



The Concept of Reason as the Controller of the Self and the Formation of Character in Islamic Education: A Conceptual Analysis Based on al-Ghazali's *Ihya' Ulum al-Din*

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ABSTRACT

This study addresses the growing tendency in contemporary education to reduce rationality to cognitive and instrumental functions, often neglecting its moral and spiritual dimensions in character formation. In the context of Islamic education, this condition contributes to the weakening of students' moral awareness and self-control. Therefore, this study aims to analyze the concept of reason ('aql) as the controller of nafs in al-Ghazali's thought and to explain its implications for character education in contemporary Islamic education. This study employs a qualitative approach with a library research design, focusing on conceptual and textual analysis of al-Ghazali's works, particularly *Ihya' Ulum al-Din*, supported by relevant academic literature. Data were analyzed using content analysis to identify key concepts and interpret their philosophical meanings. The findings reveal that, in al-Ghazali's perspective, reason functions not only as a cognitive faculty but also as a moral guide that regulates the impulses of the nafs and directs human behavior toward ethical and spiritual excellence. Furthermore, the integration of reason, nafs, and qalb forms a comprehensive framework for character formation, emphasizing the balance between cognitive, moral, and spiritual dimensions. In conclusion, al-Ghazali's concept of reason provides a robust conceptual foundation for reconstructing character education in Islamic education by reinforcing the role of reason as a moral regulator and integrating intellectual, ethical, and spiritual development.

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INTRODUCTION

Reason is a fundamental instrument in controlling the nafs (self) and shaping human character from an Islamic educational perspective. In Islamic educational philosophy, reason is understood as the rational potential of humans, functioning to acquire knowledge and distinguish between good and evil, thus forming the basis for moral action in human life.¹ Furthermore, Islamic education positions the development of rationality as a means of maturing the mind, building intellectual awareness, and shaping knowledgeable and cultured individuals through intellectual enlightenment.² Within the framework of Islamic metaphysics, intellectual capacity is also related to the formation of adab (good character), namely the proper arrangement of knowledge and actions that enable humans to act ethically in life.³ Thus, reason functions not only as a tool for thinking but also as a moral guide that controls the impulses of the nafs (self) in the process of shaping human character.

However, the reality of contemporary education demonstrates phenomena that contradict these ideals. Various media reports point to increasing moral problems in educational settings, ranging from violence and bullying to a weakening of respect for teachers' moral authority. Education monitoring data shows that between January and September 2024, at least 36 cases of violence occurred in educational institutions, with a total of 144 student victims, reflecting the continued fragility of the internalization of moral values within the education system.⁴ Furthermore, a report by the Indonesian Child Protection Commission recorded more than 2,057 complaints related to violence against children in 2024, including cases occurring in educational settings, indicating that schools have not yet become fully safe spaces for character formation.⁵ Several education observers even believe that the rise in violence against teachers and bullying between students reflects a serious character crisis and a shift in educational orientation that overemphasizes academic achievement over the development of moral values and social empathy. These phenomena demonstrate that education is often trapped in a pragmatic, instrumental orientation, while students' moral and spiritual development has not received adequate attention.

If the various moral problems reflected in cases of school violence, bullying, and the weakening of respect for teachers are not immediately addressed, Islamic education has the

¹ Salminawati Salminawati, *Philosophy of Islamic Education: Building an Islamic Concept of Education* (Bandung: Citapustaka Media Perintis, 2011), 53.

² Asrori Asrori and Rusman Rusman, *Philosophy of Islamic Education: A Classical Islamic Philosophical Approach*. : , 2020 (Malang: Pustaka Learning Center, 2020), 124.

³ Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas, *Prolegomena to the Metaphysics of Islam* (Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia: ISTAC, 1995), 41.

⁴ Mahar Prastiwi, *Deputy Minister of Elementary and Secondary Education: Cooperation between Teachers and Parents is Needed to Overcome Violence in Schools* , December 2024, https://www.kompas.com/edu/read/2024/12/02/190124171/wamen-dikdasmen-butuh-kerja-sama-guru-dan-orangtua-atasi-kekerasan-di?utm_source=chatgpt.com.

⁵ Stephanus Aranditio, "Violence Against Children Increases, Teachers Must Have Guidance and Counseling Competencies," Kompas.id, February 11, 2025, <https://www.kompas.id/artikel/kekerasan-anak-meningkat-guru-wajib-punya-kompetensi-bk>.

potential to experience a deepening character crisis. The dominance of an academic orientation, without strengthening the ethical dimension, can cause education to lose its balance between intellectual development and the moral formation of students. This condition ultimately hinders the integration of the cognitive, affective, and spiritual dimensions that should underpin Islamic education.⁶ Furthermore, reducing rationality to instrumental rationality can narrow the function of reason to merely a tool for achieving pragmatic goals, without a value orientation.⁷ If this situation persists, character education risks becoming trapped in a normative approach that cannot foster ethical awareness and authentic self-control.⁸

A conceptual solution to the problem of character crisis and the reduction of rationality in Islamic education can be found in Al-Ghazali's thoughts in the chapter "Reason and Its Glory" in *Ihya' Ulum al-Din*, which emphasizes that reason is a normative light that functions to control the nafs and direct humans towards moral and spiritual glory.⁹ This concept is reinforced by the study of Islamic philosophy, which positions reason as a moral faculty that enables humans to bear ethical responsibility and to control self-driven rationality.¹⁰ From the perspective of Ghazalian psychology and ethics, the relationship between reason, heart, and nafs forms an integrated ontological system in the process of character development and soul transformation.¹¹ Other studies show that controlling the nafs through the guidance of reason is a pedagogical process that occurs through continuous moral training and spiritual habituation.¹² This approach also has a therapeutic dimension because reason is positioned as a mechanism for diagnosing and healing moral illnesses in the process of *tazkiyah al-nafs*.¹³ Thus, the concept of reason as the controller of the nafs in Al-Ghazali's thought offers a comprehensive epistemological and pedagogical framework for reconstructing Islamic character education that is integrative, rational, and oriented towards spiritual development.¹⁴

Based on the background and gaps in the study, this research is directed at two main

⁶ F. Lahmar, "Islamic Education: An Islamic 'Wisdom-Based Cultural Environment' in Awestern Context," *Religions* 11, no. 8 (2020): 5, Scopus, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel11080409>.

⁷ J. Arroisi, MK Muslih, and N. Inayah, "Coping Discrepancy Between Rationality and Religiosity: Analysis of the Balancing Model in Islamic Psychology," *Cyprus Turkish Journal of Psychiatry and Psychology* 6, no. 1 (2024): 71, Scopus, <https://doi.org/10.35365/ctjpp.24.4.08>.

⁸ NS Kirabaev, "The 'Light' of Reason in the Philosophical and Theological Teachings of al-Ghazali in Relation to the Byzantine Mysticism of Light," *Western St. Petersburg University, Philosophy and Conflictology* 40, no. 4 (2024): 568, Scopus, <https://doi.org/10.21638/spbu17.2024.401>.

⁹ Abu Hamid Al-Ghazali, *Ihya Ulum Al-Din* (Beirut: Dar ibn Hazm, 2005),

¹⁰ J. Janssens, "Al-Ghazālī Between Philosophy (Philosophy) and Sufism (Taṣawwuf): His Complex Attitude in the Marvels of the Heart ('Ajā'ib Al-Qalb) of the Ihyā' 'Ulīm Al-Dīn," *Muslim World* 101, no. 4 (2011): 618, Scopus, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1478-1913.2011.01375.x>.

¹¹ S. Vasalou, "Ethics as Medicine: Moral Therapy, Expertise, and Practical Reasoning in al-Ghazali's Ethics," *Archiv Fur Geschichte Der Philosophie* 104, no. 3 (2022): 475, Scopus, <https://doi.org/10.1515/agph-2020-5006>.

¹² SS Everett, "Peripheral Traditionalism: Judeoislamic Self-Help in Marseille's Northern Districts," *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 31, no. 4 (2025): 1043, Scopus, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9655.14320>.

¹³ Achmad Reza Hutama Al Faruqi, Imam Fuadi, and Ilham Dwitama Haeba, "Tazkiyah Al-Nafs as Therapy for Mental Illness (Hadith Review)," *Kalimah: Journal of Religious Studies and Islamic Thought* 22, no. 1 (July 2024): 117, <https://doi.org/10.21111/klm.v22i1.12409>.

¹⁴ S. Sauri, S. Gunara, and F. Cipta, "Establishing the Identity of Insan Kamil Generation Through Music Learning Activities in Islamic Boarding Schools," *Heliyon* 8, no. 7 (2022): 2, Scopus, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.heliyon.2022.e09958>.

objectives. First, to analyze the concept of reason as a controller of the nafs in Al-Ghazali's thought, as explained in the chapter "Reason and Its Glory" in *Ihya' Ulum al-Din*. Second, to explain the conceptual implications of this idea for strengthening character education in contemporary Islamic education, which is facing a character crisis and a reduction in rationality. To achieve these objectives, this article will present a discussion in two main parts. The first part describes the concept of reason as a controller of the nafs according to Al-Ghazali through an analysis of the text of *Ihya' Ulum al-Din*. The second part discusses the relevance and conceptual contribution of this idea to the reconstruction of Islamic character education, supported by various contemporary research findings. Thus, this research is expected to provide a theoretical contribution in strengthening the epistemological foundation of Islamic character education while offering a relevant conceptual framework for the development of contemporary Islamic education practices.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study uses a qualitative approach with a library research type, because all data analyzed are sourced from texts and scientific literature relevant to the theme "The Concept of Reason as a Controller of the Self and the Formation of Islamic Educational Character from the Perspective of al-Ghazali." The qualitative approach was chosen to deeply understand the concepts of 'aql and nafs within the framework of classical Islamic epistemology, especially in *Ihya' Ulum al-Din*, and to engage in dialogue with contemporary Islamic education literature. Library research in this sense does not merely collect references, but rather conducts a systematic philosophical and theoretical study of primary and secondary sources to develop a comprehensive conceptual framework.¹⁵ Through critical and reflective reading of the literature, library research enables the formation of a comprehensive conceptual synthesis of a scientific theme.¹⁶ This approach is also in line with the view that library research requires a structured analytical process in interpreting the meaning of the text and linking it to a broader scientific context.¹⁷

The data analysis technique in this study uses content analysis, placing the text as the primary object of scientific interpretation. Content analysis is understood as a research technique used to generate valid and replicable inferences from texts to the contexts of meaning that underlie them.¹⁸ In this approach, the text is viewed as a medium of meaning produced in a specific social and intellectual context, thus requiring a systematic analytical reading process.¹⁹ The analysis process is carried out through several stages: identifying units of meaning in the text, grouping conceptual themes, and interpreting Al-Ghazali's argumentative structure regarding the function of reason as a controller of the nafs. These stages align with the content analysis procedure, which includes unitizing, coding, and

¹⁵ Amir Hamzah, *Library Research Methods: Philosophical, Theoretical and Application Studies of Process and Results* (Malang: Literasi Nusantara Abadi, 2020), 23.

¹⁶ Hamzah, 45.

¹⁷ D. Evaniroso, *Library Research Methods* (Media Sains Indonesia, 2022), 34.

¹⁸ Klaus Krippendorff, *Content Analysis: An Introduction to Its Methodology* (London: Sage publications, 2018), 18, https://www.google.com/books?hl=id&lr=&id=nE1aDwAAQBAJ&oi=fnd&pg=PP1&dq=Content+Analysis++An+Introduction+to+Its+Methodology+&ots=y_chWplKbv&sig=e9EvstDEOsj-tjetAu8SIuXf1aY.

¹⁹ Krippendorff, 19.

interpreting meaning to generate conceptual inferences from the analyzed text.²⁰ Thus, this study is not only descriptive of classical texts but also analytical-constructive in formulating the conceptual relevance of Al-Ghazali's thought for the development of character education in contemporary Islamic education.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Concept of Reason as Controlling the Nafs in al-Ghazali's Perspective

The Concept of Reason as Controlling the Nafs in al-Ghazali's Perspective

Imam al-Ghazali in *Ihya' 'Ulum al-Din* places reason as the most noble gift given by Allah to humans as well as the basis of their virtue and nobility. In the discussion of the Book of Knowledge, especially in the section *Bayān Syaraf al-'Aql*, al-Ghazali emphasizes that human nobility does not lie in physical or material aspects, but rather in the ability of reason that enables humans to understand the truth and distinguish between good and bad. He stated: "Reason is the most noble element in humans; with it humans are distinguished from other creatures, and with it humans also gain nobility and moral responsibility²¹." This statement shows that reason is the epistemological and ethical foundation in human life according to al-Ghazali's perspective.

In contemporary Islamic educational studies, al-Ghazali's concept of the nobility of reason is understood as the basis for integrating the cognitive, moral, and spiritual dimensions in the educational process. Reason functions not only as a rational instrument for acquiring knowledge but also as a moral guide that helps humans determine ethical choices and correct behavior. Studies on the epistemology of Islamic education emphasize that reason plays a crucial role in developing moral awareness and human reflective capacity in facing various worldly desires and temptations.²² Furthermore, other research indicates that, from an Islamic educational perspective, character formation cannot be separated from the role of reason as a self-regulatory instrument that connects the rational dimension with spiritual awareness.²³ Recent studies also emphasize that integrating reason's functions in education allows for a balance between knowledge mastery and the formation of an ethical personality.²⁴ Thus, al-Ghazali's thoughts on the nobility of reason can be understood as a conceptual foundation for the formation of human character, integrating rationality, morality, and spirituality in Islamic education.

Reason as an instrument of human differentiation and moral guidance

Imam al-Ghazali emphasized that reason is the element that distinguishes humans from other creatures and is also the basis for human moral responsibility before God. In *Ihya' Ulum al-*

²⁰ Krippendorff, 34.

²¹ Al-Ghazali, *Ihya Ulum Al-Din*, 101.

²² Arroisi, Muslih, and Inayah, "Coping with the Conflict Between Rationality and Piety: An Analysis of the Balancing Model in Islamic Psychology," 72.

²³ N. Taja et al., "Character Education in the Pandemic Era: A Religious Ethical Learning Model Through Islamic Education," *International Journal of Learning, Teaching and Educational Research* 20, no. 11 (2021): 146, Scopus, <https://doi.org/10.26803/ijlter.20.11.8>.

²⁴ N. S. Kirabaev and O. V. Chistyakova, "The Human Being in Eastern Church Father's and Al-Ghazali's Philosophical Theology," *Religions* 14, no. 7 (2023): 11, Scopus, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel14070854>.

Din, he explains that reason is not only the potential for thinking, but also the ability to understand the essence of truth and weigh the consequences between what is beneficial and what is harmful, between good and evil, and between truth and error. This is reflected in his statement: "With reason humans can know right from wrong and good from bad."²⁵ Therefore, reason is the foundation for humans in carrying out the function of the caliphate and in forming behavior based on moral values.

From the perspective of contemporary Islamic education, the function of reason as a human distinguishing factor and a moral guide has important implications for the formation of students' character. Various studies have shown that rationality in Islamic education is not only related to the ability to think logically but also serves as the basis for ethical awareness that guides humans toward moral action.²⁶ However, in modern educational practice, rationality is often reduced to instrumental rationality, emphasizing efficiency and academic achievement alone, thereby ignoring the ethical dimension that should be inherent in the function of reason.²⁷ On the other hand, other studies confirm that when reason functions as a moral guide, education not only produces individuals who are intellectually intelligent but also possess a strong sense of value in managing their behavior and life decisions.²⁸ Thus, the concept of reason as an instrument of human distinction and moral guide in al-Ghazali's thought indicates that rationality in Islamic education must be directed not only to intellectual development but also to the formation of ethical awareness that underpins human character.

The relationship between reason, nafs, and heart in the structure of human personality

Imam al-Ghazali explained that human personality is formed through the interaction of three main elements: reason ('aql), nafs (nafs), and qalb (heart). In *Ihya' Ulum al-Din*, he describes the reason as a guide and controller, while the nafs is the source of desires that can lead humans to good or evil. The qalb, on the other hand, is positioned as the center of spiritual awareness that determines human inner orientation. Al-Ghazali emphasized that when the reason is able to lead and control the nafs, the heart will tend towards truth and virtue. Conversely, if the nafs dominates, humans will easily fall into deviant behavior. Within this framework, al-Ghazali stated that "the heart is like a king, the mind as its advisor, and the nafs as the source of lustful impulses and emotions that must be controlled."²⁹

In contemporary Islamic educational studies, the relationship between reason, nafs, and heart is understood as a moral psychological structure that shapes the complete human personality. Research shows that character formation in Islamic education requires integrating cognitive, affective, and spiritual dimensions, emphasizing not only the intellectual aspect but also the development of students' moral and spiritual awareness.³⁰ Other studies also emphasize that failing to integrate the rational and spiritual dimensions in

²⁵ Al-Ghazali, *Ihya Ulum Al-Din*, 100.

²⁶ N.S. Kirabaev, "Abu Hamid Al-Ghazali on "Reliable Knowledge," *Philosophy of Religion: Analytic Researches* 7, no. 2 (2023): 1, Scopus, <https://doi.org/10.21146/2587-683X-2023-7-2-30-45>.

²⁷ Arroisi, Muslih, and Inayah, "Rasyonellik ve Dindarlık Arasındaki Uyuşmazlıkla Başa Çıkma: İslam Psikolojisinde Dengeleme Modelinin Analizi," 71.

²⁸ Kirabaev, "The "Light" of Reason in the Philosophical and Theological Teachings of Al-Ghazali in Correlation with the Byzantine Mysticism of Light*," 568.

²⁹ Al-Ghazali, *Ihya Ulum Al-Din*, 103.

³⁰ Taja et al., "Character Education in the Pandemic Era: A Religious Ethical Learning Model Through Islamic Education," 146.

education can lead to a character crisis, as humans lose the ability to control destructive, lustful impulses.³¹ Furthermore, an analysis of contemporary Islamic educational discourse shows that strengthening the functions of reason and heart in managing the urges of the nafs is an important foundation for the formation of a personality balanced between intellectual intelligence and moral maturity.³² Thus, in al-Ghazali's thought, the relationship among reason, nafs, and heart shows that the formation of human character requires a balance among rationality, self-control, and spiritual awareness within the structure of human personality.

Reason as a controller of nafs impulses

In Imam al-Ghazali's thought, reason plays a primary role in controlling the nafs's (self-centeredness) impulses, which can lead humans to deviant behavior. In *Ihya' Ulum al-Din* (Theology of the Divine Principles), al-Ghazali explains that the nafs is inherently prone to lust and anger, which, if uncontrolled, will dominate human behavior. Therefore, reason functions as a force that directs and regulates these impulses so that they remain within the boundaries of truth. Al-Ghazali illustrates this relationship through the analogy that reason must guide and regulate the nafs so that it does not dominate human life. Within this framework, he emphasizes that reason serves to regulate lustful impulses and control emotions, enabling humans to maintain moral balance in their lives.³³

In contemporary studies, the concept of controlling the nafs (self) through reason is also understood as a crucial mechanism in the development of human morality and psychological health. Research shows that managing the nafs (self) in the Islamic tradition is not only about spiritual discipline but also about the human ability to regulate emotional impulses, desires, and behaviors arising from inner states.³⁴ Furthermore, studies of al-Ghazali's ethics emphasize that, in Islam, moral development is often understood as a therapeutic process aimed at regulating human inner impulses through rational reflection and ongoing spiritual practice.³⁵ In the context of education, controlling the nafs is also related to the development of ethical awareness, which enables individuals to balance psychological impulses with the demands of moral values in social life.³⁶ Thus, the concept of reason as the controller of the nafs in al-Ghazali's thought demonstrates that the formation of human character requires self-regulation skills rooted in a balance between rational awareness, emotional management, and profound moral values.

Implications of the concept of reason on the formation of human character

The concept of reason in al-Ghazali's thought has important implications for the formation

³¹ Lahmar, "Islamic Education: An Islamic 'Wisdom-Based Cultural Environment' in Awestern Context," 7.

³² Kirabaev and Chistyakova, "The Human Being in Eastern Church Father's and Al-Ghazali's Philosophical Theology," 11.

³³ Al-Ghazali, *Ihya Ulum Al-Din*, 104.

³⁴ S. Khan, "Taming the Nafs: Unbounded Spirits and Mental Illness in Militarized Pakistan," *Ethos* 51, no. 4 (2023): 404, Scopus, <https://doi.org/10.1111/etho.12407>.

³⁵ Vasalou, "Ethics as Medicine: Moral Therapy, Expertise, and Practical Reasoning in al-Ghazali's Ethics," 477.

³⁶ N. S. Eggen, "Trust, Trusting and Trustworthiness in Ethical Discourse," *Journal of Islamic Ethics* 6, no. 30 (2021): 209, Scopus, <https://doi.org/10.1163/24685542-12340059>.

of human character, as it serves as a force that guides moral action while controlling the nafs's urges in human life. From the perspective of Islamic philosophy, reason has a normative function, enabling humans to assess truth and determine actions in accordance with ethical principles and moral rationality.³⁷ In the context of Islamic education, character formation requires integrating rational, spiritual, and emotional dimensions so that the educational process produces not only intellectual intelligence but also a strong ethical awareness.³⁸ In addition, character strengthening in Islamic education emphasizes the importance of developing reflective awareness and self-control as the basis for a mature, moral personality.³⁹ Thus, the concept of reason in al-Ghazali's thought indicates that the formation of human character requires integrating rationality, nafs control, and moral awareness into the Islamic educational process.

The Relevance of Al-Ghazali's Concept of Reason for Character Education in Contemporary Islamic Education

The conceptual basis of reason is the basis for character education

Imam al-Ghazali, in his *Ihya' Ulum al-Din*, places reason as the primary source of human moral guidance. He asserts that reason is the inner light that enables humans to understand the truth, distinguish between good and evil, and direct behavior toward a meaningful life. Within this framework, reason is understood not only as intellectual potential but also as a means of guiding humans in making moral choices. Therefore, education, from al-Ghazali's perspective, aims not merely to increase knowledge but also to strengthen the function of reason so that it can guide human life and control the impulses of the nafs (self) that tend to lead humans to deviant behavior.

From an Islamic educational perspective, strengthening the function of reason is closely linked to the formation of students' character. Rationality in Islam is not only about the ability to think logically but also about the reflective capacity that enables humans to assess the moral consequences of every action. Research shows that integrating rationality with religious values can be a crucial foundation for the formation of human moral awareness.⁴⁰ Furthermore, studies of al-Ghazali's epistemology also emphasize that reason plays a crucial role in connecting knowledge and action, so that the educational process does not stop at the cognitive aspect alone but also encourages human moral transformation.⁴¹ In this context, reason-based character education can be understood as a process of strengthening rational awareness that directs humans to act ethically and responsibly.

Thus, the concept of reason in al-Ghazali's thought provides a conceptual foundation for character education in Islam. Education serves not only to transfer knowledge but also

³⁷ A. Ahsan and M. Karima, "Torn Between the Contours of Logic: Exploring Logical Normativity in Islamic Philosophical Theology," *European Journal of Analytic Philosophy* 18, no. 2 (2022): 14, Scopus, <https://doi.org/10.31820/ejap.18.2.11>.

³⁸ Taja et al., "Character Education in the Pandemic Era: A Religious Ethical Learning Model Through Islamic Education," 146.

³⁹ Mardan Umar et al., "Transforming of Moderate Character Education in Islamic Educational Institutions," *Nazhruna Jurnal Pendidikan Islam* 7, no. 1 (2024): 181, <https://doi.org/10.31538/nzh.v7i1.4168>.

⁴⁰ Arroisi, Muslih, and Inayah, "Coping with the Conflict Between Rationality and Piety: An Analysis of the Balancing Model in Islamic Psychology," 70.

⁴¹ Kirabaev, "Abu Hamid Al-Ghazali on "Reliable Knowledge," 1.

to strengthen human rational capacity to weigh moral values and direct behavior toward virtue.

Critique of the reduction of rationality in modern education

The concept of reason developed by al-Ghazali also critiques the tendency to downplay rationality in modern education. In many contemporary educational systems, rationality is often narrowly understood as a cognitive ability oriented toward efficiency, productivity, and academic achievement. As a result, education places greater emphasis on mastering technical knowledge than on developing students' moral and spiritual awareness.

Numerous studies have shown that reducing rationality to instrumental rationality has led to inequality in the educational process, with ethical and spiritual dimensions often marginalized.⁴² Similar criticisms have emerged in studies of Islamic educational philosophy, which assert that the dominance of a cognitive orientation in modern education can produce individuals who are intellectually intelligent but weak in moral awareness.⁴³ This situation suggests that education that emphasizes only cognitive aspects without character development risks creating a values crisis in social life.

From al-Ghazali's perspective, this reduction contradicts the true purpose of education, which should shape individuals with a balance between intellectual intelligence and moral maturity. Therefore, al-Ghazali's thinking offers a critical perspective on the modern education system, emphasizing the importance of integrating rationality, morality, and spirituality.

Integration of cognitive, moral, and spiritual dimensions in Islamic education

Al-Ghazali's thinking on reason emphasizes that education must integrate cognitive, moral, and spiritual dimensions in a balanced manner. Reason functions not only to comprehend knowledge but also to guide humans in internalizing the moral and spiritual values that underlie human life. Within this framework, Islamic education is understood as a holistic human development process encompassing intellectual, ethical, and spiritual development.

Various studies in Islamic education confirm that character formation requires integrating cognitive, affective, and spiritual dimensions into the learning process.⁴⁴ Education that emphasizes knowledge alone, without fostering moral values, will result in an imbalance in the development of human personality. Furthermore, other research shows that integrating Islamic values with modern learning processes can strengthen students' moral identity and increase ethical awareness in social life.⁴⁵ Therefore, integrating cognitive, moral, and spiritual dimensions is a crucial prerequisite for effective character education.

In this context, al-Ghazali's concept of reason provides a philosophical framework

⁴² Arroisi, Muslih, and Inayah, "Coping with the Conflict Between Rationality and Piety: An Analysis of the Balancing Model in Islamic Psychology," 71.

⁴³ Abdul Khobir, Fina Nikmatul Kamelia, and Neza Dwi Nasyfa, "The Relevance of Perennialism Philosophy in Shaping the Character and Intellectual Intelligence of Students in the Modern Era," *Didactics: Scientific Journal of PGSD STKIP Subang* 11, no. 04 (2025): 250.

⁴⁴ Taja et al., "Character Education in the Pandemic Era: A Religious Ethical Learning Model Through Islamic Education," 146.

⁴⁵ EF Fahyuni et al., "Integrating Islamic Values and Science for Millennial Students' Learning on Using Seamless Mobile Media," *Indonesian Science Education Journal* 9, no. 2 (2020): 232, <https://doi.org/10.15294/jpii.v9i2.23209>.

for the development of integrative Islamic education. Reason serves as a bridge connecting knowledge with moral awareness, so that the educational process produces not only intelligent individuals but also moral ones.

Self-control as the basis for the character formation of students

In al-Ghazali's thinking, character formation is inseparable from a person's ability to control their nafs (self-control). Nafs is understood as a source of emotional impulses and desires that can lead humans to both good and evil. Therefore, education must help students develop self-regulation skills to manage these impulses wisely.

Contemporary studies show that the ability to control one's impulses is a crucial factor in character formation and psychological health.⁴⁶ When individuals lack the ability to manage emotional impulses and personal desires, they are at risk of experiencing moral conflict, which can affect their social behavior. In the educational context, failure to develop self-regulation skills in students can contribute to various character problems in modern society.⁴⁷

Thus, the concept of self-control in al-Ghazali's thought demonstrates that character education must be directed toward the development of strong self-regulation skills. Education not only imparts knowledge but also fosters moral awareness, enabling humans to control their impulses.

Reconstruction of character education based on Al-Ghazali's concept of reason

Al-Ghazali's thinking on reason as the controller of the nafs (self) has made a significant contribution to the reconstruction of character education in contemporary Islamic education. This concept emphasizes that the formation of human character requires the integration of rationality, moral awareness, and spiritual development, systematically occurring throughout the educational process.

Various studies on character education in Islam demonstrate that character development requires a holistic approach that simultaneously encompasses intellectual, moral, and spiritual dimensions.⁴⁸ Furthermore, other research confirms that Islamic education plays a strategic role in building human character by internalizing ethical values derived from the Islamic intellectual tradition.⁴⁹ By integrating al-Ghazali's concept of reason into a modern educational framework, character education can be developed as a process that cultivates individuals who are not only intellectually intelligent but also possess a strong moral conscience.

Thus, the reconstruction of character education based on al-Ghazali's concept of reason offers an integrative perspective relevant to contemporary Islamic education. This concept emphasizes that character education must be oriented toward strengthening reason

⁴⁶ Khan, "Taming the Nafs: Unbounded Spirits and Mental Illness in Militarized Pakistan," 412.

⁴⁷ S. Rahmah and M. Fadhli, "CHARACTER EDUCATION IN ISLAMIC EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS: A Study on the Impact of Lecturer Competence at IAIN Lhokseumawe," *Miqot: Jurnal Ilmu-Ilmu Keislaman* 45, no. 1 (2021): 89, Scopus, <https://doi.org/10.30821/miqot.v45i1.771>.

⁴⁸ Umar et al., "Transforming of Moderate Character Education in Islamic Educational Institutions," 183.

⁴⁹ M. Taufik, "Strategic Role of Islamic Religious Education in Strengthening Character Education in the Era of Industrial Revolution 4.0," *Jurnal Ilmiah Islam Futura* 20, no. 1 (2020): 89, Scopus, <https://doi.org/10.22373/jiif.v20i1.5797>.

as the moral guide of humankind, so that education can produce a generation with a balance between intellectual intelligence, moral maturity, and spiritual depth.

CONCLUSION

This study found that the concept of reason in Imam al-Ghazali's thought functions not only as an intellectual capacity but also as a primary mechanism for controlling the nafs (self-centeredness), which determines the quality of human character. This finding suggests that the character crisis often discussed in modern education is not solely due to a weak mastery of moral values, but rather due to the reduction of reason's function to a mere cognitive instrument detached from ethical and spiritual dimensions. In other words, the issue of character in education is not only a matter of moral curriculum, but also an epistemological problem in understanding the function of reason in the educational process. This finding confirms previous studies on the importance of integrating rationality and morality in Islamic education, while also offering a new perspective: that character education needs to be reconstructed by strengthening the role of reason as a moral guide capable of controlling the urges of the nafs (self-centeredness). Thus, this study contributes a conceptual framework that positions reason as an integrative foundation between the cognitive, moral, and spiritual dimensions in contemporary Islamic character education.

However, this study has several limitations that require attention. This study used a conceptual analysis approach based on a literature review, so the findings remain limited to the reconstruction of normative thinking in classical texts and relevant academic literature. This study also did not empirically test how the concept of reason as a controller of the nafs (self) is implemented in Islamic education practices across various levels of education, institutional contexts, and students' social backgrounds. Therefore, further research is needed to examine this concept empirically, using a broader sample, a wider range of educational institutions, and a more comprehensive methodological approach. With further, more in-depth and contextual research, a more comprehensive understanding of the integration of reason, morality, and spirituality in character education can be developed, thus providing a basis for formulating more appropriate and effective educational policies.

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