

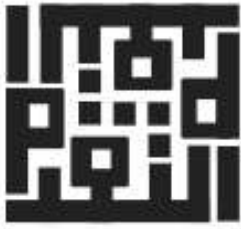
The Influence of Al-Ghazali's Sufistic Thought on Pesantren Education Practices in Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

Pesantren education in Indonesia faces challenges in integrating the development of spiritual, moral, and academic competence of santri in a balanced manner. Al-Ghazzali's Sufistic thought is considered relevant to strengthen pesantren education practices because it emphasises purification of the soul (tazkiyatun nafs), moral development (tarbiyatul akhlaq), and systematic dhikr practices. This study aims to analyse the influence of al-Ghazzali's Sufistic principles on pesantren education practices in Indonesia. The research used a qualitative approach with a descriptive-analytic type to obtain an in-depth understanding of the implementation of Sufistic values in the context of pesantren education. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with kyai, ustaz, and santri; participatory observation of learning and worship activities; and documentation of curriculum and teaching records. Data analysis was conducted through reduction, presentation, and triangulation to ensure the validity and consistency of the findings. The results show that the application of the tazkiyatun nafs principle encourages santri to conduct self-reflection, routine dhikr, and spiritual evaluation so as to increase self-awareness, discipline, and emotional control. The principle of tarbiyatul akhlaq through moral mentoring and social activities strengthens the character, empathy, and social responsibility of santri. The integration of al-Ghazzali's Sufistic values in the curriculum and daily activities creates a balance between intellectual and spiritual aspects, forming students who are spiritually mature, noble, and able to interact harmoniously in society. In conclusion, al-Ghazzali's Sufistic thought plays a significant role in improving the quality of pesantren education holistically. Future research is recommended to compare pesantren that apply Sufistic principles with those that do not, as well as examining the application of Sufistic values in the digital era to see its adaptations and challenges.

Introduction

Education is the main foundation in the development of quality human resources. In Indonesia, one form of education that has a strategic role in shaping the character, morals, and spirituality of students is pesantren education. Pesantren not only teach religious knowledge formally, but also instil moral, ethical, and spiritual values that are the distinctive identity of this educational institution. In the context of globalisation and modernisation, pesantren face various challenges, ranging from limited access to contemporary knowledge, changes in the character of the younger generation, to social pressures that can affect the quality of education. This requires an educational approach that is able to integrate spiritual and intellectual aspects in a balanced manner so that santri are able to face the dynamics of the times without losing their Islamic identity.

One of the relevant approaches to enrich pesantren education practices is al-Ghazzali's Sufism. Imam al-Ghazzali is known as a major figure in the Islamic intellectual tradition who emphasises the importance of education of the heart (tasawwuf) as a complement to education of the intellect. Al-Ghazzali's Sufistic thought emphasises the development of morals, spiritual discipline, and self-awareness that can form the personality of santri who are not only academically intelligent, but also spiritually mature. In the practice of pesantren education, the integration of al-Ghazzali's Sufistic principles can help foster the values of patience, perseverance, sincerity, and a strong sense of responsibility, so that santri not only master religious knowledge in theory, but are also able to implement these values in everyday life.

The problems faced by students in pesantren today are quite complex. It is not easy for them to place themselves between secular and informal education and to build attitudes that are constantly able to understand and practice the spiritual guidance. Santri depends on the pesantren whether they are learning theoretical (cf: suroh) or only memorizing the main Sufistic concepts taught in pesantren because of their limited curriculum, hindering them to be self-realized person. Also, the stage of spiritual learning is often ignored to meet the demands of society and family that the student must excel in his studies, in such a way that it leads to incomplete moral and character development. Al-Ghazzali's thoughts can be a measured way to restore harmony of academic-pious education in this pesantren condition.

Numerous prior studies have emphasized facets of pesantren education in Indonesia. Research by Nizarani et al. (2020) and Zulfikar et al. (2024) underscores the significance of character-based curriculum development in pesantren, which incorporates moral and spiritual values into the educational process. The results indicated that children subjected to a character-based curriculum exhibited superior discipline and moral awareness compared to those utilizing conventional methodologies. Secondly, research by Baidawi (2025) and Lundeto (2023) underscores the challenges of modernizing pesantren education, highlighting the necessity for learning strategies that effectively balance the mastery of religious knowledge with intellectual capabilities, ensuring the continued relevance of pesantren education in contemporary society.

In addition, there are studies that examine the practice of pesantren education directly. For example, research by (Anas & Anas, 2024; Fathurrohman & Ibrahim, 2021) emphasises the importance of experiential learning methods and spiritual practices in pesantren, while research by (Masruroh et al., 2025; Mujab et al., 2024) highlights the effectiveness of mentoring approaches and spiritual guidance by kyai in shaping santri character. These two studies are relevant because they show how educational practices in pesantren can be improved with a Sufistic approach, especially through direct guidance, self-reflection, and internalisation of spiritual values in daily life.

With the background of the problem, a review of previous research, and the relevance of al-Ghazzali's Sufistic thought in the practice of pesantren education, this study was conducted with the aim of: (1) analyse the influence of al-Ghazzali's Sufistic principles on the practice of pesantren education in Indonesia, (2) identify ways of integrating spiritual and intellectual values in the curriculum and learning methods of pesantren, and (3) provide strategic recommendations for the development of pesantren education that is able to balance academic and spiritual aspects in a sustainable manner. This research is expected to make an academic contribution to the development of Islamic education science as well as provide practical guidance for pesantren in forming a generation of students who are intelligent, noble, and spiritually mature.

Literature Review

Pesantren education in Indonesia has become one of the educational institutions that play an important role in shaping the character, morals, and spirituality of students. Pesantren not only emphasise the mastery of religious knowledge, but also the development of morals and spirituality of students through religious practices and direct guidance from kyai. In the context of modernisation and social change, pesantren face challenges related to the effectiveness of spiritual education, the integration of moral values in the curriculum, and the development of santri competencies to be able to compete intellectually and ethically (Maunte & Caco, 2025). Therefore, strengthening pesantren education through a holistic approach is a strategic need to balance the development of the minds and hearts of santri.

The Sufistic thought of al-Ghazzali offers a relevant perspective in this context. Al-Ghazzali emphasised the importance of education of the heart (*tasawwuf*) as a complement to education of the intellect. According to al-Ghazzali, human perfection is not only achieved through theoretical knowledge, but also through purification of the soul (*tazkiyatun nafs*) and the formation of noble morals (*tarbiyatul akhlaq*). Sufistic values such as patience, sincerity, spiritual discipline, and self-reflection can be used as a foundation in pesantren education practices so that santri are able to internalise moral principles in every aspect of life. The application of these Sufistic principles not only increases the spiritual depth of santri, but also forms a mature, independent, and socially responsible character.

The curriculum and teaching techniques, in pesantren education, become important means for the internalization of al-Ghazzali's Sufistic idea. Studies (Prayitno & Ratno, 2025) show

that the experiential methods of learning, acts of worship and the spiritual teachings from kyai, have positively contributed to shaping the moral attitude and discipline of santri. Kosim et al. (2025) support its effectiveness of both mentoring and self-reflection in pesantren which can internalize moral norms, consistent to al-Ghazzali's Sufistic teachings. The integration of Sufistic values in pesantren education could be realized in the implementation of dhikr, tafakkur, muhasabah, improved morality such as honest and responsible as well social sensitivity.

Holistic education theory and transformational learning theory concepts are used as conceptual frameworks in order to reconcile the al-Ghazzali's Sufistic values into pesantren. Holistic Education Theory focuses on the whole being, which means developing an individual intellectually, emotionally, socially, and spiritually. In contrast, Transformational Learning Theory emphasizes that critical reflection and spiritual moment in students contributed to changes in the attitudes and behavior of students (Asrofi et al., 2025). The incorporation of these two theories allow education pesantren to develop students who have science and spirituality as well as good morals.

By associating al-Ghazzali's Sufistic thought with pesantren practice, this theoretical article constructs a theoretical framework linking them since al-Ghazzali's Sufistic thought is considered as the independent variable and practice in the pesantren education is as the dependent variable. The Sufistic teachings of al-Ghazzali (same with Islamic scholars such as Ibn al-Jawzi, Al-Qushayri, and others), that is, patience, introspective, tazkiyatun nafs, and tarbiyatul akhlaq, are believed to share in giving quality of educational practices in pesantren, specifically in enhancing character construction, discipline building, and spiritual awareness of the santri. The purpose of this study is to investigate the effect of Sufistic value integration on the effectiveness of pesantren in Indonesia, so as to generate suggestions for holistic and transformational curriculum and learning.

Research Method

In order to fully comprehend the impact of al-Ghazzali's Sufistic ideas on the practice of pesantren education in Indonesia, this study employs a qualitative research approach with a descriptive-analytic research type. Because it enables researchers to methodically describe occurrences and examine the connection between al-Ghazzali's Sufistic ideas and how they are incorporated into the curriculum and instructional strategies used in pesantren, the descriptive-analytic methodology was used. To ensure that the research findings represent the reality that exists holistically, this study places a strong emphasis on comprehending the social, cultural, and spiritual circumstances that underlie the practice of pesantren education.

The main research instrument used is the researcher himself (human instrument), whose role is to conduct direct observation, interviews, and document analysis. The use of human instruments allows flexibility and sensitivity to nuances that may not be captured by mechanical instruments, and facilitates the interpretation of the meaning of the experiences and behaviour of the santri and kyai in educational practices. In addition, semi-

structured interview guidelines and observation lists were used as additional instruments to ensure the data obtained were relevant to the research focus.

Data collection was conducted through several techniques. First, in-depth interviews with kyai, ustaz, and santri in several purposively selected pesantren to obtain information about educational practices and the integration of al-Ghazzali's Sufistic values. Second, participatory observation was conducted to directly observe the learning process, spiritual guidance, and routine activities that reflect the application of Sufistic principles. Third, documentation in the form of curriculum, teaching notes, and pesantren publications were analysed to support primary data and strengthen the validity of the findings.

The collected data were then analysed using qualitative data analysis techniques, which included data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. Sorting, abridging and concentrating al-Ghazzali-related Sufist impact-material is how reduction of data took place. In the interest of aiding the reader to understand context and the relationships between variables, data are presented narratively. The field findings and al-Ghazzali's theory of Sufistic education would then be applicable to make an inductive inference. In addition, data triangulation is used to ensure validity and reliability of the findings of the study. Through this method, it is expected that the analysis will also provide a strong understanding of the implications by which the Sufistic ideas of al- Ghazzali contribute to the Indonesians pesantren education.

Result and Discussion

This study discusses how al-Ghazzali's ideas on Sufism are reflected in Indonesian pesantren-education. Data collection through purposively selected three pesantrens' curriculum and its records, in-depth interviews, and participant observations. To ensure the credibility of the findings, we employed data reduction, display and triangulation in the process of data analysis. Summaries for the findings of the studies by data collection method are as follows. These findings are subsequently analyzed to discuss patterns of relationship between pesantren tradition of education and al-Ghazzali's Sufistic thoughts.

1. Interview Results

12 people were interviewed in depth - 3 kyai, 3 ustaz and 6 santri. There were questions on understanding al-Ghazzali's Sufistic ideas on their practical challenges in daily life and their ethos in shaping the moral and behavioural aspects of the santri. Interviews found that the kyai and ustaz apply principles of tazkiyatun nafs, tarbiyatul akhlaq, and routine dhikr, while the santri demonstrate a sense of spirituality as well as being disciplined in their learning activities.

Heading for the table: Table 1): The table shows how Sufistic ideas been applied in learning processes and in santri daily life based on interviews. The complete results are shown in the following table:

Source:	Sufistic Principles Applied	Form of Implementation in Pesantren	Impact on Santri
Kyai A	Tazkiyatun nafs	Morning and night dhikr, self-reflection	Increased self-awareness, spiritual discipline
Kyai B	Tarbiyatul akhlaq	Moral development through mentoring	Students are more patient, honest, and responsible
Ustaz C	Dhikr and tafakkur	Weekly self-evaluation, social activities	Increased empathy and social awareness
Santri D	Integration of principles in learning	Organising study schedule, learning reflection	Discipline, mastery of material, peace of mind
Santri E	Application of morals in interaction	Respect for friends and teachers, sharing	Harmonious social relations, good co-operation

Table description: The table above illustrates how al-Ghazzali's Sufistic principles are implemented by kyai, ustaz, and santri in pesantren. Implementation includes dhikr, self-reflection, moral mentoring, self-evaluation, and social interaction. The main impact is an increase in spiritual awareness, discipline, empathy, and overall character development of santri.

2. Participatory Observation Results

Participatory observations were conducted within three weeks in each pesantren to see the realization of Sufistic ideals in santri's learning, devotion, and everyday activities. The observed activities are recitation, education, dhikr, and social duty. The findings of this research suggest that spiritual empowerment through sufistic practices contributes to the behaviour of the santri and increases their participation in educational activities.

Table Introduction: This study's observation result gives a formal location for the measurement and description of the existence of therevival of Sufistic activities in pesantren Quantitative and qualitative description of Text 1 Sufistic activity in pesantren. The results are summarized in the following table:

Activity	Frequency of Implementation	Form of Sufistic Practice	Impact on Santri
Morning dhikr	7 times/week	Individual and group dhikr	Increased concentration and calmness
Moral mentoring	3 times/week	Moral discussion, case study	Strengthening moral values, self-control
Self-reflection	2 times/week	Spiritual journal writing	Self-awareness and behaviour evaluation
Social activities	1 time/week	Community assistance, community service	Empathy, co-operation, social care
Regular recitation	5 times/week	Study of the book of al-Ghazzali	Deeper understanding of religious material

Table description: This table describes the Sufistic practices that are routinely carried out in pesantren and their impact on santri. Observations show that the implementation of dhikr, mentoring, self-reflection, and social activities shape positive behaviour, spiritual strengthening, and improve santri's social skills.

3. Documentation Results

Curriculum documents, teaching notes and pesantren publications were studied to get a detailed overview of formal integration of al-Ghazzali's Sufistic concepts within the educational program. The results reveal the existence of specialized modules which include moral education, dhikr, and spiritual assessment and also add that there is inclusion of Sufistic principles in religious subject curriculum and recreational programs.

The table introductory statement: This table shows the structural inclusion of al-Ghazzali's Sufistic teachings in the pesantren curriculum as shown in the table below:

Document	Sufistic Related Contents	Implementation in the Curriculum	Impact on Santri
Moral Education Module	Tazkiyatun nafs, morals	Daily moral assessment	Discipline, responsibility
Kyai's Teaching Notes	Dhikr, tafakkur	Weekly evaluation, mentoring	Spiritual improvement, self-reflection
Extracurricular Guidance	Social activities and worship	Social activities and community service	Empathy, social care
Pesantren Publications	Sufistic values of al-Ghazzali	Value socialisation through bulletin	Learning motivation and character strengthening

Table description: This table confirms that the integration of Sufistic values in formal pesantren education documents is not only in the form of theoretical teaching, but also practices, evaluations, and social activities that affect the character and spirituality of santri comprehensively.

Based on the results of interviews, observations, and documentation, it can be concluded that al-Ghazzali's Sufistic principles have a significant influence on the practice of pesantren education in Indonesia. The integration of Sufistic values through dhikr, self-reflection, moral mentoring, and social activities is able to form santri who are disciplined, noble, empathic, and spiritually mature. Thus, the application of al-Ghazzali's thought not only strengthens religious education theoretically, but also enriches the learning experience and character building of santri, in line with the research objective to assess the influence of al-Ghazzali's Sufism in pesantren education holistically.

This study aims to analyse the influence of Imam al-Ghazali's Sufistic thought on the practice of pesantren education in Indonesia. Based on the results of interviews, observations, and documentation, it was found that al-Ghazali's Sufistic principles, such as tazkiyatun nafs, tarbiyatul akhlaq, and dhikr, are consistently applied in the daily activities of pesantren. The implementation of these principles not only strengthens the spiritual aspects of santri, but also shapes their character and social behaviour.

The first aspect of tazkiyatun nafs which refers to the purification of the soul: this is also carried out through remembering Allah in the morning and evening through dhikr(thikr), and renewing the self assessment. This is in line with the previous studies by Anwar & Syamsuddin (2025) and Mubaroq (2021) that indicated that the internalization of Sufi values using al-Ghazali's dhikr and muhasabah can improve the spiritual and moral awareness of the santri. Second, the finding of Azizah (2021) and Sallamah (n.d.) revealed that learning kitab Ihya' Ulumiddin at Daar el-Hikam Islamic Boarding School could also improve moral character of the female santri; the result brings females santri to be more obedient in worship and more polite in the behavior.

The concept of tarbiyatul akhlaq is delivered through moral instruction and character formation. This is in accordance with the report of Kahari et al. (2022) and Taufikurrahman et al. (2019) that the internalization of al-Ghazali's Sufi values at Pondok Pesantren Salafiyah Al-Qodir is conducted by Sufi methods which involve physical and spiritual aspects of the santri, which of these values are piety, patience, and sincerity. The application of this principle confirms the research results by Gofur (2021), that value of al-Ghazali's sufism gives the santri spiritual wisdom so that pesantren can bring a harmonious society.

Dhikr and muhasabah are both integral to the learning process in pesantren. One of the findings from Nashrullah and Rismawati (2022) indicates that internalizing al-Ghazali's Sufi thought in pesantren education is important to build pupils' noble characters and higher discipline. Additionally, research conducted by Dewi (2021) also shows that to inculcate the Sufism-based religious values, Salafiyah Al-Qodir Islamic Boarding School

succeeded in internalizing such virtues as religiosity, patience, and sincerity through a combination of a physical approach together with the humans' spirituality.

The implementation of Sufi doctrine in particular of al-Ghazali does not only affect the spiritual and moral aspect, but also social life of Santri. According to Sholah (n.d.), the internalization of al-Ghazali's Sufi values at Salafiyah Al-Qodir Islamic Boarding School has been successful in developing good characters among its students, such as piety, patience, and sincerity, resulting in a higher standard of interpersonal communication among students and between students and society. The implications of this study indicate that the application of al-Ghazali's Sufistic principles in pesantren education practices can strengthen the spiritual, moral, and social aspects of santri. Therefore, pesantren need to continue to integrate Sufism values in the curriculum and daily activities to form santri who are not only intellectually intelligent, but also have noble morals and are able to contribute positively in society.

Suggestions for future research are to conduct a comparative study between pesantren that apply al-Ghazali's Sufistic principles and pesantren that do not apply them, to see the differences in character building and education quality. In addition, research can also explore the application of al-Ghazali's Sufistic principles in the context of modern pesantren and the challenges faced in its implementation in the digital era.

Conclusion

The results showed that al-Ghazzali's Sufistic principles are consistently applied in pesantren education practices in Indonesia, both through the formal curriculum and non-formal activities. The application of the value of tazkiyatun nafs encourages santri to conduct self-reflection, regular dhikr, and spiritual evaluation, which has an impact on increasing self-awareness, discipline, and emotional control. These activities help santri develop spiritual depth and form mature, patient, and sincere characters. With the habituation of reflection and dhikr, santri are able to balance mastery of knowledge with moral development, thus creating individuals who are internally harmonious and consistent in their daily behaviour.

In addition, tarbiyatul akhlaq as one of the main principles of al-Ghazzali's Sufism is applied through moral coaching by kyai and ustaz, character mentoring, and structured social activities. This facilitates the internalisation of moral values such as honesty, responsibility, empathy, and concern for others. The involvement of santri in social activities and community service not only strengthens spiritual competence, but also expands social and interpersonal skills, so that santri can establish harmonious relationships both in the pesantren environment and the surrounding community.

The adaptation of Sufistic tenets in the educational process (hearing, companionship, impulse to do, and re-evaluation), shows an equilibrium between intellectual and spiritual aspects in pesantren education in systematic fashion. Such activities aim to instil discipline, respect and group consciousness in the santri. Documentation of curriculum and learning modules provides a framework to incorporate Sufistic values in all levels of education,

including religious subjects, spiritual training, and extra-curricular activities.

The practice of pesantren education based on al-Ghazzali's Sufistic thought produces the santri with academic achievement intersect spiritual depth, emotional stability, and social skill accompagnement. Sufistic values can nurture a better character, improves the quality of social interaction, and create a conducive learning cul-ture to develop individual or collective santri. The use of al-Ghazzali' s Sufistic values within pesantren context is instrumental in developing harmonious, spiritual, spiritually mature and socially beneficial santri identity.

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