

Holistic Character Education: Strategic Formation Through the Lens of Al-Ghazali

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Abstract

This study aims to reconstruct Al-Ghazali's thoughts on character education through the synthesis of various scientific studies to establish a more systematic conceptual framework. This research employs a qualitative approach with a literature review design, examining Al-Ghazali's ideas in the fields of general and character education. Data analysis was conducted using qualitative content analysis through the processes of identification, thematic classification, coding, conceptual categorization, and conceptual reconstruction analysis. The research findings indicate that, according to Al-Ghazali, character education is built upon four integrated dimensions: moral knowing, which is oriented toward *ma'rifah* (knowledge) and sharia; moral feeling, rooted in the cultivation of the *qalb* (heart), intention, and wisdom; moral action, manifested through *akhlak* (morals), habituation, and role modeling; and moral purification, based on *tazkiyat al-nafs* (purification of the soul), *riyāḍah* (spiritual exercise), and *mujāhadah* (spiritual struggle). These findings represent a conceptual construction that has not been adequately accommodated in modern character education frameworks, thereby serving as the primary contribution of this study. This reconstruction yields a character education model that integrates cognitive, affective, behavioral, and spiritual dimensions, enriching the development of character education theory from a contemporary Islamic educational perspective.

Keywords: *Al-Ghazali; Character Education; Moral Purification.*

Abstrak: Penelitian ini bertujuan menganalisis konstruksi moderasi beragama pada komunitas Muslim minoritas di Desa Pearaja Matiti II Kabupaten Humbang Hasundutan, Sumatera Utara. Fokus penelitian diarahkan pada identifikasi modal sosial, bentuk konsensus hubungan antarumat beragama, serta peran aktor-aktor keagamaan dalam membangun dan memelihara harmoni sosial di tengah masyarakat multikultural. Penelitian menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan desain studi kasus. Data diperoleh melalui observasi, wawancara mendalam, dan dokumentasi terhadap tokoh agama, kepada desa dan masyarakat yang

kemudian dianalisis melalui tahapan kondensasi data, penyajian data, dan penarikan kesimpulan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa moderasi beragama pada komunitas Muslim minoritas dibentuk melalui hasil interaksi antara pendidikan keagamaan non-formal, modal sosial berbasis kepercayaan dan gotong royong, budaya resiprositas lintas agama, serta kepemimpinan tokoh agama dan pemerintah desa. Pendidikan Islam non-formal berfungsi sebagai sarana reproduksi nilai-nilai akhlak yang mendorong keterbukaan sosial, sementara hubungan timbal balik antara komunitas Muslim dan Kristiani diwujudkan melalui partisipasi bersama dalam kegiatan keagamaan, sosial, dan kemanusiaan. Di sisi lain, tokoh agama dan pemimpin lokal berperan sebagai agen moderasi yang menjembatani perbedaan serta memperkuat kohesi sosial masyarakat. Penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa moderasi beragama pada komunitas Muslim minoritas merupakan konstruksi sosial yang dibangun melalui sinergi antara identitas keagamaan yang kuat dan keterbukaan terhadap keberagaman.

Kata Kunci: *Muslim minoritas; Agensi; Moderasi Beragama*

Introduction

mam Al-Ghazali is one of the most influential Muslim scholars and philosophers in the history of Islamic educational thought (Arifin, 2018). His ideas regarding human development do not rely solely on the mastery of knowledge but position moral cultivation as the primary orientation of the entire educational process. In Al-Ghazali's view, education loses its meaning if it only produces intellectually intelligent individuals but fails to cultivate moral and spiritual maturity (Safitri et al., 2023). Therefore, character (*akhlāq*) is positioned as the fundamental foundation of human personality, acting as the source of all behaviors enacted consciously, spontaneously, and with an orientation toward goodness. This paradigm establishes Al-Ghazali as a pioneer who laid the philosophical foundations of character education long before the concept developed in modern educational traditions.

Character formation in Al-Ghazali's thought (Faza, 2021) begins with the mastery of knowledge (*ma'rifah*), followed by the cultivation of the heart (*qalb*), the habituation of righteous deeds, and finally, the purification of the soul (*tazkiyat al-nafs*). Character education is not understood merely as the transmission of moral norms but as a personality transformation that integrates intellectual, affective, behavioral, and spiritual dimensions (Windi Lestari et al., 2025). Consequently, good character is not just behavior that aligns with social norms, but rather the

manifestation of a soul that has undergone cultivation through the control of desires, spiritual exercises, and the continuous application of divine values.

Discourse on character education is largely dominated by paradigms that situate education within Al-Ghazali's thought. However, these paradigms are generally more oriented toward psychological, social, and behavioral dimensions, resulting in character formation being understood primarily as a process of developing moral competencies in social life. From the perspective of Islamic education, such an approach leaves a conceptual gap, as it has not fully accommodated the spiritual dimension as the center of human character transformation. As a result, character tends to be reduced to a set of moral competencies, while the process of soul purification—which is the core of moral formation—has not received adequate attention.

Various previous studies have examined Al-Ghazali's thought from diverse perspectives, ranging from the concepts of morals, moral education, Sufism, and *tazkiyat al-nafs*, to their relevance to modern Islamic education. Nevertheless, most research remains confined to normative descriptions of Al-Ghazali's ideas without attempting to reconstruct them into an analytical framework for contemporary character education. Furthermore, research concerning the conceptual contributions of classical scholars to the development of contemporary character education theory remains relatively limited.

Based on this gap, this article aims to reconstruct Imam Al-Ghazali's character education thought regarding the dimensions of moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action, as well as to identify the dimension of moral purification as a conceptual construct that complements the contemporary Character Education framework. Driven by this objective, the present study seeks to answer the primary question of how Imam Al-Ghazali's construction of character education shapes the dimension of moral purification as an epistemological contribution of Islamic character education to the development of contemporary character education theory.

Method

This study utilizes a qualitative approach with a library research design oriented toward a qualitative literature review. The data sources are not derived from the primary works of Imam Al-Ghazali, but rather from published scientific journal articles specifically discussing Al-Ghazali's thoughts in the fields of education, character education, morals, and personality development. The literature was selected purposively based

on substantive relevance, publication quality, and its connection to the research focus concerning the construction of character education according to Imam Al-Ghazali. Data analysis was conducted using qualitative content analysis techniques through several interrelated stages: literature identification, data reduction, thematic classification, coding, conceptual categorization, and the interpretation of inter-thematic relationships.

The emerging themes were subsequently analyzed using a conceptual reconstruction analysis approach. In this stage, the various concepts scattered throughout previous research findings were not treated as isolated findings; rather, they were reassembled into a coherent conceptual framework to systematically explain Imam Al-Ghazali's structure of character education. The results of this reconstruction were then formulated into an interpretive model consisting of four main dimensions: moral knowing, moral feeling, moral action, and moral purification. This model represents a conceptual synthesis built from the accumulation of findings from various previous studies, thereby offering a novel perspective for understanding character education according to Imam Al-Ghazali within the context of developing contemporary character education theory.

Results and Discussion

The Fundamental Basis of Islamic Character Education

Character education from an Islamic perspective possesses a different conceptual basis compared to the character approach in modern educational traditions, which frequently positions character as a set of behavioral values that can be shaped through social habituation. Character harbors a more profound dimension as it is rooted in the concept of *akhlāq* as an inherent psychological condition within human beings. For Al-Ghazali, *akhlak* is not merely an observable external behavior; it is an internal state (*ḥay'ah fī al-nafs*) that has become firmly embedded, generating spontaneous actions without the need for prolonged deliberation. Thus, an action cannot be classified as a character trait if it is performed solely due to external pressure, specific interests, or mere adherence to social rules; it must emerge as a natural expression of a soul's quality that has been formed through education and self-purification (Kurniawan, 2018).

This concept indicates that character education, according to Al-Ghazali, is not solely oriented toward external behavioral changes but places greater emphasis on the internal transformation of the human being. Character is the result of the interaction between intellectual,

spiritual, and moral aspects that shape an individual's action orientation in life. Therefore, character education cannot be sufficiently achieved through the mere transmission of knowledge regarding good and bad values; it requires a process of soul formation so that these values truly become an integral part of the student's personality. In Al-Ghazali's perspective, someone who understands goodness theoretically does not necessarily possess good character unless that knowledge is ingrained within them as a moral inclination that consistently drives positive actions.

Based on this premise, Al-Ghazali categorizes human character into two primary categories: *khuluq ḥasan* (good character) and *khuluq sayyi'* (bad character). *Khuluq ḥasan* illustrates a balanced spiritual condition wherein human actions arise from the harmony between rational deliberation ('*aql*'), the guidance of revelation (*syar'*), and the control of desires. Good character not only pertains to interpersonal human relationships but also reflects the quality of an individual's relationship with Allah, themselves, and their social environment. Conversely, *khuluq sayyi'* denotes an uncontrolled state of the soul that produces behaviors contrary to both religious values and human rationality. The distinction between the two does not merely lie in the visible form of the action but in the inner source that produces it (Faza, 2021).

Al-Ghazali's understanding of character reveals that moral education has a much broader objective than simply creating individuals who comply with social regulations. The goal of character education is to form human beings who possess a balance of intellectual intelligence, emotional maturity, and spiritual awareness. Al-Ghazali designates the formation of a strong, virtuous, wise, sincere, and civilized personality as the ultimate orientation of education. The ideal character in Al-Ghazali's view is not simply an individual capable of distinguishing right from wrong, but a human being who has an inner inclination to choose goodness due to the deeply ingrained moral awareness within them. Thus, character education becomes a process of shaping a holistic human being (*insān kāmil*) who is capable of self-control and living in accordance with divine values (Windi Lestari et al., 2025).

The pedagogical implications of Al-Ghazali's thought are evident in his view regarding the educator's position in the character formation process. Al-Ghazali likens an educator to a doctor who must understand a patient's condition before administering treatment. This analogy suggests that character education cannot be implemented using a uniform method for all students, as every child possesses different psychological characteristics, intellectual capabilities, social backgrounds, and stages of moral development. An educator must be

capable of diagnosing the condition of the students so that the educational approach provided aligns with their developmental needs. This perspective demonstrates that character education requires a personal, dialogic approach that is highly attentive to the human dimensions of the students (Ali et al., 2025).

In the context of contemporary education, Al-Ghazali's ideas hold strong relevance, particularly when character education often becomes trapped in administrative approaches in the form of programs, moral slogans, or formal behavioral habituation. Al-Ghazali's perspective serves as a reminder that character cannot be built instantly through normative instruction; rather, it is achieved through a lengthy process involving the educator's role modeling, the habituation of values, the strengthening of spiritual awareness, and the cultivation of the students' inner conditions. Therefore, character education based on Al-Ghazali's thought offers a more profound approach: integrating the dimensions of knowledge, internalization, and moral practice so that virtues are not only understood conceptually but genuinely become a part of the human personality (Windi Lestari et al., 2025).

Strategies for Character Formation

Within Imam Al-Ghazali's educational framework, the formation process cannot be accomplished merely through the theoretical delivery of moral knowledge; it requires a strategy for value transmission that aligns with the students' psychological development characteristics. Al-Ghazali understands that children in their early developmental stages do not yet possess the perfect abstract thinking capabilities required to comprehend complex moral concepts. Consequently, character values must be instilled through a gradual, concrete approach that touches upon the child's daily life experiences. Character education from Al-Ghazali's perspective is not merely a process of transferring information about good and evil, but rather a process of value internalization so that goodness becomes an inherent psychological inclination within the child (Fadlullah et al., 2023).

Based on this reasoning, Al-Ghazali developed character value transmission strategies through two main approaches: the direct approach and the indirect approach. These two approaches are not contradictory but mutually complementary in building a child's moral structure. The direct approach serves to provide a normative foundation regarding the standard of values that must be understood, while the indirect approach plays a role in shaping emotional experiences and

moral habits that bring these values to life in a child's behavior (Madhar, 2024).

First, the direct approach in Al-Ghazali's character education is executed through the explicit delivery of moral teachings by referring to the primary sources of Islam: the Qur'an and the Hadith of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). In Al-Ghazali's view, the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) is the preeminent figure in moral education because he did not merely preach the teachings of goodness but also served as a concrete model of the values he taught. The Prophet is positioned as *mu'allim al-nās al-khair* (the educator of mankind towards goodness), a figure who integrates knowledge, role modeling, and life practices within the educational process (Anwar, 2022).

Through this approach, children are introduced to fundamental moral concepts such as honesty, trustworthiness, compassion, respect for parents, responsibility, and obedience to Allah SWT. The transmission of values is carried out through the teaching of Qur'anic verses, hadiths, advice, and explanations regarding the moral consequences of an action. However, Al-Ghazali does not perceive moral instruction merely as a process of indoctrination, but rather as the initial stage in building a child's awareness of the value standards that will guide their life. Knowledge of goodness becomes the foundational stepping stone before that value is molded into character through experience and habituation (Tanjung et al., 2025).

Parental Strategies in Instilling *Siddiq* (Honesty) Character in Early Childhood. This approach is predicated on the understanding that children assimilate values more easily through experience, role modeling, storytelling, and repetitive practice rather than through mere verbal instruction. In this context, character education occurs through the process of creating an environment that enables children to observe, feel, and practice moral values in real life (Safingah & Putri, 2025).

The Storytelling Method. One of the essential strategies in Al-Ghazali's character education is the use of the storytelling method. Stories possess pedagogical power because they can present moral values in the form of concrete experiences that are easily understood by children. Through tales of prophets, righteous individuals, or life events containing moral messages, children not only acquire information about virtues but also learn to understand the consequences of actions (Mushoffa Zain & Manik, 2023).

According to Al-Ghazali's perspective, stories utilized in education must be oriented toward the formation of the soul, not merely for entertainment. Narratives must be directed to present *'ibrah* (moral

lessons) capable of engaging a child's emotional aspects. Consequently, children do not merely know that honesty is a good value; they understand why honesty brings nobility and how dishonesty can damage both human social and spiritual relationships (Faris Sulistiyani et al., 2025).

Role Modeling and Habituation Methods. Al-Ghazali places immense importance on the habituation method because character is fundamentally formed through actions performed repeatedly until they become a tendency in the soul. Knowledge of moral values will not produce character if it is not translated into concrete practice. Therefore, children must be trained to continuously perform good deeds so that these actions develop into deeply ingrained habits (Endang Komara et al., 2026).

Within the family context, Al-Ghazali provides various examples of moral habituation that can shape a child's character from an early age. First is the prohibition against allowing children to swear oaths in various situations. This prohibition is not merely related to speech; it aims to cultivate an awareness that words carry moral responsibility. A child accustomed to guarding their speech will grow into an individual who values honesty and the sanctity of promises (Fadhilah & Mutmainnah, 2024).

Second, the education of giving (altruism) is a vital component in forming a child's social character. Al-Ghazali encourages that children should not be habituated to a mentality of constant asking, but should instead be guided to understand that giving holds a higher nobility than receiving. This habituation aims to develop generosity, empathy, and sensitivity to the needs of others.

Third, controlling show-off behavior is a form of character education related to the purification of the soul (*tazkiyah al-nafs*). Al-Ghazali warns that children should not be habituated to flaunt the food, clothing, or amenities they possess, as such behavior can foster arrogance and trigger social jealousy. The education of simplicity serves as an instrument to build a character of humility and appreciation for the conditions of others (Setiawan, 2017).

Fourth, Al-Ghazali emphasizes the importance of behavioral transparency in children by avoiding the habit of doing things secretly. This prohibition is based on the understanding that the tendency to hide certain actions often indicates an awareness that the deed contradicts correct values. Through the habituation of openness, children are directed to possess moral integrity—the ability to act righteously not only when supervised but due to an internal awareness of the value of truth (Br & Syamsuddin, 2025).

Thus, the strategy for transmitting character values according to Al-Ghazali illustrates that character education is an integrative process involving moral knowledge, emotional experience, role modeling, and behavioral habituation. Character is not formed through the mere delivery of theory, but through a long process that bridges the understanding of values with life practices. This perspective demonstrates that Al-Ghazali's character education has strong relevance for contemporary education because it offers an approach that positions humans as both rational and spiritual beings, ensuring that character formation not only produces individuals who know goodness but also have the inclination to enact goodness in their lives.

Strategies for Personality Formation

Personality formation (*shakhsyah*) in Imam Al-Ghazali's thought is not understood merely as external behavioral change, but rather as an internal transformation process that affects the structure of the human soul. According to Al-Ghazali, a good personality is born through a lengthy process of internal management involving the cleansing of the soul from negative tendencies while simultaneously developing the positive potentials bestowed upon humanity by Allah. Therefore, character education in Al-Ghazali's perspective is constructed through two simultaneous processes: *takhalli* and *tahalli*. *Takhalli* is the process of emptying the soul of reprehensible traits (*akhlāq madzmūmah*), while *tahalli* is the process of adorning the soul with praiseworthy traits (*akhlāq karīmah*) (Rohayati, 2011).

According to Al-Ghazali, the emergence of bad character cannot be separated from the domination of uncontrolled desires. The two psychological forces that often become the sources of moral deviation are *syahwat* (excessive desires) and *ghadab* (undirected emotional impulses or anger). If these two forces are not controlled by intellect and religious guidance, humans will easily fall into behaviors oriented toward self-interest, arrogance, greed, and various other forms of moral deviation. In addition to these internal factors, excessive attachment to worldly orientations also acts as a barrier to human spiritual development by distancing the soul from an awareness of the purpose of its creation (Astuti et al., 2025).

Conversely, positive character in Al-Ghazali's view stems from human ability to actualize the divine potential within themselves. Divine light (*nūr ilāhī*), intellectual capacity (*al-'aql*), and wisdom act as the primary foundations for directing human behavior toward moral balance. The intellect functions crucially as a controller and guide for desires, while

wisdom plays a role in situating every action proportionally. Consequently, an ideal character is not born out of mere restraint, but from human capacity to achieve harmony between physical needs, rationality, and spiritual awareness.

To achieve this personality transformation, Al-Ghazali offers three interrelated methodological stages: adherence to sharia, self-development, and spiritual attainment through the Sufistic approach. These three stages depict a character education process that moves gradually from external aspects toward the formation of a deeper internal awareness.

Adherence to Sharia. The first stage in personality formation according to Al-Ghazali is building a moral foundation through obedience to sharia. At this stage, character education is directed toward developing an individual's ability to follow religious rules, social norms, and the stipulations of communal life. Sharia functions as an initial framework that provides boundaries regarding behaviors deemed right and wrong, equipping the child with a clear moral orientation in navigating life.

However, obedience in Al-Ghazali's perspective is not intended as mechanical compliance devoid of understanding. This stage is the initial process of building self-discipline, which gradually establishes behavioral regularity. Through the habituation of worship, responsibility, adherence to rules, and respect for social values, individuals begin to develop the ability to control themselves. The implication of this stage is the formation of behavioral stability, the ability to adapt to the environment, and the growing awareness that human actions bear moral consequences (Agus et al., 2026).

Self-Development. The second stage involves the process of developing self-quality through psychological awareness and more personalized moral exercises. In this phase, character education is no longer solely based on external rules but begins to be directed toward an individual's capacity for self-reflection (self-awareness). A person starts to understand their weaknesses, potentials, and the moral responsibilities inherent within them.

In this process, Al-Ghazali underscores the importance of the role modeling method as an instrument for character formation. Children or students tend to accept moral values more readily through figures they admire and trust rather than through verbal instruction alone. Therefore, educators hold a strategic position as moral models who present values in the form of tangible behavior.

Self-development also necessitates disciplined, intensive, and continuous practice. Character is not formed through a single

educational event, but through the repetition of good actions until they become ingrained habits. At this stage, the individual begins to undergo a transition from merely performing good deeds out of obedience to rules to doing so out of personal consciousness.

Sufism. The highest stage in Al-Ghazali's personality formation methodology is the Sufism stage, which is the process of soul perfection through spiritual exercises (*riyādhah al-nafs*) and the spiritual struggle against negative tendencies (*mujāhadah al-nafs*). At this stage, the goal of character education is not solely to produce humans who behave well socially, but individuals who possess a profound relationship with Allah SWT.

Through the process of soul purification, individuals strive to liberate themselves from the dominance of desires and cultivate a higher spiritual consciousness. In Al-Ghazali's view, the highest achievement of character occurs when humans can position divine values as the primary orientation of their lives. Because this process possesses a complex spiritual dimension, Al-Ghazali emphasizes the importance of guidance from a spiritual teacher (*mursyid*) capable of directing one's moral and spiritual journey.

This Sufism stage leads to the formation of the ideal human (*insān kāmil*)—an individual who possesses a balance of intellectual intelligence, moral maturity, and spiritual depth. Such a personality is not only capable of self-control but is also able to provide benefits to their social environment.

The entirety of Al-Ghazali's personality formation methodology demonstrates that character education is an integrative process encompassing cognitive, affective, and psychomotor dimensions. Character cannot be adequately built merely through the transfer of moral knowledge, as knowledge without soul transformation does not consistently result in behavioral change. For this reason, Al-Ghazali places *tazkiyat al-nafs* (purification of the soul) at the core of character education—a process that bridges value comprehension, spiritual internalization, and moral practice in real life.

In the context of contemporary education, Al-Ghazali's ideas imply that shaping students' characters requires a more flexible and humanistic approach. Educators cannot merely act as transmitters of norms; they must be able to understand the students' psychological conditions, developmental needs, and individual potentials. Effective character education is not education that strictly emphasizes obedience to rules, but rather education capable of building internal awareness through role modeling, habituation, self-reflection, and continuous mentoring (Marpaung et al., 2026).

Analysis of Imam Al-Ghazali's Character Education

To gain a more comprehensive understanding of Imam Al-Ghazali's construction of character education, this study analyzes his thoughts using the character education framework developed by Thomas Lickona (Mainuddin et al., 2023). This framework is employed as an analytical instrument to identify how the character formation process unfolds from Al-Ghazali's perspective. The analysis reveals that Al-Ghazali's concept of character education not only encompasses the three main dimensions formulated by Lickona—namely moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action—but also introduces an additional dimension in the form of moral purification. This final dimension serves as the defining characteristic of Islamic character education because it establishes soul purification as the core foundation of personality formation.

Analytical Framework	Indicators in Al-Ghazali's Thought
Moral Knowing	<i>Ma'rifah</i> , knowledge, sharia
Moral Feeling	<i>Qalb</i> (heart), intention, wisdom
Moral Action	<i>Akhlak</i> (character), habituation, role modeling
Moral Purification	<i>Tazkiyat al-nafs</i> , <i>riyadhah</i> , <i>mujahadah</i>

The analysis demonstrates that the moral knowing dimension in Al-Ghazali's thought is built through the processes of *ma'rifah*, knowledge acquisition, and the comprehension of sharia as the primary source of moral knowledge. For Al-Ghazali, it is impossible for humans to distinguish between good and evil if they lack a correct foundation of knowledge. Therefore, character education always begins with an introduction to religious teachings that guide students to understand the essence of right and wrong. However, this moral knowledge is not positioned as the goal of education, but as the initial foundation for the personality transformation process. This indicates that the function of knowledge in character education is not merely to broaden cognitive horizons, but to shape a moral mode of thinking that aligns with the values of revelation.

The next dimension is moral feeling, which is the process of internalizing values into inner consciousness. In Al-Ghazali's perspective, the center of character education does not reside solely in the intellect, but in the *qalb* (heart) as the center of human moral orientation. A pure heart will breed righteous intentions, while righteous intentions become the source from which wisdom in action emerges. Thus, character education does not stop at the ability to comprehend values but is directed toward shaping moral awareness so that students love goodness as an inner necessity, not merely due to external demands. This analysis demonstrates that the affective dimension occupies a highly dominant position in Al-Ghazali's construction of character education because

behavioral change can only occur when values have transformed into internal awareness.

Furthermore, moral action is actualized through the formation of *akhlak*, which is carried out continuously through habituation and modeling. According to Al-Ghazali, good character is not born out of mere moral instruction or lectures, but through exercises performed continuously until the behavior becomes an integral part of a person's life habits. The role modeling of an educator holds a highly strategic position because students are more inclined to imitate the behaviors they observe rather than simply memorize the values they hear. Therefore, moral action is understood as the outcome of an educational process that integrates knowledge, experience, practice, and tangible examples in daily life. This finding illustrates that Al-Ghazali's concept of *akhlak* aligns with the modern character education approach that positions habituation as the primary mechanism for behavioral formation.

Nevertheless, the analytical results also reveal that Al-Ghazali's thought introduces a dimension not explicitly explained in modern character education frameworks, namely moral purification. This dimension emerges as the conceptual finding of the research because the entire character formation process in Al-Ghazali's perspective culminates in the purification of the soul (*tazkiyat al-nafs*). This process is executed through *riyadhah* as self-control exercises and *mujahadah* as a spiritual struggle to subdue desires. Consequently, character formation is not only directed at ensuring an individual can perform moral actions, but also at cultivating a purity of inner orientation that renders every action a form of devotion to Allah. In this perspective, ethical behavior is not merely the result of social control, but the manifestation of an ongoing spiritual transformation.

These four dimensions illustrate that character education, according to Imam Al-Ghazali, is constructed through a gradual and integrative process. Knowledge births understanding, understanding develops into inner consciousness, consciousness is actualized in concrete actions, and all these actions are continuously perfected through the soul purification process. This model demonstrates that Islamic character education does not stop at the achievement of moral competencies but is directed toward forming humans who possess spiritual integrity as well as social responsibility. Therefore, Al-Ghazali's character education construct offers a more comprehensive paradigm as it integrates cognitive, affective, behavioral, and spiritual dimensions as an inseparable unity in the personality formation process (Indrawati et al., 2025).

Conclusions

This study demonstrates that Imam Al-Ghazali's thought regarding character education cannot be understood merely as normative moral teachings; rather, it is a pedagogical construct built through a holistic personality transformation process. The reconstruction of various scientific studies reveals that character education in Al-Ghazali's perspective occurs through four interrelated dimensions: moral knowing, oriented toward the formation of knowledge through *ma'rifah* and sharia; moral feeling, situating the *qalb*, intention, and wisdom as the center of moral awareness; moral action, manifested through *akhlak*, role modeling, and habituation; and moral purification, founded on the processes of *tazkiyat al-nafs*, *riyāḍah*, and *mujāhadah*. This reconstruction affirms that character formation according to Al-Ghazali is not a behavioral change resulting from a soul that spontaneously produces moral action, but a manifestation of the integration between intellect, heart, and divine values.

This research expands the Character Education framework through the addition of the moral purification dimension as a foundation for character formation. Consequently, the reconstruction of Al-Ghazali's thought offers a more integrative character education paradigm by connecting cognitive, affective, behavioral, and spiritual dimensions within a single, cohesive conceptual structure. Simultaneously, this model opens space for the development of character education theories that are more adaptive to contemporary educational needs without relinquishing the ethical and spiritual foundations that serve as the hallmark of the Islamic educational tradition.

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