

Moral Education Approaches: Ibn Miskawayh And Imam Al-Ghazali

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Abstract. This study aims to explore and compare the approaches to moral education in the thought of Ihn Miskawayh and Imam Al-Ghazali. Both are significant figures in the intellectual tradition of Islam who devoted considerable attention to the formation of human character. This research employs a library research method with a qualitative approach and descriptive analysis. The data sources consist of primary works by both scholars, such as Tahdhib al-Akhlaq and Ihya' Ulum al-Din, supported by relevant secondary literature. The findings indicate that Ibn Miskawayh emphasizes the importance of habituation and rationality in moral development, applying a more philosophical and ethical approach. In contrast, Al-Ghazali highlights a Sufi and spiritual perspective, wherein character building is achieved through purification of the soul and closeness to God. Despite their differing methodologies, both thinkers agree that moral education is the core of the ideal human education process.

Keyword: Moral Education Approach, Ibn Miskawayh, Imam Al-Ghazali

INTRODUCTION

Education is a lifelong journey that must be undertaken without time limitations. Moreover, education plays a vital role in human life, and thus, this limitless timeframe begins at birth and continues until the end of one's life. Education, therefore, is a comprehensive process aimed at shaping all aspects of the human being. Substantially, education is an effort to transmit civilization and culture in order to realize the ideal of the complete human being (insan al-kamil). (Fitiryani Sanuhung, Yazida Ichan, Nur Rahma Setyaningrum, 2021) Naturally, this process does not only develop the cognitive domain but also has fundamental objectives, which include the development of intellectual ("aqliyyah"), spiritual ('ruhaniyyah'), physical ('jismiyyah'), and social ('ijtima'iyyah') dimensions. (Diane Monika, Silvi Rera, 2021) Furthermore, education cannot be separated from the development of akhlaq or character. This is because all aspects of education are inherently linked to the holistic development of the human selfenriching knowledge, sharpening character, and guiding one's talents and interests within the soul.

Consciously, knowledge or character is acquired through the learning process; therefore, what matters most is how a person can develop a broad scope of understanding so that the goal of education leads to absolute success. Thus, the goal of education is not limited merely to the domain of knowledge it goes far beyond that. The true aim of education is to understand how character plays an active role in shaping an individual's personality. Educational success is truly realized when a person possesses noble traits, temperament, and character that reflect a complete and ideal human being in life.

Therefore, the best form of education is one that creates a generation that embodies the comprehensive essence of education where individuals possess good character, strong spiritual awareness, and adequate knowledge. In line with this, Law No. 20 of 2003 Article 1 Paragraph 1 of the Republic of Indonesia states that education is a conscious and planned effort to create a learning environment and learning process in which learners actively develop their potential to have spiritual strength, self-control, personality, intelligence, noble character, and the skills needed by themselves, society, the nation, and the state. (Republic of Indonesia, 2003)

The importance of education also arises from the growing phenomenon of moral degradation among students, which has become a serious issue in the world of education. Various cases such as drug abuse, narcotics use, brawls, bullying, and exposure to pornography are increasingly common among students. This situation is further exacerbated by the lack of integration and synergy between educational institutions, parents, and the community (the three centers of education), resulting in the core values of education not being properly upheld or optimally implemented. These problems are prevalent in many countries, including Indonesia.

Several academic circles have attempted to find the right concepts and formulas to address these issues. One of the efforts is by revisiting the thoughts of scholars who focused on education, such as Ibn Miskawayh, Imam Al-Ghazali, Ibn Sina, Ibn Khaldun, and others. In this context, the discourse surrounding the educational thoughts of Ibn Miskawayh and Imam Al-Ghazali becomes a highly important area of study. This is especially true considering that Al-Ghazali was a renowned scholar and a leading teacher at the Nizamiyyah Madrasah, whose scholarly focus largely centered on moral education, as reflected in his works such as *Ihya' Ulum al-Din*, *Mishkat al-Anwar*, *Mukashafat al-Qulub*, *Minhaj al-'Abidin*, *Mizan al-'Amal*, and others. (Nafi, 2017) Although the two scholars differ in their educational approaches Imam Al-Ghazali being more focused on character education, while Ibn Miskawayh emphasized rational education their differing perspectives offer valuable insights.

From these differences, we can draw conclusions and derive benefits from both of their educational concepts.

Therefore, it is of great interest for the writer to explore more deeply the thoughts of these two prominent figures regarding character education for both educators and students. This study aims to examine how each of these scholars approached education and the methods they employed in shaping character through their educational philosophies.

METHOD

This research employs a qualitative approach using descriptive analysis and the library research method. The qualitative approach was chosen because this study focuses on an in-depth analysis of the moral education concepts of Ibn Miskawayh and Imam Al-Ghazali. Descriptive analysis is used to systematically and objectively describe, explain, and compare the thoughts of both figures. The research data were obtained from primary sources such as original works *Tahzib al-Akhlaq* (by Ibn Miskawayh) and *Ihya' Ulum al-Din* (by Imam Al-Ghazali) as well as secondary sources including books, journal articles, and other relevant scholarly works.

FINDINGS

1. Biography of Ibn Miskawaih

The full name of Ibn Miskawaih is Abu Ali Ahmad Ibn Muhammad Ibn Miskawaih. He was born in the city of Ray (Iran) in 330 H/ 932 M and died in Isfahan in 421 H / 1030 M. Miskawaih was not only an expert in the field of moral philosophy but also skilled in medicine, language and literature, and history. In his early life, before converting to Islam, Miskawaih was a follower of the Magi religion.

Ibn Miskawaih lived during the reign of the Buyid dynasty in Baghdad (320 – 450 H/932 – 1062 M), which was predominantly Shi'a. He was a Muslim intellectual specializing in moral philosophy. He studied history and philosophy and once served as the librarian (*khazin*) to Ibn al-'Abid, where he was able to acquire knowledge and many positive experiences through his interactions with the elite. Afterwards, Ibn Miskawaih left Ray and moved to Baghdad, living at the palace of the Buyid prince, where he served as a treasurer and held several other positions. (H. Supriyanto, 2022) Miskawaih was even given the title of the "third teacher," following Aristotle as the "first teacher" and Al-Farabi as the "second teacher."

2. Biography of Imam Al-Ghazali

His full name is Abu Hamid, with the honorific title *Hujjat al-Islam*. His complete name is Muhammad ibn Muhammad ibn Muhammad al-Ghazali. He is considered one of the most important and popular figures in the history of Arab-Islamic intellectual thought. He was known for his deep engagement with philosophy. He was born in Iran, specifically in the village of Thus, in 450 H/1058 M. He spent his study years in Nishapur, where he became a student of the prominent Sunni scholar Abu al-Ma'ali al-Juwayni, who held the title *Imam al-Haramayn*.

After his teacher passed away, al-Ghazali formed a friendship with Nizam al-Mulk, the minister of the Seljuk Sultanate. When al-Ghazali was only 34 years old, the minister appointed him as the Rector of the Nizamiyya University in Baghdad, a position he held from 484 – 488 H /1091-1095 M. During his tenure as Rector, al-Ghazali gained widespread popularity throughout the country as he taught in the Abbasid capital, Baghdad. His scholarly integrity earned him great respect from the Caliph. When the state faced difficult problems, the Caliph would always seek advice and counsel from al-Ghazali. (Imam Ghazali Said, 2017)

3. Works of Ibn Miskawaih

Ibn Miskawaih is known as a prolific Muslim thinker who produced many written works, although only a small portion of them have survived. Some of Ibn Miskawaih's recorded works include: (Ridwan and Nur Aisyah, 2022)

- a. Al-Fauz Al-Akbar (On Great Success)
- b. Al-Fauz Al-Asghar (On Small Success)
- c. Tajarib Al-Umam (On the Experiences of Nations from the Beginning Until His Time)
- d. Uns Al-Farid (A Collection of Anecdotes, Poems, Proverbs, and Wise Sayings)
- e. Tartib As-Sa'adah (On Morality and Politics)
- f. Al-Musthafa (Selected Poems)
- g. Jawidan Khirad (A Collection of Wise Expressions)
- h. *Al-Jami'* (On Community)
- i. As-Siyar (On Rules of Life)
- j. Tahdzib al-Akhlaq (Moral Education)
- k. Ajwibah wa Al-As'ilah fi An-Nafs wa Al-Aql (Questions and Answers about the Soul and Intellect)
- 1. Al-Jawab fi Al-Masa'il As-Salas (Answers on Three Issues)
- m. Taharat An-Nafs (Purity of the Soul)
- n. Risalah fi Al-Ladzdzat wal Alam fi Jauhar An Nafs (A Treatise on Pleasure Concerning the Essence of the Soul's Pain)
- o. Risalah fi Jawab fi Su'al Ali bin Muhammad Abu Hayyan Ash Shufi fi Haqiqat Al-Aql (A Treatise in Response to Ali bin Muhammad Abu Hayyan Ash Shufi's Question about the Truth of the Intellect)
- p. Risalah fi Haqiqah Al-Aql (A Treatise on the Truth of Reasoning)

4. Works of Imam Al-Ghazali

Al-Ghazali was one of the most prolific scholars and thinkers in the Islamic world. Throughout his life whether as a state official in Mu'askar, a professor in Baghdad, during his skeptical phase in Nishapur, or throughout his spiritual quest for truth until the end of his life Al-Ghazali continuously wrote and authored numerous works, including: (Ahmad Zaini, 2016)

- a. Ihya Ulum ad-Din (Revival of Religious Sciences; discusses various religious sciences)
- b. *Tahafut Al-Falasifah* (The Incoherence of the Philosophers; explaining the philosophers' views from a religious perspective)
- c. Al-Iqtishad fi Al-Itiqad (The Moderation in Belief; core knowledge of theological scholars)
- d. Al-Munqidz min adh-Dhalal (Deliverance from Error; explaining the goals and secrets of knowledge)

- e. Jawahir al-Our'an (The Jewels of the Qur'an; secrets contained in the Qur'an)
- f. Mizan al-'Amal (The Balance of Action; on religious philosophy)
- g. Al-Maqashid al-Asna fi Ma'ani Asma'illah al-Husna (The Most Excellent Objectives in the Meanings of God's Beautiful Names)
- h. Faishal at-Tafriq Baina al-Islam wa al-Zindiqah (The Criterion for Distinguishing Between Islam and Heresy)
- i. Al-Oisthas al-Mustagim (The Just Balance; a path to resolving differences of opinion)

5. About the Book *Tahdzib al-Akhlak* by Ibn Miskawaih

The book *Tahdzib al-Akhlak* consists of seven chapters. The first chapter begins by discussing the soul, as the soul is the center from which moral character arises. The second chapter discusses akhlaq (morality or character), where Ibn Miskawaih starts by emphasizing the definition of akhlaq itself. Then, there is a discussion about human nature (*fitrah*). The third chapter covers the main aspects of akhlaq, namely good and evil as well as happiness. The fourth chapter discusses virtues, including the issue of justice. The fifth chapter talks about love and friendship. The last two chapters deal with the health of the soul and the healing of soul diseases, among other topics. Thus, Ibn Miskawaih's approach to akhlaq is a blend of theoretical and practical studies, placing greater emphasis on education and teaching. Because of this, many scholars classify Ibn Miskawaih's discussion as rational ethics or ethical philosophy.

6. About the Book Ihya Ulumuddin by Imam Al-Ghazali

Imam Al-Ghazali's work Ihya Ulumuddin is one of his most famous books among the Muslim community. This book is divided into four major parts (called Rub'), each consisting of 10 chapters (Juz). The first part discusses the quarter of worship (Rub' al-Tbadah), focusing on outward acts of worship and methods of drawing closer to Allah. The chapters cover topics such as: knowledge and teaching, creed and faith, secrets of purification, secrets of prayer, secrets of almsgiving (zakat), secrets of fasting, secrets of pilgrimage (hajj), Qur'an recitation, remembrance (dhikr) and supplication (du'a), as well as prescribed litanies (wirid) and timing. The second part covers the quarter of daily habits (Rub' Al-'Adat), which deals with daily etiquette. The chapters include: etiquette of eating, marriage, earning a livelihood, lawful and unlawful matters, brotherhood and social interaction, solitude, traveling, listening and music, enjoining good and forbidding evil, and the character of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). The third part discusses the quarter of destructive things (Rub' al-Muhlikat), focusing on diseases of the heart and bad morals that must be avoided. The chapters cover: a general explanation about the heart, dangers of lust, dangers of the tongue, anger, hatred, and envy, the world and its love, stinginess and love of wealth, showing off and desire for popularity, vanity and arrogance, Satan's deceit, and misguidance and innovation (bid'ah). The fourth part addresses the quarter of causes of salvation (Rub' al-Munjiyat), which deals with noble morals and ways of drawing near to Allah. The chapters include: repentance, patience and gratitude, fear and hope, asceticism and reliance on God, love and contentment, intention and sincerity, self-examination and spiritual vigilance, contemplation, remembrance of death, and life after death. (Imam Al-Ghazzali, 2011)

DISCUSSION

A. Ibn Miskawaih's Approach to Moral Education in the Book Tahzib al-Akhlak

1. Definition of Moral Education

The word *akhlaq* etymologically originates from the Arabic language. *Akhlaq* is the plural form of *khuluq*, which means character, morals, or habits. Terminologically, Ibn Miskawaih defines character (*khuluq*) as a state of the soul that urges a person to perform certain actions without prior intellectual deliberation. (Nisrokha, 2016)

Morality (akhlaq) is one of the foundational concepts in Ibn Miskawaih's educational philosophy. He bases his concept of morality on the doctrine of the middle way (al-wasath). Generally, he interprets this as balance, moderation, harmony, virtue, nobility, or a middle position between two extremes. However, he tends to view moral virtue in general as the middle position between the extremes of excess and deficiency in the human soul.

The core issues discussed in the study of morality are goodness (al-khair), happiness (al-sa'adah), and virtue (al-fadhilah). According to Ibn Miskawaih, goodness is a state where one reaches the ultimate limit and the highest perfection of existence. Thus, goodness represents happiness that attains the highest degree. Goodness leads to truth, and through truth, a person will consistently behave rightly, so goodness ultimately brings about the highest happiness. (Nur Aisyah, 2020)

2. The Goals of Moral Education

According to Ibn Miskawaih, the goal of moral education is the realization of an inner attitude that can spontaneously encourage all actions that have good value, thereby achieving perfection and attaining true and complete happiness. This allows a person to behave in a praiseworthy and perfect manner in accordance with their essence as a human being. Conversely, a person may reach a disgraceful status if they act contrary to their nature as a human. For Ibn Miskawaih, human perfection lies in spiritual pleasure, not physical enjoyment.

The goal of moral education formulated by Ibn Miskawaih is the realization of an inner attitude that spontaneously motivates the emergence of all virtuous deeds. (Miswar, 2020) Thus, it achieves perfection and attains true, complete, and comprehensive happiness, encompassing human happiness in its broadest sense.

3. The Content of Moral Education

Broadly speaking, Ibn Miskawaih classifies the content of moral education into three types: (1) Things that are obligatory for the needs of the human body, (2) Things that are obligatory for the human soul, and (3) Things that are obligatory for human relationships with others. This classification is closely related to Ibn Miskawaih's division of the powers of the human soul.

From these three main content areas, the knowledge acquired can generally be grouped into two categories: First, knowledge related to thought (al-'ulum al-fikriyah), Second, knowledge related to the senses (al-'ulum al-bissiyat). (Alfian, Indah Herningrum, 2019)

4. Methods of Moral Education

Ibn Miskawaih proposed several methods of education, including: (Della, Ramli, 2022)

a. Natural Method

This method starts from observing human potential, where the potential that appears first is then nurtured in accordance with its needs.

b. Guidance Method

This method is important to direct the students toward the expected educational goals, namely obeying Sharia and doing good deeds.

c. Habituation Method

To transform morals into good character, he offered an effective method focused on two approaches: habituation and training, as well as role modeling and imitation. Habituation can be done from an early age by demonstrating good attitudes and behaviors, being polite, and respecting others.

d. Punishment, Reprimand, and Light Physical Discipline Method

Ibn Miskawaih stated that in the process of moral education, sometimes it is permissible to try reprimands, punishments, and light physical discipline. However, this method should be the last resort (ultimum remedium) if other methods are ineffective.

B. Imam Al-Ghazali's Approach to Moral Education in the Book Ihya Ulumuddin

1. Definition of Moral Education

According to Al-Ghazali, education is the process of removing bad morals and instilling good morals. Thus, education in its essence is moral education a systematic process aimed at producing progressive changes in human behavior. (Munshorif, 2022)

Al-Ghazali proposed two systems of moral education that humans should implement: formal and non-formal education. This education begins informally within the family environment, including care and the type of food consumed. When a child's imagination and ability to distinguish things (tamyiz) start to emerge, it is important to direct them towards positive things. Education is a means for a person to improve the quality of their life. (Enok Rohayati, 2011)

Education is a system and method for enhancing the quality of human life in all aspects. In Islamic education, there are three terms used to describe education: *at-Tarbiyah*, *at-Ta'lim*, and *at-Ta'dib*. *At-Tarbiyah* means nurturing, raising, and educating, which inherently includes the meaning of teaching or *allama* (Ahmad Hifdzil, Yoke Suryadarma, 2015). Based on this understanding, *tarbiyat* is defined as the process of guiding human potential (physical, spiritual, and intellectual) to its fullest extent, so that it can serve as a provision for facing life and the future.

2. Purpose of Moral Education

The purpose of moral education according to Imam Al-Ghazali aligns with the very essence of education itself. In his book *Ihya Ulumuddin*, Al-Ghazali states that the goal of education is to attain the pleasure (ridho) of Allah SWT. This is reflected by maintaining the quality of relationships with Allah (mu'amalah ma' Allah), with the environment (mu'amalah

ma' al-biah), and with fellow humans (mu'amalah ma' an-nass). For Al-Ghazali, the aim of moral education is in line with the purpose of human creation, namely to become a leader (khalifah) on earth, to worship (draw closer) to Allah SWT, and to perform righteous deeds (Syukri Indra, Zahra Khusnul, 2023). Essentially, education's purpose as explained by Imam Al-Ghazali is that humans

will reach their highest dignity when education is understood as a concept to achieve the pleasure of Allah SWT. Once this state is reached, any form of knowledge will be easily absorbed by the human intellect.

3. Content of Moral Education

Regarding the content or curriculum of education, Al-Ghazali offers two important insights: First, his detailed clarification of knowledge and everything related to it. Second, he emphasizes that the material or curriculum must be structured and delivered to students according to their psychological growth and development. This means explanations should be given gradually, taking into account theories, laws, and the developmental stages of the child (Hasyim Ashari, 2020).

Moral education is the core of Islamic teaching. The content of moral education consists of a collection of values and teaching materials such as: Al-Haya (modesty), Tasammuh (tolerance), Muhasabah (introspection), As-Sidq (honesty), creativity, As-Shabr (patience), Ar-Rifq (gentleness), Aniisatun (smiling/friendliness), gratitude, contentment (qona'ah), generosity, avoiding suspicion, loving and hating for the sake of Allah. These materials are meant to guide students toward the formation of noble character (akhlaq al-karimah). The contents also include attitudes classified as munjiyat (causes of salvation), such as patience, gratitude, fear, hope, poverty, asceticism, monotheism (tauhid), reliance on God (tawakkal), love, longing, and acceptance (ridho).

4. Methods of Moral Education

In *Ihya' Ulumuddin*, Al-Ghazali proposes several methods for moral education, including: (Abdulloh Arif, Febrianti Rosiana, 2023)

a. Method of Habituation

This method requires certain conditions when applied: habituation should be continuous, regular, and well-planned; it must be supervised strictly and firmly; and the habit, initially mechanical, should gradually become internalized and sincerely felt by the child.

b. Method of Role Modeling

Role modeling plays a significant role in achieving successful moral education. The effectiveness of this method depends heavily on the sincerity and real characteristics of the role model, including knowledge, leadership, sincerity, and behavior.

c. Method of Advice

According to Al-Ghazali, advice is an important method to shape a child's character. To be effective, advice should be: Delivered using polite and appropriate language, Adapted to the child's age, nature, and developmental level, Given at the right time and place, Ideally accompanied by verses from the Qur'an, Hadith of the Prophet Muhammad (SAW), stories of prophets, companions, and pious people

d. Method of Punishment and Reward

Rewards serve as educational tools given to students as compensation for achievements. Al-Ghazali classifies rewards into three types: Respect or appreciation, conveyed through words or gestures, Gifts, material rewards aimed at pleasing the student, Public praise.

Regarding punishment, Al-Ghazali outlines several stages: Give the child a chance to improve and avoid repeating mistakes, Provide warnings and criticism, Physical punishment should never cause suffering or harm to the child.

C. Comparison of Approaches of the Two Thinkers

Tabel 1. Comparison of Moral Education Approaches: Ibnu Miskawaih vs Imam Al-Ghazali

Aspek	Ibnu Miskawaih	Imam Al-Ghazali
Theoretical Foundation	Rational (Philosophy)	Spiritual (Sufism/Tasawuf)
Concept of Moral Education	Balance (Al-Wasath), avoiding extremes	Combination of Formal and Non-Formal Education
Purpose of Moral Education	Achieving balance of the soul	Achieving closeness and approval (ridha) of Allah
Content of Moral Education	Focus on body, soul, and social relations	Emphasis on detailed knowledge and age- appropriate curriculum
Methods of Moral Education	Intellectual training, habituation, guidance, and discipline	Methods include spiritual consolation (takziyah), struggle (mujahadah), habituation, role modeling, advice, and reward-punishment system

CONCLUSION

Ibnu Miskawaih and Imam Al-Ghazali have made significant contributions to moral education. Ibnu Miskawaih's rational approach helps train the cognitive and moral aspects of human beings, while Al-Ghazali's spiritual approach touches the deeper spiritual dimension. Both have correlating views on moral education: Ibnu Miskawaih emphasized that moral character lies in the middle path (Al-Wasath), meaning not being excessive in judging right and wrong, yet not neglecting the ethical

principles established in the Qur'an and Hadith. On the other hand, Al-Ghazali divided education into two aspects: formal and non-formal. Formal education refers to structured learning, such as in schools or educational institutions, while non-formal education emphasizes the role of parents in the growth and development of a child.

Furthermore, both scholars focus their materials and methods on the development of learners' character by applying methods such as role-modeling, advice, and discipline. Their concepts of moral education do not contradict each other; instead, they complement one another. Therefore, an integrative approach that combines rational and spiritual perspectives is highly relevant for application in modern educational contexts.

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