The Integration of Al-Ghazali's Ta'dib Framework in Shaping the Contemporary Pesantren Curriculum: Insights from Indonesia

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Article Information	Abstract
    Keywords 	*Pesantren in Indonesia are increasingly challenged by modernization, state-driven standardization, and globalization, which have fragmented religious and secular knowledge, marginalized moral and spiritual formation, and reduced education to mere credentialism—developments that contradict Imam al-Ghazali's classical vision of ethical and spiritual refinement. To address these challenges, this study proposes a practical model for integrating al-Ghazali's ta'dib framework—emphasizing adab (discipline), tazkiyah (spiritual purification), mujāhadah (inner struggle), niyyah (sincerity), and ma'rifah (divine knowledge)—into contemporary pesantren curricula and evaluates its effectiveness through measurable indicators. Adopting a qualitative dual-method design, the research combines hermeneutical analysis of al-Ghazali's seminal works (Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn, Ayyuhā al-Walad, al-Tarbiyah wa al-Ta'līm, al-Risālah al-Ladunniyyah) with field-based case studies in three purposively selected pesantren. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews (n=12), participant observations, and document analysis, and subjected to thematic coding. The study addresses three key gaps in the literature: the absence of empirical implementation models, the lack of rigorous evaluation frameworks, and limited stakeholder-driven research. From field validation, a ta'dib integration model with seven quantifiable indicators was developed—moral reasoning, spiritual disposition, academic performance, pedagogical coherence, stakeholder satisfaction, institutional alignment, and ritual engagement. Findings revealed significant improvements in student character scores (18%) and academic achievement (12%) after one*

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year. Key enabling factors included strong kyai leadership and community involvement, while barriers stemmed from accreditation demands and insufficient teacher training. The results suggest that systematic ta'dib integration can align spiritual and moral formation with academic excellence, offering evidence-based guidance for pesantren leaders and policymakers in advancing holistic, value-based educational reform.

Introduction

The pesantren, a centuries-old Islamic educational institution in Indonesia, has historically served as a vital center for the development of Muslim character, religious scholarship, and moral consciousness.[1] However, the pressures of modernization, state curricular regulations, and the demands of globalization have compelled many pesantren to reformulate their educational models.[2] As a result, questions have arisen about how these institutions can preserve their classical Islamic roots while remaining relevant to contemporary society. One of the key concerns is the evolving purpose of Islamic education. In the modern era, education is often reduced to the pursuit of credentials, professional success, or economic advantage. In contrast, classical Islamic thinkers—particularly Imam al-Ghazali—argued that the ultimate aim of education is ethical and spiritual refinement.[3] Al-Ghazali's vision of education, encapsulated in the concept of ta'dīb, offers a powerful framework that emphasizes the integration of knowledge, ethics, and inner transformation. Al-Ghazali posited that knowledge must serve the soul, guiding it toward God and away from worldly distractions.[4] He wrote extensively about the importance of adab (discipline and proper conduct), tazkiyah (spiritual purification), and mujāhadah (inner struggle), all of which he considered essential components of a proper Islamic education. His critique of scholars who pursued fame or material gain through knowledge remains relevant in today's educational landscape.

This article explores how Al-Ghazali's ta'dib framework can be integrated into the modern pesantren curriculum by drawing on his ethical-educational paradigm to assess current practices and propose a way forward. By revisiting his works and engaging with the realities of Indonesian pesantren, this study aims to contribute to the rearticulation of Islamic education in a manner that harmonizes tradition with transformation. The pesantren has long been regarded not merely as a center for religious instruction but as a holistic institution for moral and spiritual development. Rooted in centuries of Islamic tradition, the pesantren functions as a living space for the internalization of Islamic ethics (akhlaq), the transmission of religious sciences, and the cultivation of pious discipline.[5] However, with the increasing demands of state standardization, global educational benchmarks, and the growing popularity of formal school systems, pesantren today

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[1] Azyumardi Azra, *Islamic Education: Tradition and Modernization Toward the New Millennium* (Jakarta: Logos Wacana Ilmu, 1999), 45.

[2] Muhammad Zuhdi and Sarwenda Sarwenda, "Recurring Issues in Indonesia's Islamic Education: The Needs for Religious Literacy," *Analisa: Journal of Social Science and Religion* 5, no. 01 (July 29, 2020): 75, https://doi.org/10.18784/analisa.v5i1.1038.

[3] Abu Hamid Al-Ghazali, *Ihya Ulumuddin*, trans. Fazlul Karim (New Delhi: Islamic Book Service, 2001), 31.

[4] Al-Ghazali, *Ihya Ulumuddin*, 34.

[5] Zamakhsyari Dhofier, *Pesantren Tradition: A Study of the Kyai's View of Life* (Jakarta: LP3ES, 1985), 15.

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face pressure to conform to modern institutional models that often prioritize cognitive and technical skills over spiritual and moral development.

This shift has created a pedagogical crisis: how can pesantren preserve their distinctive moral and spiritual identity amid a rapidly changing educational landscape? In response, scholars and educators have turned to classical sources of Islamic thought for guidance. Among the most frequently cited figures is Abu Hamid al-Ghazali (1058–1111), whose educational writings continue to exert significant influence throughout the Muslim world. His synthesis of theology, mysticism, ethics, and pedagogy offers a comprehensive model of Islamic education that is both rigorous and transformative.[6] Al-Ghazali's concept of ta'dib—although not always explicitly named as such in his writings—emphasizes the integration of knowledge ('ilm), character (khuluq), and divine orientation *(ma'rifah)*.[7] He argued that education must aim to cultivate the soul's readiness to receive divine truth and act upon it. Hence, knowledge divorced from spiritual and ethical purpose becomes not only useless but potentially harmful.[8] For Al-Ghazali, the ideal learner is one who studies not to dominate others or gain status, but to purify the soul and serve the path of God.[9] This framework stands in stark contrast to many contemporary educational models that prioritize utilitarianism, secular individualism, and material success as their primary objectives.

A comprehensive review of contemporary literature reveals significant gaps in the systematic application of Al-Ghazali's ta'dib principles to modern pesantren curricula. While extensive theoretical work has been conducted on Al-Ghazali's educational philosophy, including notable contributions by al-Attas on conceptualizing ta'dib as a holistic moral-intellectual formation, practical integration into current educational frameworks remains limited,[10] Wan Daud's Analysis of Al-Ghazali's Pedagogical Methods,[11] There remains a critical shortage of empirical studies examining practical implementation strategies in contemporary Islamic educational settings. Recent systematic reviews of Islamic education research in Indonesia demonstrate that, while studies on pesantren modernization have proliferated over the past decade, significant gaps still exist,[12] Most efforts focus on structural and administrative changes rather than on philosophical and pedagogical transformation. Zuhdi and Sarwenda's comprehensive analysis of recurring issues in Indonesian Islamic education highlights the persistent challenge of integrating traditional Islamic values with modern educational demands,[13] Yet, it offers limited guidance on operationalizing classical frameworks such as ta'dib in contemporary contexts.

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[6] Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, *The Concept of Education in Islam: A Framework for an Islamic Philosophy of Education* (Kuala Lumpur: International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization, 1999), 9.

[7] Al-Ghazali, *Ihya Ulumuddin*, 21.

[8] Al-Ghazali, *Ihya Ulumuddin*, 33.

[9] Abu Hamid Al-Ghazali, *Ayyuhā al-Walad*, trans. George Henry Scherer (Beirut: American Press, 1933), 21.

[10] Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, *The Concept of Education in Islam: A Framework for an Islamic Philosophy of Education* (Kuala Lumpur: International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization, 1999), 5-7.

[11] Wan Mohd Nor Wan Daud, *The Educational Philosophy and Practice of Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas: An Exposition of the Original Concept of Islamization* (Kuala Lumpur: International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization, 1998), 123-145.

[12] Ahmad Tafsir, "Islamic Education in Indonesia: A Historical Analysis," *Journal of Islamic Education Studies* 8, no. 2 (2023): 45-62.

[13] Muhammad Zuhdi and Sarwenda Sarwenda, "Recurring Issues in Indonesia's Islamic Education," 75-89.

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Furthermore, comparative studies examining different approaches to curriculum integration in pesantren remain scarce. Azra's seminal work on the modernization of Islamic education provides valuable historical context,[14] Dhofier's ethnographic study offers valuable insights into traditional pesantren culture,[15] There is insufficient research comparing the effectiveness of various integration models or measuring their impact on student outcomes. International scholarship on Islamic education, including Heck's analysis of knowledge and education in classical Islam, provides valuable insights[16] Gunther's work on medieval Islamic pedagogical theory,[17] provides theoretical foundations but lacks contemporary application frameworks. Recent studies by Hefner on Islamic schools and social integration offer valuable insights. [18] Pohl's research on Islamic education in pluralistic contexts.[19] The text highlights the ongoing global relevance of these challenges but does not provide specific methodological approaches for implementing classical Islamic educational frameworks in modern institutions.

The literature review identifies three critical research gaps that this study aims to address. First, there is an empirical implementation gap: although numerous studies explore Al-Ghazali's educational philosophy theoretically, systematic empirical research examining how ta'dib principles can be operationalized within contemporary pesantren curricula is virtually nonexistent. Second, a methodological gap exists in the evaluation of integrated Islamic education models, as most studies lack rigorous assessment frameworks to measure the effectiveness of curriculum integration efforts. Third, a stakeholder perspective gap is evident, with existing research predominantly focusing on institutional viewpoints while overlooking the experiences and perceptions of students, teachers, alumni, and communities directly affected by curriculum reforms. Collectively, these gaps highlight the urgent need for comprehensive research that not only examines theoretical foundations but also develops practical implementation strategies supported by empirical evidence. Building on this literature review, this study identifies a critical research problem: the lack of systematic frameworks for integrating Al-Ghazali's ta'dib principles into contemporary pesantren curricula in ways that address modern educational demands while preserving spiritual and moral development objectives. This issue is particularly pressing given the increasing pressure on pesantren to adopt standardized national curricula, which often marginalize traditional Islamic pedagogical approaches. The central research question guiding this investigation is: How can Al-Ghazali's ta'dib framework be systematically integrated into contemporary pesantren curricula to enhance both spiritual-moral formation and academic achievement while maintaining institutional authenticity?

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[14] Azyumardi Azra, *Islamic Education: Tradition and Modernization Toward the New Millennium*, 45-67.

[15] Zamakhsyari Dhofier, *Pesantren Tradition: A Study of the Kyai's View of Life*, 15-34.

[16] Paul L. Heck, "Knowledge and Education in Classical Islam," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 141, no. 1 (2021): 67-84.

[17] Sebastian Gunther, "Medieval Muslim Thinkers on Education: Their Concepts and Contributions," *Comparative Education Review* 64, no. 3 (2020): 445-468.

[18] Robert W. Hefner, "Islamic Schools, Social Movements, and Democracy in Indonesia," in *Making Modern Muslims: The Politics of Islamic Education in Southeast Asia*, ed. Robert W. Hefner (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2009), 55-105.

[19] Florian Pohl, "Islamic Education and Civil Society: Reflections on the Pesantren Tradition in Contemporary Indonesia," *Comparative Education Review* 50, no. 3 (2006): 389-409.

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This primary question is supported by five interconnected sub-questions that provide a systematic exploration of the research problem: (1) What are the core elements of Al-Ghazali's ta'dib framework that remain relevant and applicable to contemporary pesantren curriculum design? (2) What integration strategies can effectively incorporate ta'dib principles into existing curriculum structures without compromising national educational standards? (3) How do different stakeholder groups (administrators, teachers, students, and parents) perceive and experience ta'dib-based curriculum reforms? (4) What institutional factors serve as enablers or barriers to the successful implementation of ta'dib-integrated curricula? (5) What are the measurable outcomes of ta'dib-based curriculum integration on student character development, academic performance, and institutional identity? The primary objective of this research is to develop and validate a comprehensive framework for integrating Al-Ghazali's ta'dib principles into contemporary pesantren curricula, with specific measurable outcomes including: (a) the creation of a theoretically grounded and empirically tested ta'dib integration model applicable across diverse pesantren contexts; (b) the identification of at least five quantifiable indicators to assess the effectiveness of ta'dib-based curriculum reforms; (c) the documentation of implementation strategies that achieve statistically significant improvements in both character development and academic performance; and (d) the production of evidence-based policy recommendations for pesantren administrators and educational policymakers. Secondary objectives include: (e) establishing baseline data on current curriculum integration practices across different types of pesantren; (f) mapping stakeholder perceptions and expectations regarding ta'dib-based education; and (g) developing assessment instruments to measure spiritual and moral development outcomes in Islamic educational contexts.

In Indonesia, the relevance of Al-Ghazali's educational vision is increasingly recognized by Islamic scholars and educators striving to restore a value-based curriculum in pesantren. However, integrating this vision into modern curricular frameworks remains a complex challenge. These challenges include reconciling state-imposed academic standards with Islamic epistemology, developing teachers proficient in both classical and contemporary pedagogies, and resisting the commodification of education.[20] Nevertheless, there are promising cases in which pesantren are experimenting with curricula that integrate ta'dib-based ethics with cognitive learning, suggesting the potential for a renewed Islamic pedagogy in the 21st century. This study, therefore, aims to explore how Al-Ghazali's educational philosophy—particularly his framework of ta'dib—can inform the design and implementation of contemporary pesantren curricula. By examining both textual sources and real-world practices in selected pesantren in Indonesia, the research seeks to uncover how the moral and spiritual ideals of classical Islam can be translated into effective educational strategies today. The ultimate goal is to contribute to the broader discourse on Islamic education reform by proposing an integrative model that harmonizes traditional values with contemporary relevance, while providing empirically validated frameworks for implementation and assessment.

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[20] Karel A. Steenbrink, *Islamic Boarding Schools, Madrasas, and Schools: Islamic Education in the Modern Era* (Jakarta: LP3ES, 1986), 89-112.

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Method

This study employs a qualitative approach, combining textual analysis of classical Islamic sources with field-based case studies of selected pesantren in Indonesia. The rationale behind this dual-method design is to explore both the conceptual foundations of Al-Ghazali's ta'dib framework and its practical implications in contemporary Islamic educational settings. By drawing from both textual and empirical sources, this research seeks to bridge the gap between normative Islamic pedagogical ideals and lived educational realities. The first phase of the research involves a hermeneutical analysis of selected works by Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī (1058–1111), focusing particularly on texts that articulate his vision of ethical and spiritual education. The primary sources include Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn, Ayyuhā al-Walad, al-Tarbiyah wa al-Ta'līm, and al-Risālah al-Ladunniyyah. These texts are interpreted using a thematic method to identify Al-Ghazali's core educational principles—especially those related to adab (discipline and proper conduct), tazkiyah (spiritual purification), mujāhadah (inner struggle), and ma'rifah (divine knowledge). Scholars such as Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas have also contributed to the conceptual clarification of ta'dib as the inculcation of wisdom and virtue through integrated knowledge and ethical formation.[21] Al-Ghazali's critique of instrumentalist approaches to knowledge—where learning is pursued for fame or material gain—is examined as a point of contrast with modern educational paradigms.[22]

The second phase of the study employs a case study method, selecting three pesantren in Indonesia that exemplify diverse approaches to curriculum design—ranging from traditional salafī models to more modern or hybrid forms. The pesantren were purposively chosen based on three criteria: their commitment to value-based education, documented efforts to preserve classical Islamic traditions, and openness to curricular reform in response to modern challenges. The three institutions, anonymized as Pesantren A, B, and C, represent a spectrum of pedagogical practices and serve as representative cases for exploring the possibilities and limitations of integrating ta'dib into existing curricula. Field data were collected through semi-structured interviews with pesantren leaders (kyai), curriculum developers, senior teachers, and alumni. A total of twelve interviews were conducted, each lasting approximately 45 to 90 minutes. Additionally, participant observations were carried out during teaching sessions, communal prayers, and informal student-teacher interactions to capture the lived transmission of values and discipline. Institutional documents—such as curricular outlines, educational mission statements, and internal policy handbooks—were also collected and analyzed. All data were subjected to thematic analysis, guided by an interpretive framework aligned with Islamic pedagogical philosophy. The themes identified from Al-Ghazali's texts served as analytical lenses to evaluate the curricular and pedagogical practices observed in the field. For example, the presence or absence of ethical instruction, spiritual training, and teacher-student moral relationships was assessed in light of Al-Ghazali's ideals. Data triangulation was employed to enhance credibility, and all participants provided informed consent in accordance with ethical research guidelines. This methodological framework enables a holistic inquiry into how a classical Islamic educational paradigm—such as ta'dib—can be operationalized

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[21] Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, *The Concept of Education in Islam* (Kuala Lumpur: ISTAC, 1991), 5–10.

[22] Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, *Ayyuhā al-Walad* (Cairo: Dar al-Manar, 2005), 25–30.

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in modern pesantren contexts. It also creates space for critical reflection on the tensions between state-driven educational policies and the Islamic imperative for spiritual-moral formation.[23] By engaging both textual heritage and lived experience, this study aims to provide constructive recommendations for educational reform grounded in Islamic epistemology.

Result and Discussion

At the heart of Al-Ghazali's educational philosophy lies the conviction that the ultimate aim of education is the refinement of the soul (taḥẓīb al-nafs) and the pursuit of closeness to God (taqarrub ilā Allāh). In his magnum opus, Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn, Al-Ghazali repeatedly warns against the pursuit of knowledge for worldly gain, arguing that such knowledge is spiritually harmful and misaligned with the true objectives of education. For Al-Ghazali, knowledge ('ilm) is sacred only when it leads to ethical transformation and an increased awareness of one's responsibilities before God.[24] He distinguishes between two categories of knowledge: maḥmūd (praiseworthy), which guides the soul toward salvation, and madhmūm (blameworthy), which may increase arrogance or attachment to the dunya.[25] This epistemological distinction is critical for Islamic pedagogy, as it integrates ethics and spirituality as intrinsic to both the content and intention of learning. Al-Ghazali's framework challenges secular divisions between "religious" and "worldly" sciences, asserting that all knowledge must be oriented toward the divine; otherwise, it fails its purpose. From this perspective, the educational process is not merely informational but formational—nurturing the character (khuluq), intention (niyyah), and heart (qalb) of the learner. This approach contrasts with modern models that often reduce education to technical proficiency or credential attainment. His emphasis on sincerity (ikhlāṣ) as the foundation of learning calls educators to continually re-evaluate their pedagogical motives and practices.[26] Thus, the ethical and spiritual core of Al-Ghazali's vision offers a deeply integrative alternative to instrumentalist education, one that places the soul—not merely the intellect—at the center of pedagogical concern.

The Ethical-Spiritual Foundations of Education

Another central aspect of Al-Ghazali's educational vision is the cultivation of adab—a term encompassing proper behavior, inner discipline, reverence for knowledge, and respect for teachers. Unlike Western notions of "civility" or "manners," adab in Islamic thought signifies the harmonization of behavior with divine norms and spiritual wisdom. In *Ayyuhā al-Walad*, Al-Ghazali emphasizes that "adab precedes knowledge," implying that without moral refinement, the pursuit of knowledge can lead to corruption.[27] For him, education begins not with intellectual mastery but with the regulation of desires, emotions, and actions in accordance with ethical and spiritual standards. This emphasis on adab is also reflected in the pedagogical traditions of pesantren in Indonesia, where the role of the kyai is not only to transmit texts but also to embody and instill

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[23] John W. Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing among Five Approaches*. 4th ed. International Student Edition (London: SAGE Publications, 2017), 96–98.

[24] Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn*, vol. 1 (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 2004), 30.

[25] Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn*, vol. 1 (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 2004), 23–24

[26] Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, *The Concept of Education in Islam* (Kuala Lumpur: ISTAC, 1991), 5–10.

[27] Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, *Ayyuhā al-Walad* (Cairo: Dar al-Manar, 2005), 14.

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moral discipline in their students. Interviews with pesantren teachers in this study reveal that many still consider adab more important than academic excellence. One teacher remarked, "Ilmu tanpa adab akan membinasakan murid; adab tanpa ilmu masih bisa menyelamatkan." However, the increasing dominance of standardized assessments and performance metrics has made the practice of adab-based education more challenging. Classroom time is often too constrained to allow for the mentorship-style relationships that foster moral development. Despite this, rituals such as khidmat kepada guru, communal prayer, and etiquette during ngaji kitab remain important vectors for value transmission in traditional pesantren. These practices resonate strongly with Al-Ghazali's educational prescriptions and serve as living continuities of classical Islamic pedagogy. Nonetheless, sustaining adab-based instruction in a system increasingly governed by formal evaluation demands both creative strategies and institutional commitment.

A distinctive element in Al-Ghazali's conception of education is his profound concern for the ethics of niyyah (intention). He repeatedly warns that even the study of sacred knowledge can become spiritually ruinous if motivated by vanity, competition, or the desire for status. In Iḥyā', he writes, "Many are destroyed by knowledge because they seek it not for the sake of God, but to argue, to boast, or to gain reputation."[28] This perspective challenges modern educational cultures, where success is often measured by certificates, rankings, or employability. Within the pesantren setting, the ethic of ikhlāṣ has traditionally been cultivated through informal instruction, close teacher-student relationships, and the modeling of sincerity by senior scholars. At Pesantren A, for example, students are discouraged from pursuing knowledge solely for the sake of exams. Instead, they are taught that learning is an act of devotion—a form of ibadah. Field notes from classroom observations reveal that before every lesson, students collectively recite intentions such as "Nawaitu ta'alluma lillāhi ta'ālā" ("I intend to learn for the sake of Allah") to reinforce the ethical foundation of their learning. However, such practices are increasingly rare in pesantren that adopt formal school systems, where curricular time is segmented and religious learning becomes just one subject among many. This has led some educators to lament the loss of ruḥ al-ta'līm—the spiritual soul of education. The findings suggest that reviving ikhlāṣ-based learning requires not only curricular change but also a cultural shift in how educational success is defined and evaluated, aligning more closely with Al-Ghazali's integrative ethos.

The Role of the Teacher as a Moral Guide (Murabbī)
In Al-Ghazali's vision, the teacher is not merely a transmitter of information but also a spiritual guide and moral exemplar. He writes that a true teacher must "act upon the knowledge he teaches," for otherwise, he is like "a candle that lights others while burning itself out."[29] This image encapsulates Al-Ghazali's call for coherence between knowledge and action, emphasizing that the personal piety of the teacher is essential to the transformative power of education. The kyai in pesantren settings often embody this role, not only delivering lessons but also mentoring students in everyday situations—from prayer etiquette to conflict resolution. The teacher-student relationship in many pesantren is characterized by deep trust, reverence, and intimacy, forming a

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[28] Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn*, vol. 1 (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 2004), 38.
[29] Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, *Ayyuhā al-Walad*, trans. Mukhtar Holland (London: Al-Baz Publishing, 1992), 33.

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moral ecology that cannot be replicated by standard schooling models. In interviews, students frequently cited the akhlak (moral character) of their teachers as more impactful than their intellectual brilliance. However, several challenges were noted. Younger pesantren educators, especially those trained in formal institutions, often lack the spiritual authority or moral gravitas of senior kyai. Moreover, the formalization of teaching roles into contractual school positions has begun to erode the organic teacher-student dynamics that support long-term moral mentorship. As Al-Ghazali insists, the credibility of the teacher lies not in certificates but in taqwā (God-consciousness) and zuhd (asceticism).[30] Strengthening the role of teachers as murabbī involves not only pedagogical training but also the spiritual formation of the educators themselves—a priority that is currently underemphasized in most pesantren reform agendas.

Lastly, Al-Ghazali underscores the importance of *hal* (spiritual state) and *ḥāl* (learning atmosphere) in shaping the soul's receptivity to knowledge. He suggests that learning must occur in environments conducive to *dhikr* (remembrance), reflection, and humility.[31] The structure of pesantren traditionally embodies this ethos: dormitories situated near mosques, daily routines centered around prayer, and communal meals shared in simplicity. These practices create an integrated spiritual ecosystem that nurtures ethical learning. Fieldwork at Pesantren C revealed deliberate efforts to preserve such an atmosphere, even within a semi-modernized facility. Students begin their day with congregational tahajjud, recite morning supplications before class, and perform cleaning duties as part of character education. The presence of these rituals reinforces Al-Ghazali's assertion that ethics are best taught not through lectures but through lived experience. However, the shift toward modern infrastructure—such as computer labs, digital classrooms, and modular scheduling—has made it more challenging to sustain spiritually immersive environments. The findings highlight that learning spaces, when stripped of their sacred rhythm, may cultivate technical competence but not necessarily virtue. Revitalizing Al-Ghazali's model would therefore require pesantren to reimagine physical and temporal learning spaces—not only what is taught, but how, when, and where it is taught—to foster the adab, ikhlāṣ, and spiritual focus that define true education. In this way, Al-Ghazali's thought calls for not only curricular reform but also a re-sacralization of the entire learning ecosystem.

Curricular Tensions Between Classical and Modern Models

One of the key tensions in contemporary pesantren curricula is the emergence of epistemological dualism between religious sciences and secular subjects. As Hasan Langgulung observes, modern Islamic education often adopts Western structural models without critically examining their epistemological foundations, resulting in a division between intellectual and spiritual domains.[32] In many pesantren that implement the national curriculum, religious studies are relegated to non-core hours, while mainstream subjects like science and mathematics dominate the primary timetable. This compartmentalization contradicts Al-Ghazali's integrated vision, in

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[30] Fazlur Rahman, *Islam and Modernity: Transformation of an Intellectual Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 102–104.

[31] Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn*, vol. 4 (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 2004), 261.

[32] Hasan Langgulung, *Asas-asas Pendidikan Islam* (Jakarta: Bulan Bintang, 1986), 127.

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which all knowledge—when properly oriented—serves as a path to divine proximity.[33] Paulo Freire similarly criticizes such fragmentation, arguing that it produces a divided consciousness and impedes education's liberating potential.[34] In the context of pesantren, this division may produce students who are technically competent but spiritually deficient. Field observations at Pesantren B reveal that students begin to perceive Islamic subjects as secondary and less perceptions highlight the need for an epistemological reconstruction in curriculum design—one that does not simply combine two educational systems but integrates them within a unified philosophical and pedagogical framework.

The incorporation of pesantren into the national education system brings recognition, funding, and access to higher education but also introduces institutional pressures that compromise their educational ethos. One significant pressure arises from standardization—through accreditation frameworks and bureaucratic assessment tools—that prioritize measurable outcomes over ethical or spiritual development.[35] At Pesantren B, teachers expressed frustration that much of their energy was devoted to fulfilling administrative documentation rather than nurturing students' character. Thomas Lickona warns that an excessive focus on cognitive achievement often comes at the expense of moral development.[36] In Al-Ghazali's view, education must be founded on ikhlāṣ (sincerity) and oriented toward taqwā (piety), rather than on institutional metrics.[37] Ivan Illich similarly critiques the schooling system for becoming overly technocratic, which undermines the organic moral authority of educators.[38] In the pesantren setting, the authority of the kyai—traditionally respected as a moral exemplar—is often diminished in favor of managerial school leadership. This shift results in a changing institutional identity, where pesantren increasingly resemble secular schools adorned with Islamic elements rather than serving as holistic centers for moral and spiritual cultivation. In traditional pesantren, moral formation occurs not only through formal lessons but also through daily lived practices—shared meals, communal prayers, informal dialogues, and acts of service.[39] However, the increasing formalization of pesantren schedules and their alignment with state curricula have compressed these informal spaces. Ki Hajar Dewantara, the father of Indonesian education, emphasized that education is fundamentally a process of cultural formation involving emotional and social immersion.[40] Likewise, James Arthur argues that effective character education requires regular, contextual moral practice—something that is difficult to achieve within rigid, time-bound schedules.[41] Al-Ghazali places great importance on the state of the heart (ḥāl) and the affective

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[33] Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn*, vol. 1 (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 2004), 40.

[34] Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, trans. Myra Bergman Ramos (New York: Continuum, 2000), 71.

[35] Nura H. Harun and Mohamad Abd. Rahman, "Curriculum Reform in Traditional Islamic Schools," *Journal of Islamic Education Studies* 5, no. 2 (2021): 140.

[36] Thomas Lickona, *Educating for Character: How Our Schools Can Teach Respect and Responsibility* (New York: Bantam Books, 1991), 56–58.

[37] Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, *Ayyuhā al-Walad*, ed. Badawī Ṭabānah (Cairo: Dār al-Manār, 2005), 14.

[38] Ivan Illich, *Deschooling Society* (London: Marion Boyars, 2002), 20–22.

[39] Zamakhsyari Dhofier, *Islamic Boarding School Traditions* (Jakarta: LP3ES, 1985), 105–106.

[40] Ki Hajar Dewantara, *Education* (Yogyakarta: Majelis Luhur Taman Siswa, 2004), 34.

[41] James Arthur, *The Moral Foundations of Teaching* (London: Routledge, 2001), 73–75.

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presence of the teacher as critical to the transmission of values.[42] The decline of informal moral interactions in pesantren—caused by overcrowded schedules and the loss of communal routines—reduces opportunities for habituating virtue. Teachers increasingly function as administrators rather than mentors, and education becomes procedural instead of transformative. Addressing this issue requires rethinking scheduling, space utilization, and pedagogical relationships to ensure that spiritual and moral development is not neglected. The dualistic curriculum also reshapes students' perceptions of educational success. In interviews conducted at Pesantren B, many students expressed that they prioritized national examination results, university admissions, or scholarships as their primary goals. While such aspirations are valid, they reflect a paradigm that views knowledge as a qualification rather than as a means of transformation. Kieran Egan criticizes these reductionist views of education, which prioritize utility over wisdom.[43] Al-Ghazali warns that pursuing knowledge for status or material gain leads to spiritual ruin.[44] Without a strong ethical framework, education may empower students intellectually while leaving them morally impoverished. In the Indonesian context, Suyanto and Jihad advocate for new indicators of educational success that are rooted in values, integrity, and social consciousness.[45] For pesantrens to remain true to their mission, they must resist measuring success solely by cognitive achievement and instead reaffirm character, sincerity, and divine orientation as central goals of learning.

Despite these tensions, several pesantren are exploring ways to bridge the gap between classical Islamic thought and modern educational frameworks. At Pesantren C, for instance, science teachers have begun integrating Qur'anic verses and Islamic ethical perspectives into biology and environmental science lessons. This approach aligns with UNESCO's framework for value-based education, which promotes the integration of ethical and spiritual dimensions across all disciplines.[46] Such efforts resonate with Al-Ghazali's call for holistic education, where knowledge should lead to an increased awareness of God and moral responsibility. While these reforms are still in their early stages, they indicate promising paths for ta'dib-based renewal. However, their success depends heavily on the presence of educators equipped with both classical Islamic literacy and modern pedagogical competence. Supporting these educators through training, mentorship, and curricular flexibility will be essential to overcoming the epistemological dualism currently embedded in many pesantren. As Al-Ghazali reminds us, the soul of education lies not merely in what is taught, but in how and why it is taught—and to what end.

Emerging Integrative Pedagogies: Foundations of Reform

Despite the challenges posed by dualistic epistemologies and institutional constraints, some pesantren have begun developing integrative pedagogical approaches that embody Al-Ghazali's vision of ta'dib. Field research conducted at Pesantren C and D revealed experimentation with thematic learning models that merge Qur'anic ethics, traditional sciences, and contemporary

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[42] Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn*, vol. 3 (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 2004), 251.

[43] Kieran Egan, *The Educated Mind: How Cognitive Tools Shape Our Understanding* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 45.

[44] Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn*, vol. 1 (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 2004), 52.

[45] Suyanto and A. Jihad, *Toward Effective Schools* (Jakarta: Esensi, 2013), 99.

[46] UNESCO, *Education for Sustainable Development Goals: Learning Objectives* (Paris: UNESCO, 2017), 14–18.

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knowledge domains. For example, a lesson on environmental science incorporated verses from Surah Al-A'raf and Surah Al-Rum, alongside discussions on the Islamic concept of khalifah and human responsibility toward nature. This interdisciplinary approach reflects Al-Ghazali's assertion that knowledge should lead to moral insight and divine orientation, rather than remain isolated cognitive data.[47] These curricular reforms often begin informally—initiated by motivated teachers rather than imposed from above—but they represent an organic movement toward reimagining the pesantren as an ethical learning ecosystem. Similar pedagogical models have been encouraged by UNESCO and the OECD under the framework of "Education for Sustainable Development," which promotes the integration of value-laden knowledge.[48] These innovations, although still isolated, indicate that meaningful reform is emerging from within the pesantren tradition itself—not merely through top-down interventions.

Another notable development is the emergence of reflective and collaborative teaching practices that align with Al-Ghazali's ideal of moral and intellectual growth. In some pesantren, particularly those affiliated with Ma'had Aly or progressive Islamic universities, teachers participate in halaqah sessions where they not only study classical texts but also reflect on their teaching methods and spiritual development. This mode of reflective inquiry corresponds with Donald Schön's concept of the "reflective practitioner," in which professionals engage in a continual dialogue between action and thought.[49] Within the *halaqah*, teachers share classroom experiences, discuss moral dilemmas, and revisit foundational texts like *Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn* to ground pedagogical decisions in Islamic values. Such efforts bridge the personal and the professional, transforming pedagogy into a site of both cognitive and ethical formation. Collaborative learning among teachers also fosters what Wenger terms "communities of practice," which are essential for sustaining long-term educational innovation.[50] In the context of pesantren, this revitalizes the traditional majlis culture by integrating it into contemporary pedagogical frameworks.

Emerging pedagogical models in some pesantren also reflect a shift toward student-centered learning—an approach consistent with Al-Ghazali's view that learners must be active agents in their moral and spiritual development. Teachers at Pesantren C reported using dialogical methods that enable students to explore ethical questions derived from both scriptural texts and real-life dilemmas. For example, discussions on consumerism were linked to Qur'anic verses about moderation (wasatiyyah) and greed (tama'), encouraging students to examine their own habits. This approach mirrors Paulo Freire's concept of "problem-posing education," where critical reflection leads to the transformation of self and society.[51] In contrast to rote learning, these models promote muhasabah (self-evaluation), internal dialogue, and social empathy—qualities central to Al-Ghazali's educational philosophy. Additionally, experiential learning methods such as khidmah (community service), journaling, and peer mentoring are being reintroduced as tools for holistic

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[47] Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn*, vol. 1 (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 2004), 43.
[48] UNESCO, *Education for Sustainable Development Goals: Learning Objectives* (Paris: UNESCO, 2017), 14–18.
[49] Donald A. Schön, *The Reflective Practitioner: How Professionals Think in Action* (New York: Basic Books, 1983), 68.
[50] Etienne Wenger, *Communities of Practice: Learning, Meaning, and Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 73.
[51] Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, trans. Myra Bergman Ramos (New York: Continuum, 2000), 66–68.

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education. These initiatives offer a counter-narrative to standardized testing by emphasizing moral depth, critical thinking, and spiritual maturity.

While these pedagogical innovations are promising, they remain vulnerable to institutional and systemic barriers. Most reforms are localized and teacher-driven, lacking support from formal policy frameworks or curriculum design structures. For example, at Pesantren D, efforts to integrate Islamic ethics into science teaching were constrained by rigid textbook requirements and accreditation pressures. Moreover, many teachers are unfamiliar with integrative curriculum development or lack the training needed to merge classical Islamic knowledge with modern subject matter.[52] The fragmented teacher certification system in Indonesia further complicates this process, as pesantren teachers often fall outside the national teacher qualification pathways.[53] Without targeted support—such as training programs, modular curriculum guides, and institutional incentives—these seeds of reform may fail to take root beyond isolated contexts. As Fullan argues, educational innovation requires systemic alignment among purpose, policy, and practice.[54] Therefore, while integrative pedagogy is emerging at the micro level, macro-level reforms remain essential to scaling its impact. To institutionalize these emerging pedagogies, a concerted effort is required to formulate a holistic reform agenda rooted in ta'dib. This approach involves moving beyond the binary opposition of traditional versus modern education toward a unified epistemology that honors both revelation and reason. Integrating Al-Ghazali's educational philosophy necessitates rethinking the curriculum—not only in terms of the subjects taught but also in how knowledge is framed, delivered, and internalized.[55] Institutions such as the Indonesian Islamic Education Council (MEBI) and Nahdlatul Ulama's LP Ma'arif have begun drafting integrative curriculum blueprints aimed at harmonizing national standards with pesantren values. In this process, they draw inspiration from both classical turāth and international best practices in value-based education.[56] Ultimately, successful reform will depend on the development of educational leadership—teachers, curriculum developers, and kyai—who are grounded in ethical scholarship and capable of articulating a coherent, spiritually infused pedagogy. As Al-Ghazali asserted, true education is the cultivation of the soul through knowledge, not merely the accumulation of facts.[57] Pedagogical reform must begin by reawakening this spirit within the structures, content, and relationships of the pesantren.

Conclusion

The findings of this study demonstrate that Al-Ghazali's framework of ta'dib provides a deeply rooted and philosophically robust foundation for reimagining the curriculum of Indonesian pesantren in the twenty-first century. Central to the ta'dib paradigm is the emphasis on

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[52] Directorate of Early Childhood Education and Islamic Boarding Schools: Integrated Curriculum Training Based on Islamic Boarding Schools (Jakarta: Kemenag RI, 2022).

[53] Suyanto and A. Jihad, *Toward Effective Schools* (Jakarta: Esensi, 2013), 121.

[54] Michael Fullan, *The New Meaning of Educational Change*, 5th ed. (New York: Teachers College Press, 2016), 47.

[55] Azyumardi Azra, *Islamic Education: Tradition and Modernization Toward the New Millennium* (Jakarta: Logos, 1999), 189.

[56] LP Ma'arif NU, *Integrated Curriculum Blueprint for Islamic Boarding Schools* (Jakarta: LP Ma'arif NU, 2023).

[57] Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn*, vol. 1 (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 2004), 47.

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transforming the learner's soul through ethical conduct (adab), spiritual sincerity (ikhlāṣ), and moral self-discipline (tazkiyah), distinguishing it sharply from modern educational models that prioritize technical achievement, economic output, and standardized testing. Despite preserving the spirit of classical Islamic pedagogy, many pesantren face significant challenges, including dualistic curricular structures that separate religious and secular knowledge, institutional pressures from accreditation systems, and shifting perceptions of educational success oriented toward extrinsic outcomes. These factors contribute to the fragmentation of spiritual and ethical education, marginalizing the holistic vision espoused by Al-Ghazali. Nevertheless, progressive efforts in select pesantren illustrate promising integrative pedagogies that weave Qur'anic ethics into scientific content, employ reflective teaching practices, and reconceptualize learning as a moral endeavor rather than mere skill acquisition. These initiatives, though currently localized, represent nascent reforms requiring support through systemic structural alignment, dedicated ethical teacher development, and institutional shifts toward Islamic epistemology. In conclusion, the ta'dib framework remains a living and dynamic resource for contemporary educational transformation, necessitating commitment at pedagogical, institutional, and policy levels to cultivate pesantren as communities dedicated to forming not only knowledgeable but also spiritually anchored and morally upright individuals.

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