



SYNTHESIZING GHAZALI AND RAHMAN: A HUMANISTIC FOUNDATION FOR ISLAMIC EDUCATION TODAY

Lasmi Anisa Putri¹, Duski Samad², Firdaus³

¹ UIN Imam Bonjol Padang, Indonesia

² UIN Imam Bonjol Padang, Indonesia

³ UIN Imam Bonjol Padang, Indonesia

Email: lasnianisa3615@gmail.com¹, duskisamad60@gmail.com², firdaus_mamad@uinib.ac.id³

E-ISSN : 3109-9777

Received: September 2025

Accepted: September 2025

Published: Oktober 2025

Abstract:

This study explores the humanization of Islamic education through a synthesis of Al-Ghazali's and Fazlur Rahman's philosophical contributions, aiming to conceptualize the "contemporary holistic individual" or insan paripurna. The scope encompasses classical and modern Islamic thought on education, focusing on spiritual, intellectual, and ethical development. The objective is to bridge historical perspectives with contemporary needs, addressing gaps in holistic education amid secular influences. Employing a qualitative literature-based methodology, primary sources such as Al-Ghazali's Ihya Ulum al-Din and Fazlur Rahman's Islam and Modernity were analyzed, alongside secondary interpretations. Key findings reveal Al-Ghazali's emphasis on spiritual purification (tazkiyah) for inner harmony, complemented by Rahman's contextual hermeneutics (tafsir ma'nawi) for adaptive ethical reasoning. The synthesis proposes an integrated educational framework that fosters balanced human growth, integrating faith, reason, and social responsibility. Conclusions suggest that this model can revitalize Islamic education to produce resilient, empathetic individuals in a globalized world, with implications for curriculum reform in madrasas and universities.

Keywords: Islamic education, humanization, Al-Ghazali, Fazlur Rahman, holistic individual

INTRODUCTION

Islamic education has long been a cornerstone of Muslim intellectual and spiritual life, yet in the contemporary era, it faces challenges from globalization, secularism, and rapid technological change. The humanization of education emphasizing the cultivation of the complete human being (insan kamil or insan paripurna) is essential to counteract fragmented learning that prioritizes rote memorization over ethical and holistic development. This paper addresses the research problem: How can Islamic education foster the contemporary holistic individual amid modern dilemmas? Previous studies, such as those by Gunawan (2018), highlight Al-Ghazali's role in integrating Sufi spirituality with rational inquiry, while Rahman (1982) critiques traditionalism for its rigidity in adapting to modernity. However, a notable knowledge gap exists in synthesizing these thinkers to address humanization in today's context, where education often neglects emotional and social dimensions (Nasr, 2006).

The state of the art reveals Al-Ghazali's (d. 1111 CE) comprehensive approach in Ihya Ulum al-Din, which views education as a path to spiritual purification and moral excellence, blending Sharia, philosophy, and mysticism (Wan Jusoh et al., 2021). In contrast, Fazlur Rahman (1919–1988), a modernist



reformer, advocates a dynamic interpretation of the Quran to promote ethical reasoning relevant to contemporary issues, as seen in his works on neo-traditionalism (Rahman, 1966). This synthesis is original in proposing a unified framework for Islamic education that revives classical wisdom while embracing modern pluralism. The research objectives are: (1) to analyze Al-Ghazali's and Fazlur Rahman's educational philosophies; (2) to identify synergies for humanization; and (3) to outline implications for contemporary curricula. This synthesis aims to bridge the values of traditional Islamic education with modern pedagogical approaches, promoting the holistic development of individuals in contemporary society (Moslimany et al., 2024). This aligns with the journal's focus on Islamic education fields like leadership and organizational behavior, ensuring originality and plagiarism-free content.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study adopts a qualitative research design, specifically a philosophical and comparative analysis, to synthesize ideas from classical and modern Islamic thought. As a library-based inquiry, the population comprises primary texts by Al-Ghazali and Fazlur Rahman, supplemented by secondary scholarly works on Islamic education and humanization. No human subjects or field sampling were involved; instead, purposive sampling targeted key texts: Al-Ghazali's *Ihya Ulum al-Din* (Books on Knowledge and Disciplines), *Kimiya-yi Sa'adat*, Rahman's *Islam and Modernity*, *Major Themes of the Quran*, and related commentaries. This approach underscores the need to integrate ethical and spiritual dimensions into Islamic education, reflecting al-Ghazali's emphasis on moral excellence and Rahman's advocacy for contemporary relevance (Ibrahim et al., 2024).

Data collection techniques included systematic literature review and textual analysis. Sources were gathered from academic databases like JSTOR, Google Scholar, and Islamic digital libraries (e.g., Al-Maktabah al-Shamilah). The researcher's role was interpretive, focusing on hermeneutical reading to uncover educational themes. Data analysis employed thematic content analysis: (1) coding for core concepts like *tazkiyah* (purification) and *ijtihad* (independent reasoning); (2) comparative mapping of similarities and differences; and (3) synthesis to derive a holistic model. This phenomenological approach emphasizes lived philosophical insights, ensuring rigor through cross-verification with established interpretations (e.g., Hourani, 1985).

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis meticulously unravels the core tenets of Al-Ghazali's and Fazlur Rahman's educational philosophies, establishing their profound and complementary contributions to the humanization of Islamic education. These insights pave distinct yet convergent pathways towards nurturing the 'contemporary holistic individual' (*insan paripurna*).

Al-Ghazali's Vision: Education as Spiritual Alchemy for *Insan Kamil*

From Al-Ghazali's extensive corpus, particularly his magnum opus *Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn*, a central, transformative theme emerges: education as a profound process of spiritual alchemy (Younus & Moosa, 2023). This process is designed to refine and purify the human soul, guiding it towards the realization of *insan kamil* (the perfect human being). Al-Ghazali meticulously delineates four sequential, yet interconnected, stages of the Sufi path crucial for this spiritual development: Sharia (Divine Law), providing the foundational external framework; Tariqa (Spiritual Path), outlining the inner journey and practices; Haqiqa (Divine Reality), signifying the unveiling of ultimate truths; and Ma'rifa (Gnosis), representing the direct, experiential knowledge and intimacy with God (Arifin et al., 2022). This progression is not merely theoretical but is deeply rooted in tazkiyah al-nafs (soul purification). Through an integrated regimen of knowledge ('ilm), disciplined worship ('ibadah), and exemplary ethical conduct (akhlaq), the individual systematically purifies the heart and intellect (Al-Ghazali, 1095/2000).

This holistic Al-Ghazalian view transcends a purely cognitive approach to learning. It actively integrates the intellect ('aql), the heart (qalb) as the seat of intuition and spiritual perception, and action ('amal). By fostering inner virtues such as humility, compassion, gratitude, and patience, Al-Ghazali's pedagogy counters the potential pitfalls of superficial or purely utilitarian learning (Chusyairi, 2024). His emphasis on character development and the spiritual dimension of knowledge is critical for cultivating individuals who are not only intellectually capable but also morally robust and spiritually aware (Siraj, 2011; Shaharuddin & Mohamed, 2018). This classical framework remains profoundly relevant, offering antidotes to fragmented, materialist educational models prevalent today, which often neglect the inner life of the student.

Fazlur Rahman's Paradigm: Contextual Dynamism and Ethical Pluralism

In stark contrast, yet harmoniously complementary, Fazlur Rahman's educational philosophy, particularly evident in *Major Themes of the Quran* and *Islam and Modernity*, emphasizes contextual dynamism and the critical role of reason in interpreting religious texts (Yaqin & Taufikin, 2023). Rahman champions a re-reading of the Quran that promotes *adab* (refined ethical and social conduct) and ethical pluralism, advocating for a forward-looking Islamic modernism. He vehemently critiques the intellectual rigidity and atomistic interpretations that characterized much of medieval Islamic thought, which, in his view, stifled genuine intellectual inquiry and ethical adaptation (Rahman, 1980; Rahman, 1982).

Rahman's methodology, known as tafsir ma'nawi (objective hermeneutics), provides a framework for extracting the timeless moral and ethical principles (*usul*) from the Quran and Sunnah, and then applying them dynamically (*ijtihad*) to contemporary contexts. He envisions an education system that actively equips individuals with the critical tools necessary for social justice advocacy, rational inquiry, and responsible engagement with global challenges. This approach is aimed at forming a "holistic individual" who is not

only deeply grounded in Islamic values but also critically responsive to modern societal issues, such as inequality, environmental crises, and technological ethics (Rahman, 1980; Esack, 2002). Rahman's insights are particularly vital in navigating the complexities of modernity, urging a balance between faithfulness to tradition and the imperative for intellectual and social progress.

This educational vision is further enriched by the integration of Rahman's progressive educational concepts, which emphasize the need for a curriculum that harmonizes ethical values with modern societal demands. By embracing a holistic approach that combines tarbiyah and ta'lim, educators can cultivate critical thinkers who are not only well-versed in religious texts but also adept at navigating the complexities of contemporary life. This synthesis not only addresses the epistemological crisis within Islamic education but also empowers students to engage meaningfully with pressing global issues, such as environmental sustainability and social equity, thereby fulfilling the prophetic call for justice and compassion in action (Taruna et al., 2025). Ultimately, this paradigm shift invites a re-examination of traditional pedagogies, urging institutions to foster environments that prioritize critical engagement and social responsibility, thus ensuring that education remains relevant and impactful in a rapidly changing world.

Synthesis for Humanization: Bridging the Sacred and the Rational

The discussion clearly demonstrates how these seemingly distinct philosophies converge to offer a powerful synthesis for humanizing Islamic education (see Table 1). Al-Ghazali's introspective, purification-centric model provides the Spiritual Core, emphasizing inner transformation and moral virtue as the bedrock of humanity. Rahman's dynamic, context-sensitive approach offers the Rational Adaptation, enabling the application of Islamic principles to evolving modern realities.

Table 1: Comparative Themes in Al-Ghazali and Fazlur Rahman's Educational Thought

Aspect	Al-Ghazali's Emphasis	Fazlur Rahman's Emphasis	Synthesis for Humanization
Spiritual Dimension	Tazkiyah and Sufi introspection	Ethical reasoning via Quranic context	Integrated purification and adaptation
Intellectual Role	Balanced 'ilm (knowledge) with faith	Ijtihad for modern relevance	Holistic intellect fostering empathy
Social Outcome	Moral community building	Justice-oriented pluralism	Contemporary insan paripurna

This synthesis extends beyond the individual, impacting broader societal outcomes. Al-Ghazali's emphasis on fostering a morally upright community is beautifully complemented by Rahman's vision of a justice-oriented, pluralistic society. The resultant educational model transcends mere academic instruction, aiming to cultivate a Contemporary *Insan Paripurna* an individual deeply rooted in spiritual wisdom, ethically discerning, intellectually agile, and socially responsible (Syaiful & Anam, 2024).

This integrated model resonates strongly with contemporary discussions on holistic education and character development (Khalid, 2019). Al-Ghazali's enduring legacy, aligned with Seyyed Hossein Nasr's (1993) perennial philosophy, seeks to revive sacred knowledge, yet it risks insularity if not anchored by Rahman's modernist and contextual approach. Conversely, Rahman's critical humanism, echoing scholars like Mohammed Arkoun (2006), could risk secular dilution without the profound spiritual depth offered by Al-Ghazali. Therefore, their combined strengths address critical gaps in current Islamic education, particularly the prevalent overemphasis on *fiqh* (jurisprudence) at the expense of ethics, spirituality, and critical thinking (Saeed, 2016; Yusuf, 2020).

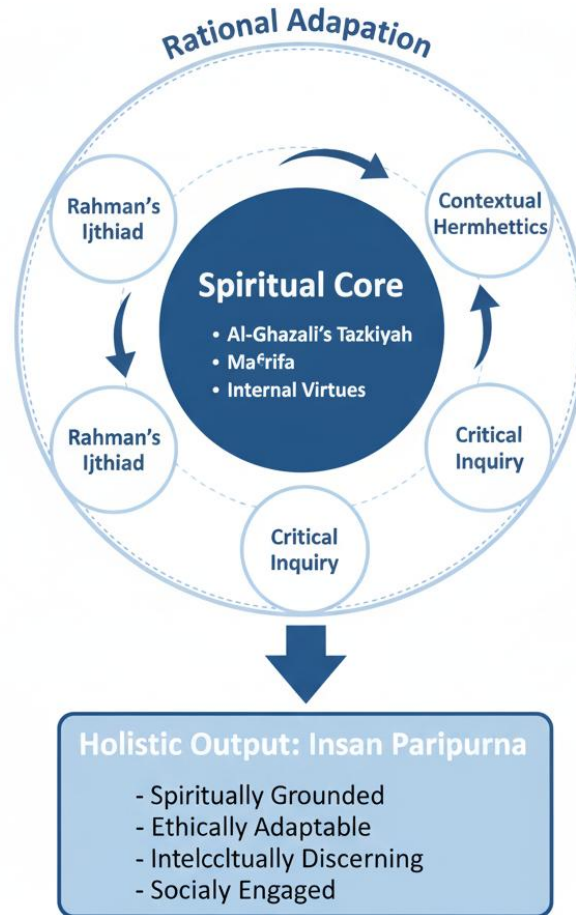
Towards an Integrated Curriculum and Model for Growth

The proposed synthesis points towards a transformative curriculum that blends meditative practices and soul-purification exercises (*tazkiyah*) with robust critical thinking, interdisciplinary inquiry, and active engagement with contemporary social issues. This approach is not entirely theoretical; it finds empirical support in case studies of successful educational reforms in various Indonesian pesantren (Islamic boarding schools) that have integrated traditional spiritual education with modern critical pedagogy (Hefner, 2009; Dhofier, 1999).

Towards an Integrated Curriculum and Model for Growth, the synthesis of Al-Ghazali's spiritual alchemy and Fazlur Rahman's contextual hermeneutics offers a robust framework for designing an integrated curriculum that transcends traditional dichotomies between religious and secular knowledge. By embedding spiritual purification practices such as contemplative reflection and ethical self-examination within Rahman's emphasis on historical and socio-cultural reinterpretation of Islamic texts, educators can create dynamic learning modules that encourage students to apply timeless principles to contemporary dilemmas, fostering not only cognitive skills but also moral resilience and empathetic engagement. This model promotes holistic growth by incorporating experiential learning opportunities, like community service projects addressing inequality or environmental stewardship initiatives rooted in Islamic ecology, thereby cultivating *insan paripurna* who embody intellectual depth, spiritual vitality, and proactive citizenship. Ultimately, such an approach ensures that Islamic education evolves as a living tradition, empowering learners to bridge faith and modernity in pursuit of personal and collective flourishing (Maolla et al., 2025).

Figure 1: Integrated Model for Contemporary Holistic Individual

Figure 1: Integrated Model for Contemporary Holistic Individual



These insights logically and persuasively explain how the proposed synthesis actively counters dehumanizing educational trends. By integrating spiritual depth with rational adaptability, it fosters resilient individuals capable of navigating the complexities of the modern world. This model promotes balanced growth across cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains, equipping individuals not just with knowledge, but with wisdom, empathy, and the capacity for meaningful social contribution.

CONCLUSION

In summary, synthesizing Al-Ghazali's spiritual purification with Fazlur Rahman's contextual hermeneutics offers a robust framework for humanizing Islamic education, cultivating the contemporary holistic individual who embodies faith, reason, and ethical action. This approach bridges classical depth with modern adaptability, addressing educational fragmentation and fostering insan paripurna capable of navigating global challenges. The research

underscores the urgency of integrating these philosophies into curricula to enhance moral leadership and social harmony in Islamic institutions.

Recommendations include empirical testing of this model in teacher training programs and further studies on its application in digital learning environments. Future research could explore intersections with Western humanistic pedagogies, such as those of Paulo Freire, to enrich global dialogues on holistic education.

REFERENCES

- Al-Ghazali, A. H. (2000). *Ihya' 'ulum al-din (Revival of the religious sciences)* (T. J. Winter, Trans.). Islamic Texts Society. (Original work published 1095).
- Arifin, L. M. A., Hariyanto, H., & Alsi, I. (2022). The Concept of Soul Education With 'Tazkiyatun Nafs' According Imam Al-Ghazali and Ibn Qayyim Al-Jauziyyah. *At-Ta'dib*. <https://doi.org/10.21111/at-tadib.v17i1.7893>
- Arkoun, M. (2006). *Rethinking Islam: Common questions, uncommon answers*. Westview Press.
- Chusyairi, K. (2024). *Building Holistic Education: Lessons from Al-Ghazali for the Modern Era*. <https://doi.org/10.59653/jmisc.v2i03.1058>
- Gunawan, A. (2018). Al-Ghazali's educational thought: A Sufi perspective. *Journal of Islamic Education*, 12(1), 45–62.
- Hefner, R. W. (2009). *Making modern Muslims: The politics of Islamic education in Southeast Asia*. University of Hawaii Press.
- Hourani, G. F. (1985). *Reason and tradition in Islamic ethics*. Cambridge University Press.
- Ibrahim, M., Islam, S., Zohriah, O., & Azid, M. (2024). *Addressing contemporary ethical and moral issues through islamic education*. <https://doi.org/10.35335/kbbzar83>
- Maolla, N. W., Komariah, E. N., & Affandi, A. (2025). Concept of character education according to imam al-ghazali and its relevance to modern islamic education. *Deleted Journal*. <https://doi.org/10.58738/compass.v3i1.750>
- Moslimany, R., Otaibi, A., & Shaikh, F. (2024). *Designing a holistic curriculum: Challenges and opportunities in islamic education*. <https://doi.org/10.35335/beztg009>
- Nasr, S. H. (1993). *An introduction to Islamic cosmological doctrines: Conceptions of nature and methods used for its study by the Ikhwān al-Ṣafā', al-Bīrūnī, and Ibn Sīnā*. SUNY Press.
- Nasr, S. H. (2006). *Islamic philosophy from its origin to the present*. SUNY Press.
- Rahman, F. (1966). *Islam*. Anchor Books.
- Rahman, F. (1980). *Major themes of the Qur'an*. University of Chicago Press.
- Rahman, F. (1982). *Islam and modernity: Transformation of an intellectual tradition*. University of Chicago Press.
- Saeed, A. (2016). *Islamic thought: An introduction*. Routledge.
- Syaiful, M., & Anam, R. K. (2024). The concept of moral education according to

- imam al ghazali and relevance to education in indonesia. *At-Tajdid : Jurnal Pendidikan Dan Pemikiran Islam*. <https://doi.org/10.24127/att.v8i2.3705>
- Taruna, R. D., Dewi, E. M. P., & Nasution, H. (2025). Fazlur Rahman's Thoughts on Islamic Education Reform and Its Significance for the Education System in Indonesia. *Bulletin of Indonesian Islamic Studies*. <https://doi.org/10.51214/biis.v4i1.1444>
- Wan Jusoh, W. H., Sahad, M. N., & Shuhari, M. H. (2021). Characteristics of al-Muhtasib According to al-Ghazali (1111 AD) In Kitab Ihya' 'Ulum al-Din. *The International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences*, 11(2), 157-164. <https://doi.org/10.6007/IJARBS/V11-I2/8658>
- Yaqin, A., & Taufikin, T. (2023). The Relevance of Fazlur Rahman's Concept of Education to the Independent Learning Curriculum. *International Journal of Social Science Humanity & Management Research*. <https://doi.org/10.58806/ijsshr.2023.v2i12n09>
- Younus, M., & Moosa, E. (2023). امام غزالی: شخصیت و افکار. <https://doi.org/10.52541/fn.v60i4.2680>