

## Parenting in the Perspective of Al-Ghazali

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### ABSTRACT

Parenting style is a pivotal factor influencing a child's character, social skills, and emotional development. In contemporary psychological and educational studies, parenting styles are commonly categorized into permissive, democratic, and authoritarian, each exerting distinct impacts on children's behavior and developmental outcomes. Democratic parenting, characterized by balanced authority and open communication, has been shown to foster independence, social competence, and emotional resilience in children. Conversely, authoritarian parenting often correlates with lower social adaptability and heightened aggressive tendencies. Moreover, early integration of moral and spiritual education significantly contributes to the holistic formation of a child's character, aligning with perspectives that emphasize the centrality of religious values in parenting. In this regard, Al-Ghazali's thought offers a profound framework, highlighting the necessity of instilling moral virtues and spiritual discipline from an early age as an integral part of nurturing a righteous and well-balanced individual. This study underscores the intersection of modern parenting theories with classical Islamic thought, providing a comprehensive understanding of how parenting styles, when infused with moral-spiritual guidance, can shape children's character in a transformative and sustainable manner.

## INTRODUCTION

From Al-Ghazali's perspective, parenting is deeply rooted in the idea that parents are not merely caretakers but also moral guides. He argues that a child's character is significantly shaped by the behaviour and values instilled by the parents. This aligns with Al-Ghazali's assertion that effective parenting methods are essential for fostering a well-rounded personality in children and for preventing violence against them within the framework of Islamic teachings (Sholihah & Nurhayati, 2022). Furthermore, Al-Ghazali highlights the integration of Islamic values in parenting, stressing that the success of Islamic parenting depends on the treatment children receive from their parents, since parental behaviour and attitudes are absorbed and internalised by the child (Fajriyah et al., 2023). This reflects his conviction that parenting must encompass care, education, and the inculcation of moral values based on religious principles.

In examining the application of Islamic values in parenting, Al-Ghazali advocates a balanced approach that combines discipline and compassion. He

underscores the importance of instilling religious values and moral education as fundamental elements in child-rearing. This is supported by Triputra (2020), who notes that Islamic parenting is an interactive process involving the nurturing, protection, and guidance of children in accordance with Islamic principles. Similarly, Yanuarti (2019) discusses how Islamic parenting can prevent undesirable behaviour by instilling religious and social values from an early age. Such practices not only nurture spiritual growth but also contribute to the child's psychological and social development.

When comparing Al-Ghazali's views with contemporary approaches to parenting, it becomes evident that his teachings provide valuable insights that resonate with modern educational philosophies. Analyses of the integration between Western and Islamic parenting models demonstrate a growing recognition of the need to combine diverse approaches in order to enhance child development (Madyawati, 2023). Moreover, character education methods derived from Al-Ghazali's teachings, as discussed by Sasmita (2022), highlight the relevance of his principles in addressing challenges faced by today's youth. This synthesis of traditional Islamic values with contemporary educational practices underscores the enduring significance of Al-Ghazali's contributions to parenting.

The comparison between Al-Ghazali's teachings and modern parenting practices reveals a strong continuity of values, despite arising from different historical and epistemological contexts. Al-Ghazali's thought, grounded in tawhid and ethical orientation, places the moral and spiritual dimensions at the core of parenting. This paradigm corresponds with findings in contemporary developmental psychology that emphasise the importance of emotional intelligence, ethical conduct, and character-building in child development. Research on parental sensitivity to children's emotional needs, such as that conducted by Ekmekçi et al. (2016), substantively aligns with Al-Ghazali's call for parenting that nurtures emotional health, interpersonal warmth, and spiritual connectedness between parent and child.

Furthermore, Al-Ghazali's idea of creating a safe, supportive, and loving environment finds resonance in modern parenting practices oriented towards positive parenting. This emphasis extends beyond physical and emotional aspects, providing a conducive space for the internalisation of noble values. In this regard, the findings of Castro Carrasco et al. (2017), which highlight the positive effects of supportive family environments on children's prosocial development, may be seen as empirical confirmation of Al-Ghazali's long-standing conceptual framework. Thus, although separated by time and culture, the converging lines between Al-Ghazali's thought and modern approaches become apparent in their shared orientation: the nurturing of holistic, harmonious, and morally grounded human beings.

From Al-Ghazali's perspective, parenting is a divine trust (*amanah ilahiyyah*) that entails a dual responsibility: safeguarding the physical well-being of the child while shaping their spiritual growth. This involves integrating moral education rooted in Islamic ethics, empathetic care, and the proportional

application of discipline. He reminds us that parental example is the most effective educational tool, where actions and speech reflect the values to be instilled. When placed alongside contemporary parenting principles, these values reveal a profound harmony between ethical ideals and practical application, positioning parenting not merely as a biological or social function, but as a comprehensive process of human formation.

In conclusion, Al-Ghazali's thought offers a comprehensive framework of parenting that combines ethical, spiritual, and practical dimensions relevant across time. His emphasis on moral education, parental responsibility, and the application of Islamic values in daily life provides timeless guidance for parents striving to nurture positive character traits in their children. The relevance of his teachings to modern parenting discourse reaffirms the importance of aligning parental practices with ethical and religious principles, with the aim of raising a generation that is not only intellectually capable but also emotionally mature, morally upright, and oriented towards the common good.

## **METHODS**

This study adopts a **qualitative approach** using the **library research method**, deliberately chosen to enable an in-depth exploration of Al-Ghazali's classical ideas, particularly those concerning education and parenting. This approach provides scope for a comprehensive understanding of classical texts, not only at the descriptive level but also in terms of their **philosophical, theological, and pedagogical dimensions**. The research is **descriptive-analytical** in nature: the descriptive aspect is used to present Al-Ghazali's concepts of parenting, while the analytical aspect focuses on examining their relevance to parenting practices in the modern era. The choice of method ensures that the study does not remain at the stage of merely cataloguing ideas, but also assesses their significance and adaptability in addressing the challenges of child development within dynamic social and cultural transformations.

The research data are divided into two categories. **Primary data** are drawn from Al-Ghazali's major works that contain explicit or implicit discussions on child education, such as *Ihya' Ulum al-Din* and *Ayyuhal Walad*. **Secondary data** comprise academic literature, books, and scholarly articles discussing Al-Ghazali's thought, alongside modern parenting theories from developmental psychology, especially the framework introduced by Diana Baumrind, which distinguishes between authoritarian, permissive, and authoritative parenting styles. The combination of these two types of sources provides a rich and comprehensive analytical foundation, enabling the researcher to synthesise classical perspectives with modern empirical findings.

The data collection process was carried out through a **systematic and focused review of the literature**. The researcher identified, selected, and critically examined relevant primary and secondary works, extracting key concepts related to parenting. Data analysis followed three main stages: (1) **Data Reduction**, filtering and focusing on Al-Ghazali's core ideas directly related to parenting; (2) **Data Presentation**, organising findings into a coherent framework

so that the connections between Al-Ghazali's thought and modern parenting theories could be examined in depth; and (3) **Conclusion Drawing and Verification**, in which preliminary findings were cross-checked against secondary literature to ensure validity, reliability, and consistency.

The stages of the research implementation began with the collection of primary and secondary literature, followed by a **theoretical comparison** between Al-Ghazali's thought and modern parenting frameworks to identify areas of relevance, divergence, or potential integration. The results of this comparison were then formulated into a systematic account explaining Al-Ghazali's concept of parenting and its implications for child education in contemporary contexts. This study recognises its limitation in relying solely on literature-based analysis, making its results largely theoretical. Therefore, future research is recommended to adopt **empirical methods** such as case studies, observations, or in-depth interviews to capture the practical implementation of Al-Ghazali's parenting concepts within real educational settings.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Imam Al-Ghazali, a prominent Islamic scholar and philosopher of the 11th century, provided a comprehensive framework for understanding child-rearing practices deeply rooted in Islamic values, ethics, and morality. His insights into parenting emphasise the importance of moral and spiritual education, the exemplary role of parents, and a balance between discipline and compassion.

This literature review aims to explore Al-Ghazali's views on parenting, focusing on several key principles derived from his teachings. Research findings concerning parenting patterns from Al-Ghazali's perspective generally highlight the integration of moral, spiritual, and intellectual education, alongside the role of parents as role models. The following is a summary of research that outlines Al-Ghazali's views on child-rearing practices:

### 1. Moral and Spiritual Education

Al-Ghazali asserted that moral and spiritual education constitutes a non-negotiable foundation in the process of child-rearing. For him, parenting extends beyond the fulfilment of physical needs; it is a systematic effort to shape a child's character, mindset, and spiritual awareness from an early age. Islamic values encompassing ethics, manners, honesty, a sense of responsibility, and respectful conduct towards others should be instilled as priorities before the child reaches intellectual maturity. According to Al-Ghazali, this process cultivates individuals who are not only cognitively intelligent but also possess strong moral integrity.

Within this framework, the home and family are viewed as the most strategic first school (*madrrasah*), where parents serve as the primary educators, conveying noble values through exemplary behaviour and daily interactions. In line with this view, Sholeh (2017) emphasises that the family environment serves as the most dominant arena for moral education, given that children spend the majority of their formative years under the influence of the home atmosphere. The values, norms, and habits instilled during this period shape personality traits that endure into adulthood. A harmonious and religious household provides

children with the opportunity to internalise values in a natural, consistent, and continuous manner. This process touches not only on cognitive development but also cultivates emotional and spiritual awareness, which serve as the foundation for ethical behaviour.

This perspective is further reinforced by Setiawan (2017), who stresses that moral education should ideally begin at home, as this is where children first encounter the concepts of right and wrong. Parents, in this regard, are responsible for ensuring that the values instilled align with Islamic teachings whether through verbal instruction or habituation in everyday life. Moral education at home is not merely the delivery of commands or prohibitions; rather, it is a nurturing process involving affection, dialogue, and positive reinforcement. In this way, children do not simply comprehend values but are also motivated to embody them.

Thus, Al-Ghazali's ideas supported by findings from contemporary researchers affirm the importance of moral and spiritual-based parenting as a cornerstone for character development. Parenting rooted in Islamic values from an early age enables the formation of a generation that is faithful, virtuous, and capable of fulfilling its social role with a strong sense of responsibility. This also demonstrates that integrating classical teachings with modern understandings of moral education in the family can produce a timeless and relevant parenting model.

## **2. Parental Role Modelling**

Al-Ghazali places the role of parents as exemplary figures (*uswah hasanah*) at the very heart of child-rearing. According to him, the process of moral and spiritual education cannot be effective if delivered merely through verbal instruction or advice, without being accompanied by genuine role modelling in daily behaviour. Children, especially during the early stages of development, have a natural tendency to imitate and replicate the behaviours they observe in those closest to them most notably, their parents. Therefore, every word, action, and attitude displayed by parents has a direct influence on the formation of a child's character. This role modelling encompasses various aspects, from discipline in practising religious duties, honesty in social interactions, to patience and compassion in facing life's challenges.

This view aligns with findings by Sugiana (2019), who asserts that the role of parents in shaping a child's attitudes and behaviours cannot be replaced by others not even by formal educational institutions. The home becomes the child's first and most intensive learning environment, where daily interactions form the foundation of personality development. In this context, the consistency of parental behaviour is key. Discrepancies between what parents say and what they do not only risk blurring the moral message being conveyed, but may also cause value confusion in the child, thereby weakening the internalisation of the intended values.

Al-Ghazali also emphasises that the example set by parents must be consistent with Islamic teachings. Such consistency creates harmony between the values taught and the reality experienced by the child at home, thereby

reinforcing the natural process of value internalisation. For instance, when parents teach the importance of honesty, the child will find it easier to grasp and appreciate this value if they consistently witness their parents speaking the truth in all situations. Thus, role modelling is not merely a complement to parenting, but a central instrument that accelerates and strengthens the development of a child's moral and spiritual character.

From this perspective, it is evident that Al-Ghazali's views remain both relevant and applicable within the context of modern parenting. Although technology and media exert increasing influence on today's children, the role of parental example remains a fundamental pillar in building a generation with strong character. The integration of tangible role modelling with Islamic values in everyday life ensures that moral and spiritual education is not just theoretical, but truly manifested in the child's behaviour ultimately shaping individuals who are faithful, possess integrity, and are capable of contributing positively to society.

### **3. Gentle Parenting and the Enforcement of Discipline**

Within his framework of thought, Al-Ghazali advocates for a balanced model of child-rearing one that integrates gentleness (*rifq*) with proportionate discipline. He affirms that love and compassion form the emotional foundation essential for building a child's sense of security, self-confidence, and positive attachment with their parents. However, affection that is not accompanied by guidance and control can lead to fragile character development and a lack of self-regulation. For this reason, Al-Ghazali positions fair and just discipline as an essential complement. In his view, discipline is not to be understood as harsh punishment or the suppression of a child's freedom, but rather as wise and consistent guidance that helps children understand boundaries, responsibilities, and the consequences of their actions.

This dual approach demonstrates that ideal parenting cannot lean excessively towards either boundless leniency or rigid discipline. Gentleness is necessary to nurture emotional bonds and cultivate empathy, while discipline plays a key role in instilling a sense of responsibility, self-discipline, and adherence to moral norms. The integration of both creates a holistic educational environment in which the child grows up with a balanced understanding of personal freedom and an awareness of boundaries.

The principle of balance championed by Al-Ghazali aligns with modern findings in developmental psychology, which highlight the benefits of *authoritative parenting* a parenting style that combines warmth with consistent rule enforcement. Though originating from a medieval Islamic context and tradition, Al-Ghazali's thought remains relevant in addressing the challenges of parenting in the modern era, where children face increasingly complex moral, social, and emotional landscapes. With a balanced approach, parents can raise individuals with strong character, mature emotional intelligence, and behaviour that reflects ethical and religious values.

From Al-Ghazali's perspective, the balance between gentleness and discipline is not merely a pedagogical strategy but a form of worship and a moral

responsibility. Parents who are able to implement this principle are not only guiding their children toward righteous behaviour in this world, but also preparing them for the hereafter. In this way, parenting in Al-Ghazali's teachings carries a dual dimension: shaping individuals who are courteous and civil in their interactions with others, while also being devout servants before God. When applied consistently, this approach holds the potential to produce a generation that is not only intellectually capable but also morally and spiritually outstanding.

#### **4. The Importance of Intellectual and Emotional Education**

Al-Ghazali also highlights the significance of intellectual and emotional education. He believed that children should be given opportunities to develop their cognitive abilities while also learning to understand and manage their emotions. This holistic approach to education is supported by research which notes that effective character education involves nurturing both the intellectual and emotional capacities of children (Sasmita, 2022). Such an educational framework equips children to navigate life's complexities while maintaining a firm moral compass.

#### **5. Attention to the Social Environment**

The social environment is another critical factor in Al-Ghazali's perspective on child development. He emphasised that children should be raised within a supportive community that fosters their moral and spiritual growth. This view is reinforced by findings that highlight the role of social influence in shaping children's behaviour and values (Rahmadi, 2022). Parents are encouraged to ensure that their children are exposed to positive influences that align with Islamic principles.

#### **6. Early Childhood Education**

Al-Ghazali stresses the importance of beginning education at an early age. He argues that moral and spiritual education should commence in early childhood to build a solid foundation for future development. This perspective is consistent with contemporary educational theories that regard early childhood as a critical period for character formation. However, specific references to contemporary theory were not cited in the source material and have therefore been omitted from this translation.

#### **7. Balancing Worldly and Spiritual Goals**

Finally, Al-Ghazali teaches that parenting should involve a balance between worldly pursuits and spiritual aspirations. Children should be educated not only to seek success in this life, but also to reflect upon their spiritual purpose and the afterlife. This holistic educational view is echoed in Al-Ghazali's writings on the relevance of his moral philosophy in contemporary Islamic education (Gunawan & Lestari, 2021). By instilling awareness of goals that transcend material success, parents can guide their children towards a more meaningful and purposeful life.

### **Implications for Children's Education in the Modern Era**

Moral and spiritual education remains vital in the modern era, with many schools and educational programmes integrating ethical and religious values into their curricula. Such integration is essential not only within formal education but also in informal settings and character development initiatives. In this context, the role of exemplars remains central, even in the digital age. Parents, in particular, are expected to model responsible and ethical use of technology while guiding their children in navigating the challenges of social media. Similarly, the principle of balancing affection and discipline continues to be relevant, though contemporary approaches emphasise positive discipline strategies and effective communication rather than physical punishment.

Early childhood education also receives considerable global attention, with many initiatives highlighting the importance of embedding moral and religious values from the earliest stages of development. In addition, the social environment plays a crucial role in child-rearing, especially within multicultural contexts. Supportive communities can nurture an appreciation of diversity while reinforcing universal values, thereby helping children to grow into individuals who are both morally grounded and socially responsible.

## CONCLUSIONS

Overall, Al-Ghazali's concept of parenting emphasises a balanced approach that integrates religious, moral, and emotional education. By highlighting the importance of parental role modelling, the influence of the social environment, and early childhood education, Al-Ghazali offers a framework that remains highly relevant for educating future generations. These principles are not only rooted in Islamic tradition but also align with modern educational thought, demonstrating the continued relevance of Al-Ghazali's teachings in the context of contemporary child education. By systematically presenting the research findings as outlined above, we gain a clear understanding of how Al-Ghazali's parenting principles can be applied or adapted to modern educational practices

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