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# The Nature of Humanity and Knowledge as the Ontological Foundation of Islamic Education in Al-Ghazali's Perspective

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**ABSTRACT** *This study aims to analyze the concepts of the nature of human beings and knowledge in Al-Ghazali's perspective as the ontological foundation of Islamic education. This research employs a qualitative approach using a library research design, drawing on Al-Ghazali's major works and other relevant literature. Data were collected through documentation techniques and analyzed using content analysis with descriptive-analytical and philosophical approaches. The findings reveal that, according to Al-Ghazali, human beings are an integral unity of body, intellect, and soul, with the soul serving as the center of moral and spiritual consciousness. Meanwhile, knowledge is understood as a transformative means that is not merely cognitive but also functions in moral formation and the purification of the soul. The relationship between the nature of human beings and knowledge forms a holistic and integrative ontological framework for Islamic education, emphasizing the balance between intellectual, moral, and spiritual dimensions. This study contributes theoretically to strengthening the philosophical foundation of Islamic education, particularly in developing a more systematic and contextual ontology of education.*

**Keywords** : Nature, Humanity and Knowledge, Ontological, Islamic Education, Al-Ghazali

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## INTRODUCTION

Islamic education constitutes an integral part of human life that cannot be separated from all human activities (Anshori, 2026; Washudin et al., 2022). Essentially, every aspect of human existence is closely related to the process of education, as it enables individuals to develop their potential and perform their human functions optimally (Kurniawan, 2026). Without education, humans would be unable to actualize their intellectual, moral, and spiritual capacities that distinguish them from other creatures (Anshori & Washudin, 2024). Therefore, Islamic education possesses a broad and universal scope, encompassing individual, social, and spiritual dimensions (Faizudin et al., 2025).

As a system, Islamic education requires a solid philosophical foundation to guide its direction and development (Murniasih & Anshori, 2024). This foundation serves as a conceptual framework for formulating educational objectives, content, methods, and evaluation (Pratami et al., 2025).

From a philosophical perspective, education is examined through three primary dimensions: ontology, epistemology, and axiology (Anggraini et al., 2025). Ontology addresses the nature of human beings and the reality of education (Rosenblad & Wheelahan, 2025); epistemology explores the sources and methods of acquiring knowledge (Irfani et al., 2025); and axiology concerns values, purposes, and the benefits of education (Vakhovskiy, 2025). Thus, Islamic education is not merely oriented toward practical implementation but is also grounded in deep and systematic thought.

In the modern context, educational systems face various challenges, including the fragmentation of knowledge, moral crises, and the loss of meaning in the learning process (Bou Zeid & Abouchedid, 2025). These conditions reflect a gap between intellectual development and the cultivation of values and spirituality. Consequently, there is a need for an educational paradigm capable of integrating these dimensions holistically. Islamic education emerges as an alternative paradigm that offers a balanced approach by integrating intellectual, moral, and spiritual development. Concepts such as *tauhid* (monotheism), *insan kamil* (the perfect human), *adab* (proper conduct), knowledge, and morality are key characteristics that distinguish it from other educational systems (Nopita et al., 2026).

In the philosophy of Islamic education, human beings are viewed as creatures endowed with *fitrah* (Harahap et al., 2024), an innate pure disposition and a tendency to accept truth and divine values. Education is not merely a process of knowledge transmission (Harahap et al., 2024) but a comprehensive effort to develop all human potentials in an integrated manner, aiming to achieve balance among intellectual intelligence, emotional maturity, and spiritual depth. Therefore, Islamic education is essentially a process of shaping human personality and existential awareness (Wasehudin et al., 2022), enabling individuals to fulfill their roles as servants of Allah and as stewards (*khalifah*) on earth.

One of the prominent scholars who significantly contributed to strengthening the ontological foundation of Islamic education is Imam Al-Ghazali (Nasrun, 2025). His thought emphasizes the integration of rationality and spirituality in understanding the nature of human beings and knowledge. According to Al-Ghazali, human beings are composed of both body and soul, where the soul represents the essential and eternal element as the center of spiritual consciousness, while the body functions as an instrument for worldly activities (Jarman Arroisi et al., 2023). Furthermore, humans possess elements of the heart, intellect, and *nafs*, all of which must be nurtured harmoniously to achieve moral and spiritual perfection.

Al-Ghazali asserts that the primary goal of education is to form the *insan kamil*, a complete human being who achieves balance between physical and spiritual aspects (Azizah & Abidin, 2025). Education should guide individuals toward closeness to Allah (*taqarrub*), cultivate noble character, and attain happiness in both this world and the hereafter (Solihin et al., 2020). Accordingly, education does not merely emphasize the acquisition of knowledge (Popow, 2026) but also the purification of the soul through stages of *takhalli* (self-cleansing), *tahalli* (self-adornment with virtues), and *tajalli* (spiritual illumination). In this context, educators are not only transmitters of knowledge but also guides who integrate intellectual instruction with moral and spiritual development.

Although Al-Ghazali's thought has been widely studied (Andika et al., 2025), discussions that specifically position the nature of human beings and knowledge as the ontological foundation of Islamic education still require more systematic conceptual elaboration. Therefore, this study aims to analyze in depth the concepts of the nature of human beings and knowledge in Al-Ghazali's perspective and their relevance as the ontological foundation of Islamic education (Marsella &

Turjiman, 2025). This study is expected to contribute theoretically to the development of a more integrative and contextual philosophy of Islamic education.

This study aims to analyze in depth the concepts of the nature of human beings and knowledge in Al-Ghazali's perspective as the ontological foundation of Islamic education. Although studies on Al-Ghazali's thought have been widely conducted, most of them tend to examine the concepts of human nature and knowledge separately and have not systematically positioned them within the framework of the ontology of Islamic education, indicating a conceptual gap that requires more comprehensive investigation. Therefore, the novelty of this study lies in its integrative approach to constructing the relationship between the nature of human beings and knowledge as a unified conceptual framework within the ontology of Islamic education, while also offering a reinterpretation of Al-Ghazali's thought that is relevant to the context of modern education.

## **METHOD**

This study employs a qualitative approach using a library research design aimed at analyzing in depth the concepts of the nature of human beings and knowledge in Al-Ghazali's perspective as the ontological foundation of Islamic education. The data sources consist of primary and secondary data. Primary data are derived from Al-Ghazali's major works relevant to the research topic, while secondary data are obtained from books, journal articles, and previous studies related to Islamic educational philosophy, ontology, and Al-Ghazali's thought. Data collection is conducted through documentation techniques by reviewing, identifying, and classifying relevant literature sources.

Data analysis is carried out using content analysis with a descriptive-analytical approach. In this process, the researcher performs data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing systematically to achieve a comprehensive understanding. In addition, a philosophical approach is employed to interpret key concepts such as the nature of human beings and knowledge within the framework of the ontology of Islamic education. To ensure data validity, this study applies source triangulation by comparing various relevant references and conducting critical and in-depth interpretation. Through this method, the study is expected to produce a systematic, logical, and academically accountable conceptual framework.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Result**

#### **1. Biography of Imam Al-Ghazali**

Imam Al-Ghazali's full name is Abū Ḥāmid Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad al-Ghazālī. He is widely known by the honorary titles *Ḥujjat al-Islām* and *Zayn al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī*, and he was a prominent jurist of the Shāfi'ī school. In Islamic intellectual history, he is most commonly referred to as Al-Ghazali. The attribution of his name is generally linked to Ghazalah, a district in Ṭūs, although some interpretations associate it with *ghazzāl*, reflecting his strong inclination toward spiritual purification.

Al-Ghazali was born in Ṭūs, in the region of Khurasan (Persia), in 450 H/1058 CE. After the death of his father, he and his brother were placed under the care of a family friend who was both a jurist and a Sufi. His early education included the study of the Qur'an and Hadith, as well as exposure to spiritual teachings. During his youth, he pursued scholarly journeys to Jurjan and Mazandaran to study Islamic jurisprudence, and later continued his education at the Nizamiyyah Madrasah in Nishapur under the guidance of Imam al-Juwayni. Under this mentorship, Al-Ghazali

demonstrated exceptional intellectual ability, mastering disciplines such as jurisprudence, theology, and philosophy, while also developing a critical approach toward various intellectual traditions of his time.

## 2. Philosophy of Islamic Education

The philosophy of education is a branch of philosophy that examines the fundamental nature, purpose, and meaning of education. It views education not merely as a technical activity but as a system grounded in ontological, epistemological, and axiological foundations. Ontology addresses the nature of human beings and educational reality, epistemology examines the sources and methods of acquiring knowledge, and axiology focuses on values and educational goals.

In the Islamic context, the philosophy of education is rooted in the principle of *tawhīd*, which emphasizes the unity of knowledge, values, and existence. Islamic education is not limited to the transmission of knowledge; it is also a process of *tazkiyah* (purification of the soul) and *ta'dīb* (cultivation of proper conduct), aimed at forming the complete human being (*insān kāmil*). Therefore, Islamic education promotes the integration of intellectual, moral, and spiritual dimensions while rejecting the dichotomy between religious and secular knowledge.

From an ontological perspective, human beings are viewed as possessing *fiṭrah*, an innate pure disposition with a natural inclination toward truth and divine values. Education functions to actualize this potential in a balanced manner across spiritual, intellectual, social, and moral dimensions. Thus, Islamic education is directed not only at knowledge acquisition but also at the holistic development of human personality.

## 3. The Nature of Human Beings According to Al-Ghazali

According to Al-Ghazali, human beings are composed of two primary dimensions: the body and the soul. The body is material and temporary, while the soul is immaterial, eternal, and represents the true essence of human existence. In addition, humans possess intellect (*‘aql*) as a means of understanding truth, and the heart (*qalb*) as the center of spiritual and moral consciousness.

Ontologically, Al-Ghazali views human beings as an integrated unity of body, intellect, and soul. The body serves as the medium for physical activity, the intellect functions to comprehend knowledge and discern truth, and the soul acts as the central controller of moral and spiritual life. Therefore, education must nurture these three dimensions in a balanced manner.

This perspective is closely related to the concept of *fiṭrah*, which represents the innate human potential inclined toward goodness and recognition of God. However, this potential can deviate if not properly guided through education. Thus, education serves as a means to preserve and develop human nature through the process of *tazkiyat al-naḥs* (purification of the soul).

In Al-Ghazali's view, moral development constitutes the core of education. Morality is understood as a stable condition of the soul that gives rise to spontaneous virtuous actions. The process of moral formation involves eliminating negative traits and cultivating positive virtues. The ultimate goal of education is to attain true happiness in the hereafter (*sa'ādah al-ākhirah*) and to form the perfect human being (*insān kāmil*).

## 4. The Nature of Education According to Al-Ghazali

Al-Ghazali conceptualizes education as the primary means of attaining closeness to God (*taqarrub*) and achieving happiness in both this world and the hereafter. Education is not merely

the transmission of knowledge but a comprehensive process of human development encompassing intellectual, moral, and spiritual dimensions.

Knowledge is a divine light that can only be received by a purified heart. Therefore, education must integrate knowledge with action, and intellect with spirituality. The aim of education is to cultivate individuals of noble character and deep spiritual awareness. Al-Ghazali also emphasizes that education should be conducted gradually and continuously, with educators serving as moral exemplars (*uswah ḥasanah*). The educational curriculum should include the balanced development of faith, morality, intellect, social awareness, and physical well-being. Thus, education is not limited to cognitive development but extends to character formation and personal growth.

## **5. The Ontological Foundation of Islamic Education**

Ontology is a branch of philosophy concerned with the nature of being and reality. In the context of education, ontology examines the essence of education, the nature of human beings as subjects of education, and the fundamental goals of the educational process. Through an ontological approach, education is understood not merely as a technical activity but as a meaningful process with existential significance.

In Islamic thought, the ontology of education is grounded in divine revelation as the ultimate source of truth. Reality is understood as originating from God, the Creator and Sustainer of the universe. Consequently, Islamic education aims to develop human potential in alignment with the purpose of creation, namely to serve as servants of God (*'abdullāh*) and stewards (*khalīfah*) on earth. The ontological framework of Islamic education encompasses three main concepts: *ta'lim* (the transmission and development of knowledge), *tarbiyah* (the nurturing of human potential), and *ta'dīb* (the cultivation of ethical conduct). These concepts must be integrated to ensure that education addresses not only cognitive aspects but also affective and behavioral dimensions.

Furthermore, the concept of *fiṭrah* serves as a fundamental ontological basis, emphasizing that humans possess inherent potential that must be developed through education. Al-Ghazali reinforces this foundation by highlighting the importance of balancing the body, intellect, and soul. Education is directed toward moral formation through *tazkiyat al-nafs* and the cultivation of spiritual awareness. Ultimately, the ontological perspective of Islamic education, as articulated by Al-Ghazali, positions human beings as holistic entities and education as a transformative process that integrates intellectual, moral, and spiritual dimensions. Its ultimate goal is to produce the *insān kāmil*, a balanced individual capable of fulfilling their role in both worldly and spiritual life.

## **Discussion**

The findings of this study demonstrate that the concepts of the nature of human beings and knowledge in Al-Ghazali's thought constitute a coherent ontological foundation for Islamic education. This foundation is built upon an integrative understanding of human existence as a unity of body, intellect, and soul, as well as knowledge as a means not only of intellectual development but also of spiritual and moral transformation (Anuth et al., 2026). In this regard, Al-Ghazali's perspective provides a holistic framework that overcomes the dichotomy between material and spiritual dimensions, which often characterizes modern educational systems.

From an ontological standpoint, Al-Ghazali's conception of human beings emphasizes the centrality of the soul (*nafs/qalb*) as the core of human identity and moral consciousness. This view implies that education should not be limited to the development of cognitive abilities but must also prioritize the purification of the soul (*tazkiyat al-nafs*) and the cultivation of moral character. This

finding aligns with the broader framework of Islamic educational philosophy (Nopita et al., 2026), which positions human beings as both servants of God (*'abdullāh*) and stewards on earth (*kehalifah*). Consequently, the educational process must aim at achieving a balance between intellectual competence and spiritual integrity.

In relation to the concept of knowledge, Al-Ghazali's view highlights that knowledge is not value-neutral but inherently linked to ethical and spiritual purposes. Knowledge is regarded as a divine light that guides human beings toward truth and ultimate happiness. This perspective challenges the modern secular paradigm that often separates knowledge from values, leading to the fragmentation of disciplines and the erosion of moral responsibility. Therefore, integrating knowledge with ethical and spiritual dimensions becomes a crucial aspect in reconstructing the ontology of Islamic education (Yono & Abrista Devi, 2025).

Furthermore, the integration of the concepts of human nature and knowledge in Al-Ghazali's thought reveals that education is essentially a transformative process. It is not merely concerned with the transfer of information but with the formation of a complete human being (*insān kāmīl*) (As-Shidqi, M. H., & Abbas, 2022). This transformation is achieved through a gradual process involving moral training, habituation, and spiritual discipline. Such an approach underscores the importance of the educator's role not only as an instructor but also as a moral and spiritual guide who exemplifies ethical values in practice.

In the context of contemporary education, the relevance of Al-Ghazali's thought becomes increasingly significant. The current challenges of moral decline, loss of meaning in learning, and the fragmentation of knowledge indicate the limitations of purely technical and utilitarian educational models. Al-Ghazali's integrative approach offers an alternative paradigm that emphasizes the unity of knowledge, values, and human purpose. By reconstructing the ontological foundation of education based on this perspective, it is possible to develop a more holistic and value-oriented educational system that responds to contemporary challenges.

Moreover, this study contributes to the theoretical development of Islamic educational philosophy by providing a systematic formulation of the relationship between the nature of human beings and knowledge as an ontological foundation. Unlike previous studies that tend to address these concepts separately, this research demonstrates their intrinsic interconnectedness within a unified conceptual framework. This integrative perspective not only enriches the discourse on Islamic education but also opens new avenues for further research, particularly in exploring the practical implications of this ontological framework in curriculum development, pedagogical strategies, and educational policy.

The discussion affirms that Al-Ghazali's thought offers a comprehensive ontological basis for Islamic education that integrates intellectual, moral, and spiritual dimensions. This integrative framework is essential for developing an educational model that not only produces knowledgeable individuals but also nurtures ethical character and spiritual awareness, ultimately leading to the realization of holistic human development.

## CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the ontological foundation of Islamic education in Al-Ghazali's perspective is constructed through an integrative relationship between the nature of human beings and knowledge. Human beings are positioned as holistic entities whose essential purpose is spiritual realization, while knowledge functions as a transformative medium that directs humans toward that ultimate purpose. Therefore, the ontology of Islamic education is not merely concerned with

defining what education is, but with establishing a unified framework in which human existence and knowledge are intrinsically connected in guiding the educational process toward moral and spiritual perfection. This integrative formulation affirms that the success of education is determined by its ability to harmonize intellectual development with the cultivation of ethical and spiritual dimensions. Recommendations for future research include the need to further explore the practical implications of this ontological framework in contemporary educational contexts, particularly in curriculum design, learning methodologies, and character education models. In addition, future studies may adopt interdisciplinary approaches by integrating Al-Ghazali's thought with modern educational theories to develop more contextual and applicable models of Islamic education. Empirical research is also recommended to examine the effectiveness of implementing this integrative ontological framework in educational institutions, thereby bridging the gap between philosophical concepts and educational practice.

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