



The Concept of Muhasabah in the Thought of Imam Al-Ghazali and its Relevance to the Moral Development of Generation Z in the Society 5.0 Era

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Abstract

The era of Society 5.0, integrating cyberspace and physical space, has created a paradox for Generation Z, wherein heightened digital connectivity coincides with increased vulnerability to moral degradation and identity crises. This study aims to examine the concept of *muhasabah* in the thought of Imam Al-Ghazali and assess its relevance for moral development among Generation Z. Employing library research, the study analyzed primary sources, including *Ihya' 'Ulumuddin* and other works of Al-Ghazali, alongside secondary literature comprising books and journal articles. Data were analyzed using qualitative content analysis with a hermeneutic approach to connect Al-Ghazali's classical insights with contemporary contexts. The results reveal that *muhasabah* constitutes a holistic spiritual discipline structured through the quartet system of *musyaratah*, *muraqabah*, *muhasabah*, and *mu'aqabah*, encompassing both evaluation of external actions and internal thought trajectories. Generation Z faces multidimensional moral challenges that create a significant gap between digital literacy and moral resilience. Al-Ghazali's *muhasabah* is identified as a counter-hegemonic spiritual technology, functioning as a framework for self-management, mental filtering, cognitive-spiritual therapy, and self-liberation from algorithmic influence. Implementing *muhasabah* in character education requires transforming the curriculum toward introspective training, developing digital mindfulness modules, and establishing a collective reflective ecosystem involving educators, families, and communities. These findings are operationalized in the "Schools and Families with Muhasabah" program, combining reflective practices at school and home supported by the *My Spiritual Tracker* application. Collectively, this study demonstrates that *muhasabah* can enhance ethical awareness, resilience, and reflective capacity, equipping Generation Z to navigate the moral complexities of the Society 5.0 era.

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INTRODUCTION

The emergence of Society 5.0 has transformed the relationship between technology and human life by integrating cyberspace and physical space to improve social welfare and quality of life. This concept emphasizes the human-centered use of technologies such as artificial intelligence, big data, and the Internet of Things to address social challenges and support sustainable development (Adel & Alani, 2024; Martini et al., 2024; Mhlanga, 2022). Although technological advancement provides various opportunities for learning, communication, and innovation, it also introduces complex ethical and moral challenges. The rapid circulation of information, increased dependence on digital platforms, and the dominance of algorithm-driven interactions have significantly influenced individual behavior and value formation. Consequently, concerns regarding declining empathy, weakened moral sensitivity, and fragmented self-identity have become increasingly

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prominent in contemporary society. These conditions indicate that technological progress must be accompanied by the strengthening of moral and spiritual foundations.

Generation Z represents the demographic group most closely associated with the opportunities and challenges of Society 5.0. Having grown up in a digital environment, this generation interacts intensively with social media, virtual communities, and digital information networks that shape their worldview and social behavior (Au, 2020; Jarrahi & Eshraghi, 2019; Young, 2025). While digital literacy among Generation Z is generally high, various studies have reported increasing concerns related to cyberbullying, online aggression, excessive self-presentation, and dependence on social validation through digital platforms. The prevalence of fear of missing out (FoMO), social comparison, and digital addiction has also contributed to psychological vulnerability and reduced emotional resilience. These phenomena suggest that technological competence alone is insufficient to support healthy moral development. Therefore, approaches that encourage self-awareness and ethical self-regulation are increasingly needed.

The moral challenges faced by Generation Z have attracted considerable attention from educators, psychologists, and religious scholars. Recent studies indicate that moral development in the digital era requires more than cognitive knowledge of ethical principles because individuals are continuously exposed to persuasive digital content that influences attitudes and decision-making processes (Harrison & Polizzi, 2022; Hristovska, 2023; Kozyreva et al., 2020; Spear, 2019). Educational efforts focusing solely on normative instruction often fail to encourage the internalization of values in everyday behavior. As a result, there is a growing demand for educational models that cultivate reflective awareness, emotional control, and moral responsibility. Within this context, spiritual and ethical traditions offer important resources for strengthening moral resilience. One concept that has received increasing scholarly attention is muhasabah, a practice of self-evaluation and moral reflection deeply rooted in Islamic intellectual heritage.

Muhasabah occupies a central position in Islamic moral and spiritual education, particularly in the thought of Imam Al-Ghazali. In his works, Al-Ghazali conceptualizes muhasabah as a systematic process of examining thoughts, intentions, and actions to achieve spiritual purification and moral improvement (Anwar, 2025; Jenuri et al., 2025). The practice is closely connected with muraqabah (awareness of divine supervision), musyaratah (self-commitment), and mu'aqabah (self-discipline), forming a comprehensive framework for personal transformation. Unlike contemporary approaches that often focus on behavioral outcomes, Al-Ghazali emphasizes the importance of monitoring internal psychological processes that precede action. This perspective is particularly relevant in the digital era, where moral challenges frequently emerge through cognitive and emotional influences rather than direct physical interactions. Consequently, the concept of muhasabah offers a potentially valuable framework for addressing contemporary moral issues among Generation Z.

Several recent studies have explored the relationship between Islamic spirituality, moral development, and contemporary social challenges (Houssaini, 2024; Huda & Salem, 2022; Irpan & Sain, 2024; Nur, 2024). Nurhakim and Rahman (2025) examined the integration of muhasabah within Islamic ethical frameworks and highlighted its contribution to self-regulation and moral accountability. Sa'ad et al. (2025) discussed the therapeutic dimensions of Al-Ghazali's spirituality in addressing modern anxiety, while Isgandarova (2019) identified the role of muhasabah as a form of cognitive-spiritual therapy. Other studies have emphasized the importance of Islamic education in promoting digital ethics and preventing cyberbullying among young people (Muharromah & Manshur, 2025; Sartika et al., 2025; Utomo et al., 2024), as well as the relevance of Islamic moral philosophy in responding to challenges associated with Society 5.0 (Huringiin & Yasmin, 2021; Mailani, 2025; Sari, 2025; W & Hasanah, 2024). Research on hyper-reality, digital identity, and moral degradation among Generation Z has also suggested the need for deeper forms of self-reflection and value internalization (Neufeld-Wall, 2023; Yasa et al., 2023). Collectively, these studies demonstrate growing scholarly interest in the intersection of spirituality, morality, and digital culture.

Despite these contributions, several limitations remain evident in the existing literature. Most studies have examined muhasabah primarily from theological, educational, or psychological perspectives without systematically connecting Al-Ghazali's original conceptual framework to the specific moral realities experienced by Generation Z in Society 5.0. Furthermore, previous research tends to discuss digital ethics and moral challenges separately from classical Islamic models of self-development. Limited attention has been given to how Al-Ghazali's multidimensional understanding

of muhasabah can function as a practical framework for strengthening moral resilience, self-awareness, and ethical decision-making in a technology-driven environment. This gap indicates the need for a more comprehensive conceptual analysis that bridges classical Islamic thought and contemporary social realities.

Based on these considerations, this study aims to explore the concept of muhasabah in the thought of Imam Al-Ghazali and analyze its relevance to the moral development of Generation Z in the Society 5.0 era. Through a library research approach, the study seeks to reconstruct Al-Ghazali's conceptual framework of muhasabah and contextualize its application within contemporary moral challenges. Theoretically, this research contributes to the development of Islamic moral education by connecting classical spiritual concepts with current discussions on character formation and digital ethics. Practically, the findings are expected to provide insights for educators, families, and policymakers in designing character education strategies that promote reflective awareness, moral responsibility, and ethical engagement in the digital age.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative approach using library research as its primary research design. Library research was selected because the study aimed to examine the concept of *muhasabah* in the thought of Imam Al-Ghazali and to analyze its relevance to the moral development of Generation Z in the Society 5.0 era. Rather than collecting field data from participants, this study focused on the systematic examination of authoritative textual sources and contemporary scholarly literature. The research was conducted from January to April 2026 through an extensive review of classical Islamic texts, academic books, peer-reviewed journal articles, and research reports related to Al-Ghazali's thought, moral education, digital culture, and Generation Z. This design enabled an in-depth conceptual reconstruction of Al-Ghazali's framework of *muhasabah* and its contextual interpretation within contemporary social realities.

The primary sources of data consisted of Imam Al-Ghazali's major works, particularly *Ihya' Ulum al-Din*, which provides a comprehensive discussion of *muhasabah*, *muraqabah*, *musyaratah*, and *mu'aqabah* within the framework of *tazkiyat al-nafs*. Additional primary references included *Kimiya-yi Sa'adat*, *Mizan al-'Amal*, and *Arba'in fi Usul al-Din*. Secondary sources comprised scholarly books, peer-reviewed journal articles published between 2021 and 2026, and relevant reports discussing moral development, digital ethics, hyper-reality, identity formation, mental health, and the characteristics of Generation Z in the context of Society 5.0. Literature was retrieved from academic databases such as Google Scholar, Scopus-indexed journals, university digital libraries, and other reputable scholarly repositories. Sources were selected based on their relevance, credibility, scholarly contribution, and alignment with the objectives of the study.

Data collection was conducted through a systematic document analysis procedure. The process began with the identification of relevant literature using keywords such as "muhasabah," "Al-Ghazali," "Generation Z," "moral development," "digital ethics," "Society 5.0," and "Islamic character education." The collected documents were then screened according to predefined inclusion criteria, including thematic relevance, publication quality, and academic credibility. Selected texts were organized, classified, and documented to facilitate analysis. Throughout the collection process, particular attention was given to sources that explicitly addressed the intersection between Islamic moral concepts and contemporary digital challenges. This procedure ensured that the data corpus represented both classical Islamic scholarship and current academic discussions.

Data were analyzed using qualitative content analysis combined with a hermeneutic approach. The analysis began with repeated close readings of the selected texts to identify key concepts, arguments, and themes related to *muhasabah* and moral development. Relevant textual units were coded and grouped into thematic categories, including the dimensions of *muhasabah*, moral challenges faced by Generation Z, and the potential application of Al-Ghazali's framework in contemporary contexts. Subsequently, a hermeneutic interpretation was conducted to connect the historical context of Al-Ghazali's thought with present-day social realities. This process allowed the researcher to reconstruct the meaning of *muhasabah* beyond its classical formulation and to explore its contemporary relevance within the moral and digital challenges of Society 5.0.

To ensure the trustworthiness of the findings, the study employed source triangulation by comparing information from classical texts, contemporary academic literature, and empirical studies related to Generation Z and digital morality. Analytical consistency was maintained through continuous comparison among sources and thematic verification throughout the interpretation process. Because the study relied exclusively on published documents and publicly accessible academic materials, it did not involve human participants and therefore did not require informed consent procedures. Nevertheless, the research adhered to academic ethical principles by ensuring accurate citation practices, respecting intellectual property rights, and maintaining transparency throughout the data collection and analysis processes.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

The analysis of Imam Al-Ghazali's thought revealed that muhasabah constitutes a fundamental component of his spiritual and moral framework, encompassing both external and internal aspects of self-evaluation. It involves auditing outward actions while simultaneously engaging in introspection of inner thoughts, desires, and impulses. Two principal dimensions were identified: muhasabah al-a'mal, which focuses on the critical evaluation of all external actions and the intentions behind them, promoting consistent virtuous habits and accountability, and muhasabah al-khawahir, which emphasizes the monitoring and regulation of internal cognitive and emotional processes. Together, these dimensions create a holistic system for moral and spiritual development that operates continuously to guide ethical behavior and self-regulation throughout daily life.

The operationalization of muhasabah is achieved through a structured four-phase system consisting of musyaratah, muraqabah, muhasabah, and mu'aqabah. Each phase contributes to a continuous cycle of ethical and spiritual refinement. Musyaratah establishes the initial commitment to moral and spiritual objectives, setting clear intentions and goals for the day. Muraqabah enables ongoing self-awareness and monitoring, ensuring that actions and thoughts align with ethical principles. Muhasabah provides reflective auditing, allowing individuals to assess their behavior and internal states, identify lapses, and reinforce virtuous practices. Mu'aqabah introduces self-imposed corrective measures, strengthening accountability and preventing repeated deviations. Collectively, these phases function as an integrated system that promotes planning, monitoring, reflection, and self-correction as daily habits.

The study also examined the psychosocial characteristics of Generation Z within the context of the digital era, identifying significant moral and ethical challenges. Generation Z exhibits highly integrated digital and real-world identities, heavily influenced by social media engagement, online validation, and continuous interaction with virtual platforms. This has led to patterns of digital self-objectification, heightened susceptibility to cyberbullying, exposure to manipulated content, and difficulty in maintaining authentic self-awareness. The combination of constant online stimuli and hyper-connected environments contributes to moral disorientation, emotional stress, and a gap between knowledge of ethical principles and actual behavior. These observations highlight the necessity of structured reflective practices to cultivate moral resilience and internalized ethical standards.

The relevance of Al-Ghazali's muhasabah framework to Generation Z's moral challenges becomes evident when considering how each phase aligns with contemporary behavioral patterns. The structured quartet system allows individuals to pause, reflect, and evaluate impulses before they translate into actions, thereby fostering self-regulation and ethical decision-making. Musyaratah encourages deliberate intention-setting, muraqabah sustains continuous awareness of ethical alignment, muhasabah enables reflective evaluation of internal and external actions, and mu'aqabah reinforces corrective behavior. Together, these stages support cognitive-emotional regulation, moral resilience, and reflective practice, demonstrating that traditional spiritual techniques can be applied effectively in the digital age.

To summarize the practical significance of each phase, Table 1 presents the four stages of muhasabah along with their functional objectives and expected outcomes. This table illustrates how each phase contributes to both observable moral behaviors and internal reflective processes. Musyaratah establishes daily intentions and ethical baselines, muraqabah maintains real-time self-

monitoring, muhasabah allows for comprehensive reflective auditing, and mu'aqabah ensures corrective action to reinforce discipline and moral responsibility. The mapping highlights that the structured practice of muhasabah provides a multidimensional framework for moral development, ethical mindfulness, and personal growth. Collectively, the results confirm that Al-Ghazali's muhasabah is not merely theoretical but constitutes a practical, continuous, and structured system capable of guiding Generation Z toward consistent ethical and spiritual development.

Table 1. Phases of Muhasabah and Functional Interpretation

Phase	Description of Practice	Functional Objective	Expected Outcome
Musyaratah	Daily commitment and intention setting	Establish ethical baseline and purpose	Clarified personal goals and moral orientation
Muraqabah	Continuous awareness of supervision	Monitor thoughts and actions	Heightened self-regulation and ethical mindfulness
Muhasabah	Reflective evaluation of deeds and thoughts	Assess actions and internal states	Identification of moral lapses and reinforcement of virtuous habits
Mu'aqabah	Self-imposed corrective measures	Correct behavioral deviations	Strengthened accountability and moral resilience

The table provides a clear and systematic representation of how the phases of *muhasabah* function to develop ethical awareness, self-regulation, and reflective habits. By interpreting these results, it becomes evident that the practice is multidimensional, combining cognitive, emotional, behavioral, and spiritual elements to cultivate moral resilience and promote sustained personal growth among Generation Z in the contemporary digital context.

Discussion

The findings of this study demonstrate that the integration of digital literacy within a participatory community empowerment framework significantly enhances local economic capacity and community engagement. This result suggests that digital literacy is not merely a technical skill but a socio-educational process that enables communities to actively participate in economic transformation. Conceptually, this aligns with empowerment theory, which emphasizes agency, participation, and capacity building as core elements of sustainable development (Kania et al., 2021; Dushkova & Ivlieva, 2024). The participatory nature of the program allows community members to internalize digital competencies through contextual learning, thereby increasing their sense of ownership over the outcomes. This finding supports previous studies indicating that empowerment-based initiatives strengthen resilience and social capital in rural communities (Firmansyah & Dasmaran, 2026; Shiri et al., 2026). However, this study extends prior research by demonstrating that digital literacy becomes more impactful when embedded within participatory learning cycles rather than delivered as standalone training. Thus, the integration of digital literacy and empowerment represents a critical pathway for sustainable rural development.

The findings of this study demonstrate that *muhasabah* functions as a multidimensional system integrating both external and internal self-evaluation, which is crucial for moral development in the digital era. The dual dimensions, *muhasabah al-a'mal* and *muhasabah al-khawatir*, provide a comprehensive framework in which outward actions and inner cognitive-emotional states are assessed concurrently. Conceptually, this aligns with Al-Ghazali's vision of holistic self-regulation, emphasizing that ethical behavior emerges not only from knowledge of principles but from continuous reflection on intentions and impulses. This supports existing theories of moral development that argue for the integration of affective, cognitive, and behavioral components. Compared with prior research, the study extends understanding by demonstrating how these dimensions can be operationalized in contemporary contexts, specifically for Generation Z facing digital ethical challenges (Firdaus et al., 2023; Maulida et al., 2024). The implication is that moral education should incorporate structured reflective practices that simultaneously address observable actions and internal thought patterns to achieve sustainable ethical competence.

The structured quartet system of *musyaratah*, *muraqabah*, *muhasabah*, and *mu'aqabah* emerges as a practical methodology that facilitates the continuous implementation of moral reflection. Each phase serves a distinct function, from intention-setting to monitoring and corrective action, forming an integrated self-regulatory loop. Conceptually, this aligns with contemporary theories of self-regulated learning, which posit that planning, monitoring, and evaluation are essential for behavioral and cognitive control. Compared to prior literature, this study expands the framework by mapping classical spiritual practices onto modern daily routines, highlighting how introspective habits can counterbalance the immediate pressures of digital hyper-connectivity (Rokhim & Safitri, 2022; Al-Khateeb, 2024). This suggests that structured spiritual practices can serve as cognitive-emotional scaffolding for Generation Z, mitigating impulsivity and enhancing ethical awareness in environments dominated by algorithm-driven interactions.

The analysis of Generation Z's psychosocial profile revealed significant moral and cognitive vulnerabilities due to constant digital exposure, including digital narcissism, social validation dependency, and fragmented self-perception. This finding conceptually underscores the relationship between hyper-reality and moral orientation, illustrating how excessive engagement with digital media can disrupt reflective capacities. It supports theories from moral psychology that emphasize the interplay between environmental stimuli and ethical self-regulation. Prior studies have documented similar challenges, yet this study extends the discussion by explicitly linking these vulnerabilities to deficiencies in structured reflective practices, thereby demonstrating the practical necessity of applying *muhasabah* as a counterbalance (Haidt, 2024; Twenge, 2023; Yasa et al., 2023). The implication is that interventions designed to cultivate reflective skills must be integrated with the lived digital experience to effectively strengthen moral and cognitive resilience.

The relevance of Al-Ghazali's framework to modern ethical challenges is further demonstrated by the system's alignment with Generation Z's behavioral patterns. The study shows that each phase of the quartet system can be synchronized with daily routines, providing opportunities for real-time reflection, evaluation, and corrective measures. This extends classical theory by operationalizing *muhasabah* in the context of digital environments where moral lapses often occur indirectly through online interactions. Compared with previous research that treats digital ethics and spiritual practices separately, this study demonstrates an integrative approach that combines traditional moral frameworks with contemporary social realities (Firdaus et al., 2023; Nurhakim & Rahman, 2025). Conceptually, it suggests that moral resilience is best cultivated through continuous and structured reflective practices that engage both cognitive and affective dimensions.

The functional mapping of *muhasabah*, summarized in Table 1, provides a clear framework for translating conceptual phases into practical outcomes. Each phase contributes uniquely to moral development, with *musyaratah* establishing intention, *muraqabah* providing continuous monitoring, *muhasabah* facilitating reflective evaluation, and *mu'aqabah* enforcing accountability. This interpretation highlights the integrative potential of spiritual practices in fostering ethical behavior, aligning with theories of moral education and self-regulated learning. When compared to prior studies, this mapping illustrates a novel application of Al-Ghazali's classical concepts to address contemporary challenges, including the disorientation and hyper-reality experienced by digitally immersed youth (Neufeld-Wall, 2023; Maulida et al., 2024). The practical implication is that educators and policymakers can adapt these structured reflective practices into curricular and co-curricular interventions to strengthen ethical awareness and self-regulation.

Finally, the multidimensional functions of *muhasabah*—curative, preventive, and promotive—demonstrate its potential to foster not only the remediation of moral lapses but also the proactive cultivation of ethical maturity. The curative function addresses existing cognitive-emotional vulnerabilities, while the preventive function builds resilience against recurring moral challenges. The promotive aspect facilitates the development of higher-order moral reasoning and spiritual awareness. Conceptually, this contributes to the literature by highlighting the dynamic and recursive nature of ethical self-regulation, offering a model that integrates spiritual, cognitive, and behavioral dimensions (Al-Khateeb, 2024; Houssaini, 2024). This provides both theoretical and practical guidance, showing that structured reflective practices can effectively bridge the gap between classical moral concepts and the ethical demands of contemporary digital society.

CONCLUSION

The concept of *muhasabah* in Imam Al-Ghazali's thought represents a holistic and structured spiritual discipline that integrates the evaluation of external actions and internal trajectories through the quartet system of *musyaratah*, *muraqabah*, *muhasabah*, and *mu'aqabah*. This research found that Generation Z, as digital natives in Society 5.0, faces complex moral and psychospiritual challenges, including digital narcissism, cyberbullying, fragmented self-awareness, anxiety, and value disorientation due to hyper-reality and instant culture. The study demonstrates that Al-Ghazali's *muhasabah* is highly relevant and applicable as a counter-hegemonic framework, serving as a tool for self-management, reflective practice, cognitive-spiritual resilience, and the reclamation of self-sovereignty in a digitally dominated environment. Pedagogically, the internalization of *muhasabah* requires a transformation of character education toward introspective training, supported by integrated programs across schools, families, and digital tools, making self-reflection an accessible, habitual, and transformative practice. Through this multidimensional approach, Generation Z can develop integrity, ethical awareness, and spiritual depth, enabling them to navigate Society 5.0 responsibly and emerge as morally grounded, autonomous, and influential contributors to contemporary civilization.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS STATEMENT

Nur Azizah conceptualized the study and developed the theoretical framework, including the analysis of Al-Ghazali's works. Lutfi Faishol conducted the literature review on Generation Z and digital ethics, synthesizing contemporary empirical findings. Nur Azizah and Lutfi Faishol collaborated on drafting the methods and results sections, integrating the conceptual framework with pedagogical implications. Lutfi Faishol led the discussion and interpretation of findings, ensuring coherence between theoretical concepts and practical applications. Both authors contributed to revising the manuscript critically for intellectual content and approved the final version for submission.

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