

# A Study of Imam Ghazali's Philosophy of Education

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## Abstract

*This paper draws the conclusion of study of philosophy of education of Imam Ghazali. During the 12th century, education was not as sophisticated and comprehensive as it is today. Imam Ghazali was a great Muslim educationist and presented many fruitful theories, aims, methods and curriculum of education. Al-Ghazali has been referred by historians as the single most influential Muslim after the Islamic Prophet Mohammad (PBUH). Within Islam he is considered to be a Mujaddid or renewal of the faith, who, according to tradition, appears once every century to restore the faith of the community. His works were so highly acclaimed by his contemporaries that Al-Ghazali was awarded the honorific title- Hujjatul Islam (Proof of Islam) This small work is the analysis of Al-Ghazali practices and the intention that till what extent his educational thoughts are acceptable for the development of humanity in today's scenario. The conclusion of this paper are as follows: theoretical conceptions and refutation of philosophy. Al-Ghazali has discussed about the society and education which is significant part of his work. This article makes the learners to aware about the main purpose behind acquiring knowledge in the light of Quranic guidance. It surely makes the students and teachers realize that Islamic education along with the modern education can lead us to improve child's social moral and ethical development.*

**Keywords:** Imam Ghazali, Curriculum, Refutation

## Introduction

Presenting the history of Islamic legislation through biographies of the leading scholars we have talk about jurists from among the generations of the companions, Tabi'een (followers of the companions) and Atba al-Tabieen (generations after the Tabieen). We presented the leading erudite and distinguished 'Shafayi Jurist' Imam Al-Ghazali. His full name is Abu Hamid Muhammad ibn



Muhammad ibn Muhammad ibn Ahmad Al-Ghazali was born in Tus, a city in Khurasan, Persia-Iran. As for the date of birth, there is slight difference between historians, some say in 451 Hijri or 1059 AD, there was also argued in the year 450 Hijri of 1058 AD. In his book *al-Tabaqat*, al-Subbuki and that there is another way to read his name as 'al-Ghazali' stressing the 'Z'. In Arabic, the word al-Ghazzali means the person who makes Ghazl. This was the common among the people of Kharzan and Purjan. They used attributes relating to Arabic means Qassar, Attar and Ghazzal. They used to say Qassari, Attari and like his common name is al-Ghazzali relating to Ghazala, which was a village in Tus. Imam Abu Hamid was asked whether he prefers Ghazali or Ghazzali, and he preferred the name Ghazali. Therefore, we use the name he loved for himself. We call him 'Al-Ghazali'.

Al-Ghazali has been known as a child of knowledge since childhood and is more inclined to seek the truth of science in essence. In childhood, Imam Al-Ghazali studied with Ahmad bin Muhammad Ar-Radzikani in Tus, then studied with Abi Nash al-Isma'ili at Jurjan (Nasr, 1987). After completing studies in Tus and Jurjan, al-Ghazali continued his education in Nisabur where he studied with Abu al-Ma'ali al-Juwainy (w.478 H/1085 AD), one of the famous religious leaders called Imam al-Haramain. He teaches al-Ghazali the science of kalam, the science of ushul, mazhab of fiqh, rhetoric, logic, Sufism (tasawuf), and philosophy (Asari, 2006)

After his teacher al-Juwainy died, al-Ghazali left Naisabur heading to Nidzam al-Mulk Palace, the Prime Minister of Sultan Bani Saljuk, which was located on Mu'askar. The presence of al-Ghazali was received with great respect because the superiority and grandeur of the name al-Ghazali were known by the Prime Minister. In 1091 AD/484 H, al-Ghazali was appointed as a lecturer at the University of Nizamiyah, Baghdad. For his increasing achievements, at the age of 34, al-Ghazali was appointed as a professor and chancellor of the university (Alavi & Ziauddin, 1988).

After four years al-Ghazali became chancellor of the University of Nizamiyah, he experienced a spiritual crisis, beliefs, doubts which included the creed and all kinds of knowledge. Al-Ghazali no longer believes in the benefits and objectives of the knowledge he has possessed and has carried



out, al-Ghazali seeks truth and certainty that can eliminate his moral uncertainty. He left Nizamiyah, withdrew from public life, and for eleven years of travelling for meditation and reflection, he discovered what he was looking for, namely Sufism (Asari, 2006). After travelling between Sham-Baitul Maqdis-Hijaz, at the urging of Fakhru'l Muluk, in (499 H/1106 AD) al Ghazali returned to Naisabur to teach at the University of Nizhamiyah, the largest university in the city. The first book he compiled after returning to the university was *Al-Munqidz min al-Dhalal* (Berkey, 1992).

### The Educational Objectives

The formulation of educational goals is essentially a philosophical formula or deep thinking about education. The formulation will determine other related aspects including aspects of objectives, curriculum, methods, teachers and students. Based on analysis of al-Ghazali's thinking, it can be clearly seen that there are two final goals to be achieved through educational activities. First, the achievement of human perfection which leads to a self-approach to God, and Second, human perfection that leads to the happiness in the world and the hereafter (Sulaiman, 1968; Rohayati, 2011; Elkaisy, 2006).

Al-Ghazali's opinion is generally in line with the nuances of religion and ethics. Al-Ghazali does not deny worldly problems, but in his view, worldly problems are intended as a path to happy living in a more mainstream and eternal afterlife. He said the world as a tool or 'plantation land' for the afterlife, as a tool that would lead someone to his God (al-Ghazali, 1962).

Al-Ghazali's view of the education purpose appeared to be religious in nature, which was a specific feature of Islamic education, also tending to the spiritual side. This tendency is in line with the philosophy of Sufism (Nata, 2003). Thus, the goal of education according to al-Ghazali is human perfection in the world and the hereafter. To arrive at the level of perfection is only achieved by having the virtue and nobleness of character obtained through knowledge. With this knowledge, people will be able to draw closer to Allah SWT, deliver it to glory in the world and happiness in the hereafter (al-Ghazali, 1969).



Rusn (1998) underlines that the purpose of education according to al-Ghazali is divided into two; long-term goals and short-term goals. The aim of long-term learning is to approach yourself to God. The purpose of education in the process must direct humans towards recognition and then approach themselves to God, the creator of nature. While the aim of short-term education is the achievement of the human profession in accordance with their talents and abilities. The goals should be achieved through developing the knowledge, both farz e ain and farz e kifayah.

Al-Ghazali stressed the problem of rank, position, grandeur, popularity, and glory of the world is not a basic goal of someone to get involved in the world of education, these will be obtained when people have a high motivation to improve their quality through science and it is must be practiced.

### **Curriculum**

The concept of curriculum proposed by al-Ghazali is closely related to his concept of science (al Ghazali, 1927). Al-Ghazali divides knowledge into three parts as follows:

First, the damned sciences, both few and many, namely the sciences that have no benefits, both in the world and in the hereafter, such as sorcery, astrology and divination. Al-Ghazali considered these sciences to be reprehensible because sometimes they are disadvantageous (suffering) both for the learners and the others. For instance, Witchcraft can harm people, separate people who are friendly and love each other, spread hurt, hostility, and causing evil.

Furthermore, al-Ghazali describes that astrology is divided into two, namely astrology based on calculation, and astrology based on istidlaly, which is a kind of astrology and predict fortune based on 'star' instructions. The second type of astrology is disgraceful according to syara' because it ultimately can lead to the disbelief of Allah SWT. Al-Ghazali stated that studying philosophy for everyone is not compulsory because according to tabi'at, it cannot be learned by everyone.

Second, the praised sciences both few and many, namely science that is closely related to worship and its kinds, such as knowledge related to personal hygiene from the sin and science that can be a provision for someone to learn the goodness and carry it out, the sciences that teach humans



about ways to get closer to Allah and do something that is blessed by Allah SWT and can equip their lives in the hereafter.

Regarding the second model, al-Ghazali divides knowledge into two parts, namely farz e ain and farz e kifayah. According to al-Ghazali, the former is related to religious science and similar types, starting from the book of Allah, the main worship such as prayer, fasting, zakat and so on. Farz e ain is the science of how to do obligatory practice. Whereas the latter is all the sciences which may be ignored for the smooth functioning of all matters, such as medical science concerning the body safety or arithmetic which is very necessary for the relationship of mu'amalat, the distribution of testaments, inheritance and so forth. If no one learns these sciences, every population mentioned as the sinners. Al-Ghazali also assessed the kind of works included in the farz e kifayah group, such as agriculture, weaving, administration and sewing.

Third, the commendable sciences in a certain degree, or despicable if studied in depth because it can cause 'chaos' between belief and doubt, and can also lead to disbelief, such as philosophy. Al Ghazali concluded that the most important knowledge is the religious sciences and its branches because it can only be mastered through perfect reason and clear capture power. Furthermore, Al Ghazali's view in the book "Ihya Ulum al-Din" about the schema of science can be viewed from three perspectives, namely: epistemology, ontology and axiology as follows (al-Gazhali, 1939).

**First**, the Epistemology perspective, science is divided into two types, syar'iyah and ghairu syar'iyah. (1): Syar'iyah is divided into four categories: (a). Ushul, namely: books, Sunnah, ijma' and atsar. (b). Furu' which consists of world science, and the hereafter. Hereafter categorized as mukasyafah and mu'amalah science (self, God, world and the hereafter). (c). Muqaddimah, namely: language and grammar. (d). Mutammimah, namely: qira'at and tafsir. (2): Ghairu Syar'iyah, also called Aqliyah, consists of two types: (a) Dharuri and (b) Iktisabi.

**Second**, Ontology perspective, science is divided into two types: First: Farz e Ain, namely: Tawheed, shari'at and sirri. Second: Farz e Kifayah which is grouped into two categories: eternal and developing.



1. Eternal Sciences such as Al-Qur'an (Reading, memorization and interpretation), As sunnah, early history of Islam (Atsar) in the form of the Sirah of prophet, companions and tabi'in, Ijma', Islamic philosophy/kalam, ushul fiqh and fiqh, Sufism/morals, Arabic language and grammar of Al-Qur'an, and Islamic metaphysics.
2. The developing science: imaginative, natural, applied and practical science.

**Third**, the axiology perspective classified into three categories: commendable, subtle (mubah) and despicable. In curriculum compiling, al-Ghazali gave special attention to the religion and ethics sciences, as well as to the sciences which are very decisive or essential for people's lives and emphasizing cultural aspects. He was not concerned with the arts sciences, according to his personal approach which was controlled by Sufism and zuhud teachings. Based on the opinions expressed by al-Ghazali related to the curriculum as outlined above, in general, it can be concluded that the subjects included in the Islamic education curriculum are divided into two major parts, namely:

First, the tendency of religion and Sufism, this led al-Ghazali to place the religious sciences above all else and view them as a means to purify and cleanse themselves from the world influence. By this tendency, al-Ghazali was very concerned with moral education because he thought that it was closely related to religious education.

Second, pragmatic tendencies, this can be seen in his writings which regularly repeat his assessment of science based on its benefits to humans, both for life in the world and in the hereafter. According to al-Ghazali, every science must be seen in terms of its functions and uses in the form of amaliah, and it should be accompanied by sincerity and honesty.

Given that al-Ghazali theory of causation is practically no different than causation than understood by the philosophers and scientists of his time, the argument that his view undermines the foundations of science loses strength. The only difference is the theoretical addition of God as a divine free agent who can, in theory, interfere with the workings of the universe, but never will and never does.



as Griffel points out, Trust in God (Tawakkal) is a major condition for investigating the natural sciences. Such trust requires the certainty to know that God will not change books into horses or disconnect our knowledge from reality. Given that God habitually creates our knowledge to accord with reality, we can rely on our sense and our judgement and confidently pursue the natural sciences.

### **Theoretical Conceptions**

Al-Ghazali wrote at least two works on theology, *Al-Iqtisadfi'litiqad* (The middle path in Theology) and *Al-Risala al-Qudsiya* (The Jerusalem Epistle). The former was composed towards the end of his stay in Baghdad and after his critique of philosophy, the later soon afterwards in Jerusalem. The theological position expressed in both works is Ash'arite, and there is no fundamental difference between al-Ghazali and Ash'arite. However, some changes can be seen in the theological thought of his later works, written under the influence of philosophy and sufism.

As Ash'rite theology came into being out of criticism of Mu'tazlite rationalistic theology. There is no essential difference between them as to God's essence al-Ghazali proves the existence of God from the world according to the traditional Ash'rite proof. An atomistic ontology is presupposed here, and yet there are also philosophical arguments to refute the criticism of the philosophers. As the God's attributes however, al-Ghazali regard them as 'something different from, yet added to, God's essence' while the Mulazilites deny the existence of the attributes and reduce them to God's essence and acts.

According to al -Ghazali, God has attributes such as knowledge, life, will, hearing, seeing and speech, which are included in God's essence and coeternal with it. Concerning the relationship between God's essence and his attributes, both are said to be 'not identical, but not different'. The creation of the world and its subsequent changes are produced by God's eternal knowledge, will, and power, but this does not necessarily mean any change in God's attributes in accordance with these changes in the empirical world.



## Refutation of Philosophy

Al-Ghazali relationship with philosophy is subtle and complicated. The philosophy represented by al-Farabi and Ibn Sina, for al-Ghazali, not simply an object of criticism but also an important component of his own teaming. Al-Ghazali composed three works on Aristotelian logic, *Mayarul ilm* (The standard Measure of Knowledge), *Mihakkul-nazarfi'l-Mantiq* (The Touchstone of Proof in Logic) and *Al-Qistas Al-Mustaqim* (The Just Balance). The first two were written immediately after the *Tahafut* in order to help understanding of the latter, and the third was composed after his retirement. He also gave a detailed account of logic in the long introduction of his writing on legal theory, *Al-Mustafa min Ilmul-usul* (The Essential of Islamic Legal Theory). Al-Ghazali's greatest interest in logic is unusual, particularly when most Muslim theologians were antagonistic to it, and can be attributed not only to the usefulness of logic in refutation heretical views, but also to his being fascinated by the exactness of logic and its effectiveness for reconstructing the religious sciences on a solid basis. There is a functional disparity between al-Ghazali's theological view and the Neo-Platonic-Aristotelian philosophy of emanationist. Al-Ghazali epitomizes this view in twenty points, three of which are especially prominent.

1. The Philosophers' belief in the eternity of the world,
2. Their doctrine that God does not know particulars, and
3. Their denial of the resurrection of bodies.

First, as for the eternity of the world, the philosophers claim that the emanation of the First intellect and other beings is the result of the necessary causality of God's essence, and therefore the world as a whole is concomitant and coeternal with his existence. Al-Ghazali retorts that God's creation of the world was decided in the eternal past, and therefore it does not mean any change in God; indeed, time itself is God's creation.

Second, the philosophers deny God's knowledge of particulars or confine it to his self-knowledge, since they suppose that to connect God's knowledge with particulars means a change and plurality in God's essence. Al-Ghazali denies this.



Third, the philosophers deny bodily resurrection, asserting that ‘the resurrection’ means in reality the separation of the soul from the body after death. Al-Ghazali criticizes this argument, and also attacks the theory of causality presupposed in the philosophers’ arguments. Al-Ghazali thus claims that the philosophers’ arguments cannot survive philosophical criticism, and Aristotelian logic served as a powerful weapon for this purpose. However, if the conclusions of philosophy cannot be proven by reason, is not the same true of theological principles or the teachings of revelation? How then can the truth of the latter be demonstrated? Here in lies the force of al-Ghazali's critique of reason.

### Conclusion

Al-Ghazali writings on education constitute the high point of thinking on the subject in the Islamic world. The theory of education which he elaborated is the most complete edifice relating to the field; it clearly defines the aims of education, lays out the path to be followed, and the means whereby the objectives can be achieved. From the twelfth to nineteenth centuries AD, Islamic thinking on education was heavily influenced by Imam Al-Ghazali. Indeed, theoretical and practical educators with few exceptions, hardly did anything other than borrow from al-Ghazali and summarize his ideas and books. He focusses spiritual and also emphasis materialistic development of man. He believes that worldly business is important for the peace of mind and for a pleasant life. He advises the people to get the basic necessities of life and forbid them to indulge in luxurious life. He believes that man should work and labor because God has made this world for that purpose.

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