# Character Education Based on Al-Gazālī's Sprituality: A Solution to Moral Crisis in the Digital Era

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*ABSTRACT*

*The development of digital technology not only has a major effect on human life, including education, but also causes moral crises such as hoaxes, hate speech, and empathy degradation. This study aims to study Imām Al-Gazālī's perspective on spiritual education as an alternative solution to overcome the moral crisis in the modern era. In addition, this study also creates a plan to implement character education based on spirituality. This type of research is qualitative using a literature study approach. This study collects data by conducting an in-depth analysis of Al-Gazālī's writings and related literature. Such as Al-Gazālī's main works, such as Ihya 'Ulumuddin, Ayyuha al-Walad, and Mizan al-'Amal. The study shows that Al-Gazālī's educational ideas that emphasize the strengthening of morals, purification of the soul (tazkiyatun nafs), and spiritual achievement through reason, heart, soul, and spirit are very relevant to addressing the moral crisis that occurs in the modern era. Primarily, values such as honesty, trustworthiness, patience, gratitude, and self-reflection shape students' characters. Spirituality-based character education can be implemented through curriculum, daily routines, teacher examples, family involvement, and wise use of digital media. This study offers the concept of Al-Gazālī's spirituality-based character education as a solution to the moral crisis of the young generation in the digital era and provides practical guidelines for educational institutions, teachers, and families in forming intelligent, moral, and spiritual individuals.*

**ABSTRAK**

Teknologi digital semakin berkembang tidak hanya memiliki efek besar pada kehidupan manusia, termasuk pendidikan, tetapi juga menyebabkan krisis moral seperti hoaks, ujaran kebencian, dan degradasi empati. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mempelajari perspektif Imām Al-Gazālī tentang pendidikan ruhani sebagai solusi alternatif untuk mengatasi krisis moral di era modern. Selain itu, penelitian ini juga menciptakan rencana untuk menerapkan pendidikan karakter yang berbasis spiritualitas. Jenis penelitian ini ialah kualitatif yang menggunakan pendekatan studi kepustakaan. Penelitian ini mengumpulkan data dengan melakukan analisis mendalam terhadap tulisan Al-Gazālī dan literatur terkait. Seperti karya-karya utama Al-Gazālī, seperti *Iḥya' 'Ulūmuddin*, *Ayyuha al-Walad*, dan *Mizān al-'Amal*. Kajian menunjukkan bahwa ide-ide pendidikan Al-Gazālī yang menekankan penguatan akhlak, penyucian jiwa *(tazkiyatun nafs)*, dan pencapaian spiritual melalui akal, *qalb, nafs,* dan ruh sangat relevan untuk menangani krisis moral yang terjadi di era modern. Utamanya, nilai-nilai seperti kejujuran, amanah, sabar, syukur, dan *muhasabah* membentuk karakter siswa. Pendidikan karakter berbasis spiritualitas dapat diterapkan melalui kurikulum, rutinitas harian, contoh guru, keterlibatan keluarga, dan pemanfaatan media digital dengan bijak. Penelitian ini menawarkan konsep pendidikan karakter berbasis spiritualitas Al-Gazālī sebagai solusi untuk krisis moral generasi muda di era digital dan memberikan pedoman praktis untuk lembaga pendidikan, guru, dan keluarga dalam membentuk individu yang cerdas, moral, dan spiritual.

## A. INTRODUCTION

Human life has been greatly influenced by the advancement of digital technology, including the world of education and character building.[1] The digital era offers easy communication and information, but also raises many moral problems. Reduced respect, lots of hate speech, the spread of hoaxes, digital pornography, and lack of social empathy are common symptoms of an ethical crisis among the younger generation.[2]

Islamic education is the main foundation in the formation of a person's moral and spiritual character. However, currently it is faced with increasingly diverse challenges along with the development of modern society.[3] Social change, technological advances, and the flow of globalization have influenced various aspects of life, including the world of education. In this situation, the role of Islamic education becomes very important as a moral reference to answer various problems that arise due to these changes. However, the complexity of the existing challenges requires a deeper understanding of the various factors that influence the success of Islamic education, so that appropriate and solution-oriented steps can be formulated. This condition shows that conventional character education that only emphasizes the cognitive aspect has not been able to effectively fortify students from the negative influences of the times. A deeper approach is needed that touches the inner aspect, namely a spiritual approach that touches the heart and self-awareness.[4]

In addition, every educator, parent, and community must support character education. Character values are taught by educators through the learning process included in the curriculum.[5] Conversely, parents have a responsibility to instill these values early on through family habits. In addition, the community helps strengthen the principles instilled at home and at school. With the combination of these elements, it is hoped that character education, especially from an Islamic perspective, can contribute significantly to the formation of a generation that has superior morality, intelligence, and faith. In addition, the information age provides education with many opportunities and

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[1]T Rahmawati, "Kecanduan Media Sosial Dan Degradasi Nilai-Nilai Moral," *Komunikasi Dan Sosial Humaniora* 9, no. 1 (2021): 88–102.

[2] Achmad Muqayyidin, "Etika Sufistik Al-Gazālī Dalam Penguatan Moral Di Era Disrupsi Digital," *Jurnal Studi Ilmu-Ilmu Keislaman* 6, no. 2 (2021): 55–72.

[3] Chris Chaplin, "Islam, Politics and Change. The Indonesian Experience after the Fall of Suharto, Edited by Kees van Dijk and Nico J.G. Kaptein," *Bijdragen Tot de Taal-, Land- En Volkenkunde / Journal of the Humanities and Social Sciences of Southeast Asia* 172, no. 2–3 (January 1, 2016): 387–90, https://doi.org/10.1163/22134379-17202010.

[4] Hieronimus Canggung Darong, Yosefina Helenora Jem, and Erna Mena Niman, "Character Building: The Insertion Of Local Culture Values In Teaching And Learning," *Jhss (Journal Of Humanities And Social Studies)* 5, no. 3 (October 29, 2021): 252–60, https://doi.org/10.33751/jhss.v5i3.4001.

[5] Hasan Basri, "Spiritualitas Sebagai Fondasi Pendidikan Karakter," *Jurnal Al-Tarbawi* 5, no. 1 (2022): 42.

challenges. Education must be able to adapt to the changing times if it is to develop a person's potential and prepare them for the future.[6]

In terms of character education, it is very difficult to incorporate traditional and moral values into a curriculum that suits the needs of the digital world. Character education is not only about theoretical knowledge; it also involves building individuals who have morality, values, and positive attitudes every day. The theories of great figures such as Imām Al-Gazālī can be a useful reference in this regard. Imam Al Ghazali, an important Islamic scholar, has a deep understanding of character education.[7]

Al-Gazālī is an important figure in Islamic history because he built the foundation for spiritual-based education. He emphasized the importance of strengthening moral values through a spiritual approach, as well as purification of the soul *(tazkiyat al-nafs)*, and development of the heart *(qalb)*. According to Al-Gazālī, the concept of education is not only aimed at making the mind intelligent, but also at building people who are noble and close to God. According to Al-Gazālī, character education based on spirituality is an effective alternative to dealing with the moral crisis that is occurring in the modern era. This method can help build students' characters who are moral, self-aware, and have high internal moral control. [8]

In addition, character education based on spirituality has developed into a strategic approach in the world of education to produce students who are morally and spiritually strong in addition to being cognitively intelligent. By incorporating spiritual values into the learning process and gaining support from family and society, it is hoped that the younger generation will grow into responsible individuals, wise in using technology, and have strong morality when going through the rapid flow of digitalization. Therefore, it is very important to conduct research on the contribution of Al-Gazālī's thoughts in dealing with the moral crisis in the digital era and implementing character education based on spirituality. This aims to find concrete solutions to build human resources that are moral and able to handle the challenges of the times.[9]

Previous studies have discussed Imam Al-Gazālī's perspective on character education. Research conducted by Syifa and Ridwan emphasized the importance of moral values in the modern era, but did not explain how they can be applied directly.[10] Madhar noted Al-Gazālī's holistic education, but did not discuss current digital issues.[11] Asyikin et al. emphasized the importance of spiritual awareness in learning, but did not discuss the use

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[6] Benny Afwadzi and Miski Miski, "Religious Moderation In Indonesian Higher Educations: Literature Review," *Ulul Albab Jurnal Studi Islam* 22, no. 2 (December 31, 2021): 203–31, https://doi.org/10.18860/ua.v22i2.13446.

[7] Muqayyidin, "Etika Sufistik Al-Gazālī Dalam Penguatan Moral Di Era Disrupsi Digital."

[8] Abu Hamid Muhammad Al-Gazālī, *Ihya' Ulumuddin, Jilid 3* (Beirut: Dar al-Fikr, 2020).

[9] Abi Hamed al Ghazali, *Revival of Religion's Sciences (Ihya Ulum Ad-Din) 1-4 Vol 1:* إحياء علوم الدين- للغزالي 4-1 (انكليزي) ج1 (Dar Al Kotob Al Ilmiyah 2010, دار الكتب العلمية).

[10] Alfiana Syifa and Auliya Ridwan, "Pendidikan Karakter Islami Di Era Digital: Tantangan Dan Solusi Berdasarkan Pemikiran Sosial Imam Al-Gazālī," *Social Studies in Education* 2, no. 2 (December 15, 2024): 107–22, https://doi.org/10.15642/sse.2024.2.2.107-122.

[11] Madhar Madhar, "Pemikiran Pendidikan Imam Al-Gazālī Dan Relevansinya Dalam Sistem Pendidikan Islam Kontemporer," *Tarqiyatuna: Jurnal Pendidikan Agama Islam Dan Madrasah Ibtidaiyah* 3, no. 2 (December 30, 2024): 115–26, https://doi.org/10.36769/tarqiyatuna.v3i2.813.

of technology.[12] Meanwhile, Mukarromah et al. focused on resolving moral decadence, but did not discuss the impact of digital media.[13] Studies by Dirsa and Tohidi also discussed character education, but they were more general and did not answer questions about character in the information age.[14]

There are various methods used in this study. Not only discussing the concept of Al-Gazālī's spirituality theoretically, but also making practical plans to be applied in the world of modern education. This study recently focused on the moral crisis of the younger generation caused by the digital era, such as hoaxes, hate speech, and lack of social empathy. This study offers a solution in the form of character education based on Al-Gazālī's spirituality integrated into the curriculum, teacher examples, family roles, and wise ways to use digital media. Therefore, it is hoped that this study can make a significant contribution to solving the current problem of character education.

## B.  METHODS

This study uses a library research method, which is an approach that relies on collecting data and information from various written sources to analyze the ideas and thoughts of figures, in this case Imam Al-Gazālī, related to spirituality-based character education. The library study was conducted by examining in depth the main works of Al-Gazālī such as, -For example-, in:

$$\text{فَإِنَّ الْعِلْمَ الْبَاطِنَ لَا يُنالُ إِلَّا بِتَزْكِيَةِ النَّفْسِ وَتَطْهِيرِ الْقَلْبِ}$$

True inner knowledge cannot be attained except through the purification of the soul and the cleansing of the heart.

This quotation was interpreted as showing that any genuine educational outcome, especially in moral and character development, requires inner transformation which are the basis for formulating the concept of spiritual education and moral formation. In addition, this study also examines various secondary literature such as scientific journals, educational books, and contemporary references that are relevant to the context of the moral crisis in the digital era. The data analysis technique is carried out descriptively-analystically with a hermeneutic approach, namely by understanding the meaning of the text and interpreting it according to the needs and challenges of modern education. Through this method, it is hoped that the relevance and contribution of Al-Gazālī's thoughts can be found in formulating character education solutions that are able to form individuals who are not only intellectually intelligent, but also spiritually and morally strong amidst the challenges of the digital era.

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[12] Syahwan Tumanggor, Nurul Asyikin, and Amriansyah Pohan, "Educational Thoughts of Dewi Sartika: Study of Analysis of Islamic Education Values," *Albayan Journal of Islam and Muslim Societies* 1, no. 01 (September 23, 2024): 25–37.

[13] Aenullael Mukarromah and Meyyana Andriana, "Peranan Guru Dalam Mengembangkan Media Pembelajaran," *Journal of Science and Education Research* 1, no. 1 (February 16, 2022): 43–50, https://doi.org/10.62759/jser.v1i1.7.

[14] Hamid Tohidi and Mohammad Mehdi Jabbari, "The Effects of Motivation in Education," *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, World Conference on Learning, Teaching & Administration - 2011, 31 (January 1, 2012): 820–24, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2011.12.148.

## C. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

## 1. Biography of Al-Gazālī

Al-Ghazal or Algazael is a popular name for Muhammad ibn Muhammad bin Muhammad ibn Ahmad at-Thusy. He is known by the *kunyah* name Abu Hamid which means father of Hamid. Al-Gazālī was born in 450 H/1058 AD in Ghazalah Village, which is about half a century after the Prophet Muhammad migrated from Mecca to Medina, and about thirty years after the Seljuk Dynasty occupied Baghdad. Abū Ḥāmid was born in the city of Thus, Khurasan province, Persia (Iran), a poor city due to a long drought so that its residents experienced starvation for several years. Al-Gazālī died at the age of 50, on the 14th of *Jumadil Akhir* in the year 505 H/1111 AD, his body was buried in Thaberram, Qasabah, Thus.[15]

Al-Gazālī was born into a religious family. His father was named Muhammad, he worked as a weaver of wool. However, his father had good relations with the scholars of his village, he often listened to lectures on fiqh, and talked a lot about fiqh, because of his interest in Islamic issues, at one time he cried and begged Allah that his son would become an expert in fiqh, and a child named Al-Gazālī was born.[16]

In 473 H, Al-Gazālī continued his studies at Madrasah Nizhamiyah in the city of Naisabur (Nisyafur) and studied with Imamul Haramain Al-Jurwaini. In addition to teaching Shafi'i fiqh and Ash 'ari kalam, Al Juwaini also introduced Al-Gazālī to philosophy, so that he could master the science of mantiq, kalam science, and jadal science very well. Al-Juwaini himself praised Al-Gazālī as an ocean without shores, because of his intelligence in capturing knowledge and developing it.[17]

## 2. The Idea Spirituality-Based Character Edeucation According to Al-Gazālī

a.  Al-Gazālī's Concept of the Ten Spritualitas

Al-Gazālī, a great scholar in the Islamic tradition, views education as a process of purifying the soul *(tazkiyat al-nafs)* and forming noble morals *(tahdzib al-akhlaq)*, not merely the dissemination of knowledge. According to Al-Gazālī, the role of education in shaping human personality is very important, especially through an ethical approach. He rejects the idea that moral traits are eternal and unchangeable because if so, efforts to educate, advise, and train oneself would be useless.

Therefore, Al-Gazālī developed various profound concepts about character education, which are still relevant today because education determines the thinking and lifestyle of a nation. Al-Gazālī paid great attention to the formation of morals and purification of the soul as an important part of the educational process in many of his works, *Iḥya' 'Ulūmuddin*, Al-Gazālī writes: *Iḥya' 'Ulūmuddin*, *Ayyuha al-Walad*, and *Mizān al-'Amal*. The ultimate goal of education is to produce insan kamil (perfect human beings) who are not only intellectually intelligent, but also have a clean heart, morals, and strong spirituality. Al-Gazālī outlines the structure of human personality into core spiritual elements, including the *qalb* (heart), *nafs* (soul or self), *aql* (intellect), and *ruh* (spirit). These

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[15]Al-Gazālī, *Bidayah Al-Hidayah: Bimbingan Menggapai Hidayah, Terj. Mujahidin Muhayan,* (Jakarta: Menara, 2006). Hal.13

[16]Achmad Sunaro, *Nasehat-Nasehat Al-Imam Al-Gazālī Kepada Para Muridnya,* (Surabaya: Mutiara Ilmu, 2014).

[17]Zainuddin, *Seluk Beluk Pendidikan Dari Al-Gazālī* (Jakarta: Bumi Aksara, 1991).

components interact to shape a person's moral and spiritual development. In *Mizān al-'Amal*, Al-Gazālī explains:

<div dir="rtl">وَ﴿جُمْلَةُ أَمْرِ الدِّينِ رِعَايَةُ الْقَلْبِ وَتَصْفِيَتُهُ وَتَطْهِيرُهُ، فَهُوَ مَلِكُ الْجَسَدِ وَالْأَعْضَاءِ كُلُّهَا جُنُودٌ لَهُ</div>

The essence of religion is to care for the heart, purify it, and cleanse it, for it is the king of the body, and the limbs are its soldiers.

This statement highlights that the *qalb* leads the ethical command system of the human being. If it is purified, the rest of the faculties including reason, desire, and behavior will follow a righteous path. Hence, character education must address the integrity of all these components, beginning with the heart as the moral compass.

1)   *Qalb* (Spiritual)

*Qalb* is physically a fleshy organ shaped like a heart seed on the left side of the chest, where the soul originates. However, this meaning is not the focus because it is a medical study, not a spiritual one. This physical heart is also possessed by animals and corpses, so it does not have spiritual nobility. Second, qalb means something subtle, spiritual and divine, which is related to the physical heart. This is the essence of human nature who knows, understands, and is responsible.He further emphasizes in *Iḥya' 'Ulūmuddin*:

<div dir="rtl">وَالْقَلْبُ هُوَ الْعَالِمُ الْمُدْرِكُ مِنَ الْإِنْسَانِ، وَهُوَ الْمُخَاطَبُ وَالْمُعَاتَبُ، وَهُوَ الْمُطَالَبُ وَالْمُعَاقَبُ</div>

It is the heart that understands and perceives in a human, and it is the one being addressed, reproached, held accountable, and punished.

This illustrates that the heart is the center of spiritual cognition and moral accountability. For Al-Gazālī, the heart is not just a metaphor, but a spiritual reality that determines a person's status before God. He who feels reward and punishment. The relationship between the spiritual and physical qalb is not easy to understand by reason, but it can be analogized as the relationship between nature and the owner of nature, or between the user and his tool.[18]

Al-Gazālī believes that the heart has an instinct called *al-nur ilahy* (divine light) and *al-bashirah al-bathinah* (inner eye) which radiates faith and belief. The heart functions as a guide, controller and controller of all human behavior. If this heart functions normally, human life will be good and in accordance with its original nature. As Al-Gazālī states in *Iḥya' 'Ulūmuddin*:

<div dir="rtl">فَإِنَّ صَلَاحَ الْقَلْبِ يُؤَدِّي إِلَى صَلَاحِ الْجَوَارِحِ، وَفَسَادَهُ يُؤَدِّي إِلَى فَسَادِهَا</div>

The soundness of the heart leads to the soundness of the limbs, and its corruption leads to their corruption.

This statement illustrates the pivotal role of the qalb as the moral center of a human being. Al-Gazālī asserts that all outward actions speech, conduct, and decisions are mere reflections of the internal condition of the heart. If the heart is purified through sincere

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[18] Al-Ghazāli, *Iḥya' Ulum ad-Din, jilid. III* (Surabaya: Dar an-Nasyr al-Mishriyyah. tt),: 3

spiritual training and ethical discipline, then behavior will follow suit. Conversely, if the heart is left neglected or corrupted by arrogance, envy, or heedlessness of God, immoral behavior inevitably manifests.

In the modern digital context, where individuals are often judged by their outward image and instant reactions, Al-Gazālī's wisdom is deeply relevant. Character education must shift focus from superficial compliance to inner transformation. The heart must be nurtured with values such as humility *(tawadhu')*, awareness of divine presence *(muraqabah)*, and sincerity *(ikhlas)* qualities that build resilience against digital moral distractions such as narcissism, hate speech, and false identities.

## 2) *Ar-Ruh*

Al-Gazālī explains that the spirit has two meanings. First, the spirit as a subtle substance that originates from the physical heart cavity and spreads throughout the body through the veins, enlivening and giving function to the body parts, like the light of a lamp that illuminates a room. Second, the spirit as a subtle entity that knows and understands the nature of the human self. This spirit is rabbani and mysterious, as emphasized in the Qur'an that the spirit is part of God's affairs, which cannot be fully reached by human reason.

## 3) *Nafs*

According to Al-Gazālī, *nafs* has various meanings, one of which is an element in humans that includes strength, anger, and lust. Quoting the views of the Sufis, he called nafs the center of all bad traits, so it must be controlled and fought, as the Prophet said that the greatest enemy is the lust that exists within oneself. In addition, nafs is also understood as the core of human existence, whose nature changes depending on its condition. If it is successfully controlled and follows the will of God, then it becomes *nafs muthmainnah*, namely a calm and peaceful soul.

## 4) *'Aql*

According to Al-Gazālī, the term *'aql* (reason) has various meanings depending on the context of its use. In one sense, reason is understood as knowledge of the essence of something, namely the nature of knowledge that resides in the heart. In another sense, reason refers to the subtle aspect of the heart that functions as a place where knowledge resides. Thus, reason can refer to both the nature of knowledge and the subject who has knowledge. Al-Gazālī also links this understanding to a hadith that states that the first creature created by Allah was reason. Because knowledge is not an entity that can stand alone as a creature, then what is meant is a place that is able to receive and bring knowledge, namely the mind itself. In the hadith, the mind is described as a creature that is able to respond to God's commands, showing that the mind has an important position as a means of receiving revelation and divine guidance. Al-Gazālī, in *Iḥya' 'Ulūmuddin*, quotes a well-known prophetic tradition to emphasize the significance of reason:

إِنَّ أَوَّلَ مَا خَلَقَ اللَّهُ الْعَقْلَ، فَقَالَ لَهُ: أَقْبِلْ، فَأَقْبَلَ، ثُمَّ قَالَ لَهُ: أَدْبِرْ، فَأَدْبَرَ، فَقَالَ: وَعِزَّتِي وَجَلَالِي مَا خَلَقْتُ خَلْقًا أَكْرَمَ عَلَيَّ مِنْكَ

Indeed, the first thing God created was the intellect. He said to it: 'Come forward,' and it came forward. Then He said: 'Go back,' and it went back. Then He said: 'By My Might and Glory, I have not created anything more noble to Me than you.

This narration signifies the high spiritual status of reason *('aql)* in Islamic thought. Al-Gazālī interprets this not as the creation of a physical entity, but the bestowal of divine trust upon the human capacity to understand, choose, and respond. For Al-Gazālī, the intellect is honored precisely because it enables the reception and interpretation of revelation, placing it at the heart of moral accountability.

b.   Character Components in Al-Gazālī's

According to Imam Al-Gazālī, morals or character are the result of habituation of the soul and purification of the heart, not just external behavior.  In his books, such as *Ihyā' Ulūm al-Dīn and Mi'yār al-'Ilm*, he explains that morals are strong traits *(malakah)* that are embedded in the soul, which causes actions that are easily carried out without consideration. He describes character education with the term *"akhlaq"*, which consists of two main aspects: good morals *(al-khuluq al hasan)* and bad morals *(al-khuluq as-sayyi)*. He emphasizes that training and habituation appropriate to a person's stage of mental development can shape morals. The following are the main components of character according to Al-Gazālī: First, characters that should be avoided include: (1) Arrogance and *'Ujub*. Arrogance and *'ujub* are very despicable mental illnesses in Islam. According to Al-Gazālī, Allah does not like servants who are arrogant, and instead loves those who are humble and grateful. Only Allah knows which of His servants are arrogant or grateful. In Al-Gazālī's view (quoted by Al-Zubaidi), arrogance can drag someone to hell because it is basically a form of inner lies. Meanwhile, the trait of *'ujub* makes someone feel the most correct and superior. These two traits are considered spiritual disorders that damage the purity of the soul.[19] (2) *Nifaq*. According to Al-Gazālī, *nifaq* is a major sin. He describes a hypocrite as a person whose words sound good, but whose actions are bad and whose morals are corrupt. Hypocrites often appear to be performing worship such as prayer, but in fact do not do it sincerely. They are the ones who, according to Al-Gazālī, are the cause of the decline in morals and the spread of corruption in society.

Second, characters that should be carried out: (1) Sincerity. Sincerity means doing good deeds solely for Allah, based on the right purpose and pure intention. The intention comes from the heart, as an inner drive born from knowledge and awareness. As emphasized by Al-Gazālī in *Ayyuha al-Walad*:

$$\text{إِنَّ النِّيَّةَ أَصْلُ الْعِبَادَةِ، وَالإِخْلَاصُ رُوحُهَا}$$

Intention is the root of worship, and sincerity is its soul.

This shows that without a sincere inner purpose, outward acts lose their value. Al-Gazālī emphasizes that education must aim to instill sincerity in every action, particularly in moral development.In practice, sincerity includes three main elements: the existence of intention, purification of purpose, and honesty in its implementation. (2) Patience and Gratitude. Al-Gazālī divides faith into two main attitudes: patience and gratitude. Patience

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[19]Abu Hamid Muhammad Al-Gazālī, *Bidayatul Hidayah Ethika Kehidupan*, Terj. Oleh A. Mudjab Mahali (Yogyakarta: BPFE, 1984): 195.

is interpreted as the strength of the soul to restrain the urges of lust for the sake of obedience to Allah. This trait is only possessed by humans, because angels do not have lust, while animals are completely controlled by lust. In the Qur'an, patience is mentioned dozens of times showing its importance in spiritual life.

Gratitude, according to Al-Gazālī, is a high spiritual level, even more sublime than patience, fear *(khauf)*, and asceticism. He said that gratitude consists of three main elements: first, understanding, namely being aware of the blessings and who gave them; second, a state of mind in the form of happiness towards the Giver of the blessings; and third, real action, namely using the blessings for good, not for sin. (3) *Shidiq*. Al-Gazālī groups honesty *(ṣidq)* into six forms: honesty in speech, intention, determination, keeping promises, actions, and in practicing religious teachings. This trait is one of the main characters of the Prophet Muhammad. Although it seems simple, honesty is difficult to realize because various temptations and pressures often make a person deviate from an honest attitude.

Al-Gazālī argued that true character is acquired through the process of controlling lust and cultivating divine qualities in a person. The first step to cleanse the soul from negative tendencies such as arrogance, envy, and greed is to control lust. After that, the heart can only be filled with noble values such as sincerity, patience, humility, and gratitude. This process is part of spiritual education which aims to build individuals who are not only moral in appearance, but also have inner integrity that is in harmony with divine values. Al-Gazālī explains in *Iḥya' 'Ulūmuddin*:

$$مَنْ لَمْ يُزَكِّ نَفْسَهُ، فَعِلْمُهُ عَلَيْهِ لاَ لَهُ$$

Whoever does not purify his soul, then his knowledge will be against him, not for him.

This illustrates Al-Gazālī's conviction that knowledge without spiritual cleansing becomes dangerous. Education, then, is not just to inform but to transform the soul.Therefore, theoretical moral teaching is not enough to build character; instead, continuous and gradual development of the soul is needed to achieve it.

According to Al-Gazālī, the main purpose of education is not merely to provide knowledge or improve intellectual abilities; more than that, education must be directed to purify the soul *(tazkiyatun nafs)* and direct people towards ma'rifatullah, or deep knowledge of Allah. According to Al-Gazālī, the main purpose of education is to form a complete human being.As stated by Al-Gazālī in *Iḥya' 'Ulūmuddin*:

$$أَشْرَفُ الْعُلُومِ عِلْمُ الْمَعْرِفَةِ بِاللَّهِ، وَهُوَ الْمَقْصُودُ بِكُلِّ عِلْمٍ$$

The noblest of all knowledge is the knowledge of God, and it is the ultimate aim of all sciences.

For Al-Gazālī, all education must lead to a stronger connection with God. Without this, knowledge loses its sacred direction. The spiritual process called *tazkiyatun nafs* involves cleansing the soul from diseases of the heart such as *riya'*, arrogance, *hasad, ujub,* and excessive worldly love. According to Al-Gazālī, human knowledge and deeds will lose their original value before Allah if their hearts are filled with despicable traits. Therefore,

good education must be able to touch the inner aspects of students, give them awareness, and encourage them to perform *murāqabah* (being aware of Allah's supervision), *muḥāsabah* (moral introspection), and *mujahadah* (struggle against lusts).

Furthermore, after the soul is purified, the educational process will reach its peak in *ma'rifatullah*, which is the true recognition of Allah. According to Al-Gazālī, the highest knowledge is the knowledge of Allah, and every other branch of knowledge should actually produce a greater awareness of the existence and greatness of Allah. In this case, *ma'rifatullah* is a profound spiritual experience, not just theoretical or conceptual. It is an experience in which a servant feels the presence of God in every aspect of his life. Al-Gazālī said that education that does not direct students to Allah loses its essence and is spiritually dry.

The education system is greatly influenced by this orientation. In this situation, teachers function not only as instructors *(mu'allim)*, but also as *murabbi* or spiritual guides and spiritual guides who help students in the process of *tazkiyah* and *ma'rifah*. Lessons are also delivered in a way that combines knowledge, deeds, and spiritual awareness, so that they are not separated from moral principles and God. Moral education is now more than just ideas about ethics; it is now instilled through habits of worship, role models, dhikr, contemplation, and ongoing spiritual training.

Thus, according to Al-Gazālī, the orientation of education aims to produce individuals who not only have knowledge, but also know God, love Him, and truly submit to Him. Education that does not contain elements of *tazkiyatun nafs* and *ma'rifatullah* will ultimately only produce intelligence that may be detrimental if not guided by spiritual light. This is what makes Al-Gazālī's thoughts very relevant in modern character education, especially in programs such as the *Merdeka* Curriculum, which emphasizes the development of holistic competencies, meaningful learning, and the enhancement of human and spiritual values.

## 3. The Relevance of Al-Gazālī's Thoughts to the Moral Crisis in the Digital Era

Al-Gazālī's concept of humans includes three main elements: reason, desire, and heart. All three must be balanced in order to create humans with noble morals. He emphasized the importance of spiritual education in controlling excessive lustful urges—something that is now greatly stimulated by advances in digital technology and virtual consumer culture.[20]

The digital era is characterized by openness of information, speed of communication, and unlimited social interaction. However, this progress brings serious challenges to moral values. Some striking forms of moral crisis include: *First*, disinformation and hoaxes that damage social trust.[21] *Second,* aggressive digital behavior, such as cyberbullying and hate speech. *Third,* Addiction to social media that causes the degradation of empathy and spirituality.[22]

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[20]Muqayyidin, "Etika Sufistik Al-Gazālī Dalam Penguatan Moral Di Era Disrupsi Digital."

[21]Arifin Zainal, "Literasi Digital Dan Krisis Moral Di Kalangan Remaja," *Jurnal Pendidikan Dan Kebudayaan* 6, no. 2 (2021): 122–34.

[22]Rahmawati, "Kecanduan Media Sosial Dan Degradasi Nilai-Nilai Moral."

This phenomenon arises due to weak self-control and the loss of awareness of transcendental values in digital interactions. The virtual world tends to eliminate the sense of shame, fear of sin, and divine supervision emphasized by Al-Gazālī.

Al-Gazālī's thoughts on moral education are very relevant to answer moral challenges in the digital era. For Al-Gazālī, moral education is not only normative, but also a deep inner development through worship, dhikr, and self-introspection. This approach is important in dealing with contemporary symptoms such as digital narcissism, identity crisis, and the loss of meaning in life among the younger generation.[23] Al-Gazālī's moral values also encourage the positive use of digital media, both for preaching and character development. His thoughts can be used as a framework for building digital ethics in schools, families, and public spaces, with an approach that is transformative and contemplative, not merely legalistic.

The following is the relevance of Al-Gazālī's ethical values in the context of the digital world: First, *sidq* (Honesty), Al-Gazālī emphasized that honesty is the main foundation of all virtues, while lying is the beginning of the destruction of morals. In the digital era, honesty is greatly tested by the rampant hoaxes, misinformation, and false images on social media. The value of sidq is very important to form an honest, authentic, and responsible digital personality.

Second, *amanah* (Moral Responsibility), In *Bidayah al-Hidayah*, Al-Gazālī explains that amanah does not only concern the entrustment of objects, but also includes guarding the tongue and behavior. In the digital world, this value is translated as responsibility in disseminating information, maintaining privacy, and respecting the copyright and data of others.

Third, *tazkiyatun nafs* (Purification of the Soul), Al-Gazālī views *tazkiyah* as a process of cleansing the soul from despicable traits such as *ujub* (arrogance), *riya'* (showing off), and *hasad* (jealousy). These traits often appear in social media which often become an arena for image building and unhealthy competition. *Tazkiyatun nafs* is relevant as a basis for forming ethical and spiritual awareness in digital interactions.

Fourth, *Khalwat* and Self-Reflection, In *al-Munqidz min al-Dhalal*, Al-Gazālī emphasizes the importance of *khalwat* or solitude to achieve clarity of heart. In the modern context, this can be applied through a digital detox—taking time away from digital devices for self-reflection, purification of the heart, and restoration of spiritual focus.[24]

Al-Gazālī's theories on moral education have a great influence on the character of the modern computer generation. Role modelling and habituation are two approaches emphasized by Al-Gazālī. He argued that good habits, supported by teachers and parents, must be continuously instilled to instill morality. Given their great influence on the behavior of the younger generation, this role modelling should be extended to public figures and influencers who are moral in the internet era.

In addition, the idea of *mujahadah al-nafs*, or struggle against the passions, taught by Al-Gazālī, is very important in the digital world filled with the desire for worldly

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[23]Ahmad Budi, "Revitalisasi Pendidikan Akhlak Berbasis Tasawuf Di Era Teknologi," *Jurnal Pendidikan Islam* 7, no. 1 (2020): 65–80.

[24]Dedi Suryadi, "Detoks Digital Dalam Perspektif Pendidikan Spiritual," *Jurnal Tarbiyatuna* 6, no. 2 (2023): 129.

pleasures. The younger generation must be able to control themselves in order to continue to interact morally on the internet because they are often exposed to various digital content. This self-control is an important part of moral education which is intended to build a spiritually strong personality. In addition, Al-Gazālī's ideas can be linked to Islamic digital ethics. The moral education taught by Al-Gazālī can serve as a strong foundation for building the character of a modern generation that is wise, prudent, and has noble morals, including avoiding spreading hoaxes, protecting the privacy of others, and avoiding hate speech.

In his works, such as *Ihya' Ulum al-Din* and *al-Munqidz min al-Dhalal*, Al-Gazālī pays great attention to the inner dimension of humans as the basis of morality. In this framework, Al-Gazālī not only emphasizes the importance of outer ethics, but also inner integrity, which is formed through *riyadhah al-nafs* (soul training), *muraqabah* (awareness of Allah's supervision), and *muhasabah* (introspection).

It is not only technology that causes moral crisis in the modern era, but also the lack of a strong moral foundation. According to Al-Gazālī, the heart is the "king" of all body parts. All human behavior is damaged if the heart is damaged. In the digital world, this is shown by the lack of ethical filters when interacting on social media, accessing online content, or sharing data. In addition, Al-Gazālī emphasizes the idea of *al-khawf*, which means fear of Allah, and *al-raja'*, which means hope in His mercy, as the driving force of moral behavior. In a digital culture that emphasizes freedom without responsibility, these two things no longer exist. Therefore, education based on fear of Allah and hope for the goodness of the hereafter is very important to build strong morals amidst the free flow of information.

By encouraging the strengthening of *haya'*, or shame, Al-Gazālī's thoughts are also relevant in building a healthy digital culture. Not only does it embarrass humans, but also Allah. To avoid vulgar content, unethical speech, and digital exhibitionist behavior, this culture is very important. In addition, the application of Al-Gazālī's moral values must be structural and not only individual. Therefore, families, countries, and schools must create a safe and educational digital ecosystem. Digital literacy based on Islamic ethics can be used as an additional curriculum. This will combine digital skills with the principles of modern *muamalah fiqh*.

## 4. Implementation of Spirituality-Based Character Education

Spirituality encourages the strengthening of transcendental values derived from religious teachings, especially faith, sincerity, and moral responsibility towards God and fellow human beings.[25] In Islamic education, spirituality also includes the process of purifying the heart *(tazkiyatun nafs)*, which drives daily behavior.

The crisis of values such as materialism, hedonism, and individualism is increasing in today's digital era. Spirituality-based character education offers a solution to this situation because it helps balance emotions and thoughts with awareness of God. According to Hasan, spirituality in education functions as an internal fortress that directs

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[25]Zubaedi, *Desain Pendidikan Karakter* (Jakarta: Kencana, 2020). 88

students to universal moral values such as truth, empathy, and responsibility.[26] As a result, education not only makes people smart but also makes them careful and moral.

To implement spiritual character education in educational institutions, the curriculum must be designed to integrate spiritual education into all subjects, especially religious and moral education. For example, math teachers can worship God by teaching students the values of accuracy and honesty. Schools must promote spiritual habits, such as reciting prayers together, praying in congregation, morning dhikr, and the "Friday blessing" program that increases students' social awareness. One way to internalize spiritual values in everyday life is through these activities. The role models of educators and teachers are very important. Teachers who have morality and spiritual closeness will be more easily accepted and imitated by their students. Only when teachers ensure consistency between students' words and actions can true character education occur.

In the midst of the rapid flow of information, students need to be equipped with value-based digital literacy. The use of technology must be accompanied by moral responsibility through education on media ethics, privacy protection, and rejection of hate speech. This approach must be spiritual, not just normative. In addition, collaboration between families and schools is very important. Activities such as spiritual parenting, family study groups, and the "Inspiring Fathers and Mothers" program can help foster character at home. With parental participation, spiritual education is more permanent and sustainable.[27] Spirituality-based character education is an important approach that emphasizes the formation of students' personalities through the application of faith values, moral awareness, and transcendental connections with God within themselves. In Islam, spirituality is not only individualistic; instead, it must be manifested in actions and social relationships. According to Al-Gazālī, education is the main way to purify the soul *(tazkiyatun nafs)* and help people reach the *maqam akhlaq karimah*, or level of noble morals.

Spirituality is an important foundation in dealing with the negative effects of information globalization and value disruption in the digital era. Amidst the flow of digital content that often normalizes pornography, extreme consumerism, verbal violence, and instant culture, students are vulnerable to experiencing moral emptiness and spiritual disorientation. Therefore, character education based on spirituality is very important and very necessary.

a.   Strengthening the Theological Foundation in the Curriculum

The implementation of spiritual character education must begin with strengthening the theological foundation in the curriculum. The Islamic Religious Education (PAI) curriculum must go beyond the teaching of fiqh and tauhid cognitively, and enter into the formation of a sense of ihsan, namely the awareness that Allah always watches over all human actions. In the hadith of Gabriel it is stated that ihsan is *"An ta'budallāha ka'annaka tarāh, fa'in lam takun tarāh fa'innahu yarāka"* (You worship Allah as if you see Him, and if you are unable to see Him, then be sure that He sees you).

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[26]Basri, "Spiritualitas Sebagai Fondasi Pendidikan Karakter."

[27]Fauzan, "Peran Orang Tua Dalam Penguatan Karakter Spiritualitas Anak," *Parenting Islami* 2, no. 1 (2023): 38.

b.  Internal Strategy in the Learning Process

Spiritual education cannot succeed without learning that touches on the affective and self-reflective aspects of students. Some strategies that can be applied include: One key strategy is reflective learning, where students are given structured opportunities to contemplate the meaning of life, their purpose of existence, and their responsibility as caliphs on earth. This encourages them to internalize spiritual values and to connect intellectual lessons with personal experience.

Another approach is the use of stories and role models. Teachers can present the lives of pious Islamic figures scholars, prophets, or saints whose biographies show the integration of knowledge, faith, and righteous action. These narratives inspire students to emulate positive behaviors grounded in spiritual ethics.

Additionally, collective spiritual activities provide experiential reinforcement of values This statement aligns with the principle of affective and reflective learning, where students are guided not only to think but to feel, reflect, and spiritually grow. Thus, internal strategies such as reflective inquiry and communal worship are necessary to ensure that knowledge transforms the soul, not just informs the intellect.

c.  Character Building Through Habits and Environment

Al-Gazālī emphasized the importance of habits *(ta'wid)* and an environment that supports character building. Therefore, schools need to create a touching spiritual climate. Therefore, schools need to create a meaningful and consistent spiritual climate that fosters the internalization of moral values. One way to achieve this is by designing a visual environment that continuously reminds students of ethical and religious teachings for example, displaying posters with Qur'anic verses and messages of good character in classrooms and hallways. Such visual reinforcement plays a subtle yet powerful role in shaping students' perceptions and daily attitudes.

Beyond visual cues, daily spiritual routines also serve as essential anchors. Programs like "Morning Tadarus" conducted before class hours help orient students' minds and hearts toward divine awareness from the start of the day. Similarly, the "Salam-Sapa-Senyum" culture promotes a positive and respectful school atmosphere rooted in Islamic manners.

Furthermore, spiritual character must also be nurtured through extracurricular development. Activities such as "Spiritual Camp," the "Friday Shalawat Movement," and "One Day One Father" provide experiential learning contexts that are both engaging and reflective. These programs allow students to feel emotionally and spiritually connected to their faith outside the formal classroom, thus reinforcing character formation through positive habit and communal practice.

d.  Comprehensive Evaluation of Spiritual Character

Assessment in spiritual education is not enough to be done through behavioral observation, but requires a portfolio approach and student reflection. Students can be asked to write a daily moral journal, an Islamic life project, or make a campaign video of ethical values on social media. This assessment will be more comprehensive because it describes spiritual growth gradually and continuously.

e.  The Role of Teachers as Role Models and *Murabbi*

Al-Gazālī in *Ihya' Ulum al-Din* stated that a teacher is not only a transferor of knowledge, but also an educator of the soul. Therefore, the implementation of spirituality-based character education is highly dependent on the figure of a teacher who has high spiritual and moral integrity. Teachers must be figures who are consistent between words and deeds, who show patience, compassion, and submission to Allah in their daily lives.

f.  Family-School-Community Synergy

The success of spiritual character education also depends on the active involvement of parents and the community. At home, parents must be role models who demonstrate real spiritual values such as honesty, patience, and piety. Schools can facilitate activities such as: One effective program is the Spiritual Parenting Program, which offers structured training sessions for parents to enhance their role in supporting their children's spiritual development. In addition, schools can initiate a monthly Spiritual Silaturahmi Forum that brings together teachers, students, and parents to discuss religious values and reinforce ethical behavior through collective reflection. Furthermore, the School Youth Preaching Movement empowers students to serve as moral agents in their communities, encouraging them to actively embody and share spiritual values in their daily social interactions.

g.  Utilization of Media and Technology for Spirituality

Although digital media is often considered a cause of moral degradation, media can also be used as a tool for preaching and spiritual formation of students. Schools can develop: first, Islamic Podcasts or vlogs for students, as a means of creative preaching and moral reflection. second, the "Media Ethics" digital campaign, to encourage digital literacy based on Islamic values. third, Self-control applications, which help students monitor gadget usage time and remind them of prayer schedules.

With these various approaches, spirituality-based character education will be more than just an additional program; it will become the spirit of education itself. Only by balancing cognitive, affective, and spiritual aspects harmoniously, Islamic education is able to produce perfect human beings who are knowledgeable, moral, and wise in facing the challenges of the times.

The contribution of this paper lies in its effort to link Al-Gazālī's classical concepts of spiritual purification with modern digital realities. It implies that technology, if used consciously and ethically, can serve as a tool for nurturing students' inner awareness and moral sensitivity. In practical terms, educators are encouraged to design digital initiatives that align with Islamic ethical principles, transforming the learning environment into a medium for both cognitive excellence and spiritual character formation.

## D.  CONCLUSIONS

Through the concept of purifying the soul, balancing reason and desire, and emphasizing the ethics of knowledge and a *zuhd* attitude towards the world. The relevance of this thinking is very important in facing various moral challenges such as hoaxes, hate speech, and consumer behavior on social media. The implementation of spirituality-based character education is a strategic solution to form a young generation

that has moral and spiritual resilience. By integrating spiritual values into the curriculum, preparing teachers as digital spiritual educators, involving families, and utilizing technology wisely for education and preaching, spirituality-based character education is able to form individuals who are aware and responsible in using digital technology. Overall, the combination of Al-Gazālī's thoughts and spirituality-based character education is an effective approach to facing moral challenges in the digital era and building a more ethical and dignified society. However, this study is not without its limitations. It is primarily conceptual and focuses on the theoretical exploration of Al-Gazālī's thoughts without direct empirical validation in current educational contexts. As such, the effectiveness of spirituality-based character education rooted in Al-Gazālī's framework has yet to be measured through systematic implementation and assessment in schools. Future research is encouraged to apply this model in real educational settings, develop practical modules based on these values, and evaluate their impact on students' moral behavior, especially in digital environments.

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