



MORAL EDUCATION FROM IMAM AL-GHAZALI'S PERSPECTIVE IN RESPONDING TO MORAL CHALLENGES IN THE ERA OF GLOBALIZATION

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ARTICLE INFORMATION

Manuscript History

Received: 14-11-2025

Revised: 19-12-2025

Accepted: 25-12-2025

Keywords:

Moral education,
Imam Al-Ghazali,
globalization, character
education.

ABSTRACT

Globalization has brought significant changes to moral values, including the rise of hedonism, individualism, and materialism, which weaken spiritual values. These impacts are evident in the field of education, where modern educational systems tend to emphasize cognitive achievement rather than character formation. This article examines the concept of moral education according to Imam Al-Ghazali as a response to the moral crisis in the era of globalization. This study employs a qualitative literature-based method with content analysis of Al-Ghazali's works, particularly Ihya' 'Ulumuddin, Ayyuha al-Walad, and Kimya al-Sa'adah. The findings indicate that Al-Ghazali's moral education emphasizes the purification of the soul, the integration of knowledge and morality, and the exemplary role of teachers. The process of moral education involves self-control over desires, mujahadah, riyadhah, and muraqabah. This concept is relevant in addressing the challenges of globalization, such as consumerism and secularization, by instilling universal values including honesty, trustworthiness, and compassion. The article highlights the importance of integrating moral education into the curriculum, teaching methods, and the role of teachers. Al-Ghazali's thought offers a holistic and spiritually grounded educational approach. Moral education serves as a fundamental foundation for shaping a generation with strong character, integrity, and social as well as spiritual responsibility.

ABSTRAK

Globalisasi membawa perubahan besar pada nilai moral, seperti munculnya hedonisme, individualisme, dan materialisme yang melemahkan nilai spiritual. Dampak ini terasa dalam dunia pendidikan yang cenderung menekankan aspek pengetahuan dibandingkan pembentukan karakter. Artikel ini mengkaji konsep pendidikan moral menurut Imam Al-Ghazali sebagai jawaban atas krisis moral di era globalisasi. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode kualitatif berbasis studi pustaka dengan analisis terhadap karya Al-Ghazali, terutama Ihya' 'Ulumuddin, Ayyuha al-Walad, dan Kimya al-Sa'adah. Hasil kajian menunjukkan bahwa pendidikan moral menurut Al-Ghazali menekankan penyucian jiwa, keseimbangan antara ilmu dan akhlak, serta keteladanan guru. Proses pendidikan moral dilakukan melalui pengendalian hawa nafsu, mujahadah, riyadhah, dan muraqabah. Konsep ini relevan untuk menghadapi tantangan globalisasi seperti konsumerisme dan sekularisasi dengan menanamkan nilai kejujuran, amanah, dan kasih sayang. Artikel ini menegaskan pentingnya mengintegrasikan pendidikan moral dalam kurikulum, metode pembelajaran, dan peran guru. Pemikiran Al-Ghazali menawarkan pendekatan pendidikan yang menyeluruh dan bernilai spiritual. Pendidikan moral menjadi dasar penting dalam membentuk generasi yang berkarakter, berintegritas, serta bertanggung jawab secara sosial dan spiritual.

Kata Kunci : Pendidikan moral, Imam Al-Ghazali, globalisasi, pendidikan karakter.

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Introduction

Globalization, characterized by advances in information technology, cross-border human mobility, and rapid cultural and economic exchange, has exerted a significant impact on the transformation of value systems and lifestyles across societies worldwide. On the one hand, globalization offers opportunities for enhanced knowledge acquisition, global collaboration, and economic growth (Sihombing et al., 2024). On the other hand, it also generates serious challenges in the form of value crises and moral decline, particularly among younger generations. One concrete manifestation of this phenomenon is the emergence of a hedonistic culture a lifestyle that prioritizes worldly pleasure. Hedonism is widely disseminated through social media, digital entertainment, and commercial advertising, which aggressively promote instant gratification, luxury, and physical pleasure (Safitri & Husnaini, 2025). As a result, many individuals become trapped in consumerist behaviors, grow less aware of spirituality, and begin to neglect moral values such as modesty, empathy, and social responsibility. This culture has also permeated the educational sphere, where student success is often assessed solely on the basis of academic performance and formal achievements rather than character and moral integrity (Halim, 2024).

In addition to hedonism, individualism is another defining feature of the contemporary global moral crisis. Individualism, understood as an excessive emphasis on personal freedom and self-interest, frequently leads to a decline in social awareness and concern for others (Daeli et al., 2024; Risma Neta Lestari, 2024). In the digital era and the age of social media, individuals tend to focus more on constructing self-images than on cultivating meaningful relationships. Social solidarity weakens, face-to-face communication diminishes, and empathy becomes increasingly rare. Values of togetherness, cooperation, and compassion that have long formed the foundation of Eastern cultures are gradually eroded by modernization and Western-oriented lifestyles. This phenomenon poses a serious threat, particularly in the context of education, as students are expected not only to be intellectually competent but also capable of building healthy and responsible social relationships. When individualism is allowed to develop unchecked, education loses its essential role in shaping holistic individuals those who are civilized and morally grounded. Therefore, serious efforts are required to reintroduce moral values that emphasize balance between individual rights and social responsibilities.

Amid the rapid flow of globalization that increasingly tends toward secularism, education faces a major challenge: not only to enlighten students intellectually but also to shape their character and moral integrity. The secularization associated with globalization often separates knowledge from spiritual and moral values (Falah et al., 2024; Tawabie et al., 2025). Consequently, education becomes a technocratic instrument that emphasizes skills and competencies while neglecting moral and personality development. In this context, the urgency of moral education becomes paramount in balancing cognitive development with affective and spiritual dimensions. Moral education is not merely an additional subject but a fundamental foundation for developing civilized and responsible human beings. In Islam, education is a comprehensive process aimed at forming *insan kamil*—a complete human being who is not only intellectually capable but also possesses noble character and divine

consciousness. When moral values are instilled from an early age, students are less likely to be influenced by the negative cultures brought about by globalization.

Recognizing the importance of moral education in the global era, the ideas of classical Islamic scholars such as Imam Al-Ghazali need to be revitalized and recontextualized. Imam Al-Ghazali is widely recognized not only as a prominent scholar and philosopher but also as an educator and moral thinker who strongly emphasized moral formation in education (Ali et al., 2025; Hufron et al., 2025). In *Ihya' 'Ulum al-Din*, Al-Ghazali emphasizes that drawing closer to God and improving moral character constitute the primary objectives of knowledge. Education, according to Al-Ghazali, is not merely intended to fill the mind with information but to cultivate the heart by purifying it from spiritual diseases such as ostentation (*riya'*), self-admiration (*ujub*), greed, and envy. This perspective is highly relevant in responding to globalization, which tends to separate knowledge from moral values. By referring to Al-Ghazali's concept of moral education, contemporary educational systems can restore ethical consciousness to every learning process. Therefore, an in-depth study of Imam Al-Ghazali's concept of moral education is essential as an alternative response to the increasingly pervasive global moral degradation.

Based on the background outlined above, it is evident that globalization has significantly influenced changes in societal value systems. Globalization affects not only economic and technological dimensions but also profoundly disrupts the moral and spiritual dimensions of human life. Hedonism and individualism have become inseparable elements of modern life, gradually eroding noble values that were once firmly upheld, particularly in societies rooted in religious and Eastern cultural traditions. Amid this value crisis, education plays a central role as an agent of social transformation and character formation.

However, contemporary educational systems often tend to be pragmatic and secular, placing greater emphasis on academic achievement and technical skills, while moral and spiritual development is frequently marginalized. This situation raises fundamental questions regarding the direction and essence of education itself. Therefore, it is necessary to reexamine the thoughts of major Islamic scholars who have long positioned morality at the core of education, one of whom is Imam Al-Ghazali.

From this background, the research problem addressed in this study is formulated as follows: *How can Imam Al-Ghazali's concept of moral education be used as a solution to moral challenges in the era of globalization?* This question is explored through an examination of Al-Ghazali's views on moral education and their relevance to the moral conditions of modern societies experiencing a value crisis. By analyzing the concept of moral education from Al-Ghazali's perspective, this study aims to identify a comprehensive and contextual alternative approach to addressing the moral challenges arising from increasingly secular globalization.

Research Method

This study employs a qualitative approach using a library-based research method aimed at exploring and analyzing Imam Al-Ghazali's thought on moral education. This qualitative inquiry emphasizes a deep and holistic understanding of Al-Ghazali's concept of moral education as articulated in his major works, such as *Ihya' 'Ulum al-Din*, *Ayyuha al-Walad*, and *al-Tarbiyah al-Islamiyyah*. Rather than relying on data collected through field observations or experimental procedures, this study draws extensively on relevant literature, including classical texts, books, scholarly articles, and other academic documents, to gain an in-depth understanding of Al-Ghazali's teachings within the context of moral and spiritual education. Through this approach, the research seeks to develop a comprehensive understanding of Al-Ghazali's theory of moral education and its potential application in addressing contemporary global moral challenges.

In addition, this study utilizes secondary sources derived from relevant academic literature, including peer-reviewed journal articles, books, and previous studies that examine Imam Al-Ghazali's thought, moral education, and moral challenges in the era of globalization. These secondary sources provide broader perspectives on the applicability of Al-Ghazali's ideas within modern educational contexts and facilitate comparative analysis between his views and contemporary concepts of moral education. By integrating primary and secondary sources, this study aims to offer a comprehensive and detailed analysis of the relevance of Al-Ghazali's moral education framework in responding to the moral crisis associated with globalization.

Content analysis is employed as the primary analytical method to examine and interpret Imam Al-Ghazali's views on moral education in depth. This method is selected because it enables the researcher to explore underlying meanings, philosophical values, and moral messages embedded in classical texts. Through content analysis, key themes related to moral education in Al-Ghazali's works are identified, including the purification of the soul (*tazkiyat al-nafs*), the cultivation of the heart, the integration of knowledge and action, and the moral principles underlying human behavior. This approach also allows for the identification of connections between the historical context of Al-Ghazali's thought and the contemporary social and moral challenges faced by society, particularly in the era of globalization characterized by secularization and consumerist culture.

The analytical procedures involve systematic processes of categorization, interpretation, and reflection on significant passages from Al-Ghazali's principal works, such as *Ihya' 'Ulum al-Din*, *Ayyuha al-Walad*, and *Kimya al-Sa'adah*. Each relevant section is examined within the framework of moral education from both theoretical and applied perspectives. Furthermore, the findings are contextualized within contemporary phenomena of moral degradation through a critical engagement with recent academic literature. Accordingly, content analysis in this study functions not only as a means of textual interpretation but also as a method for assessing the substantive and normative relevance of Al-Ghazali's moral educational concepts in addressing modern moral challenges. This approach is consistent with the characteristics of qualitative research, which prioritize an in-depth and comprehensive understanding of meaning, values, and contextual dimensions of the object of study.

Results and Discussion

1. The Concept of Moral Education According to Imam Al-Ghazali

Imam Al-Ghazali asserts that moral education constitutes the fundamental foundation for developing a complete and holistic human being. He does not separate spiritual and moral dimensions; rather, he views them as an integrated and mutually reinforcing unity. The concept of *tazkiyat al-nafs*, or purification of the soul, lies at the core of his moral educational framework. According to Al-Ghazali, the human soul inherently possesses the potential to incline toward either goodness or evil, depending on how it is guided and nurtured (Aryanti, 2021; Maghfiroh, 2024). When habituated to virtuous actions, the soul develops noble character; conversely, when left to follow base desires, it descends into moral degradation.

Therefore, the educational process is not merely aimed at filling the mind with knowledge, but more importantly at purifying the heart from inner diseases such as ostentation, arrogance, envy, excessive attachment to worldly pleasures, and similar vices. This perspective distinguishes moral education that is merely external and formal from moral education that genuinely touches the deepest essence of human existence.

In his work *Ihya' 'Ulum al-Din*, Al-Ghazali emphasizes that the purification of the soul (*tazkiyat al-nafs*) is the principal foundation of moral education. This process, which includes:

a. Muraqabah

«فَأَصِلْ الْخَيْرَ كُلَّهُ الْمُرَاقَبَةُ، وَمَنْ لَمْ يُرَاقِبْ نَفْسَهُ فِي خَطَرَاتِهَا لَمْ يَصِلْ إِلَى مُجَاهَدَتِهَا فِي أَعْمَالِهَا»

“The foundation of all goodness is *muraqabah*. Whoever does not مراقب (observe and supervise) the movements of the soul within its inner thoughts will never attain earnest striving (*mujahadah*) in regulating outward actions.” (Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, p. 376)
Muraqabah refers to continuous self-awareness and vigilance before God, in which individuals consciously monitor their inner thoughts, intentions, and inclinations. For Al-Ghazali, this inner awareness is the initial and most essential stage of moral education, as ethical behavior cannot be sustained without first cultivating spiritual consciousness at the level of intention.

b. Muhasabah

«المُحَاسَبَةُ أَنْ يُحَاسِبَ الْعَبْدُ نَفْسَهُ قَبْلَ أَنْ يُحَاسَبَ»
«بِالْمُحَاسَبَةِ تَنْبَيُّنُ مَعَايِبِ النَّفْسِ، وَيَمَعْرِفَتِهَا تَحْصُلُ تَرْكِيبُهَا»

“*Muhasabah is the act of a servant calling oneself to account before being called to account.*”
“*Through muhasabah, the flaws of the soul become apparent, and through recognizing them, its purification is attained.*” (Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, pp. 382, 386)

Muhasabah functions as a reflective evaluation of one’s moral conduct. It enables individuals to identify moral shortcomings and fosters responsibility for self-improvement. Within Al-Ghazali’s moral pedagogy, muhasabah is a critical mechanism for internal correction and ethical growth.

c. Mujahadah

«الْمُجَاهَدَةُ هِيَ حَمْلُ النَّفْسِ عَلَى مَا تُكْرَهُ فِي مُوَاطَّئَةِ الْعِبَادَاتِ وَمُخَالَفَةِ الشَّهَوَاتِ»

“*Mujahadah is compelling the soul to perform actions it dislikes in order to remain steadfast in worship and to resist base desires.*” (Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, p. 63)

«وَأَعْلَمُ أَنَّ طَرِيقَ تَرْكِيبِ النَّفْسِ الْمُجَاهَدَةُ وَالصَّبْرُ»

“*Know that the path to purifying the soul lies in mujahadah and patience.*” (Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, p. 65)

Mujahadah represents disciplined moral struggle against impulses that conflict with ethical and spiritual ideals. Al-Ghazali regards this struggle as indispensable for character formation, as moral excellence cannot be achieved without persistent effort and endurance.

d. Riyadhah al-Nafs

«رِيَاضَةُ النَّفْسِ هِيَ تَعْوِيدُهَا الْخُلُقَ الْحَسَنَةَ، وَنَقْلُهَا عَنِ الْعَادَاتِ الْمَذْمُومَةِ إِلَى الْعَادَاتِ الْمَحْمُودَةِ»

“*Riyāḍah al-nafs is training the soul to adopt virtuous character traits and transferring it from blameworthy habits to praiseworthy ones.*” (Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, p. 59)

«وَلَّ تَحْصُلُ تَرْكِيبِ النَّفْسِ إِلَّا بِالرِّيَاضَةِ وَالْمُجَاهَدَةِ»

“*The purification of the soul cannot be achieved except through riyāḍah and mujahadah.*” (Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, p. 66)

Riyadhah al-nafs emphasizes moral habituation through consistent ethical practice. According to Al-Ghazali, virtue is not formed instantaneously but through sustained training that gradually reshapes character and behavior. The processes of *muraqabah*, *muhasabah*, *mujahadah*, and *riyadhah al-nafs* together constitute a comprehensive spiritual transformation aimed at shaping individuals who are not only personally pious but also socially beneficial. This framework is particularly relevant in the era of globalization, which is dominated by materialistic values, as education is expected to produce substantive moral character capable of balancing intellect and spirituality (Harahap et al., 2023; Prayitno & Ratno, 2025).

Furthermore, Al-Ghazali emphasizes that moral education requires the central role of a pious and morally upright teacher who functions as a spiritual guide and role model rather than merely a transmitter of knowledge. His approach is holistic, integrating exemplification,

practice, and inner guidance—distinct from modern educational systems that are often mechanistic in nature. The ultimate aim of education, in Al-Ghazali's view, is not worldly success but inner tranquility and eternal happiness achieved through a strong spiritual relationship with God (Muhamad Basyrul Muvid, 2019; Raharjo et al., 2025; Suhifatullah, 2024).

In addition to the teacher's role, a conducive environment and authentic role modeling constitute other decisive factors in moral formation. A virtuous environment—both physical and digital—is essential to protect the soul from negative influences. At the same time, the example set by teachers, parents, and leaders must be manifested through concrete actions, as inconsistency between words and deeds fosters hypocrisy. In responding to the challenges of globalization, Al-Ghazali's thought offers a moral defense through the cultivation of healthy social environments and the reinforcement of exemplary conduct (Nurman Hasibuan, 2025).

2. Moral Challenges in the Era of Globalization

The era of globalization, marked by rapid advances in information technology, has brought profound changes to societal value systems. Traditional and religious values have increasingly shifted due to the influence of universal, liberal, and secular values disseminated through cross-cultural interactions in the digital sphere (Aslan, 2025; Zuhri, 2021). This condition creates a dual reality and value dissonance, particularly among younger generations, which may lead to identity crises, moral degradation, and weakened life orientation as individuals struggle to filter the overwhelming flow of information.

The impact of this transformation is clearly reflected in the strengthening of consumerism, individualism, and secularization, which erode spiritual values. Social relationships have become increasingly virtual and superficial, while happiness is often equated with material possessions. Without a strong moral foundation, technological advancement risks becoming a tool of dehumanization that distances human beings from their spiritual nature. Therefore, moral education is essential for building moral resilience so that individuals are not easily influenced by the currents of global values (Angel Intan Salmiah, 2024; Pasaribu, 2025).

In addressing these challenges, Al-Ghazali's holistic and substantive conception of moral education offers a relevant solution. His framework, which emphasizes the purification of the soul (*tazkiyat al-nafs*), exemplary conduct, and spiritual awareness (*muraqabah*), seeks to form individuals who are not only intellectually capable but also possess strong character and are firmly connected to divine values (Aisyah et al., 2025). The integration of this spiritual approach into contemporary educational systems is considered essential for producing a generation with a transcendental orientation in life, enabling them to navigate the complexities of globalization without losing their identity (Bosra & Rahim, 2022; Widia Sari et al., 2025).

3. Relevance and Application of Al-Ghazali's Thought in the Global Era

Imam Al-Ghazali's thought on moral education provides a fundamental response to moral challenges in the era of globalization through its emphasis on universal values such as honesty, trustworthiness, humility, and compassion. Within his framework, morality is not merely theoretical knowledge but the outcome of spiritual practice (*riyadhah*), purification of the heart (*tazkiyat al-nafs*), and consistent moral habituation (Moh Faliqul Isbah, 2025; Mz, 2018). These values serve as essential pillars for building a civilization that is not only technologically advanced but also morally noble, particularly within a global society that tends to be pragmatic and competitive. For example, Al-Ghazali's conception of honesty encompasses harmony between intention, speech, and action, while trustworthiness is broadly understood as responsibility for knowledge, social position, and life itself as a trust bestowed by God (Subarkah, 2025).

Furthermore, Al-Ghazali emphasizes compassion (*rahmah*) and humility (*tawadhu'*) as the core of social relations (Ihwan, 2025; Nur, 2025). In a global context marked by identity conflicts and intolerance, this perspective is particularly strategic for fostering peace and cross-cultural cooperation. Awareness of one's own limitations and a gentle attitude toward others are taught as means to avoid intellectual arrogance and cultural domination. In educational practice, these values can be cultivated through collaborative learning, teachers' exemplary conduct, and the integration of spiritual values into the curriculum. Consequently, moral education grounded in Al-Ghazali's thought does not merely teach goodness normatively but forms individuals who intrinsically love virtue, making it highly relevant for addressing global moral disorientation (Abdullah et al., 2019; Irawan et al., 2025).

Amid modernization demands that prioritize intellectual intelligence, character education is often marginalized within contemporary educational systems that are trapped in a purely cognitive paradigm. According to Al-Ghazali, however, authentic education is a process of holistic human perfection encompassing intellect, heart, and behavior—with the aim of producing individuals who are pious and civilized, not merely intellectually competent (Isop Syafei, 2025; Royani et al., 2023). This idea is highly relevant for addressing crises of integrity and professional ethics in the modern era. Al-Ghazali's character education does not end at the theoretical level but is realized through habituation, exemplary conduct, and continuous purification of the soul. Therefore, its relevance is urgent not only for individual development but also as a moral foundation for sustainable civilization.

Implementing Al-Ghazali's thought requires a reformulation of educational systems, encompassing curriculum design, pedagogical methods, and the role of teachers. The curriculum must integrate cognitive and affective dimensions, intentionally designed to instill core values such as honesty, empathy, and social responsibility. Teachers, meanwhile, should act as *murabbi*—spiritual mentors and living role models—rather than merely transmitters of subject matter (Arfandi, 2020; Illahi, 2020). Integrative learning models that combine theory with real-world practice, such as project-based learning that prioritizes collaboration and integrity, are essential. Through this holistic approach, educational systems can produce a generation that excels not only academically and professionally but also possesses strong personal integrity and moral commitment to confront the complexities of global challenges.

Conclusion

Imam Al-Ghazali's thought offers a transcendental and holistic foundation for moral education, rendering it enduringly relevant, including in the contemporary era of globalization. In contrast to educational systems that often focus predominantly on cognitive development, Al-Ghazali emphasizes that authentic education must integrate knowledge with the purification of the soul (*tazkiyat al-nafs*) and character formation grounded in moral and spiritual values. This approach is particularly crucial for addressing value crises and moral challenges in the modern world, such as the proliferation of hedonism, individualism, and secularization that erode moral foundations. By instilling universal values such as honesty, trustworthiness, compassion, and humility, Al-Ghazali's moral education is not only relevant to Muslim societies but also provides guidance for the cultivation of universal morality. Its ultimate aim is to form a generation that is not only academically competent but also wise and endowed with integrity in social life.

To realize this vision, a reconstruction of educational systems is required, shifting from paradigms that merely transmit knowledge toward approaches that emphasize moral and spiritual development. Educational models that prioritize academic achievement without attending to character formation tend to produce individuals who are intellectually capable yet deficient in moral integrity. Therefore, it is essential to develop curricula that integrate moral values across all aspects of learning. The key to successful implementation lies in the role of

teachers, who function not only as instructors but also as moral exemplars (*murabbi*) who embody noble character in their daily lives. Through an integrative approach that combines knowledge, exemplary conduct, and moral habituation, education can serve as a strategic instrument for nurturing a generation that is not only intellectually accomplished but also possesses strong moral commitment to confront the complex challenges of the modern era with wisdom and responsibility.

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