotomy of religious and

general knowledge. Education that emphasizes a balance between reason and conscience will be able to shape a generation that is not only academically competent but also has high moral and spiritual awareness.

Thus, Imam Al-Ghazali's holistic educational thinking is not only a classical philosophical legacy, but also a visionary concept that is still relevant to contemporary educational needs. Amidst a crisis of character and the globalization of values, Al-Ghazali's ideas offer an educational paradigm that balances intellectuality with spirituality and makes ethics the ultimate orientation of the educational process. This is the ideal form of Islamic education that can produce a program of study for the perfect human being—a person of knowledge, faith, and noble character—which has become the universal ideal of education throughout the ages.

### **Integration of Reason, Spirit, and Ethics in Holistic Education**

The results of this study show that Al-Ghazali's thoughts on holistic education are rooted in efforts to build harmony between reason, spirit, and ethics as the main foundation for the formation of a perfect human being (*insan kamil*). The integration of these three aspects shows that true education, according to Al-Ghazali, does not stop at sharpening the mind, but goes beyond the cognitive realm to the formation of spiritual awareness and moral civility. Thus, education functions as a

process of human perfection, not merely the transmission of knowledge.

Within this framework, Al-Ghazali offers a concept of education that rejects the fragmentation between knowledge and values. Reason is understood as an instrument for the pursuit of knowledge, but it must be guided by the purity of the spirit and guided by ethics. The spirit is the source of human existential awareness of the meaning of life and its relationship with God, while ethics is the concrete manifestation of the integration of reason and spirit in action. The three form a mutually supportive system, in which neglecting one will cause an imbalance in human personality. Education that only sharpens reason without nurturing the spirit and ethics will produce intelligent but value-deprived individuals; conversely, spirituality without a rational basis can become trapped in dogmatism and blind fanaticism.

In terms of relevance, this study shows that Al-Ghazali's ideas are similar to the modern educational paradigm that emphasizes a holistic approach—namely, a balance between cognitive, affective, and psychomotor aspects. However, Al-Ghazali provides an important addition in the form of a spiritual dimension, which is central to the entire educational process. This dimension has not received full attention in contemporary education systems, which tend to be oriented towards academic results and competitive achievements (Aisida, 2025; Raniadi, 2023; Syaifulloh, 2024). In the modern context, education is

often measured by numbers—test scores, academic achievements, or job skills—while the formation of personality, empathy, and spiritual awareness are often neglected. Al-Ghazali's view serves to balance this reductionist tendency.

The integration of reason, spirit, and ethics according to Al-Ghazali also has methodological implications for educational practice. At the curriculum level, he demands a balance between the teaching of rational sciences (*'ulum al-'aqliyyah*) and religious sciences (*'ulum al-naqliyyah*). Both must be processed within the framework of tawhid so that knowledge does not become a tool of exploitation, but rather a means of self-purification (*tazkiyatun nafs*). This is in line with the modern view of character education, which emphasizes the integration of the head (knowledge), heart (values), and hand (action). The difference is that Al-Ghazali views this integration not merely as a pedagogical strategy, but as a spiritual calling to achieve human perfection.

From a practical perspective, Al-Ghazali's value-based holistic education is highly relevant to the Islamic education system in the global era. The moral crisis, ethical degradation, and weak spiritual control amid technological advances are evidence that modern education has lost its spirit of values. Al-Ghazali's concept can be used as a framework for revitalization, where every learning process is directed not only to produce productive individuals, but also to shape personalities that are faithful, knowledgeable, and moral. In this



context, teachers play a role not only as educators, but also as murabbi—educators who guide the mind with knowledge, purify the spirit with exemplary behavior, and instill ethics through action.

Furthermore, Al-Ghazali's idea of holistic education can be interpreted as a model of transformative education. The mind becomes a means of critical thinking about reality, the spirit enlivens spiritual meaning and social empathy, while ethics leads to civilized behavior. This integration produces individuals who are able to put knowledge into practice and make knowledge a path of devotion. Education is no longer merely a tool for social mobility, but a path to self-knowledge and knowledge of God. Thus, Al-Ghazali offers not only a pedagogical system, but also an ontological paradigm that defines education as a process of perfecting the soul (Fadhil & Sebgag, 2021; Maslani et al., 2025; Noviani et al., 2025).

This study confirms that Al-Ghazali's holistic concept of education is highly relevant as a reference for the renewal of the Islamic education curriculum in the modern era. The integration of reason, spirit, and ethics requires curriculum design that balances intellectual and spiritual dimensions. The evaluation of educational success is not only measured by academic achievement but also by the extent to which students demonstrate honesty, spiritual awareness, and moral responsibility. This is the fundamental value that is missing in an education system that places too much

emphasis on cognition (Adnan, 2025; Putra, 2024; Syaifulloh, 2024).

By reinforcing Al-Ghazali's ideas, education can be directed towards shaping individuals who not only master knowledge but also humanize humanity. In the context of globalization, which is highly competitive, the concept of holistic education based on spirituality becomes the antithesis of materialistic education. The integration of reason, spirit, and ethics is not merely a classical idea, but an actual offer that can restore the balance between intellectual progress and moral maturity. Therefore, Al-Ghazali's thinking can be an alternative paradigm for the development of an Islamic education system that is character-based, civilized, and oriented towards human welfare (Busroli, 2019).

### **Analysis of Key Findings and Novelty**

This study found that Imam Al-Ghazali's concept of holistic education is rooted in the integration of reason, spirit, and ethics as an inseparable unity in the formation of *insan kamil*. Reason functions as a means of thinking and seeking truth, spirit is the source of spiritual awareness, and ethics is the tangible manifestation of knowledge and spirituality in action. These three aspects do not function independently, but complement each other in shaping civilized human beings who are balanced between the world and the hereafter.

Other findings show that Al-Ghazali conceptually formulated an educational system that transcends the modern cognitive paradigm. He offers an

educational model that is not only transfers knowledge but also fosters moral and spiritual awareness. In the contemporary context, this thinking is a critique of modern educational systems that tend to be secular and materialistic.

Furthermore, this study finds that Al-Ghazali's holistic concept has methodological implications for the development of Islamic education curricula. The ideal curriculum should integrate rational and religious knowledge within the framework of tawhid, with teachers acting as *murabbi* who guide the mind, purify the soul, and instill ethics. This educational model can be a solution to the moral crisis and degradation of values that plague modern education.

The novelty of this research lies in the reinterpretation of Imam Al-Ghazali's classical thought within the framework of contemporary Islamic education. This

research not only describes Al-Ghazali's holistic education concept of textually, but also constructs it as a transformative paradigm relevant to the value crisis of the modern age. Unlike previous studies that generally highlight Al-Ghazali's morality or Sufism aspects partially, this research integrates the three main dimensions—reason, spirit, and ethics—into a complete education system. This approach produces a new conceptual model of "integrative-transformative education" that balances intellectual quotient (IQ), emotional quotient (EQ), and spiritual quotient (SQ) from an Islamic perspective. Thus, the novelty of this research lies in its attempt to contextualize Al-Ghazali's thinking to address the challenges of modern education: how to restore the function of education as a process of human perfection, not merely a tool for producing knowledge and skills.

Table 1. Analysis of Findings and Novelty of Research

No	Aspect	Main Findings	Novelty
	Educational Concept	Al-Ghazali's holistic education integrates reason, spirit, and ethics to shape <i>the perfect human being</i> .	Reinterpretation of classical concepts into an <i>integrative-transformative</i> Islamic education model.
2	The Role of Reason	Reason as a tool for seeking knowledge that must be guided by spiritual values.	The affirmation of reason in modern education based on the values of monotheism.
3	The Role of the Spirit	The spirit as the center of spiritual and moral consciousness ( <i>tazkiyatun nafs</i> ).	Conceptualization of the spirit as <i>spiritual quotient (SQ)</i> in Islamic education.
4	Ethics	Ethics as the result of the integration of reason and spirit; the ultimate goal of education is noble character.	Affirmation of ethics as the main orientation of Islamic education.
5	Modern Relevance	Criticism of modern education that is too cognitive and materialistic.	Alternative paradigm: balance between IQ–EQ–SQ based on Islamic spirituality.

## CONCLUSION

Al-Ghazali's holistic educational thinking emphasizes that the essence of education lies in the effort to perfect all human potential—intellect, spirit, and ethics—in a balanced manner. The intellect serves as an instrument for the search for truth and the development of knowledge, the spirit becomes the center of transcendental consciousness that connects humans with their God, while ethics is the concrete manifestation of the unity of the two in civilized behavior. The integration of these three dimensions gives rise to a comprehensive concept of education, oriented not only towards intellectual achievement, but also towards the purification of the soul and the formation of character. This study concludes that Al-Ghazali's ideas have strategic relevance for the reconstruction of today's education, which tends to be cognitive and competitive. He offers an alternative paradigm that returns the orientation of education to the formation of a complete human being (*insan kamil*), namely an individual who is intellectually intelligent, spiritually mature, and morally noble. Thus, the success of education should not be measured solely by academic achievement, but by the ability of students to balance knowledge, values, and deeds, as well as to bring benefits to themselves, society, and God. This concept is an important philosophical foundation for the revitalization of humanistic and transcendental Islamic education.

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