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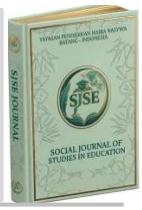

The Nature of Human Beings in Al Ghazali's Thought and Its Implications on Character Education

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Abstract

This research aims to examine the concept of human nature in the perspective of Imam al-Ghazali's thought and its implications for character education. This research uses a qualitative approach with the method used is literature research. In al-Ghazali's view, humans consist of physical and spiritual elements. Al-Ghazali emphasizes the dominance of spiritual aspects such as qalb, spirit, aql, and nafs as the core of humanity that determines the direction of human life Character education according to Al-Ghazali not only aims to transfer knowledge, but also to form noble morals through purification of the soul (tazkiyatun nafs), spiritual approaches, and habituation of moral values from an early age. The implications of Al-Ghazali's thinking are very relevant to the goals of Indonesian national education as stated in the National Education System Law No. 20 of 2003, which emphasizes the formation of people of faith, piety, knowledge, and noble character. The contribution of this research is to provide theoretical and practical insights into the importance of integrating spiritual values in character education, so that it can be a foothold for the development of holistic education models that are in accordance with the challenges of the times. This research also shows that character education based on akhlakul karimah can be an effective solution in overcoming moral degradation among today's young generation.

Kata Kunci:
Al-Ghazali; Hakikat Manusia; Pendidikan Kkarakter

Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji konsep hakikat manusia dalam perspektif pemikiran Imam al-Ghazali serta implikasinya terhadap pendidikan karakter. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatuf dengan metode yang digunakan adalah studi kepustakaan (Literature research). Dalam pandangan al-Ghazali, manusia terdiri dari unsur jasmani dan rohani. Al-Ghazali menekankan dominasi terhadap aspek rohani seperti qalb, ruh, aql, dan nafs sebagai inti kemanusiaan yang menentukan arah hidup manusia Pendidikan karakter menurut Al-Ghazali tidak hanya bertujuan mentransfer pengetahuan, tetapi juga membentuk akhlak mulia melalui penyucian jiwa (tazkiyatun nafs), pendekatan spiritual, dan pembiasaan nilai-nilai moral sejak usia dini. Implikasi pemikiran Al-Ghazali sangat relevan dengan tujuan pendidikan nasional Indonesia sebagaimana tercantum dalam UU Sisdiknas No. 20 Tahun 2003, yang menekankan pembentukan manusia beriman, bertakwa, berilmu, dan berakhlak mulia. Kontribusi penelitian ini adalah memberikan wawasan teoretis dan praktis tentang pentingnya integrasi nilai-nilai spiritual dalam pendidikan karakter, sehingga dapat

menjadi pijakan bagi pengembangan model pendidikan holistik yang sesuai dengan tantangan zaman. Penelitian ini juga menunjukkan bahwa pendidikan karakter berbasis akhlakul karimah dapat menjadi solusi efektif dalam mengatasi degradasi moral di kalangan generasi muda saat ini.

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INTRODUCTION

Humans are the most perfect and best creatures that are equipped with intellect and are not given to animals or animals (Achruh et al., 2023). As Allah said in (Qs. At-tin; 4) لَقَدْ خَلَقْنَا الْإِنْسَانَ فِيْٓ اَحْسَنِ تَقْوِيْمٍ which means '*indeed, we have truly created man in the best form'*. The idea of human nature has been around since ancient times and continues to develop to this day, and in the current era, we have also encountered many studies that discuss the nature of humans. This knowledge of the nature of human beings is debated by some experts, because the knowledge they conclude about human beings comes from different perspectives. This difference occurs due to the epistimology of western philosophy and Islamic philosophy. Even among the figures of Islamic philosophy, such as Al-Kindi, Ar-Razi, Ibn Rushd, Ibn Sina, Ibn Miskawai, Muhammad Iqbal, and al-Ghazali. Differences in reviews and interpretations of human nature also occur. This, namely the difference in epistemological foundation, shows that the essence of human beings is something that always tries to formulate the basis of its postulates, so that it can be understood better existentially.

The nature of man in Islamic philosophy is a deep and complex theme, reflecting a holistic view of human existence as creatures created by Allah with specific purposes and responsibilities. Islamic philosophy emphasizes that humans are the caliphs on earth, which means they have the responsibility to protect and manage the universe wisely (Kholil, 2024). The concept of fitrah is also the key to understanding the nature of man, where every individual is born with the potential to know his God and do good. In Islamic philosophy, the Qur'an is the epistemic foundation used to study and formulate knowledge about the nature of man. The Qur'an features three technical key vocabulary for the depiction of human existence: *al-Insan*, *al-Basyar*and *al-Nas (Noryn et al., 2021)*. Understanding the nature of human beings must be taken seriously, because humans need to know their essence in its entirety. Alexis Carrel said that the chaos of understanding the nature of human beings can lead to the failure of scientific and technological efforts as well as social structures to provide happiness to humans in this modern era (Ulfah et al., 2024). Thus, the understanding of the nature of human beings in Islamic philosophy includes not only ontological, but also ethical and spiritual aspects, which are the basis for social behavior and interaction in everyday life (Nasr, 2009). Imam al-Ghazali was a Muslim philosopher very influential not only in his time, but even in Indonesia until now. Al-ghazali offers a profound perspective on human nature involving both physical and spiritual dimensions. According to al-Ghazali, the essence of man lies in his soul (his spiritual aspect). In his view, humans not only function as biological beings but also as spiritual beings who have a purpose in life, namely, to achieve true happiness both in this world and the hereafter by getting closer to Allah SWT (taqarrub ilallah) through the mastery of knowledge and good moral practices.

Understanding the nature of human beings well certainly makes us avoid the

paradox that we are facing today, namely, moral degradation and lack of good behavior or moral degradation in adolescents, especially in terms of education because this education determines our future. Various criminal acts are often encountered, both in the school environment and outside the school, such as cases of bullying, cheating, and others. And we often find it in various mass media such as television shows, TikTok, Instagram, newspapers or other mass media. al-Ghazali in his thought emphasized that education plays an important role in the formation of human character. Education aims not only to transfer knowledge but also to form noble morals through a holistic approach, covering moral, spiritual, and intellectual aspects. al-Ghazali's thoughts on morality are expressed in his work *Ayyuhal Walad*. As Stated (Amiruddin Hadi Wibowo) in his research *"The Relevance of Character Education in the Perspective of Al-Ghazali's Philosophy"* The concept of character education offered by Imam al-Ghazali in the Book *of Ayyuhal Walad* is more about the attitude of how the character of a Muslim or a servant behaves, both to God, oneself, others and the surrounding environment.

By understanding the concept of human nature above, the author is interested in writing the essence of human beings according to al-Ghazali's thought, as well as its application to character education. The hope is that we as humans can actualize our humanity in various lives so that we can achieve happiness in this world and the hereafter. And it can be found the main points as a foundation and reference in the development of education as expected by Islam. Namely to form a Muslim person who is close to perfection by internalizing character education based on moral karimah.

METHODS

This research uses a qualitative approach, because this research aims to explore, describe, and analyze the concept of human essence in al-Ghazali's thought in depth, as well as explore its implications for character education. In this context, the research does not only focus on numbers or statistical data, but rather emphasizes on the interpretation of classical texts and relevant literature. The design of this research is a literature study *(Literature research)*, According to J. Supranto, literature studies are studies that are conducted by searching for data or research information through reading scientific journals, reference books and publication materials available in libraries (Ruslan, 2017). The design of literature studies is very appropriate because the main source of data comes from primary documents such as books written by al-Ghazali (Ihya Ulumuddin, Misykah Al-anwar, Ayyuhal Walad, etc.) and secondary sources in the form of journals, books, and scientific articles that discuss Al-Ghazali's thought. This approach allows researchers to produce comprehensive descriptions and analyses, so as to answer research questions holistically.

The author in this case does this by collecting data from written sources, both books, journals or related scientific papers. From the search results, the researcher collected a number of articles, books, and journals related to the research topic which were then analyzed *(content analysis)*, processed and presented in the form of conclusions or research results. This technique was chosen because it allows researchers to connect al-Ghazali's thought with the context of modern character education logically and argumentatively. Thus, this method is considered the most appropriate to bridge Al-Ghazali's philosophical theory with the current relevant character education practices.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Biografy of Imam Al-Ghazali

The full name of Imam al-Ghazali is Abu Hamid Muhammad bin Muhammad bin Muhammad al-Ghazali at-Thusi, but in the Islamic world he is better known as al-Ghazali only (Jahja, 1996), sometimes called him al-Ghazzali (with two "Z's") which means "a spinner" because his father was a weaver (wool craftsman). In addition, Imam al-Ghazali is also popular as the *Hujjatul Islam*, Zainuddin at-Tusi (Religious Decorator). Al-Ghazali was a well-known Islamic philosopher, Islamic theologian, educator, and medieval Sufi. Al-Ghazali was born in 450 H/1059 AD in the village of Ghazale, a city of Thus located in the Khurasan region of Persia (now Iran), which was a poor city due to a long drought. Al-Ghazali died on Monday the 14th of Jumadil Akhir 505 H or 19 December 1111 AD at the age of 55 and was buried in Thaburan, the region of Thus.

The condition of his hometown with a drought crisis certainly had an impact on the level of welfare of the al-Ghazali family. He was born into a simple, even poor, family. Al-Ghazali's father, only worked as a wool craftsman whose income was uncertain. However, al-Ghazali's father was known as a pious figure, never begging, and having a heroic nature. His father only supported his family from wool handicrafts sold in the thus market. On the other hand, the father often uses his free time after spinning wool to learn from religious people or can be known for his educational literacy. His father always prayed that he would be blessed with pious descendants and experts in preaching. Some historians believe that al-Ghazali and his brother, Abu Al-Futuh Ahmad, were the answers to the prayers that his father always prayed. His two sons are also known as scholars whose knowledge is recognized from generation to generation (Fikri, 2022).

We can also see the spirit of al-Ghazali's father in terms of education when his father was in a critical condition before he died, where his father entrusted al-Ghazali to a friend named Ahmad bin Muhammad Ar-Razakani who was a Sufi to be educated and guided. He also gave the rest of the money he had to his friend to use to support his educational needs. After the money he gave was gone, his father's friend was no longer able to take care of him. After that, al-Ghazali was directed by his father's friend to study at the madrasah. While studying with his father's friend, al-Ghazali learned various fields of knowledge, especially Fiqh.

After studying fiqh in his hometown, al-Ghazali went on a pilgrimage to Jurjan, a city in Persia located between the cities of Tabristan and Naisabur. There al-Ghazali deepened and expanded his fiqh knowledge to a fakih imam named Abu al-Qasim Isma'il bin Mus'idah al-Isma'iliy or better known as Imam Abu Nasr al-Isma'iliy (Sahar, 2012). In addition, al-Ghazali also studied the science of tasawwuf and the science of language, namely, Arabic and Persian (Mukarromah et al., 2022). Subsequently, he returned to Thus and stayed for 3 years. Then he went to Naisabur to learn the science of Sufism, the science of debate, Mantiq, Philosophy, and the science of kalam from Al-juwaini or better known as Imam Haraiman, then Imam Haramain. In the hands of Imam Haramain, al-Ghazali developed quite rapidly and became one of the prominent disciples, because he was considered to have high intellectual ability and competence, he was made an assistant to Imam Haramain. He was even then entrusted to replace the teacher to teach or preach when Imam Haramin was unable to fill the assembly. In addition to studying with Imam Haramain, he also studied hadith from many hadith scholars, such as Abu Sahal Muhammad bin Ahmad al-Hafsi al-Marwaziy and Abu al-Fath Nasr bin Ali bin Ahmad

al-Hakimi at-Thusi.

Al-Ghazali left Naisabur to Mu'askar, a place frequented by famous scholars. He was often involved in debates with scholars. They greatly admired al-Ghazali for his prowess in science. From then on, he became very famous. He taught at Nidhamiyah University in 484 AH. He was appointed rector for four years at the age of 34. After becoming rector, he began his life as a servant of Allah who was truly able to restrain his lust. He finally died at the age of 55 in 505 AH.

The Essence of Human Perspective Al-Ghazali

Facts of Arabic origin *al-haqiqat*, which means truth and essence (Hakim, 2004). Humans in the great Indonesian dictionary (KBBI) are defined as beings who are intelligent (capable of dominate other beings). The concept of man, according to al-Ghazali, is no different from the concept of Islamic teachings, because his thinking is based on the Qur'an and the Sunnah. From the point of view of Islamic educational philosophy, the best way to recognize the essence of human beings is through the explanation of the creator of it, namely Allah SWT, as stated in the holy book of the Quran. According to Imam al-Ghazali, humans are the creation of Allah SWT which is composed of physical and spiritual elements, this is in accordance with (QS. Al-Shaad verses 71-72). Between the two elements, al-Ghazali emphasizes more on humans to dominate using spiritual elements so that humans live according to their nature. It is this spiritual element that distinguishes man from other creatures. Therefore, human beings are given the burden of trust and are also given the freedom and responsibility to own and maintain their divine values. If the physical element is more dominant than the spiritual element, then human beings will lose their essence as human beings.

According to al-Ghazali, the spiritual aspects of human beings include *Al-Qalb*, *Al-Ruh*, *Al-nafs* and *Al-nafs*. These four aspects are the driving force in humans (Hasanah, 2016). Abul Quasem emphasized that human beings according to al-Ghazali are;

1. Al-Qalb

   Imam al-Ghazali gave two meanings or two meanings in this phrase *qalb* (heart). The first meaning is *physical al-qalb*, which is flesh in the shape of a banana heart in the left chest cavity and contains thick black blood. *This al-qalb* means that it is very related to medical science and not much to do with religion and humanity, because animals and the dead also have this *qalb*. The second meaning *of al-qalb* which means *luthf rabbani ruhiy* (spiritual in nature). *This qalb* is the tool to know the essence of something and in this *qalb* it is also the one that can capture something that cannot be captured by imagination.

2. Al-Ruh

   The Spirit is the place of mahabbah to Allah. According to Quraish Shihab, it is with this spirit that Allah created man to be alive, human life grows and develops because of the divine light that we call *Hubb* or Love. According to al-Ghazali, the spirit in psychological substance is lathifah (something abstract, invisible) that has the ability to think, remember, and know. Meanwhile, the spirit as a spiritual substance in the perspective of al-Ghazali is *al qudrah al ilahiyyah or divine power that comes from the realm of God's affairs (alam al amr) and not from the realm of creation*

(alam al khalq). Because it is not physical and is not limited by space and time.

According to al-Ghazali in his book *Misykah Al-Anwar,* humans have certain levels of spiritual spirits. Among them;

a. *The sense spirit* is the spirit that receives something from the five senses. This spirit is the origin and beginning of the spirit of living beings, therefore all living beings become alive.
b. *An imaginary spirit* is a spirit that records events or information and then stores it to be conveyed to the *spirit of aqli* when it is needed.
c. *The spirit of aqli,* is a spirit that is able to absorb meanings beyond the senses and imagination. This spirit is also not specifically found in babies or animals.
d. *The spirit of the thinker* is a spirit that takes the knowledge of aqli purely. Then it is united in the form of ta'lifat (series) and izdiwijat (duplication), then it is deduced into valuable knowledge and developed.
e. *The holy prophetic spirit* is a spirit that is open from the supernatural and the laws of the hereafter, as well as knowledge of the kingdom of heaven and earth, and even the knowledge of rabbani (divinity).

3. Al-Aql

According to al-Ghazali *Al-aql* (intellect) is knowledge of the basis of all things. The Essence of Something. Reason is likened to the nature of knowledge that resides in the soul. The understanding of reason at this first level is emphasized on science and its nature. Reason in the second sense is the intellect that acquires knowledge itself. The intellect is none other than a soul that is gentle and has divine qualities (Sholihin, 2003). As in the book *Miskat al-Anwar-nya,* Al-Ghazali explained; Reason is sometimes directed to the nature of a knowledgeable person, and sometimes to the place of knowledge, that is, to the one who knows (Al-Ghazali, 1994). Etymologically, reason means a bond *(Al-Ribath)* Hold *(Al-Hajr),* prohibit (Al-Nahy), and prevent *(Al-Man'u).* Based on the meaning of this language, it means that the so-called intelligent people are those who are able to restrain and bind lust.

4. An-Nafs

According to al-Ghazali *al-nafs* is distinguished in two senses. In the first sense, *al-nafs* is considered as the power of lust that has the properties *of gadlabiyah* and *syahwaniyah*. *Gadlabiyah* is the loss of consciousness of reason caused by the incitement of satan. Therefore, al-Ghazali said a person who is emotional or angry means that the person is played with by the devil, just like a ball is played with by children. whereas, *Syahwaniyah* has the ability to induce himself in all pleasant aspects. In the second sense, *al-nafs* is interpreted as a praiseworthy and subtle spiritual soul which is the essence of man.

According to al-Ghazali's perspective above, *nafs* As a bodily substance, it has the ability to encourage pleasurable outward actions. The psychological understanding of "lust", which tends to be evil and potentially ignores the considerations of reason and conscience, seems to be in line with this negative tendency. On the other hand, lust as a spiritual substance is more likely to push towards good and civilized outward behavior. There are several levels of the situation *nafs. First, Nafs Anger.* Namely nafs who likes to invite and encourage evil. In other words, this lust tends to a

biological character, which is more inclined to the pleasures of lust which are actually forbidden by religion because they attract the heart to a despicable degree. This nafs belongs to everyone, both laymen and disbelievers. *Second, Nafs Lawwāmah.* That is, nafs who likes to reproach, or regret themselves. This lust is a source of misdirection because it obeys reason, sometimes it does not. This nafs is still possessed by every believer at the public level (mostly). *Third, Nafs Muṭma'innah.* Namely calm, calm, and peaceful nafs. It is the highest level of the series of soul strata, because at this level man is free from animalistic qualities and is full of divine light. This nafs is owned by the believers at the level of *khawāṣ* (special person) (Siraj, 2018).

From the four elements above in terms of metaphysics, it can be said that the meaning is the same and cannot be differentiated from one thing to another. They are spiritual, holy, have the ability to recognize and understand things, and are created by God with eternal nature. It is also the core of humanity, known by various names, such as *al-Lathifah al Ruhaniyah* or *al-Lathifah al-Rabbaniyyah*. The names of the four elements can change because they are caused by various human spirits. If lust can defeat the soul, it is called *lust*. If the soul can overcome lust, then it is called *reason*. If the cause is a sense of faith, then it is called the heart. If he truly knows God and performs sincere devotion, then it is called spirit.

Metaphorically, al-Ghazali describes the human soul as a mirror that shows the qualities of human beings in terms of good or evil personality. Good deeds will make the soul shine, glorious and bright, while evil deeds and vices of a person will make the state of his soul dark and not luminous. Al-Ghazali also explained that the essence of human beings as spiritual beings certainly has a purpose in life, namely, to achieve true happiness both in this world and the hereafter by getting closer to Allah SWT *(taqarrub ilallah)* through mastery of knowledge and good moral practices (Hayati & Sabariyah, 2024).

Implementation of Al-ghazali Thought in Character Education

In the modern era marked by technological advances and the globalization of values, the biggest challenge in the world of education lies not only in academic achievements, but in the formation of the character of students who are intact and have noble character. According to al-Ghazali, character education *(ta'dib)* It is not just a process of transmitting knowledge, but a spiritual effort to form a complete human being who has noble character and gets closer to Allah SWT. Al-Ghazali defines character education in the term morals. Morality is a state of the soul in which all actions can be easily performed without thinking and learning (Wibowo, 2020). Al-Ghazali divides morality into 2 parts, namely, al-*khuluq al-hasan* (good morals) and *al-khuluq al-sayyi'* (bad morals), in the sense that morals can be obtained through the learning process and can also be changed through the learning process, by encouraging the soul to do what is demanded by the morals in question (Hayati & Sabariyah, 2024). Therefore, al-Ghazali's thought prioritizes the elements of *spiritual* (His soul) is in the essence of man, as explained above. In the book *Ihya' Ulum al-Din*, al-Ghazali divides several concepts of character education, including;

1. Character Education Orientation

Character education must be oriented towards the highest spiritual goal: achieving happiness in this world and the hereafter through closeness to Allah SWT (Al-

Ghazali, 1900). As the statement "the basis of happiness in this world and the hereafter is knowledge.

2. Development Goals in Character Education

In Islamic education, one should be able to develop characters such as thinking, reading the Qur'an, muhasabah, remembering death, patience, gratitude, fear and hope, generosity, honesty, love, and others. In the book *of Ihya' Ulum al-din* the characters that can be developed for students are Tawakal, sincerity, Solidarity, Love of useful knowledge, Honesty, Simplicity, Gratitude, Gentleness and prioritizing purification of the soul and worship.

According to him, education is also not enough to equip humans with knowledge, but must be able to cleanse the soul, control lust, and instill virtue through the process of *Tazkiyatun nafs* and continuous practice (Roni et al., 2024). Al-Ghazali offers ways to educate children by example, practice, and habituation, as well as advice and suggestions as educational tools. The goal is to build children's personalities in accordance with the teachings of Islam. The formation of that personality takes place gradually and develops gradually, becoming perfect. If a child from a young age is accustomed to good values, then these morals will be permanently embedded and shape their personality until adulthood.

Implementation of Al-ghazali Thought in Character Education

Talking about character education does not mean discussing how the teachings are right or wrong. On the contrary, character education must teach children habits *(habituation)* about what is right and wrong so that they become aware of *(cognitive)* about what is right and wrong, feeling *(affective)* good values, and used to do so *(psychomotoric)* (Dirsa & Kusumawati, 2019).

According to the National Education System Law (Sisdiknas) Number 20 of 2003, the objectives of national education are;

> "The development of the potential of students to become human beings who believe and fear God Almighty, have noble character, are healthy, knowledgeable, capable, creative, independent, and become democratic and responsible citizens"

According to the meaning contained in the Law on the Objectives of Indonesian National Education is that the objectives of Indonesia's national education must be integrated, and Forming the whole Indonesian people, with the keywords of faith and piety, is the main goal. This is the same as al-Ghazali's view in the book *ayyuha al-walad* which emphasizes the importance of moral values that lead to the principle of integration of spirituality in educational goals. Character comes from noble values that morally shape a person's personality and are reflected in behavior (Setiawan, 2014). This is as expressed by Ki Hajar Dewantara, namely, *"Feel, Feel, Do"* (understand, feel, do). The meaning of this definition is that character education is a type of education and teaching that focuses on student behavior and student actions in applying character principles in daily life.

In the learning process, teachers are very closely related to the success of character education in schools because they are an important component and can even be considered as determinants of the success of the program. As a substitute for parents at school, teachers are figures that should be imitated by their students. Teachers have a

greater capacity to understand how to instill character values in their students. Teachers can be good role models for students, can guide students in developing social and moral skills, and be an inspiration to students (Fazlur et al., 2024).The implications of Al-Ghazali's thinking on education today certainly need additions, refinements, and changes to adapt it to advances in technology and the current education system. Therefore, character education focuses on the formation of individuals who are moral, knowledgeable, able to make decisions, and able to actively participate in building a life together, both at home, at school, and in the life of society, nation, and state.

CONCLUSION

The nature of man in the perspective of al-Ghazali's thought reflects a deep and holistic view of human existence as a creature created by Allah SWT. According to al-Ghazali, human beings consist of 2 elements, namely, the physical element and the rahani element. Al-Ghazali emphasizes the dominance of spiritual elements (al-qalb, al-ruh, al-nafs and al-nafs) over physical elements, as the core of humanity that determines the direction and quality of human life. In this case, human beings are understood not only as biological beings, but also as spiritual beings, who have a moral responsibility to achieve happiness in this world and the hereafter.

Al-Ghazali's thought made a significant contribution to the paradigm of character education, especially in the context of Islamic education. According to him, education is not just a process of knowledge transfer, but a process of forming noble morals that are oriented towards purification of the soul and a spiritual approach to God. Through his works such as Ihya Ulumuddin and Ayyuhal Walad, al-Ghazali emphasized that education should be directed to nurture a complete Muslim person: knowledgeable, faithful, moral, and responsible. The implication of al-Ghazali's thought on character education is to form people who have faith, piety, and noble character. This is very relevant to the objectives of Indonesia's national education as stated in the National Education System Law No. 20 of 2003.

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