# Irfani Epistemology Imam Al-Ghazali's Perspective in Islamic Education

**Rodiah Nasution[1], M Sholih Salimul Uqba[1]**

[1] Universitas Islam Negeri Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang

rodiahnasution01@gmail.com, uqbamuhammad@gmail.com

**ABSTRACT:**

The aim of this research is to examine Al-Ghazali's Sufism thought and its correlation to education. This type of research uses library research with data and information collection methods. This research uses a qualitative descriptive approach by explaining Al-Ghazali's thoughts regarding irfani epistemology and its correlation to education. The results of this research show that in essence Al-Ghazali's Sufism teachings have a correlation with education where these teachings lead to the teachings of Al-Haqq (Allah SWT). Irfani Al Ghazali's thoughts provide valuable contributions in the educational context by emphasizing the integration of science and religion, character formation, values education, and active learning education. His holistic thinking and orientation towards moral and spiritual values can be the basis for developing education that is centered on the formation of quality and ethical individuals.

**Keywords:** Irfani Epistemology; Al-Ghazali; Islamic Education

**ABSTRAK:**

Tujuan penelitian ini ialah untuk menelaah pemikiran tasawuf Al-Ghazali dan korelasinya terhadap pendidikan. Jenis penelitian ini menggunakan penelitian pustaka (library research) dengan metode pengumpulan data dan informasi. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan deskriptif kualitatif dengan menguraikan pemikiran Al-Ghazali mengenai epistemologi irfani dan korelasinya terhadap pendidikan. Hasil penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa pada hakikatnya ajaran tasawuf Al-Ghazali memiliki korelasi dengan

pendidikan yang mana ajaran tersebut bermuara menuju ajaran Al-Haqq (Allah SWT). Pemikiran Irfani Al-Ghazali memberikan kontribusi berharga dalam konteks pendidikan dengan menekankan integrasi ilmu pengetahuan dan agama, pembentukan karakter, pendidikan nilai, dan pendidikan pembelajaran aktif. Pemikirannya yang holistik dan berorientasi pada nilai-nilai moral dan spiritual dapat menjadi landasan untuk pengembangan pendidikan yang berpusat pada pembentukan individu yang berkualitas dan beretika.

**Kata Kunci:** Epistemologi Irfani; Al-Ghazali; Pendidikan Islam

## INTRODUCTION

One of the important aspects of human life that has a strategic role in shaping quality and ethical individuals is education (Rachman et al., 2023). In the context of Islamic education, deep thoughts about epistemology and spiritual values have a significant contribution in shaping the foundation of education that is holistic and oriented towards the development of the individual as a whole. One of the most influential figures in Islamic educational thought is Imam Al-Ghazali. Islamic education is one of the important areas in the development of Muslim society. Education based on Islamic values not only focuses on academic aspects, but also shapes the character and morals of individuals. In this context, the thought of Al-Ghazali, a prominent Muslim scholar from the 11th century, has a significant contribution in understanding the relationship between education and Islamic values (Saputra & Wahid, 2023).

Imam Al-Ghazali is a great figure in the history of Muslim thought. He was a Sufi who was also very instrumental in the field of education. For Al-Ghazali, education has a very important role in human life. To truly understand his thought, we must understand his ideas on education, science, and learning. His active involvement in the field of education cannot be ignored. His experience and expertise as a teacher in the Nidzammiyyah Madrasah, then rector of the Nidzammiyyah University in Bagdad, as well

as his many years of educating and teaching, all show how much influence he had in the world of education (Al-Lathif, 2020). Imam Al-Ghazali, a leading Muslim scholar of his time, had a deep understanding of Sufism and its relationship with education. In his thought, he developed the concept of irfani epistemology (Halik, 2020).

The science of epistemology is the substantive study of knowledge-related topics (Rokhmah, 2021). Since epistemology is a philosophy of science, it might be claimed that there is confusion when talking about the epistemology of science. However, since the term "epistemology" has gained popularity in Indonesia, the term "epistemology of science" refers to the same philosophical field that examines issues pertaining to science that are thoroughly examined, such as the nature of science, its origins, and other topics. Additionally, epistemology has the power to shape and guide human thought (Makki, 2019). One can determine whether someone thinks deductively or intuitively from this point on. It is stated in another section that the essence of scientific epistemology is the synthesis of empirical and rational thought. Because science employs both human faculties—the mind and the senses—in its epistemology, both schools of thought are united in the study of natural occurrences in an effort to discover the truth. Thus, epistemology is an effort to explain and validate the notion that we are aware of reality outside from ourselves. While establishing anything is empirical thinking, using reasoning to interpretation is rational thinking. The scientific method is the result of combining the two previously mentioned ways of thinking (Qomar, 2005).

While irfani epistemology is a form of knowledge based on God's revelation of the secrets of reality. This thinking emphasizes the importance of combining science and religion, character building, value education, and active learning education in the context of Islamic education (Bakar et al., 2023). Al-Ghazali's views on Islamic education can make a valuable contribution to the development of an education system that integrates science and spiritual values (Kurniawati et al., 2023). By strengthening the foundation of holistic and ethical education, we can form individuals who

are not only academically intelligent, but also have good character and are committed to moral values.

It is intended that by comprehending and putting into practice Imam Al-Ghazali's perspective on educational principles, education will become more significant and must now be oriented not just toward material things but also toward the afterlife. Based on the aforementioned idea, it is intended that whatever information acquired—as long as it does not contradict Islamic teachings—will improve the owner and, of course, transform Indonesia into a developed nation.

## RESEARCH METHOD

This research uses a library research approach to collect data and information relevant to Al-Ghazali's thoughts on irfani epistemology and its correlation with Islamic education. This approach was chosen because this research aims to analyze and describe Al-Ghazali's thoughts contained in his existing works.

The first step in this research method is to identify and select relevant sources, in the form of books, articles, and other writings that discuss Al-Ghazali's thoughts on Sufism, education, and irfani epistemology. These sources were accessed through university libraries, academic databases, and reliable online sources. Next, the researcher conducted an in-depth literature review of the selected sources. This involved reading, understanding and analyzing the content of each relevant source (Subagiya, 2023). Researchers recorded important information and findings related to Al-Ghazali's thoughts on irfani epistemology and Islamic education.

The data obtained from the literature review was then analyzed qualitatively. The analysis is done by synthesizing and interpreting the findings found in the sources studied. The researcher identifies patterns, themes, and main concepts that appear in Al-Ghazali's thoughts on Islamic education. The results of the analysis are then described in this article in a systematic and coherent manner. Al-Ghazali's thoughts on irfani

epistemology and its correlation with Islamic education are explained in detail, with reference to relevant quotations and references.

In this research, no primary data collection was conducted, because this research is based on a literature review of Al-Ghazali's existing works. Therefore, there is no field data collection process involving respondents or research subjects. This research method was chosen because it allows researchers to access and analyze Al-Ghazali's thoughts that already exist in the available literature. Thus, this research can provide a better understanding of Al-Ghazali's views on Islamic education and its relevance in the current educational context.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Irfani Epistemology

Irfani knowledge is not based on text like bayani, but on kashf, God's revelation of the secrets of reality (Muzammil et al., 2022). Therefore, Irfani knowledge is not acquired through textual analysis but through spiritual practice, which is done with a pure heart hoping that God will bestow knowledge directly upon it. It is put into the mind, conceptualized and then presented to others logically. Thus Irfani knowledge is at least acquired through three stages, (1) preparation, (2) reception, (3) disclosure, orally and in writing.

The first stage is preparation. In order to receive the abundance of knowledge (*kasyf*), one must go through the stages of spiritual life. There are at least seven stages that must be undertaken(Negara, 2022), starting from the bottom towards the top, namely (1) Taubat, (2) Wara', abstaining from anything subhat, (3) Zuhud, not greedy and not prioritizing the life of the world. (4) Faqir, emptying all thoughts and hopes for the future, and not wanting anything except Allah SWT, (5) Patience, accepting all disasters with polite and willing behavior. (6) Tawakal, believing in everything that is determined by Him. (7) Ridha, the disappearance of displeasure in the heart so that only joy and joy remain.

The second phase is the reception phase. Once a person reaches a particular degree in Sufism, they will receive a wealth of insightful information directly from God. At this point, a person will experience total self-awareness, or *kasyf*, which will enable them to perceive their own reality as a known object, or *musyahadah*. That being said, consciousness and realization are one and the same form, meaning that the only object known is consciousness itself, which recognizes itself as it ought to (*ittihad*) (Mehdi Hairi Yazdi, 1994).

Third, disclosure, a spiritual experience that is verbally or in writing interpreted and communicated to others. However, not all of these experiences can be stated since Irfani knowledge is related to the oneness of self in God and is not included in the order of conception and representation.

It might be argued that despite the subjectivity of irfani knowledge, everyone can sense its veracity (Ridlo, 2023). This implies that since everyone can do the task at their own pace, reason plays a participatory role and the veracity of the truth is intersubjective. Irfani knowledge implies, within the framework of Islamic thought, that religions should be approached at their substantive level and the core of their spirituality, and that they should be developed fully cognizant of the existence of other people's religious experiences (the otherness), which differ in essence and expression but share substance and essence that is essentially similar.

In philosophy, Irfani is known as intuition (Robbani & Haqqy, 2021). With intuition, humans gain knowledge suddenly without going through a certain reasoning process. The characteristics of intuition are include *zauq* (taste), which is through direct experience, *huduri* knowledge, which is the existence of objects within the subject, and existential, which is without categorization but knows it deeply. Henry Bergson considered intuition to be the result of the evolution of higher thought, but it is personal (Mulyadhi Kartanegara, 2003). In the first surah revealed to the Prophet Muhammad, it is explained that there are two ways to acquire knowledge, the first through the "pen" (writing) which must be read by humans and the second through direct teaching without tools. The second way is known as *'llm ladunny*, such

as the knowledge gained by Prophet Haidir. In QS. Al-Kahf: 65, it means: "Then they met a servant among Our servants, to whom We had given mercy from Our side, and whom We had taught knowledge from Our side".

**Al-Ghazali**

**a. Biography of Imam Al-Ghazali**

Al-Ghazali's name is Abu Hamid Muhammad bin Muhammad bin Muhammad Al-Ghazali. He was born in the small town of Thus which belongs to the Khurasan region of Iran in 450 Hijri coinciding with the year 1058 AD (Al-Ghazali, 2005). Al-Ghazali is named after Ghuzalah, which is the name of a village in Thus (Imamsyah et al., 2023). His father worked as a wool spinner which he sold in his shop in Thus. Before his death, Al-Ghazali's father entrusted his two sons, Al-Ghazali and his brother Ahmad, to a friend who was also a Sufi and gave him some of the wealth he had kept until now. The young Al-Ghazali then studied jurisprudence in Thus to Ahmad Al-Radzakani, then as a teenager he went to the city of Jurjan to study with Abu Nashar Al-'Isma'il and then to Naisabur to study with Abu Al-Maali Al- Juwaini who was nicknamed Imam Al-Haramain (Al-Ghazali, 2005). To Imam Al-Haramain, Al-Ghazali studied the verses of Al-'Ash'ari in order to completely master them. After some time studying with Imam Al-Haramain, he visited the city of Askar (Mu'askar) to meet with Nidzam Al-Mulk, the Prime Minister of the Saljuk Banu. Nidzam eventually appointed Al-Ghazali as a lecturer at the Nidzamiyah University in Baghdad (Al-Ghazali, 2005). At the age of 34, Al-Ghazali settled in Bagdad and taught at the Nidzamiyah University. In this city Al-Ghazali's name grew in popularity and was warmly welcomed and treated with great respect. According to the testimony of 'Abdu Al-Ghafir Al-Farisi who lived during Al-Ghazali's time recounted by Al-Subki, Al-Ghazali's popularity was only one level below the Imam of Khurasan in beating the popularity of Saljuk officials and ministers (Syafril, 2017).

Al-Ghazali died at dawn on Monday, 14 Jumadil-tsani 505 AH. coinciding with December 18, 1111 AD, at the age of 53. According to Ibn Al-

'Imad, he died at the age of 55. Al-Ghazali was buried outside Thabaran, near the grave of a famous poet, named Firdawsi. About his death, Imam Al-Ghazali's brother Ahmad narrated that once Al-Ghazali performed ablution and prayed, then said; "bring me my shroud", then he took it and kissed it, and laid it in front of his face saying, "with pleasure I enter the Royal Presence". Then he straightened his legs and went to meet the Creator (Ghazali, 2013).

## b. Imam Al-Ghazali's Tasawwuf Thought

### ➢ The Maqam of Sufism According to Al-Ghazali

In the study of Sufism, if someone wants to get closer to Allah, then there are stations or stations that he must go through. Every maqam that a salik goes through, he will get ahwal. According to Al-Ghazali, as mentioned in his tasawwuf books, the stages that must be passed are repentance, patience, poverty, asceticism, tawakkal, mahabbah and pleasure. In this sub-topic, the author will briefly explain the meaning of each of these terms (Syafril, 2017).

#### a) Repentance

According to Al-Ghazali's view, the essence of repentance is regret. However, repentance has several meanings, namely related to the knowledge of sins and their consequences in the present, the desire to abandon the sins committed in the future and the determination to stop all these sins in order to be closer to Him (Mulyadi Kartanegara, 2006).

#### b) Patience

According to Al-Ghazali, there are two parts of patience, namely patience related to physical patience, namely patience related to the body when doing a job or worship that has a heavy burden in doing it, and patience related to psychology / non-physical patience, namely patience related to the soul in resisting various demands of lust.

c) Faqir

Al-Ghazali defined poverty as needing Allah's help to continue existing. Due to the unavailability of what one needs.

d) Zuhud

It is avoiding worldly luxuries, mastering lust in all its varieties.

e) Tawakkal

According to Al-Ghazali, it is an inner condition that is closely related to charity and a sincere heart, namely the sincerity of the heart solely for the sake of Allah and relying on Him.

f) Mahabbah

In Al-Ghazali's point of view, mahabbah is the highest level of all levels that must be passed, namely love for Allah more than love for others.

g) Ridha

Ridha is the last maqam, according to Al-Ghazali, ridha is to fully accept what Allah has bestowed, even every suffering is felt as a gift (Mulyadi Kartanegara, 2006).

In addition to the levels of maqam mentioned above, Al-Ghazali raised issues related to the inner state of the heart, namely Al-khaufu wa Al-raja'. Al-khauf, which is the fear of Allah by feeling pain in his heart if he falls into things that are forbidden. Al-raja' is hope, which is where a person consciously hangs his hopes only on Allah.

➢ **The Concept of Ma'rifah According to Al-Ghazali**

Ma'rifat is the substance of Al-Ghazali's Sufism. Even so, the concept of ma'rifat is not purely Al-Ghazali's thought, but is a development of earlier Sufi concepts. Ma'rifat literally means knowledge or experience. While in the terminology of Sufism, this word is defined as a Sufi's knowledge of God that he gets through a

pure heart (Rivay Siregar, 2002). In various Sufism literature, it is mentioned that the figures who introduced this ma'rifat were Zun Al-Nun Al-Misri and Al-Ghazali. Zun Al-Nun Al-Misri lived around 860 AD (Abuddin Nata, 2000).

According to Hamka, as told by Abuddin Nata, Zun Al-Nun was the pinnacle of Sufis in the third century hijriyah. He added many ways to get to God. Zun Al-Nun Al-Misri's famous phrase is "I know my God by my God, if not for my God, I would not know my God" (Abuddin Nata, 2000). This expression shows that ma'rifat cannot be obtained just like that, nor is it the result of thinking but through God's gift.

While ma'rifat in Al-Ghazali's understanding can only be obtained through inspiration, namely Allah emits nur (guiding light) into the heart of the person he wants so that he can recognize Allah, so that it becomes melted, uniting his mind and heart with the presence of Allah. In his book Raudhah Al-Thalibin, Al-Ghazali says that ma'rifat in terms of language means "knowledge that does not accept doubt". People who reach the level of ma'rifat are called wise (*'arif*). Furthermore, Al-Ghazali said that haqiqi ma'rifat can only be obtained through inspiration. So, ma'rifat is knowledge given by God directly to certain humans without going through the process of observation and reasoning, or through the learning process. According to Al-Ghazali, the way to achieve ma'rifat is the heart (*qalbu*) not the intellect. The heart in question is the heart that receives light (*nur al-hidayah*). The heart that receives the light of this guidance is called bashirah. *Qalbu*, wrote Al-Ghazali, is like a mirror, while knowledge is a reflection of the image of reality contained in it. Strictly speaking, if the mirror of the heart (*qalbu*) is not clear, it cannot reflect the reality of knowledge. He further said that what causes the mirror of the heart to be unclear is lust, while obedience to Allah and turning away from the demands of lust is what makes the heart clear and bright (Syafril, 2017).

According to him, it has been the sunnatullah for a long time, pious people have experienced and recognized that purifying the soul, surrendering to Allah and getting closer to Him is the path that will take the soul to the spiritual realm and take it to a higher place, so that it gets an abundance of grace, inspiration and ma'rifat that cannot be obtained by people whose hearts are still tied to material and worldly affairs. Like the Sufis before him, Al-Ghazali also saw ma'rifah as the ultimate goal that humans must achieve, as well as the highest perfection in which there is true happiness. In his book Minhaj Al-'Abidin, Al-Ghazali explains four things that can prevent a person from getting closer to Allah and cause his heart not to shine, namely the world and its contents, creatures, demons and passions. These four things according to Al-Ghazali can be overcome by four things as well, namely zuhud, 'uzlah, mujahadah and weakening lust (Syafril, 2017).

> **The style of al-Ghazali's Tasawwuf**

The emergence of Al-Ghazali in the fifth century hijriyah, changed the orientation of Sufism which only emphasized the esoteric aspect. Sufism developed by Sufis in the 4th century hijriyah, especially by Mansur Al-Hallaj with his hulul doctrine, was no longer in accordance with the teachings of the Al-Qur'an and Sunnah. This hulul doctrine then led to Al-Hallaj being put to death. The tragedy experienced by Al-Hallaj illustrates how sharp the conflict between the scholars of shari'ah and the teachings brought by the Sufis. Therefore, Al-Ghazali tried to restore Sufi teachings to their original status as proposed by the Sufis of the first century hijriyah, Al-Hasan Al-Bashri (110 AH) and Rabi'ah Al-Adawiyah (185 AH) which were oriented towards zuhud, education of the soul and moral formation (Alwi Shihab, 2009).

The concepts and thoughts of Sufism introduced by Al-Ghazali were so profound that they had never been introduced before. On the other hand, Al-Ghazali also sharply criticized various schools of

philosophy, mu'tazilah thought and spiritual beliefs by instilling tasawwuf principles that are more moderate and in accordance with the theological line of Ahlusunnah wal jama'ah. The orientation and details of Sufism that he developed differed from the conceptions of Al-Hallaj and Al-Bustami. The model of Sufism developed by Al-Ghazali is called Sunni Sufism (Rahman & Halim, 2019).

According to Abu Al-Wafa' Al-Taftazani as quoted by Asmaran, in Sufism Al-Ghazali's choice fell on Sunni Sufism based on the ASWAJA doctrine (Ahlusunnah wal jama'ah). From his understanding of Sufism he distanced himself from all tendencies that influenced Islamic philosophers, Ismailiyah and Shi'a sects, Ikhwan As-Safa and others. Al-Ghazali also distanced his Sufism from Aristotle's theories of divinity, including the theories of emanation and unification. With the emergence of Al-Ghazali, the Sunni model of Sufism that he developed began to spread and influence the Islamic world. Sufi figures who were heavily influenced by Al-Ghazali's school of Sufism as well as the founders of tariqahs, namely Sheikh Ahmad Rifa'i, (founder of the *Rifa'iyyah Tariqah*) and Sheikh 'Abd Al-Qadir Al-Jailani (founder of the *Qodiriyah Tariqah*). Likewise, the next generation, among whom the most prominent are Shaykh Abu Al-Hasan Al-Syadzili, Abu Al-'Abbas Al-Mursi and Ibn 'Athaillah Al-Sakandari, are the founders and leaders of the As-syadziliyah tariqah (Hamdani & Zainal, 2019).

## Correlation of Al Ghazali's Irfani Thought with Islamic Education

Al Ghazali's Irfani thinking has a strong correlation with the field of Islamic education (Nata, 2018). He was a Muslim philosopher and intellectual who made important contributions to contemporary Islamic educational thought. Some aspects of his thought related to education include:

a. Integration of Science and Religion: Irfani Al Ghazali advocates the importance of integrating science with religious values in education.

According to him, a holistic education should combine academic knowledge with an understanding of morals, ethics and spirituality. He argues that education that only focuses on the intellectual aspect will produce a generation that loses the values of life (Firman & Abdurrahman, 2023).

b. Character Formation: Irfani Al Ghazali emphasizes the importance of education in shaping good character. According to him, the transfer of knowledge should not be the exclusive goal of education, but also on the formation of an ethical, responsible and spiritually aware personality. He argues that education should help individuals to develop positive personality qualities (Arif, 2021). Building character in students is a fundamental issue and must be sustainable through religious habituation activities (Naja, 2022).

c. Value Education: Irfani Al Ghazali encouraged the adoption of an educational approach based on moral and ethical values. He argued that education should teach values such as honesty, tolerance, compassion and justice. He believed that through values education, individuals can develop a deep understanding of how to live life with integrity and respect for diversity (Arrazet, 2022). A person will have positive ethics when they get educational stimuli and good environmental support, otherwise a person will have negative ethics when they get stimuli from an unfavorable environment. In this case the role of parents at home, the community environment, and education is very important, in the educational environment forming a positive learning situation so as to form positive or good ethics or behavior that is inherent in a person's personality (Naja, 2022).

d. Active Learning Education: Irfani Al Ghazali supports an educational approach that involves students actively in the learning process. He argues that students should be active subjects in acquiring knowledge and constructing understanding. This approach encourages students to think critically, collaborate and develop problem-solving skills (Aziz, 2022).

With his thoughts that include integration between science and religion, character building, value education, and active learning, Irfani Al Ghazali makes a valuable contribution in the context of education. His holistic thinking that is oriented towards moral and spiritual values can serve as a foundation for the development of education that centers on the formation of qualified and ethical individuals.

## CONCLUSION

Based on the discussion, it can be concluded that Al-Ghazali's thought, especially in the concept of irfani epistemology, makes an important contribution in the context of Islamic education. Al-Ghazali's thought emphasizes the importance of integration between science and religion in education. He viewed that knowledge gained from God's revelation is the highest source of knowledge and can help individuals understand the secrets of reality. In the context of Islamic education, this illustrates the importance of studying worldly and religious knowledge in a balanced manner, so as to create a comprehensive understanding of self, God and the universe.

Overall, Al-Ghazali's thoughts on irfani epistemology provide a strong foundation for the development of Islamic education that is holistic and oriented towards moral and spiritual values. By integrating science and religion, character building, value education, and applying active learning approaches, Islamic education can create individuals who are qualified, ethical, and committed to good values. In this era of globalization, Al-Ghazali's thoughts on Islamic education provide valuable inspiration and guidance in shaping a generation capable of facing the challenges of the times with wisdom and moral excellence.

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