Methods for Cultivating Children's Faith in Al-Ghazali's Thought

Tantriadi, Muhammad Yunan Harahap, Charles Rangkuti

Abstract

This study aims to describe the method of instilling children's faith according to Al-Ghazali's thinking through a literature review of primary works and secondary literature that discuss the concept of spiritual education in Islam. The focus of the study is directed at how Al-Ghazali views the formation of faith as a gradual process involving cognitive, emotional, and moral habits. Based on the literature review, Al-Ghazali emphasized that faith education must begin at an early age with a method of instilling gentle values, parental role models, strengthening basic religious memorization, and developing a sense of love for God through an affective approach. He also emphasized the importance of a conducive environment, because children learn through observation and imitation. In addition, simple dialogue methods, habituating worship, and giving meaning to daily experiences are considered effective in instilling the principles of faith in a sustainable manner. Through literature analysis, this study concludes that Al-Ghazali's thinking emphasizes the integration of education between the heart, mind, and behavior as the main foundation for the formation of children's faith. Thus, the method of instilling faith according to Al-Ghazali is relevant to be applied in the context of modern education, especially in developing a balanced and responsible spiritual character.

Keywords: Faith, Children's Education, Al-Ghazali, Habituation, Role Model.

Tantriadi[1]
[1]Master of Islamic Religious Education, Universitas Pembangunan Panca Budi, Indonesia
e-mail: akanzaozlem@gmail.com[1]

Muhammad Yunan Harahap[2], Charles Rangkuti[3]
[2,3]Master of Islamic Religious Education, Universitas Pembangunan Panca Budi, Indonesia
e-mail: yunan@dosen.pancabudi.ac.id[2], charles@dosen.pancabudi.ac.id[3]
2nd International Conference on Islamic Community Studies (ICICS)
Theme: History of Malay Civilization and Islamic Human Capacity and Halal Hub in the Globalization Era

Introduction

Instilling faith in early childhood is a fundamental element in the Islamic education system, as it forms the foundation of belief that will influence all aspects of an individual's future life. Imam Al-Ghazali, a leading figure in Islamic philosophy and Sufism, emphasized that a child's heart in the early stages of life is like a sacred and malleable gem, so faith education must be carried out with gentle, gradual, and holistic methods to avoid future damage to faith. This approach encompasses not only the teaching of the doctrine of monotheism but also its integration with morals and worship as concrete manifestations of faith (Mustofa et al., 2025).

In the context of Al-Ghazali's thought as expressed in his monumental work, Ihya' Ulumuddin, children are seen as a divine trust that requires special attention from parents and educators to instill the principles of faith and morals from an early age. This study is increasingly relevant in the modern era, where the influence of secularism and digital media often threatens the purity of children's faith, so Al-Ghazali's method can be an effective solution to strengthen the faith of the younger generation (Ruhuputty et al., 2024).

This study aims to analyze in-depth the method of instilling faith in children from Al-Ghazali's perspective, including its basic principles, implementation techniques, and implications for contemporary Islamic education. Thus, it is hoped that it will provide theoretical and practical contributions for educators in developing a strong religious character (Rohimah, 2022).

The background to this problem arises from the observation that many children in the current era are experiencing a crisis of faith due to the lack of an educational approach that is in accordance with the child's nature, as emphasized by Al-Ghazali in his recommendation to prioritize moral and religious education from an early age (Syah et al., 2023).

Literature review

Imam Al-Ghazali's thoughts on child education have been the subject of numerous studies, particularly in the context of instilling faith at an early age. Critical analysis shows that Al-Ghazali advocated a gradual approach, beginning with recognizing Allah SWT through the evidence of the universe, followed by habituating the sentence of monotheism without coercion, so that faith is ingrained naturally and deeply (Mustofa et al., 2025).

The implementation of aqidah and akhlak education according to Al-Ghazali emphasizes the role of role models in the pursuit of religious knowledge, where educators must be living

models who reflect Islamic values to inspire children in strengthening their beliefs (Ruhuputty et al., 2024).

Studies on the instilling of moral and religious aspects in early childhood reveal that Al-Ghazali views education as a process of cleansing the heart from bad traits, with an emphasis on avoiding stories that can mislead faith, such as myths or fairy tales that contradict monotheism (Rohimah, 2022).

The concept of character education in Ihya' Ulumuddin is relevant to strengthening student profiles based on Pancasila, where Al-Ghazali integrates faith as the basis for forming noble morals through tazkiyatun nafs and pious deeds (Syah et al., 2023).

Character education for children based on good morals in Al-Ghazali's thinking involves a holistic approach that combines theoretical knowledge with the practice of worship, so that faith becomes the main foundation in forming responsible individuals (Gifra & Aprison, 2025).

Al-Ghazali's perspective on moral education highlights the importance of love and gentleness in teaching, where parents are tasked with cleansing children's souls from negative influences to maintain the purity of the faith (Delviany et al., 2024).

According to Al-Ghazali, early childhood moral education includes habituation methods through stories of the prophet and role models, which aim to instill a sense of love for Allah and the Messenger as the core of the faith (Maghfiroh, 2024).

The pedagogical competence of aqidah and akhlak teachers must be in line with Al-Ghazali's principles, namely teaching with full empathy and understanding of children's developmental stages (Hamyar & Harahap, 2024).

The method of instilling a routine of worship in children supports Al-Ghazali's idea that religious habits from an early age will strengthen faith in adulthood (Harahap & Harahap, 2025).

Several other studies discuss muhasabah an-nafs as a tool for recognizing self-potential, which can be linked to Al-Ghazali's approach in cleansing the heart to optimally accept the creed (Imelda & Harahap, 2023).

Religious character education through the culture of Al-Qur'an literacy also reflects Al-Ghazali's spirit in integrating faith with the habit of reading holy books (Ismaraidha et al., 2024).

The implementation of self-development programs to increase the independence of mentally retarded children demonstrates the broad application of Al-Ghazali's principles in the context of special education, where faith remains a central element (Widya et al., 2024).

Research methods

This study employs a qualitative approach with a library research design, focusing on content analysis of primary sources such as Al-Ghazali's Ihya' Ulumuddin and secondary sources in the form of related scientific journal articles. Data collection was conducted through an in-depth literature study to identify the concept of instilling faith in early childhood and its implementation in modern education (Mustofa et al., 2025).

Data analysis uses critical content analysis techniques, with steps of data reduction, presentation, and drawing conclusions to reveal Al-Ghazali's main methods such as mentalqin tauhid, exemplary behavior, and habituation of worship (Rohimah, 2022).

Validity and reliability are strengthened through source triangulation, namely comparing interpretations from various studies that discuss similar perspectives on Al-Ghazali's aqidah and morals (Ruhuputty et al., 2024).

This approach allows for a comprehensive and objective interpretation, with an emphasis on the relevance of Al-Ghazali's thought amidst contemporary educational challenges (Syah et al., 2023).

Results and Discussion

The results of the analysis show that Al-Ghazali's main method in instilling children's faith is a gradual approach starting from toddler age, by teaching the sentence of monotheism through gentle repetition and introducing the attributes of Allah through natural phenomena, so that children understand the oneness of God intuitively without a heavy intellectual burden (Mustofa et al., 2025).

Role modelling is a central pillar, where parents and teachers must demonstrate the practice of aqidah and morals in everyday life, because children tend to imitate behavior rather than simply listening to verbal advice (Ruhuputty et al., 2024).

Al-Ghazali advised avoiding negative influences such as superstitious stories or bad environments, because they can pollute the child's still pure heart, so that the faith remains pure and strong (Rohimah, 2022).

The integration of faith with character education through the habituation of pious deeds is relevant to forming the profile of students who are faithful and have noble morals, as in the Pancasila strengthening project (Syah et al., 2023).

Cleansing the heart from despicable traits such as envy and showing off is a priority, with good morals as the direct fruit of correct faith (Gifra & Aprison, 2025).

The compassionate approach in moral education ensures that children receive the teachings of faith with an open heart, through inspirational stories from the Qur'an and Sunnah (Delviany et al., 2024).

The habit of simple worship such as prayer and voluntary fasting from an early age strengthens religious routines that support the long-term instillation of faith (Maghfiroh, 2024).

Teachers of faith and morals must have gentle and adaptive pedagogical competence, according to Al-Ghazali's recommendation to avoid violence in teaching (Hamyar & Harahap, 2024).

The method of children's worship routines emphasizes consistency and intrinsic motivation, so that the faith is not only memorized but also internalized (Harahap & Harahap, 2025).

Muhasabah an-nafs can be a supporting tool for children to recognize their potential within the framework of Al-Ghazali's creed (Imelda & Harahap, 2023).

The culture of Qur'anic literacy enriches the cultivation of faith through direct interaction with revelation (Ismaraidha et al., 2024).

The self-development program demonstrates the flexibility of Al-Ghazali's method even for children with special needs (Widya et al., 2024).

Overall, this method has proven effective in overcoming the modern creed crisis through contextual implementation (Mustofa et al., 2025).

Results and Discussion

The first method emphasized by Al-Ghazali is the teaching of monotheism through the gentle repetition of the shahada from the time children are able to speak, as their hearts are still pure like white paper, easily receptive to writing. This approach avoids complex explanations of the nature of God that can confuse young children. Instead, children are invited to observe Allah's creation in the universe as evidence of His greatness. Thus, belief in Allah is instilled as a natural sense of awe. Parents are encouraged to repeat the tauhid in daily activities. This makes the faith part of the child's affective memory. This mentalqin process must be carried out with love. Children should not be forced to the point of feeling burdened. Enjoyable repetition will

strengthen the foundation of faith. Critical analysis shows that this approach is highly appropriate for modern Islamic education, which emphasizes natural-nature-based learning (Mustofa et al., 2025).

According to Al-Ghazali, parental example is the most effective instrument for instilling faith, as children imitate behavior more than words. When parents consistently perform prayers and read the Quran in front of their children, a love for worship will naturally grow. Conversely, if parents are negligent in religious practice, children will perceive the contradiction. Al-Ghazali emphasized that parental morals are the primary reflection of a child's faith. Educators must demonstrate humility and sincerity in all their actions. This way, children understand that faith is more than just theoretical knowledge. This example includes gentle and polite speech.

Children who see their parents respecting their neighbors will imitate this attitude. This imitation process accelerates the internalization of the value of monotheism. Implementing role models remains a superior method in the contemporary family context (Ruhuputty et al., 2024).

Avoiding bad influences is a preventative strategy that Al-Ghazali emphasized in maintaining the purity of children's faith. He forbade parents from telling fairy tales or superstitious stories containing elements of polytheism. Such stories can pollute a child's still-vulnerable imagination. Instead, stories of the prophets and companions should be the primary source of storytelling. Children's friendships must also be carefully monitored. Uncontrolled media exposure in the digital age further reinforces the urgency of this principle. Parents need to develop information filters from an early age. This way, children's hearts are protected from doubts about their faith. This strategy is not a form of excessive restriction but rather a protection of their natural instincts. The relevance of this method is clearly evident in facing today's information challenges (Rohimah, 2022).

The integration of faith and character development is a hallmark of Al-Ghazali's holistic thinking. He viewed faith as not merely an inner conviction but also a noble daily practice. Practicing good manners in eating, dressing, and speaking serves as a means of strengthening faith. When children are taught to recite the Basmalah (the blessings of Allah) before eating, their awareness of Allah's presence is maintained. This process creates a dialectical relationship between faith and behavior. Noble morals serve as evidence of the truth of the instilled faith. This approach aligns with the project of strengthening student profiles based on religious values. Parents and teachers must be in sync in implementing these habits. Consistency is key to long-term success. Al-Ghazali's thinking provides a strong foundation for modern character education (Syah et al., 2023).

Cleansing the heart from traits of mazmumah (infatuation) is the next step after instilling basic monotheism according to Al-Ghazali. The traits of hasad, riya (showing off), and arrogance must be prevented from childhood through gentle advice and exemplary stories. Children are taught to be grateful for the blessings they receive. This process of tazkiyatun nafs (purification of the nafs) strengthens the faith by purifying the heart. Parents act as the primary guides in cleansing the child's soul. This method emphasizes a preventive rather than a corrective approach. Once bad traits are ingrained, they are difficult to change in adulthood. Therefore, childhood is a golden period for tazkiyah (religious devotion). Good morals only flourish in a pure heart. This approach offers a comprehensive solution for Islamic-based character education (Gifra & Aprison, 2025).

Al-Ghazali's compassionate approach to conveying the teachings of faith was a key pedagogical principle, distinguishing him from the harsh methods of his time. Physical punishment was prohibited because it could incite hatred toward religion. Instead, praise and small gifts were given when children demonstrated an understanding of monotheism. This approach fostered a voluntary love for religion in children. Parents must understand their child's cognitive developmental stage. Explanations should be tailored to their child's understanding. Violence will only create religious trauma. Compassion instills faith as a blessing, not a burden. This method remains relevant in contemporary moral education. Al-Ghazali's perspective offers a humanistic and effective teaching model (Delviany et al., 2024).

According to Al-Ghazali, gradual habituation of worship serves as a bridge between theoretical and practical beliefs. Children are encouraged to pray with their parents from the age of seven in a fun way. Sunnah fasting is introduced gradually to avoid burdens. Almsgiving is taught through practical practices such as giving food to neighbors. This process allows children to experience the sweetness of faith. Worship is no longer a formal obligation but an expression of love for God. Parental consistency in worship is a determining factor in success. This habituation strengthens children's religious motor memory. By puberty, worship has become a natural habit. This method is highly appropriate for early childhood moral education (Maghfiroh, 2024).

The pedagogical competence of faith and moral educators must reflect the gentleness and patience taught by Al-Ghazali. Teachers should avoid displaying an attitude of superiority that could discourage children from asking questions. Instead, the classroom atmosphere should be warm and interactive. Children's questions about God should be answered in simple and compassionate language. Educators must continuously improve their own religious knowledge and morals. Al-Ghazali's teaching model emphasizes the emotional connection between teacher

and student. Verbal and physical violence are strictly prohibited. This competence is an absolute requirement for successful faith instillation. Empirical studies show that a gentle approach is more effective in the long term. This principle serves as an important reference for madrasah teachers today (Hamyar & Harahap, 2024).

According to Al-Ghazali, a religious routine instilled from childhood will serve as a bulwark of faith during adolescence. The habit of waking up early for Tahajjud prayer or reading the Quran before bed must be developed gradually. Parents are the primary supervisors in maintaining this consistency. When worship becomes part of the rhythm of life, worldly temptations find it difficult to shake faith. This method emphasizes the importance of developing a religious habitus. Children who are accustomed to worship will feel a sense of emptiness when they leave it. This routine also strengthens overall self-discipline. In the era of digital distraction, this habituation is increasingly urgent. Al-Ghazali's approach provides a practical recipe for modern parents. Consistency is the key to the success of this method (Harahap & Harahap, 2025).

Self-reflection can be introduced simply to children as a form of daily introspection, in keeping with Al-Ghazali's spirit. Children are encouraged to reflect on their daily practices before bed with light-hearted questions. This process fosters self-awareness from an early age. Self-reflection makes children sensitive to mistakes and grateful for good things. Parents accompany them without judgment. This habit deepens their understanding of faith as a personal relationship with God. Children learn that faith is not merely a ritual but an inner awareness. This method aligns with Al-Ghazali's tazkiyatun nafs (reflection of the nafs). In adolescence, self-reflection becomes a powerful tool for self-control. This approach is relevant for recognizing one's potential within a religious framework (Imelda & Harahap, 2023).

A culture of Quranic literacy from an early age is a highly effective means of strengthening faith, according to Al-Ghazali's principles. Children are encouraged to listen to the recitation of holy verses before bed. Reading the Quran together as a family creates an emotional bond with the word of God. This process instills faith through hearing and sight. Parents must be role models in respecting the Mushaf. This literacy is not merely memorization but also understanding its simple meanings. Children who are familiar with the Quran will have a strong foundation of faith. This method enriches spiritual treasures from an early age. In madrasas, this culture can be integrated into the daily curriculum. Al-Ghazali's approach offers a sustainable model of Quranic education (Ismaraidha et al., 2024).

Self-development programs that emphasize independence can still integrate the values of faith as taught by Al-Ghazali. Children with special needs also have the right to a gentle

monotheistic education. An individual approach tailored to their abilities is the primary principle. Parents and educators must be patient in repeating lessons. Independence in simple acts of worship, such as ablution, can be the initial target. This process demonstrates the universality of Al-Ghazali's method. Every child is a unique trust before God. Inclusive, faith-based education strengthens self-confidence. Compassion is key in overcoming limitations. Al-Ghazali's thought provides a flexible framework for special education (Widya et al., 2024).

Implementing Al-Ghazali's method in a modern Islamic education curriculum requires adaptation without changing its essence. Schools can integrate teacher role models as the main content. Worship habits are fostered through religious extracurricular programs. Parents are involved through parenting classes based on Ihya' Ulumuddin. Children's faith is monitored regularly with a positive approach. Digital media is used to convey appropriate role models. Collaboration between schools and families is a prerequisite for success. Evaluation encompasses not only cognitive but also affective and psychomotor skills. These adaptations keep Al-Ghazali's thought alive in the 21st century. Critical analysis confirms the method's enduring relevance (Mustofa et al., 2025).

Contemporary challenges such as the influence of pop culture and secularism can be addressed by reinforcing Al-Ghazali's methods from an early age. Parents need to build a stronghold of faith through regular family discussions. Children are encouraged to analyze social phenomena from a monotheistic perspective. Social media is filtered to avoid content that undermines faith. Religious communities serve as the primary support environment. Faith education is not solely the responsibility of schools but also of the extended family. Consistency of messages between home and school is crucial. A generation with strong faith will emerge from the application of this discipline. Al-Ghazali provided a clear roadmap for navigating the era of disruption. His legacy remains the most comprehensive solution (Rohimah, 2022).

Conclusion

The method of instilling children's faith in Al-Ghazali's thought includes a gradual, holistic approach, based on role models, habituation, and cleansing the heart, which has proven to be relevant and effective for modern Islamic education (Mustofa et al., 2025).

This thinking provides an eternal framework that integrates faith, morals, and worship as one unit, so that it can be the main guide for educators in forming a pious generation (Rohimah, 2022).

The practical implications require a commitment from parents and teachers to consistently apply these principles, in order to create a society based on solid monotheism (Ruhuputty et al., 2024).

Finally, this study confirms that Al-Ghazali's intellectual legacy remains a timeless solution to the challenges of faith education in the contemporary era.

Reference

[1] Imelda, R., & Harahap, MY (2023). Muhasabah An-nafs to recognize students' self-potential at the Miftahussalam private Islamic high school in Medan. Journal of Education and Entrepreneurship, 11(2), 400-414.

[2] Ismaraidha, I., Harahap, MY, & Hannum, L. (2024). Religious Character Education Through Al-Qur'an Literacy Culture at Amaliyah Sunggal Private Islamic Senior High School. Islamic Journal, 7(2), 249-362.

[3] Harahap, MY, & Harahap, TM (2025). Methods for Instilling a Routine of Worship in Children. Journal of Islamic Religious Education (JURPAI), 1(1), 9-12.

[4] Widya, R., Rozana, S., Harahap, MY, & Panggabean, N. (2024). Implementation of the Self-Development Program in Increasing Independence in Children with Mental Disabilities at SLB C Muzdalifah. Journal of Human and Education (JAHE), 4(6), 317-322.

[5] Hamyar, NR, & Harahap, MY (2024). Analysis of the Pedagogical Competence of Aqidah and Akhlak Teachers at Sunggal Islamic Senior High School, North Sumatra. Al- Fatih Journal, 7(2), 92-105.

[6] Mustofa, D., Wahyuni, DT, Ghazi, F., & Kholid, I. (2025). Critical Analysis of the Concept of Instilling Faith in Early Childhood According to Imam Al-Ghazali's Thought and Its Implementation in Modern Islamic Education. Pendas: Scientific Journal of Elementary Education, 10(04), 237-246.

[7] Ruhuputty, RA, Jazari, I., & Wiyono, DF (2024). Implementation of aqidah and akhlak education according to Imam al-Ghazali's perspective in seeking religious knowledge. Vicratina: Religious Scientific Journal, 6(1), 130-138.

[8] Rohimah, I. (2022). Analysis of Imam Al Ghazali's Thoughts on the Inculcation of Moral and Religious Aspects and Their Implications for Early Childhood Education. Edusentris, 8(3), 30-61.

[9] Syah, ADM, Sholikhudin, MA, & Yusuf, A. (2023). Al-Ghazali's concept of character education in the book Ihya'ulumuddin and its relevance to the project of strengthening the profile of Pancasila students. Mudir: Journal of Educational Management, 5(1), 118-135.

[10] Gifra, G., & Aprison, W. (2025). Children's Character Education Based on Al-Karimah Morals in Al-Ghazali's Thought. Synergy of Islamic Knowledge: Islam and Education, 2(02), 1-10.

[11] Delviany, V., Dewi, E., Hulawa, DE, & Alwizar, A. (2024). Moral Education from the Perspective of Imam Al-Ghazali. Counselia; Journal of Islamic Educational Guidance and Counseling, 5(2), 357-370.

[12] Maghfiroh, L. (2024). Early Childhood Moral Education According to Imam Al-Ghozali. MAANA: Journal of Islamic Education for Early Childhood, 3(1), 53-67.