Internalization of Imam Al-Ghazali's Tazkiyatun Nafs in the Moral Education of Adolescents in the Digital Era

Melani, Fuji Rahmadi P, Kamil

Abstract
The development of digital technology has changed the dynamics of adolescent life, from how they communicate to the formation of identity and the meaning of moral values. Unlimited access to social media and the rapid flow of information has the potential to lead to impulsive behavior, decreased self-control, and weakened moral sensitivity. In this context, moral education must be able to penetrate the inner dimension to shape character holistically. This study aims to analyze the internalization of the concept of tazkiyatun nafs according to Imam Al-Ghazali as the basis for moral development of adolescents in the digital era. This study uses a qualitative approach of literature study, with primary data sources in the form of Al-Ghazali's work Iḥya Ulum al-Din, and secondary sources from scientific literature related to moral education and adolescent behavior in the digital era. Data collection using the documentation method and data analysis was carried out using the content analysis method. The results of the study indicate that the concept of tazkiyatun nafs which includes the stages of takhalli, tahalli, and tajalli is a holistic approach in moral education because it emphasizes the purification of the soul as a source of behavioral formation. This concept is relevant to addressing the moral challenges of adolescents in the digital age because it strengthens inner awareness, self-control, and moral responsibility in both real and digital life. Thus, Imam Al-Ghazali's thoughts can serve as a conceptual foundation for developing integrative and contextual adolescent moral education in the digital age.

Keywords: Tazkiyatun Nafs, Moral Education, Adolescents, Digital Era

Melani[1]
[1]Islamic Education Study Program, Universitas Pembangunan Panca Budi, Indonesia
e-mail: melanisiantar3970@gmail.com[1]

Fuji Rahmadi P[2], Kamil[3]
[2,3]Islamic Education Departement, Universitas Pembangunan Panca Budi, Indonesia
e-mail: fujirahmadi@dosen.pancabudi.ac.id[2], kamil@dosen.pancabudi.ac.id[3]

Introduction

The development of digital technology in the last decade has brought about significant changes in the lives of Indonesian teenagers. The presence of social media and various internet-based platforms has not only transformed the way teenagers communicate but also influenced the process of identity formation and the interpretation of moral values. Previously direct interactions have shifted to faster, more concise, and more open virtual communication. This shift has impacted social relationship patterns and created new ways for teenagers to express themselves and seek social recognition (Harahap, Nabila, Sahyati, Tindaon, & Batubara, 2024).

Unlimited access to digital information exposes teenagers to constant visual and emotional stimulation. While this situation opens up opportunities for self-development, on the other hand, the rapid flow of information can trigger information overload, digital anxiety, and emotional instability. This aligns with the findings of Alauddin, Wasehudin, and Haetami (2023), which showed that the use of social media and online games negatively correlates with adolescent morality, particularly in aspects of self-control, discipline, and moral sensitivity.

The instant culture inherent in the digital ecosystem also reinforces the tendency for impulsive behavior. Teenagers are accustomed to receiving quick responses, so patience, self-reflection, and mature decision-making are increasingly rarely practiced. This is reinforced by research by Munib, Atnawi, and Laila (2023), who found that TikTok usage significantly influenced changes in the moral behavior of high school students. Putri (2023) even confirmed that TikTok usage contributed to more than 60% of the moral changes in adolescents in their study area, demonstrating the powerful impact of digital media as a value-shaper.

Exposure to diverse digital content can also shift adolescents' moral standards. As deviant behavior, hate speech, and cyberbullying become increasingly normalized on social media, adolescents become vulnerable to decreased empathy and moral sensitivity. A study by Khairunnisa and Alfurqan (2024) confirmed that social media not only influences moral expression but also reconstructs new moral norms that do not always align with cultural or religious values.

Given this complexity, moral education for adolescents in the digital age requires an approach that is not only cognitive but also addresses affective and spiritual dimensions. Safitri, Karomi, and Faridl (2024) emphasize that digital globalization demands a more comprehensive moral education strategy, aimed at building character from within so that adolescents can adapt and maintain ethical values in a fast-paced digital environment.

In Islamic tradition, the concept of tazkiyatun nafs (purification of the soul), systematically popularized by Imam Al-Ghazali, offers a framework for moral development that is highly relevant to the problems facing today's youth. Al-Ghazali believes that good morals are not born spontaneously, but rather through a long process involving mujahadah (sincerity), riyāḍah al-nafs (self-control), and purification of the heart from reprehensible traits (Al-Ghazali, Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn, 2005). Therefore, tazkiyatun nafs is considered the primary foundation for developing an emotionally stable personality. A teenager whose heart is trained to recognize and manage negative impulses will have better emotional control.

Imam Al-Ghazali emphasized that humans will not achieve closeness to God except through cleansing the heart, because a dirty heart is unable to receive the light of guidance. When teenagers undergo this process of inner purification, they learn to develop self-awareness, sincerity, and a sense of moral responsibility that stem from a deep spiritual connection. (Mhd Habibu Rahman, 2019) This process fosters spiritual maturity. One of the societal issues that requires a response from the world of education is the need for students to purify their souls (tazkiyatun nafs), which is manifested in their daily practice of noble morals. The educational world's response is to re-examine the formulation of moral education, emphasizing the process of tazkiyatun nafs. (Muhammad Yunan Harahap, 2023)

In the context of adolescent moral education in the digital age, Al-Ghazali's ideas are becoming increasingly important. Adolescents need the ability to sort information, control negative impulses, and cultivate inner peace amidst digital social pressures. The process of

internalizing tazkiyatun nafs (self-control) can serve as a character-building mechanism that helps adolescents overcome digital distractions, understand their own worth, and foster healthier online social etiquette. Education that integrates Al-Ghazali's values not only teaches what is good but also how to become a good person from within.

Numerous contemporary studies have shown that internalizing spiritual values effectively increases adolescents' self-awareness, self-control, and psychological resilience in facing the challenges of the digital era (Hidayat, 2019; Fauzi, 2021). This aligns with Al-Ghazali's view that moral change must begin with reforming the heart, the center of human behavior. Thus, studying the internalization of tazkiyatun nafs according to Imam Al-Ghazali is a strategic step in designing adolescent moral education that is more relevant, applicable, and adaptive to digital dynamics.

Literature Review

1. Imam Al-Ghazali's Tazkiyatun Nafs

Linguistically, Tazkiyatun Nafs means cleansing, purifying, and developing. In the Sufi tradition, this term refers to the process of purifying the soul from despicable traits and filling it with praiseworthy qualities. Imam Al-Ghazali viewed Tazkiyatun Nafs as the primary foundation of all spiritual education and the formation of human morals. According to Al-Ghazali (2005), the human soul must be cleansed of inner ailments in order to receive the light of guidance and foster stable moral behavior.

Purification of the soul through the process of Tazkiyatun Nafs is important because a pure heart reflects the values of truth like a polished mirror. When the heart is pure, a person's moral inclinations become more stable, less easily swayed by lust, social pressure, or worldly temptations. Al-Ghazali (2011) stated that the heart is the spiritual center of a person. If the heart is good, then all deeds will be good, but if the heart is corrupt, then behavior will also be corrupt.

This process of self-purification is not only spiritual but also psychological. By cleansing one's inner ailments, one trains oneself to be calmer, more patient, wiser, and more able to control one's emotions. From the perspective of moral education, purification of the soul is a method of developing character from within, not merely theoretical moral teaching. Therefore, Al-Ghazali believed that the development of noble morals can only be achieved if the heart is continuously cleansed through mujahadah (religious reflection), riyāḍah (self-examination), and imbuing oneself with praiseworthy qualities (Amin, 2020; Zainuddin, 2018). Thus, purification of the soul is a fundamental requirement for one to fully receive guidance and demonstrate consistent moral behavior. A pure soul radiates noble morals naturally, not through coercion, but because the heart is aligned with divine values.

2. Moral Education in the Digital Age

Moral education in the digital age faces far more complex challenges than in previous generations. Today's adolescents' lives take place not only in the physical world but also in the digital world, which shapes how they interact, understand themselves, and respond to moral values. Therefore, moral education can no longer rely on conventional, one-way methods or simply emphasize memorization of concepts of right and wrong. It must transform into a character-building process that adapts to the dynamics of the digital world.

In schools and communities, phenomena such as cyberbullying, hate speech, and game addiction also indicate weakened self-control and empathy. Alauddin, Wasehudin, and Haetami (2023) confirmed that social media and online games have a negative correlation with students' morals, particularly in the areas of discipline, manners, and responsibility. Families and schools play significant roles in moral guidance. Effective moral education requires emotional closeness, role models, and warm dialogue about how to use technology appropriately. Khairunnisa and Alfurqan (2024) emphasize that adolescents develop digital moral norms not only from formal rules, but also from interaction patterns, behavioral examples, and the culture

they observe around them. Schools, through teachers and the learning environment, can integrate character education with technology learning. Meanwhile, families serve as the initial space for the formation of digital ethics through supervision, open communication, and the cultivation of positive behavior.

Research Methodology

This study employed a qualitative approach with library research. This approach was chosen because the focus of the study is on Imam Al-Ghazali's thoughts on tazkiyatun nafs (the protection of the self) and its relevance to adolescent moral education in the digital age. The library study allowed the researcher to delve deeply into primary and secondary texts as a basis for conceptual analysis. The data sources in this study consisted of primary sources, namely Imam Al-Ghazali's original works, such as Iḥya' ʻUlum al-Din (Theology of the Discourse on the Divine), and secondary sources, namely books, scientific journals, research reports, and academic articles discussing adolescent moral education, the digital era, as well as studies on Imam Al-Ghazali's thoughts, and recent research related to adolescent morality and the impact of digital media in Indonesia.

The data collection technique used was documentation, which involved collecting, identifying, and reviewing various relevant written sources. All data obtained was analyzed and classified according to the main research theme. After data collection, it was analyzed using content analysis. To ensure data validity, researchers use source triangulation techniques, namely comparing and evaluating data from various literature sources to obtain valid information and objective interpretation.

Results

Based on a literature review of Imam Al-Ghazali's works, particularly Ihya' 'Ulumuddin, as well as various literature on moral education and the challenges of adolescents in the digital age, it was found that the concept of tazkiyatun nafs (self-purification) is the primary foundation for the formation of human morality. Tazkiyatun nafs is understood as a process of purifying the soul aimed at developing a person with noble morals through controlling desires and strengthening spiritual values.

The literature review shows that, according to Imam Al-Ghazali, moral education cannot simply emphasize the cognitive aspect; it must also address the inner dimension of human beings, encompassing both the affective and spiritual aspects. In Al-Ghazali's view, morality is not simply the result of a rational understanding of good and bad, but rather a deeply ingrained state of the soul that gives rise to spontaneous, uncoerced behavior. Therefore, moral education must be directed toward the process of purifying the soul (tazkiyatun nafs) so that moral values are truly internalized within the individual (Al-Ghazali, 2005).

Imam Al-Ghazali emphasized that knowledge without the development of the heart has the potential to produce individuals who are intellectually intelligent but morally weak. This is because the source of human behavior lies in the heart (qalb), not solely the mind. Therefore, moral education must integrate spiritual development such as self-reflection, controlling desires, and practicing good deeds so that the knowledge acquired can shape good character (Al-Ghazali, 2011).

This view is highly relevant in the context of adolescents in the digital age. Based on a review of contemporary literature, today's adolescents live in an environment rife with instant gratification, hedonism, and freedom of expression, often unbalanced by moral and spiritual self-control. Excessive exposure to digital media can encourage consumer behavior, the search for social recognition, and weaken ethical sensitivity if not accompanied by moral education oriented toward inner development (Hidayat, 2020).

From Al-Ghazali's perspective, this situation demonstrates the importance of moral education that goes beyond the theoretical transfer of values, but emphasizes the process of internalizing values through the purification of the soul. Moral education based on tazkiyatun

nafs (self-control) is seen as a moral bulwark for adolescents facing the freedom of digital space, as it instills an internal awareness that encourages adolescents to control themselves, maintain good manners, and take responsibility for their behavior, both in the real world and online (Zuhri, 2018). Thus, the results of this literature study confirm that Imam Al-Ghazali's thoughts on the integration of cognitive, affective, and spiritual aspects in moral education have strong and contextual relevance in addressing the moral challenges of adolescents in the digital era. From the literature review, the internalization of tazkiyatun nafs (self-control) in adolescent moral education can be understood through three main stages: takhalli, tahalli, and tajalli. These stages are a continuous process that shapes adolescents' self-awareness, enabling them to manage the negative influences of digital technology and utilize digital media as a means of positive self-development.

The literature review also shows that the values of tazkiyatun nafs (self-control), such as muhasabah (introspection), muraqabah (reflection), and riyadhah an-nafs (self-control), significantly contribute to fostering a sense of responsibility, discipline, and self-control in adolescents' use of digital media. Therefore, tazkiyatun nafs-based moral education is not only normative-theological but also applicable in addressing the moral challenges of contemporary adolescents.

Imam Al-Ghazali's Conceptualization of Internalization of Tazkiyatun Nafs (Self-Reliance on the Self) in the Moral Education of Youth in the Digital Era

From Imam Al-Ghazali's perspective, tazkiyatun nafs (Self-Reliance on the Self) occupies a central position in moral education because good morals arise from a pure and healthy soul. Al-Ghazali viewed morals as not merely behavior shaped by the pressure of external rules or customs, but rather an inner quality that resides within a person. Therefore, moral development must begin with the process of purifying the heart (qalb), the central control point for human behavior (Al-Ghazali, 2003).

According to Al-Ghazali, a heart that is not cleansed of inner ailments such as excessive love of the world, showing off, and the dominance of lust will struggle to produce moral behavior, even if the individual possesses extensive religious knowledge. This emphasizes that changes in human behavior cannot be achieved solely through the application of external rules or social sanctions, but must begin with improving one's inner state through spiritual practice and self-control (riyadhah an-nafs) (Al-Ghazali, 2010).

This approach is highly relevant in the context of the digital age, particularly for adolescents who are in the process of discovering their identity. Islamic education literature indicates that adolescents in the digital age face internal moral challenges, such as the urge to lust, the need for social recognition, and the tendency to construct one's existence through social media. These challenges are often not outwardly apparent but are rooted in an unstable mental state (Mulyadi, 2019).

In this situation, tazkiyatun nafs plays a role as a preventive and curative approach in adolescent moral education. By instilling inner awareness and self-control, adolescents are expected to be able to manage their internal urges wisely, resist the influence of online popularity standards, and maintain good manners and moral responsibility in digital interactions (Nata, 2014).

The takhalli stage, in the literature review, is understood as an effort to cleanse the soul of reprehensible traits, such as riya' (showing off), ujub (indulgence), envy (envy), and excessive addiction to digital technology. Islamic education literature emphasizes that this process can be achieved through cultivating self-introspection and cultivating awareness of the moral impacts of digital behavior.

The tahalli stage is the process of adorning the soul with commendable qualities, such as patience, honesty, responsibility, and manners in interactions. In the digital context, these values can be internalized through social media ethics education, strengthening religious values, and exemplary behavior from educators and parents, as emphasized in Al-Ghazali's thought.

The tajalli stage is understood as the manifestation of noble morals in the actual behavior of adolescents, both in the real world and in the digital space. Adolescents who have reached this stage are able to use technology wisely, maintain etiquette in online communication, and utilize digital media as a means of goodness and self-development.

Based on the literature review, the internalization of Imam Al-Ghazali's tazkiyatun nafs (self-control) has strong relevance for adolescent moral education in the digital era. This approach offers a holistic solution by combining spiritual, moral, and social dimensions, so that it can shape the character of adolescents who are not only intellectually intelligent, but also morally and spiritually mature.

Conclusion

Moral education, from Al-Ghazali's perspective, is not sufficient to simply emphasize cognitive aspects or mastery of moral knowledge. Moral education must address the inner dimension of human beings, encompassing the development of the heart, controlling desires, and strengthening spirituality as the primary source of noble behavior. The concept of tazkiyatun nafs (the inner self), consisting of the stages of takhalli, tahalli, and tajalli, demonstrates that moral formation is a gradual and ongoing process. This process emphasizes that behavioral change in adolescents cannot be achieved instantly, but rather through consistent efforts to purify the soul and cultivate virtuous values. In the context of the digital era, this approach is highly relevant because adolescents face moral challenges in the form of a culture of instant gratification, hedonism, and freedom of expression that often lacks ethical control.

Internalizing tazkiyatun nafs can serve as the foundation for holistic moral education, integrating intellectual, affective, and spiritual aspects. This approach plays a crucial role in shaping adolescents' internal awareness and self-control, enabling them to act wisely in utilizing digital technology and maintain good manners in social life, both in the real world and in the digital space. Thus, Imam Al-Ghazali's thoughts on tazkiyatun nafs (self-control) have strong and contextual relevance in developing adolescent moral education in the digital age. This concept can serve as a conceptual reference for educators and Islamic educational institutions in formulating a model of moral education that focuses not only on knowledge but also on developing the students' souls and character.

References

[1] Alauddin, A., Wasehudin, W., & Haetami, M. (2023). Pengaruh media sosial dan game online terhadap akhlak siswa di Madrasah Aliyah Caringin. Ta'lim: Jurnal Pendidikan Agama Islam, 11(2).

[2] Al-Ghazali. (2005). Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn. Beirut: Dār al-Fikr.

[3] Al-Ghazali, 2003, Ihya 'Ulumiddin (Menghidupkan Ilmu-Ilmu Agama Islam), Semarang: Asy Syifa, jilid I.

[4] Amin, A. (2020). Etika Islam: Pemikiran Moral Menurut Al-Ghazali. Yogyakarta: Pustaka Pelajar.

[5] Fauzi, A. (2021). Pendidikan Akhlak Remaja di Era Digital. Jakarta: Prenada Media.

[6] Hadi Saputra Panggabean, Bakti Nasution, Usiono, (2023). Internalisasi Nilai-Nilai Karakter dalam Membentuk Kesadaran Peduli Lingkungan di SMA Ormas Islam Kota Medan, Edukasi Islami: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam, 12 (1).

[7] Harahap, R. S., Nabila, A., Sahyati, S., Tindaon, M., & Batubara, E. (2024). Pengaruh media sosial terhadap perilaku etika remaja. Jurnal Diksima, 2(1).

[8] Hidayat, R. (2019). Spiritual Self-Development pada Remaja. Bandung: Alfabeta.

[9] Khairunnisa, N., & Alfurqan, F. (2024). Pengaruh media sosial TikTok terhadap akhlak remaja di Jorong Panta. Jurnal Koloni, 3(1).

[10] Mhd Habibu Rahman, Metode Mendidik Akhlak Anak dalam Perspektif Imam

Al-Ghazali, Jurnal Equalita, Vol. 1 Issue 2, Desember 2019.

[11]   Muhamad Yunan Harahap, Rustam Ependi. (2023). Tazkiyatun Nafs dalam Membentuk Akhlakul Karimah, Yogyakarta: Green Pustaka Indonesia.

[12]   Munib, K., Atnawi, A., & Laila, N. (2023). Pengaruh TikTok terhadap akhlak siswa kelas IX SMPN 2 Pamekasan. Jurnal Ahsana, 5(2).

[13]   Mulyadi. (2019). Pendidikan karakter remaja di era media sosial. Jurnal Pendidikan Islam 8(1), 67–80

[14]   Nata, A. (2014). Akhlak Tasawuf dan Karakter Mulia. Jakarta: RajaGrafindo Persada.

[15]   Putri, A. S. (2023). Pengaruh penggunaan aplikasi TikTok terhadap akhlak remaja Kecamatan Anggana. Skripsi. UIN Sultan Aji Muhammad Idris.

[16]   Safitri, D., Karomi, K., & Faridl, M. (2024). Pengaruh globalisasi digital terhadap moral remaja. Jurnal MIA, 4(1).

[17]   Zainuddin. (2018). Filsafat Pendidikan Islam: Pemikiran Al-Ghazali. Jakarta: Rajawali Press.

[18]   Zuhri, S. (2018). Konsep tazkiyatun nafs dalam pendidikan Islam perspektif Al-Ghazali. Jurnal Studi Keislaman, 6(1), 33–48.