



## Internalizing Moral Education Values in Sufism: A Comparative Study of Al-Ghazali's and Ibn Taymiyyah's Thought

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### Abstract

Contemporary Islamic education faces a persistent challenge in bridging the gap between moral knowledge and moral practice, as moral instruction often remains cognitive and formalistic without leading to meaningful character transformation. This study aims to comparatively analyze the thoughts of Imam al-Ghazali and Ibn Taymiyyah on the internalization of moral education values in Sufism, with a focus on their epistemological foundations, mechanisms of internalization, and educational implications. Employing a qualitative library research design, this study draws on primary classical texts and recent scholarly literature, analyzed through qualitative content analysis and comparative synthesis. The findings reveal that al-Ghazali conceptualizes moral internalization as a process of inward transformation grounded in *tazkiyat al-nafs*, spiritual discipline, and the cultivation of the heart, whereas Ibn Taymiyyah emphasizes normative alignment through the purification of *tawhid*, the strengthening of faith, and disciplined adherence to the Qur'an and Sunnah. While differing in methodological emphasis, both perspectives converge in viewing morality as an integrated expression of inner disposition and outward action. This study proposes a dual-process model of moral internalization that integrates inward spiritual transformation with normative discipline as a comprehensive framework for moral education. The study contributes theoretically by offering an integrative conceptual model and practically by providing a foundation for designing value-based educational practices that address the limitations of purely cognitive approaches. These findings highlight the need for a balanced educational paradigm that fosters both inner awareness and consistent moral action in contemporary Islamic education.

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## INTRODUCTION

Contemporary Islamic education is increasingly challenged by the tension between the transmission of religious knowledge and the formation of meaningful moral character. In many educational settings, moral instruction is still delivered in a cognitive and normative manner, emphasizing rules and doctrines rather than inner transformation and lived experience (Jenuri et al., 2025). This condition reflects a broader global concern in education, where character formation is often detached from students' emotional and spiritual development (Hart, 2022). Recent studies have shown that spiritual well-being significantly influences students' learning engagement, psychological resilience, and overall academic attitudes (Deymevar et al., 2024). However, when spirituality is reduced to formal instruction, it risks losing its transformative potential and becoming merely ritualistic. As a result, students may possess knowledge of moral values without necessarily embodying them in their daily lives. This gap between knowing and being represents a fundamental issue in moral education. Therefore, there is a pressing need to reconceptualize moral education as a process of value internalization that integrates cognition, affect, and behavior in a holistic manner.

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Empirical evidence indicates that many students experience what scholars describe as a “spiritual emptiness” in modern educational environments. This phenomenon is characterized by low moral sensitivity, weakened self-regulation, and limited connection between religious teachings and real-life practices (Jenuri et al., 2025). In addition, studies on student behavior suggest that moral reasoning alone does not automatically lead to prosocial actions unless it is supported by internalized values and emotional engagement (Yusoff et al., 2022). Educational practices that prioritize academic achievement over character development often exacerbate this condition. Furthermore, the rapid influence of globalization and digital culture introduces complex ethical challenges that traditional pedagogical approaches are not fully equipped to address. Consequently, moral education requires a deeper foundation that goes beyond external regulation toward internal transformation. Without such transformation, educational efforts risk producing individuals who are intellectually competent but morally fragile. This empirical reality underscores the importance of revisiting foundational frameworks of moral education within Islamic intellectual traditions.

The urgency of this issue becomes more evident when considering the role of education in shaping not only individual character but also social cohesion and ethical responsibility. Moral decline among students is often associated with broader societal concerns such as intolerance, ethical relativism, and weakened communal values (Mukhibat et al., 2024). In this context, Islamic education is expected to contribute to the formation of balanced individuals who are spiritually grounded and socially responsible. However, achieving this goal requires more than the transmission of religious content; it demands a pedagogical approach that facilitates the deep internalization of values. Research has shown that value internalization plays a crucial role in shaping consistent behavior, emotional regulation, and long-term character development (Wu et al., 2025). Therefore, rethinking moral education as an internal process rather than an external imposition becomes a critical step. This shift also aligns with contemporary educational paradigms that emphasize learner-centered and transformative learning. Accordingly, exploring models that integrate inner development with normative guidance is highly relevant for current educational challenges.

Within this framework, Sufism emerges as a significant intellectual and pedagogical resource for moral education. Unlike conventional approaches that focus primarily on external compliance, Sufism emphasizes inner purification, self-awareness, and the cultivation of virtues through disciplined practice (Mannopov et al., 2025). The concept of *tazkiyat al-nafs*, for instance, provides a systematic pathway for transforming the self through reflection, struggle, and habituation of good deeds. At the same time, Sufism is not merely a mystical tradition but also an ethical system that integrates knowledge, practice, and spiritual experience. This integrative nature makes it particularly relevant for addressing the gap between moral knowledge and moral action. However, the interpretation and application of Sufism in education vary across different scholars and traditions. Some emphasize its experiential and inward dimensions, while others stress its alignment with normative religious principles. Therefore, understanding these variations is essential for developing a balanced model of moral education. In this regard, the thoughts of Imam al-Ghazali and Ibn Taymiyyah offer two influential yet distinct perspectives.

Recent scholarly works have extensively examined al-Ghazali’s contribution to moral and spiritual education, particularly his emphasis on the integration of the soul, heart, intellect, and behavior. Studies highlight that al-Ghazali views morality as a trait embedded within the soul that can be cultivated through training, habituation, and spiritual discipline (Jalaldeen & Al-Hidabi, 2025; Murdani & Fauzi, 2024). Contemporary research also demonstrates the relevance of his concepts in addressing modern educational issues such as spiritual emptiness and character formation (Jenuri, Faqihuddin, Suresman, & Abdullah, 2025; Pratama, 2026). On the other hand, studies on Ibn Taymiyyah reveal a strong emphasis on the purification of faith, adherence to the Qur’an and Sunnah, and the integration of belief, speech, and action (Alkhindi & Yusuf, 2025; Alsuhaymi & Atallah, 2025a). Contrary to common assumptions, recent research suggests that Ibn Taymiyyah did not entirely reject Sufism but advocated for its purification and alignment with Islamic orthodoxy (Arikewuyo, 2020, 2021). These findings indicate that both scholars contribute significantly to the discourse on moral education, albeit from different methodological orientations. While al-Ghazali focuses on inward transformation, Ibn Taymiyyah emphasizes normative discipline and theological clarity. Together, they provide a rich theoretical foundation for understanding moral internalization in Islamic education.

Despite this growing body of literature, several limitations remain evident. Most studies tend to examine al-Ghazali and Ibn Taymiyyah in isolation, focusing on specific aspects such as moral reasoning, spiritual psychology, or theological critique (Sham et al., 2021). Comparative analyses that systematically explore their perspectives on value internalization in moral education are still relatively scarce. Furthermore, existing research often lacks a coherent analytical framework that integrates their ideas into a unified educational model. This fragmentation limits the potential to fully understand how their thoughts can complement each other in addressing contemporary challenges. Additionally, many studies emphasize theoretical exposition without sufficiently connecting it to pedagogical implications for modern educational contexts. As a result, the practical relevance of these classical perspectives remains underexplored. Therefore, there is a clear need for a comprehensive and integrative study that bridges these gaps. Such a study would not only enrich theoretical discourse but also provide practical insights for educational reform.

Based on these considerations, this study aims to comparatively analyze the thoughts of Imam al-Ghazali and Ibn Taymiyyah regarding the internalization of moral education values in Sufism. Specifically, it seeks to examine their conceptualizations of morality, the mechanisms of value internalization, the role of Sufism, and the educational implications of their ideas. By bringing these two perspectives into a single analytical framework, this study offers a novel contribution to the field of Islamic education. Theoretically, it provides a deeper understanding of how spiritual and normative dimensions can be integrated in moral education. Practically, it offers a conceptual foundation for developing educational models that foster both inner transformation and disciplined action. Ultimately, this study contributes to the ongoing effort to create a more holistic and relevant approach to moral education in contemporary Islamic contexts.

## METHOD

### Research Design

This study employed a qualitative research design using a library research approach combined with a comparative analysis of thought. The qualitative approach was selected because the focus of this study lies in interpreting conceptual frameworks, philosophical arguments, and textual meanings related to moral education and Sufism, rather than measuring variables quantitatively. Library research was considered the most appropriate design as the primary data consist of classical texts and scholarly works that require in-depth reading, interpretation, and synthesis. Furthermore, a comparative design was utilized to systematically examine similarities and differences between the thoughts of Imam al-Ghazali and Ibn Taymiyyah regarding the internalization of moral education values. This design enables the identification of conceptual patterns, divergences, and potential integrative frameworks derived from both perspectives. The use of qualitative content analysis within a comparative framework allows the study to move beyond descriptive exposition toward analytical interpretation. Thus, this design aligns with the study's objective to construct a conceptual synthesis relevant to contemporary Islamic education. Overall, the chosen design provides a rigorous methodological basis for analyzing classical intellectual traditions within a modern educational context.

### Research Context and Timeframe

As a library-based qualitative study, this research was not confined to a specific physical location but was conducted within an academic research environment that facilitated access to primary and secondary sources. The study relied on both printed and digital academic databases, including peer-reviewed journals, classical manuscripts, and contemporary scholarly publications related to Islamic education, Sufism, and moral philosophy. The data collection and analysis were carried out over a period of approximately four months, from January to April 2026. This timeframe allowed for iterative reading, coding, and comparative analysis of the selected texts. The contextual focus of the study is contemporary Islamic education, particularly the challenge of internalizing moral values in modern learning environments. Therefore, although the primary sources are classical, the analytical lens is oriented toward present-day educational relevance. This contextual positioning ensures that the findings are not only historically grounded but also applicable to current pedagogical discourse. Consequently, the study bridges classical Islamic thought with contemporary educational needs through a well-defined temporal and contextual scope.

### **Population and Participants (Data Sources)**

In qualitative library research, the concept of population is understood as the body of texts relevant to the research focus, while the sample refers to selected documents that meet specific inclusion criteria. The primary data sources in this study consisted of the major works of Imam al-Ghazali and Ibn Taymiyyah that discuss morality, Sufism, the purification of the soul, and ethical development. These texts were selected purposively based on their relevance to the themes of moral internalization and educational thought. Secondary data sources included recent academic articles, books, and review papers published between 2021 and 2026 that address Islamic moral education, Sufism, qualitative methodology, and value internalization. The inclusion criteria required that sources be academically credible, thematically relevant, and directly related to the conceptual variables under study. Sources that lacked scholarly rigor or were not aligned with the research focus were excluded. The purposive sampling technique was employed to ensure that the selected data provided rich and meaningful insights for analysis. This approach is consistent with qualitative research principles that prioritize depth over breadth. Therefore, the selected corpus of texts represents a carefully curated dataset suitable for comparative conceptual analysis.

### **Research Instruments**

The primary instrument in this study was the researcher as the key instrument, supported by a structured document analysis guide. This guide functioned as an analytical framework to systematically extract relevant data from the selected texts. The instrument included predefined indicators such as the concept of morality, anthropological foundations, mechanisms of value internalization, the role of Sufism, the function of the teacher, and the objectives of moral education. These indicators were derived from theoretical constructs in Islamic education and value internalization literature. In addition, note-taking matrices and coding sheets were used to organize extracted data into meaningful units. The use of these instruments ensured consistency in data extraction across different sources. Furthermore, the document analysis guide allowed the researcher to maintain focus on the research questions while engaging in interpretive reading. This structured approach minimizes subjectivity and enhances analytical clarity. Thus, the combination of researcher interpretation and systematic documentation tools constitutes a robust qualitative instrument.

### **Validity and Reliability**

To ensure the trustworthiness of the findings, this study employed several qualitative validation strategies, including credibility, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility was achieved through prolonged engagement with the data, iterative reading, and cross-referencing between primary and secondary sources. Source triangulation was conducted by comparing multiple texts and scholarly interpretations to validate emerging themes. Dependability was ensured by maintaining a clear audit trail documenting the data selection, coding process, and analytical decisions. Additionally, peer debriefing was conducted through informal academic discussions to refine interpretations and reduce potential bias. Confirmability was strengthened by grounding all interpretations in textual evidence rather than personal assumptions. The use of a structured document analysis guide also contributed to consistency in data handling. Although statistical reliability measures are not applicable in qualitative research, methodological rigor was maintained through transparency and systematic procedures. Therefore, the study meets established qualitative standards for validity and reliability.

### **Data Collection Procedures**

Data collection was carried out through a systematic documentation and literature review process. The first stage involved identifying and selecting relevant primary and secondary sources based on predefined inclusion criteria. The second stage consisted of intensive reading to gain a comprehensive understanding of each text. During this stage, relevant passages were highlighted and recorded in a data extraction matrix. The third stage involved organizing the collected data into thematic categories aligned with the research focus. This process included identifying key concepts, arguments, and terminologies used by each thinker. The fourth stage involved verifying the consistency and relevance of the extracted data through repeated reading. All collected data were documented digitally to facilitate easy retrieval and analysis. This step-by-step procedure ensured

that the data collection process was systematic, transparent, and replicable. Consequently, the study maintains a high level of methodological clarity in gathering textual evidence.

### Data Analysis Techniques

The data were analyzed using qualitative content analysis combined with comparative analysis. The analysis followed five systematic stages. First, data reduction was conducted by selecting the most relevant information related to the research objectives. Second, coding was performed by assigning labels to meaningful units of data derived from the texts. Third, categorization was carried out by grouping similar codes into broader thematic categories such as morality, soul purification, faith, and educational processes. Fourth, interpretation was conducted to understand the underlying meanings of each category within the intellectual context of al-Ghazali and Ibn Taymiyyah. Fifth, comparative analysis was employed to identify similarities, differences, and complementary aspects between the two perspectives. Finally, a synthesis was developed to construct an integrative conceptual framework for moral education. The analysis was conducted iteratively to ensure depth and accuracy. This analytical approach allows for a comprehensive understanding of complex philosophical ideas. Therefore, the combination of content and comparative analysis provides a robust methodological framework.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Basic Concepts of Moral Education in Sufism

Conceptually, moral education in Sufism is not merely a process of transmitting normative knowledge, but a transformative process that reconfigures the individual's inner structure so that values are embodied as stable dispositions. While recent literature emphasizes that morality encompasses reasoning, emotion, and behavior (Wu et al., 2025), such a tripartite model often remains insufficient to explain how values become deeply internalized within the self. This limitation indicates that conventional moral education frameworks tend to overemphasize cognitive understanding while underestimating the role of inner discipline and spiritual experience. In this regard, Sufism offers a more integrative paradigm by positioning moral development as an ontological transformation rather than a behavioral adjustment. Therefore, moral education within a Sufi framework operates not only at the level of instruction but also at the level of being. This perspective is particularly relevant in addressing the persistent gap between moral cognition and moral practice in contemporary education. Consequently, Sufism can be reinterpreted as a structured pedagogical approach that integrates inner awareness, ethical discipline, and lived experience. From this standpoint, moral education becomes a process of forming the self rather than merely informing the mind.

From that point, Sufism provides a deeper foundation for moral education. While conventional moral education often stops at the instilling of rules, Sufism extends to the realm of inner development. Contemporary readings of al-Ghazali demonstrate that human formation occurs through the integration of the *nafs*, *qalb*, *rūḥ*, and *'aql* as a whole, directed toward holistic spiritual development. This means that morality cannot be separated from discussions of the soul, because corrupt external behavior is usually rooted in inner chaos, while good external behavior rests on the order of the human inner elements (Yusoff et al., 2022).

In this context, the relationship between morality, soul, heart, *nafs*, and deeds is organic, not separate. Recent studies on al-Ghazali explain that the human crisis begins with the soul and mind filled with worldly desires, then self-recovery is achieved through the path of Sufism with *maqāmāt* (repentance, patience, asceticism, surrender, self-control, self-respect, and self-righteousness). These seven *maqāmāt* are seen as the basis for developing a believer's identity. From this, it can be understood that the *nafs* is the field of self-control, the heart is the center of inner acceptance and purification, the soul is the space for moral struggle, and deeds are the outward manifestation of the results of this development. In other words, good morality is not born instantly, but grows from a continuous process of inner development (Harahap et al., 2024).

This relationship becomes clearer in al-Ghazali's explanation of knowledge and understanding. Recent studies have shown that the two are linked in a spiritual chain: the deeper one knows God, the stronger one's love for Him, and this connection fosters the strengthening of one's spiritual life. Therefore, the heart in Sufism is not merely the seat of feeling, but the center of moral

and spiritual awareness. From a heart that knows, love is born, from love is born obedience, and from obedience are born consistent good deeds. In this logic, deeds are not merely outward actions, but expressions of an inner state that has been formed through divine knowledge and love. (Rahmawati, 2022).

On this basis, Sufism can be understood as a medium for character formation. It not only teaches prohibitions and commands, but also provides a path for self-training so that values transform into character. In al-Ghazali's view, Sufism works through *tazkiyat al-nafs* (self control), *mujahadah* (self control), *riyāḍah* (self control), and *maqamat* (self control), which reorganize the orientation of human life. In contemporary educational reading, the integration of the concepts of *nafs*, *qalb*, *rūḥ*, and *'aql* (self awareness) into learning models is used to overcome students' spiritual emptiness and foster holistic spiritual development. This demonstrates that Sufism has a strong pedagogical function: it simultaneously addresses motivation, self-awareness, life orientation, and the habituation of good deeds (Ghofur, 2020).

In educational terms, this process is called internalization. Internalization means that values that originally came from outside are accepted, understood, experimented with, and then integrated into the self. Recent qualitative studies mapped the internalization of values into four stages: ignoring or rejecting, understanding, trying to practice, and integrating. Once the integration stage is reached, values become relevant to the self, take priority, and stably guide emotions, motivation, and behavior. Other findings in the field of education indicate that the internalization of values is related to students' prosocial behavior. Thus, the internalization of moral values in Sufism is not simply about understanding the teachings, but rather about transforming those teachings into enduring attitudes and behaviors (Riasih & Partono, 2026).

Within the framework of this research title, the positions of al-Ghazali and Ibn Taymiyyah converge on the idea that human development must touch the inner dimension, but both place different emphases. Al-Ghazali positions Sufism as a path to moral formation through purification of the soul, understanding, understanding, and gradual spiritual practice (Artika et al., 2023). In contrast, international studies of Ibn Taymiyyah show that he was highly critical of forms of Sufism deemed deviant or contrary to the principles of monotheism and sharia. Thus, while al-Ghazali tended to move from purification of the heart to good deeds, Ibn Taymiyyah moved from maintaining the purity of faith and sharia to inner discipline and behavior. This difference is important, but the two converge on one point: that Islamic values must be embodied in living character, not merely normative discourse.

From all of these descriptions, the basic concept of moral education in Sufism can be formulated as a process of instilling Islamic values that operates on the soul, heart, *nafs*, intellect, and deeds in an integrated manner until those values become concrete life attitudes and behaviors. From al-Ghazali's perspective, the emphasis is on purifying the inner self and deepening one's relationship with God. From Ibn Taymiyyah's perspective, the emphasis is on regulating spiritual experience so that it remains subservient to the Qur'an and Sunnah. Comparatively, both provide a strong basis for this study to interpret the internalization of morality not merely as moral teaching, but as personality transformation.

## **Imam al-Ghazali's Thoughts on Internalizing Moral Values**

### ***1. The essence of morality as a trait embedded in the soul***

In several of al-Ghazali's writings, morality is not understood as a momentary act, but rather as an inner quality that persists within the individual, then radiates outward in the form of relatively spontaneous and consistent behavior. This is clearly evident in recent studies that confirm that al-Ghazali's moral level encompasses not only moral reasoning but also moral behavior, so that morality encompasses both the reasons behind actions and the form of the actions themselves.

Therefore, for al-Ghazali, morality is not merely knowledge of good and bad, but a disposition of the soul that can be shaped, changed, and directed toward goodness through education. From here, internalizing moral values means moving values from the realm of information to the realm of personality, until they become a living character within the soul.

### ***2. The importance of tazkiyat al-nafs as the core of moral education***

For al-Ghazali, moral education must begin with *tazkiyat al-nafs* (self-compassion), because behavioral corruption is rooted in the soul and mind, which are filled with worldly orientations.

While behavioral improvement must begin with inner healing (Ibrahim et al., 2022). A recent article on al-Ghazali's psychotherapy shows that in *Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn*, there is a series of *maqāmāt* (repentance), such as repentance, patience, asceticism, *tawakkul* (repentance), self-control, understanding, and *riḍā* (relief), and all these *maqāmāt* are positioned as the foundation for developing a believer's identity.

This finding is important because it demonstrates that *tazkiyat al-nafs* in al-Ghazali is not a superficial moral process, but a gradual, conscious, and continuous project of spiritual restructuring. More recent readings also emphasize that al-Ghazali's concept of man is constructed holistically through the integration of the *nafs*, *qalb*, *rūḥ*, and *'aql*, so that moral education should not only focus on cognition, but must also touch the heart, self-motivation, spiritual awareness, and habits of action (Jenuri, Faqihuddin, Suresman, Abdullah, et al., 2025). Thus, *tazkiyat al-nafs* is the center of the internalization of moral values because it is there that the process of cleansing motives, structuring orientations, and strengthening divine awareness takes place.

### **3. The role of mujahadah, riyāḍah, muraqabah, and muhasabah**

In recent literature, the two terms that most explicitly appear in readings of al-Ghazali are *mujahadah* and *riyāḍah*, namely the sincere abandonment of bad traits and the continuous practice of cultivating good traits and deeds. (UKM) An article on al-Ghazali's moral reasoning explains that someone who desires to be generous, for example, must force themselves to be generous even if it is difficult at first, then repeat the practice until it becomes a characteristic.

This is where *mujahadah* functions as a struggle against the evil tendencies of the *nafs* (self), while *riyāḍah* serves as practical practice to gradually instill praiseworthy qualities (Sham et al., 2021). Meanwhile, the terms *muraqabah* and *muhasabah* have not always been discussed as separate themes in international articles on al-Ghazali over the past five years, but both can be read strongly within the same framework: monitoring the heart, awareness of God's presence, controlling one's impulses, and continuous self-evaluation.

This aligns with the finding that al-Ghazali positions *ma'rifah* as the path to *maḥabbah*, and that knowledge of God fosters a more alert, conscious, and controlled inner orientation. Therefore, in the context of internalizing moral values, *muraqabah* can be understood as the discipline of maintaining the heart's awareness before God, while *muhasabah* is the continuous evaluation of motives, intentions, and actions so that the soul is not again overcome by lust and negligence.

### **4. Habituation of good deeds as a means of character formation**

Al-Ghazali rejected the view that morality is something completely fixed and unchangeable, believing that morality can be formed through the habituation of good deeds. Recent studies show that al-Ghazali actually combines cognitive, behavioral, and psycho-spiritual elements in moral education, so that character formation occurs through understanding values, practicing actions, and cultivating the soul simultaneously.

In the context of contemporary education, an article on the integration of al-Ghazali's concept of man in learning emphasizes that sincere intentions, the acquisition of true knowledge, and good deeds are essential pillars of character formation. This means that good deeds in al-Ghazali's thought are not a byproduct of moral education, but rather its primary instrument, because consciously repeated actions form habits, and established habits become traits. This link is increasingly relevant because contemporary research also shows that morality is positively related to life satisfaction, positive emotions, and reduced perceived stress. Therefore, cultivating good morals is not only normatively important but also impacts human well-being.

### **5. The position of the teacher or mursyid in guiding the purification of the soul**

In al-Ghazali's educational thought, teachers should not be limited to mere conveyors of information, but must also serve as moral and spiritual guides. An article on al-Ghazali's Teaching Model, built on a comprehensive reading of *Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn*, identifies seven main themes: the critical teacher, mastery of knowledge, teaching goals, feedback strategies, teacher student relationships, thought communities, and the teacher's experience in writing and lecturing (Zhaffar et al., 2022).

These findings confirm that teachers, according to al-Ghazali, must be open, listen to students' ideas, provide non-threatening feedback, and build close and trusting relationships so that students are willing to open themselves to the process of inner transformation. Because moral

education in Sufism operates within the deepest realm of the heart and habits, the teacher's role is indeed closer to that of a murabbī and, in more formal Sufi contexts, to that of a murshid (Badaruddin & Mahyuddin, 2021).

Contextually, articles on the sanad of the tariqa demonstrate that the Sufi tradition views the chain of spiritual transmission as a fundamental element connecting the Sufi teacher to the previous shuyūkh, and that the sanad legitimizes a teacher or spiritual guide to guide those seeking the spiritual path. Thus, within al-Ghazali's framework, the teacher or murshid functions as a role model of morality, guardian of etiquette, guide of methods, and overseer of the journey of spiritual purification so that the process of internalizing values does not stop at theory.

### **6. Sufism as a systematic path of inner education**

The reading of the past five years shows that Sufism is increasingly understood not as a vague mysticism, but as a structured, pedagogical, ethical and spiritual discipline that shapes moral subjects (Mannopov et al., 2025). A 2025 article on Sufism as an ethical science explains that Sufism works as an educational method that fosters spiritual insight through disciplined ethical practice, and that dhikr and sulūk transform religious language into concrete guidelines for tahdhīb al-akhlāq. This context aligns closely with al-Ghazali, because in his thinking, Sufism is not an escape from the Shari'a, but rather a systematic path to purify the heart, rectify the soul, cultivate understanding and understanding, and strengthen righteous deeds.

Thus, the internalization of moral values according to Imam al-Ghazali can be formulated as an inner education process that moves from tazkiyat al-nafs, continues with mujahadah and riyāḍah, guarded by muraqabah and muhasabah, guided by a teacher or murshid, then strengthened through the habit of pious deeds until the values turn into character. That is why Sufism in al-Ghazali deserves to be called a systematic path of inner education, because it has clear goals, stages, training, supervision, guidance and indicators of behavior change.

While al-Ghazali's model provides a profound framework for inner transformation, it may also present certain limitations when applied to contemporary educational contexts. The strong emphasis on inward spiritual discipline and gradual self-purification could risk being perceived as overly introspective, particularly in institutional settings that require observable and measurable learning outcomes. Moreover, without a clear linkage to structured pedagogical strategies, the implementation of such a model may depend heavily on the presence of highly competent spiritual teachers. This suggests that although al-Ghazali's framework is powerful at the level of personal transformation, it requires contextual adaptation to function effectively within modern educational systems. Therefore, its integration into contemporary education demands a reinterpretation that bridges spiritual depth with pedagogical practicality. This critical perspective does not diminish al-Ghazali's contribution, but rather highlights the need to operationalize his ideas in more structured and scalable forms.

## **Ibn Taimiyah's thoughts on the internalization of moral values**

### **1. Tawhid as the Foundation for Internalizing Morals**

In Ibn Taymiyyah's thinking, the internalization of moral values does not begin simply with habituation techniques, but rather with Tawhid as the core of the entire educational process. Education, he argued, must shape individuals who are not only knowledgeable but also spiritually pious and morally upright. Therefore, morals do not stand alone but grow from sound faith and a life orientation directed toward God.

This framework becomes increasingly clear in recent studies of Ibn Taymiyyah's epistemology, which show that he built religious knowledge on three elements: naql, 'aql, and fitrah. In this model, revelation remains primary, reason serves as a sound tool for understanding the truth, and fitrah serves as a basic human tendency toward truth, worship, and moral awareness. Thus, the internalization of morals, according to Ibn Taymiyyah, is not merely a social process, but a process of activating fitrah and submitting it to the guidance of revelation.

### **2. Morals are closely related to faith, heart, speech and deeds.**

In Ibn Taymiyyah's interpretation, faith is not simply understood as conviction in the heart. A recent article specifically examining Ibn Taymiyyah's concept of faith emphasizes that faith encompasses conviction of the heart, verbal confession, and bodily actions, and can increase and

decrease according to deeds. A key implication is that morality cannot be separated from deeds, as a person's moral quality must be evident in concrete actions, not merely in internal claims or words.

This view establishes a very close relationship between the heart, faith, and deeds. The heart is the center of intention, sincerity, fear, hope, love, and trust in God. However, all these impulses must result in deeds in accordance with the Qur'an and Sunnah. Therefore, the internalization of moral values, according to Ibn Taymiyyah, can be understood as a process that moves from the refinement of faith and intentions, to the strengthening of faith, which then manifests itself in pious deeds and social responsibility.

### **3. *Tazkiyat al-nafs as purification of the soul and control of self-impulse***

Recent literature directly discussing Ibn Taymiyyah's tazkiyat al-nafs indicates that he understood it as a process of purifying the soul and developing moral character. The nafs is seen as the element that drives humans and can be trained to control it. Tazkiyat means cleansing the inner human element of traits that deviate from nature, then directing it toward a life of obedience. This demonstrates that moral education, from Ibn Taymiyyah's perspective, places great emphasis on the inner dimension of healing, not just on regulating external behavior.

The same study also confirms that Ibn Taymiyyah's moral education emphasized monotheism and strong faith. Therefore, tazkiyat al-nafs, for him, is not a stand-alone spiritual method, but rather part of the development of monotheism. The soul is purified to become more submissive to Allah, not to pursue mystical experiences independent of Sharia. At this point, Ibn Taymiyyah's tazkiyat is both theocentric and normative.

### **4. *Internalization of morals through ittiba', good deeds, and discipline of the heart's actions***

While al-Ghazali emphasized maqāmāt (the maqām) and gradual spiritual training as the main focus, Ibn Taymiyyah emphasized ittibā', namely adherence to the Qur'an and Sunnah, as a safe path to moral development. Studies on Ibn Taymiyyah's education confirm that he viewed education as a transformative process that integrates intellectual development with ethical and religious development. This means that morality is formed through correct knowledge, righteous intentions, and actions that align with guidance.

Other sources state that Ibn Taymiyyah's education emphasized knowledge and practice, not knowledge separated from action. Within the framework of internalizing values, this means that good deeds are not an afterthought after learning, but rather the primary means of character formation. Values are truly ingrained when they are consistently implemented as a form of obedience. (slamultitechpublisher.my.id) From this, it can be concluded that Ibn Taymiyyah's internalization of morality works through three main movements: straightening one's faith, disciplining one's heart's actions, and manifesting one's external actions. This aligns with the article on the concept of faith, which emphasizes that faith must be manifested in concrete actions. Therefore, morality is not merely a good inner state, but a righteous inner state that gives rise to righteous actions.

### **5. *Ibn Taymiyyah's attitude towards Sufism: purification, not total rejection***

One important aspect of reading Ibn Taymiyyah is to avoid the simplification of his absolute rejection of Sufism. A recent article in the Journal of Oriental Studies suggests that Ibn Taymiyyah's critique of Sufism stemmed from his struggle against innovations and doctrines he considered deviant, such as philosophical forms of Sufism associated with waḥdat al-wujūd, ḥulūl, and ittihād. Thus, he primarily rejected Sufism that deviated from the boundaries of tawhid and shari'a.

On the other hand, a study of Ibn Taymiyyah's model of Sufism education shows that he continued to view Sufism as a means of character formation, as long as it was practiced in a valid form and bound by Islamic teachings. The article concludes that Ibn Taymiyyah's model of Sufism education upholds tawāzun, tasāmuḥ, ta'dīl, and tawassuṭ, and these values foster a moderate attitude and character. In other words, Ibn Taymiyyah did not reject inner education, but rather refined it to align with tawhid and the Sunnah.

Therefore, in the context of internalizing moral values, Sufism, according to Ibn Taymiyyah, is more accurately understood as a form of meditation purified from deviant elements. This path does not focus on ecstasy or metaphysical speculation, but on purification of the heart, sincerity of worship, and the formation of just, balanced, and non-fanatical behavior. This also explains why discussions of Ibn Taymiyyah often revolve around the realm of charity (amal al-qulūb) and social morality, rather than speculative mysticism (Fauziyah & Azaria, 2024).

### **6. The role of teachers in guiding the straightening of intentions and the formation of morals**

In Ibn Taymiyyah's educational thought, teachers play a crucial role. A 2025 article on Ibn Taymiyyah's educational philosophy states that the ideal teacher must be sincere, trustworthy, and earnest in guiding students toward the truth. Students, at the same time, are required to be humble, respectful, and seek knowledge to seek God's pleasure. This demonstrates that the teacher-student relationship, according to Ibn Taymiyyah, is ethical and spiritual, not merely instructional (Sutiono et al., 2025).

The pedagogical implications are strong. Internalizing moral values requires role models, correction, and guidance of intentions. Therefore, in Ibn Taymiyyah's framework, teachers function not only as transmitters of knowledge but also as guardians of learning orientations so that knowledge is not separated from monotheism, morality, and good deeds. In the language of Islamic education, teachers educate both knowledge and manners (Dalillah et al., 2025).

### **7. Sufism as a systematic path of spiritual education within the framework of Islamic law**

Conceptually, Ibn Taymiyyah's thoughts on the internalization of moral values demonstrate a systematic pattern. Its foundation is monotheism. The medium is education that integrates revelation, reason, and natural instinct. The inner process is tazkiyat al-nafs (the practice of the nafs) and the strengthening of the heart's practices. Its practical forms are pious deeds, moderation, and social responsibility. The entire process is guided by a sincere and trustworthy teacher (Mannopov et al., 2025).

Therefore, Sufism, from Ibn Taymiyyah's perspective, is not a wild, individualistic, or anti-sharia path. It is a path of structured inner education, oriented toward monotheism, and measured in behavior. Hence, Ibn Taymiyyah's contribution to this research lies in his assertion that the internalization of morals must maintain two things simultaneously: the depth of the soul and the purity of its references. The soul must be purified, but this purification must remain subservient to the Quran and Sunnah (Badaruddin & Mahyuddin, 2021).

### **Comparative Analysis of the Thoughts of Imam al-Ghazali and Ibn Taymiyyah**

In general, the thoughts of Imam al-Ghazali and Ibn Taymiyyah converge on one fundamental point: that moral education should not stop at conveying norms. Values must be internalized until they become concrete attitudes, habits, and behaviors. The difference is that al-Ghazali begins this process with spiritual therapy and purification of the soul, while Ibn Taymiyyah begins with the purification of monotheism, the straightening of faith, and strict adherence to the Qur'an and Sunnah. Thus, al-Ghazali emphasizes transformation from the inside out, while Ibn Taymiyyah emphasizes the harmony between true belief, a righteous heart, and righteous deeds.

In terms of the essence of morality, al-Ghazali views morality as a trait embedded in the soul and can be formed through education, habituation, and moral training. The article *Moral Reasoning Theory: Between Kohlberg's and al-Ghazali's Perspective* emphasizes that in al-Ghazali's view, morality concerns not only reasoning but also behavior, and morality can change toward goodness through the process of education. In contrast, in Ibn Taymiyyah's perspective, morality is more strongly linked to monotheism, faith, and natural disposition. The article on the concept of faith according to Ibn Taymiyyah emphasizes that faith encompasses conviction of the heart, verbal confession, and deeds, so that morality cannot be separated from concrete actions. This means that al-Ghazali emphasizes morality as a formed disposition of the soul, while Ibn Taymiyyah emphasizes morality as a manifestation of valid faith.

From the perspective of the anthropological focus of education, al-Ghazali adopted a more detailed approach to the inner structure of humans. A 2025 study on the integration of al-Ghazali's concept of man into a learning model emphasized that he viewed humans holistically through the elements of nafs, qalb, ruh, and 'aql. Therefore, for him, the internalization of morality must address all of these elements. Meanwhile, recent readings of Ibn Taymiyyah indicate that the foundation of his anthropology rests more on fitrah, the connection between reason and revelation, and the unity of the inner and the human spirit. A 2025 article in *Religions* demonstrated that Ibn Taymiyyah's epistemological framework is built on the relationship between revelation, reason, and fitrah, rather than on metaphysical speculation. Thus, al-Ghazali focuses more on the psychology of the spiritual soul, while Ibn Taymiyyah emphasizes the normative-epistemological foundations of the believer.

In terms of internalization mechanisms, al-Ghazali placed great emphasis on tazkiyat al-nafs (self-control), mujahadah (self-control), riyāḍah (self-control), and the habituation of righteous deeds. A 2022 article on al-Ghazali's psychotherapy suggests that maqāmāt (obedience to God) such as repentance, patience, asceticism, tawakkul (repentance), self-control, self-control, and riḍā (relief) are positioned as the foundation for developing a believer's identity. Another article asserts that, according to al-Ghazali, someone who desires good qualities must force themselves to do so repeatedly until they become part of one's character. In contrast, Ibn Taymiyyah emphasized internalization through the refinement of faith, strengthening of the heart's good deeds, and practical adherence to sharia. In his model, values are not primarily instilled through gradual mystical experiences, but through the discipline of belief, intention, and deeds. Therefore, while al-Ghazali followed the path of gradual spiritual training, Ibn Taymiyyah followed the path of consistent discipline of faith and good deeds.

This difference is particularly evident in the position of Sufism. A 2023 study of al-Ghazali in Cogent Social Sciences asserted that al-Ghazali's Sufism was moderate and connected sharia with inner depth. He did not position Sufism as an opponent of fiqh, but rather as a means of moral refinement and the cultivation of balance. In contrast, an article on Ibn Taymiyyah's critique of Sufism in the Journal of Oriental Studies explains that his criticism was directed at innovations and forms of Sufism deemed to deviate from monotheism and sharia. An article in the Australian Journal of Islamic Studies also shows that Ibn Taymiyyah's stance on Sufism was not a total rejection, but rather a selective assessment of authentic Sufism and deviant Sufism. In other words, al-Ghazali developed Sufism as a path of inner education, while Ibn Taymiyyah refined Sufism to keep it within the boundaries of faith and the Sunnah.

In terms of the objectives of moral education, both actually depart from the same goal, namely to form a person who is spiritually pious and socially righteous. However, al-Ghazali emphasizes the end result on the depth of ma'rifah, maḥabbah, and purity of heart, while Ibn Taymiyyah emphasizes the validity of monotheism, clarity of faith, and accuracy of deeds. The article Al-Ghazali's Ma'rifah and Maḥabbah's Relations shows that for al-Ghazali, ma'rifah gives birth to maḥabbah, then maḥabbah encourages moral and spiritual perseverance. In contrast, the article on Ibn Taymiyyah's philosophy of education emphasizes that all education must be centered on monotheism to form a person who is knowledgeable, pious, and morally upright. Thus, al-Ghazali emphasizes affective-spiritual transformation, while Ibn Taymiyyah emphasizes the integration of faith, ethics, and practice.

Regarding the role of teachers, al-Ghazali gives teachers significant space as guides of reason, heart, and morals. A 2022 study of al-Ghazali's teaching model reveals seven main themes, including the teacher-student relationship, feedback strategies, and thought communities. This demonstrates that teachers, in al-Ghazali's framework, are not merely transmitters of knowledge, but educators of the soul. In Ibn Taymiyyah's framework, teachers are also important, but the emphasis is different. An article on Ibn Taymiyyah's contribution to educational philosophy emphasizes that education must instill monotheism as its core, so that teachers function to maintain the orientation of knowledge so that it is not separated from faith, worship, and good deeds. This means that al-Ghazali brings teachers closer to the function of murabbī-murshid, while Ibn Taymiyyah emphasizes teachers as guardians of the purity of knowledge and good deeds.

When viewed in light of current value internalization theory, the differences between the two can be more clearly mapped. A 2025 BMC Psychology study explains that value internalization proceeds through four stages: ignoring-resisting, understanding, attempting to practice, and integration. In al-Ghazali's model, the stages of understanding and practice progress intensively through tazkiyah, mujahadah, and riyāḍah until the value merges into character. In Ibn Taymiyyah's model, the internalization stage is more quickly bound by the authority of revelation, tawhid, and amal, so that the value is practiced as a form of obedience that is continuously reinforced until it becomes personality. Both models acknowledge that values are not enough to be known, but must be lived until they become a personal priority and a consistent behavior.

From the above analysis, the comparative contributions of this research become clear. Al-Ghazali offers a strong model of moral internalization in the dimensions of healing the soul, shaping the heart, and gradual spiritual training. Ibn Taymiyyah offers a strong model of moral internalization in the dimensions of purifying monotheism, controlling deviations, and disciplining deeds based on revelation. The two are not to be viewed in a binary opposition, but can be read as

complementary. For contemporary Islamic education, a synthesis of the two is crucial: moral education needs to possess both al-Ghazali's spiritual depth and Ibn Taymiyyah's normative rigor to avoid falling into either dry formalism or limitless spirituality.

**Table 1.** Comparative Analysis of the Thoughts of Imam al-Ghazali and Ibn Taimiyah on the Internalization of Moral Education Values in Sufism

Aspect	Imam al-Ghazali	Ibn Taymiyyah	Author's Synthesis	Relevance for Contemporary Islamic Education
Nature of morality	Morality is understood as a quality deeply rooted in the soul, from which behavior emerges in a relatively spontaneous and consistent manner.	Morality is understood as the fruit of true faith, reflected in the heart, speech, and actions.	Both agree that morality is not merely moral knowledge, but a personal quality that must be expressed in real behavior.	Moral education should not stop at teaching norms, but must be directed toward character formation.
Anthropological foundation	Emphasizes the cultivation of the inner elements of the human being, especially the <i>nafs, qalb, ruh,</i> and <i>'aql,</i> as the center of moral transformation.	Emphasizes <i>fitrah, tawhid,</i> and the relationship between revelation and reason in human formation.	Al-Ghazali places greater emphasis on spiritual psychology, while Ibn Taymiyyah is stronger in normative-theological foundations.	Islamic education needs to integrate inner spiritual formation with the strengthening of creed and intellectual awareness.
Starting point of value internalization	Begins with <i>tazkiyat al-nafs</i> and the purification of the heart from blameworthy traits.	Begins with the correction of <i>tawhid,</i> the purification of faith, and the rectification of intention.	Both begin moral education with the improvement of the deepest dimension of the human person.	Moral education programs must address the inner dimension, not merely outward behavior.
Mechanism of internalization	Through <i>mujahadah, riyadah, muraqabah, muhasabah,</i> and the habituation of righteous deeds.	Through <i>ittiba',</i> the strengthening of <i>a'mal al-qulub,</i> disciplined worship, and righteous deeds based on the Sharia.	Al-Ghazali follows a gradual path of spiritual training, while Ibn Taymiyyah follows a path of disciplined faith and action.	Value internalization requires training, repetition, self-control, and consistency in practice.
Position of Sufism	Sufism is a systematic path of inner education aimed at purifying the soul, nurturing <i>ma'rifah,</i> and strengthening <i>mahabbah.</i>	Sufism is accepted as long as it remains in accordance with the Qur'an and Sunnah, and rejected when it deviates from <i>tawhid.</i>	Al-Ghazali develops Sufism as a means of moral perfection, while Ibn Taymiyyah purifies Sufism to preserve its soundness.	Sufism can serve as a medium of character education, as long as it is directed toward inner formation while remaining bound to the Sharia.
Relationship between heart, soul, and action	The heart is the center of moral awareness. The soul is purified so that righteous deeds arise naturally.	The heart is the center of faith and intention, but the truth of the heart must be proven through actions in accordance with the Sharia.	Both reject any separation between the inner dimension and action. Their difference lies in emphasis.	Moral education must connect intention, self-awareness, and concrete action.
Role of righteous deeds	Righteous deeds are a means of habituation that transform values into enduring qualities.	Righteous deeds are proof of true faith and the result of sound <i>tawhid.</i>	In al-Ghazali, righteous deeds are formative, while in Ibn Taymiyyah they are both verificative and formative.	Students must be guided to practice values repeatedly until they become part of their character.
Role of the teacher	The teacher functions as a <i>murabbi,</i> even approaching the role of	The teacher functions as an educator of <i>tawhid,</i> a	In both thinkers, the teacher does not merely transfer	Teachers must serve as moral exemplars, spiritual guides, and

Aspect	Imam al-Ghazali	Ibn Taymiyyah	Author's Synthesis	Relevance for Contemporary Islamic Education
	<i>a murshid</i> , guiding the purification of the soul and the refinement of the student's adab.	guardian of the orientation of knowledge, and a guide of righteous action.	knowledge, but shapes the whole person.	directors of religious practice.
Goal of moral education	To produce a purified soul, a living heart, closeness to Allah, and noble character arising from <i>ma'rifah</i> and <i>mahabbah</i> .	To produce a person with sound <i>tawhid</i> , strong faith, correct deeds, and a moderate social attitude.	Both converge on the formation of a righteous person, although with different emphases.	Ideal Islamic education should form human beings who are spiritually strong, theologically sound, and socially virtuous.
Main strength of the thought	Strong in spiritual therapy, inner deepening, and inward character transformation.	Strong in the purity of creed, discipline of the Sharia, and protection from spiritual deviation.	Both are complementary.	A contemporary model of moral education can synthesize al-Ghazali's spiritual depth with Ibn Taymiyyah's normative firmness.

Based on Table 1, it can be confirmed that Imam al-Ghazali and Ibn Taymiyyah both viewed moral education as a process of human development that does not stop at conveying norms but must lead to real personal change in behavior. Both agree that morality is not merely knowledge of good and bad, but rather a personal quality that must be ingrained and reflected in daily life. However, these two figures take different conceptual paths in explaining how moral values are internalized in humans (Sham et al., 2021).

In al-Ghazali's thought, morality is understood as a trait embedded in the soul, from which relatively spontaneous and consistent behavior emerges. Therefore, according to al-Ghazali, moral education must begin with the development of the human inner elements, especially the *nafs* (self), *qalb* (mind), *rūḥ* (spirit), and *'aql* (soul). The process of internalizing values is carried out through *tazkiyat al-nafs* (self-examination), namely the purification of the soul from reprehensible traits, followed by *mujāhadah* (self-examination), *riyāḍah* (self-examination), *muraqabah* (self-examination), and *muhasabah* (self-examination) so that good values are not only understood but truly become character. Within this framework, Sufism occupies a central position as a systematic path of inner education to cleanse the heart, organize the soul, and foster *ma'rifah* (religious understanding) and *maḥabbah* (religious devotion) to Allah (Ibrahim et al., 2022).

In contrast, Ibn Taymiyyah placed monotheism as the primary foundation for internalizing moral values. According to him, morality is rooted in true faith, which encompasses conviction of the heart, verbal confession, and proof through deeds. Therefore, the formation of morality must begin with the straightening of faith, purification of intentions, and strengthening of faith to produce deeds in accordance with the Qur'an and Sunnah. From this perspective, Sufism is not absolutely rejected, but accepted as long as it remains within the corridors of monotheism and sharia. Ibn Taymiyyah's criticism is directed at forms of Sufism that are considered deviant, not at the inner education itself. Thus, the internalization of moral values, according to Ibn Taymiyyah, moves from the purification of faith to the formation of an upright heart and righteous behavior (Zhaffar et al., 2022).

The main difference between the two figures is evident in their methodological emphasis. Al-Ghazali emphasized inner transformation, namely character change through spiritual therapy, spiritual training, and spiritual deepening. Meanwhile, Ibn Taymiyyah emphasized normative purification, namely maintaining monotheism, orderly faith, and the conformity of deeds to revelation. Al-Ghazali saw that a pure heart would naturally give rise to righteous deeds, while Ibn Taymiyyah emphasized that the truth of the heart must be proven by valid deeds. In other words, al-Ghazali moved from improving the heart to deeds, while Ibn Taymiyyah moved from straightening faith and monotheism to morals and deeds (Muvid, 2024).

Nevertheless, this comparison shows that the differences between the two are not mutually exclusive. Instead, they can be read as complementary. Al-Ghazali made significant contributions to the aspects of soul development, self-control, and spiritual depth. Ibn Taymiyyah contributed

significantly to the purity of faith, the firmness of sharia, and protection from spiritual deviation. In the context of contemporary Islamic education, a synthesis of the two is highly relevant for formulating a more comprehensive model of moral education, namely education that combines spiritual depth, firmness of monotheism, and consistent social action (Jenuri et al., 2025; Muvid, 2024).

Thus, the results of this comparative analysis confirm that the internalization of moral education values in Sufism can be developed through two complementary orientations. The first orientation is the purification of the soul and the formation of the heart, as emphasized by al-Ghazali. The second orientation is the rectification of monotheism and the discipline of deeds, as emphasized by Ibn Taymiyyah. These two orientations can be combined into an integrative framework for Islamic moral education, namely education that not only instills values but also shapes inner awareness, firm convictions, and actual, civilized behavior (Alsuhaymi & Atallah, 2025b).

### **Relevance for Contemporary Islamic Education**

In a deeper analytical perspective, the comparison between Imam al-Ghazali and Ibn Taymiyyah reveals not merely a difference in emphasis, but a fundamental epistemological tension in the construction of moral education. Al-Ghazali's framework is grounded in an inward, experiential epistemology that prioritizes the transformation of the soul as the foundation of moral behavior. In contrast, Ibn Taymiyyah's approach is rooted in a normative-epistemological framework that emphasizes the alignment of belief, intention, and action with authoritative sources. This distinction reflects two different pathways of value internalization: one that moves from inner awareness to outward action, and another that moves from normative commitment to internal discipline. Rather than viewing these approaches as contradictory, they can be interpreted as addressing different dimensions of the same educational problem. This perspective suggests that moral education requires both internal depth and external guidance. Therefore, the integration of these two frameworks offers a more comprehensive understanding of how values are internalized within individuals.

The relevance of this discussion to contemporary Islamic education lies in the need to shift moral education from an overly cognitive pattern toward one that internalizes values until they become habits and character. A bibliometric study on religious education and moderation confirms that religious education should not be understood merely as the transmission of academic knowledge, but also as a process of character formation and the cultivation of life attitudes. In line with this, research on students shows that moral reasoning and value internalization play an important mediating role in prosocial behavior. Therefore, moral education today must move beyond merely knowing values toward habituating, internalizing, and practicing them in real life.

Islamic educational institutions also need a more integrated approach that combines the spiritual, intellectual, and social dimensions. Recent systematic reviews show that spiritual well-being contributes positively to various aspects of the learning experience, including psychological health and student engagement. At the same time, studies on curricula for religious moderation in higher education indicate that value reinforcement should not stop at knowledge alone, but must be designed to produce knowledge, skills, and attitudes simultaneously. These findings strengthen the idea that contemporary Islamic education must develop the whole person, not only intellectually capable, but also spiritually mature and socially responsible.

In this context, al-Ghazali's model is highly useful for strengthening character education based on inner development. Recent research that integrates al-Ghazali's concept of the human being into Islamic Religious Education shows that the concepts of *nafs*, *qalb*, *ruh*, and *'aql* can be used to address students' spiritual emptiness and encourage more holistic spiritual growth. Other studies on *tasawwuf* moderation in higher education also show that al-Ghazali's Sufi legacy remains relevant for building a moderate and morally grounded intellectual community. This means that al-Ghazali's model is important for contemporary moral education because it provides a strong foundation for nurturing the heart, self-control, and the habituation of good deeds from within the student (Nabi, 2024).

Meanwhile, Ibn Taymiyyah's model is relevant for preserving the purity of values and normative discipline in moral education. International studies show that Ibn Taymiyyah did not reject Sufism entirely, but rather made selective judgments and critiques of forms of Sufism that he

considered to deviate from tawhid and the Sharia. Recent interpretations of his thought also emphasize his strong orientation toward revelation, reason, and fitrah as the basis for correcting excessive theological speculation. When translated into the educational context, this reading suggests that Ibn Taymiyyah's model is useful for ensuring that spiritual formation remains firmly tied to the Qur'an, the Sunnah, the purity of creed, and disciplined righteous action. This emphasis is an interpretive synthesis drawn from recent literature on Ibn Taymiyyah's critique and selective appreciation of Sufism (Mukhibat et al., 2024).

The synthesis of these two models opens the possibility for a more balanced form of moral education, one that is spiritual, textual, practical, and social. From al-Ghazali, Islamic education gains a foundation for the cultivation of the soul, tazkiyah, and a deeper understanding of worship. From Ibn Taymiyyah, Islamic education gains a foundation for the purity of tawhid, normative discipline, and vigilance against the distortion of values. This synthetic direction is in line with recent studies that view Sufism as an ethical science and an embodied pedagogy, that is, an educational path that connects law with love, action with awareness, and outward form with inner transformation. It is also consistent with studies on curricula for religious moderation that emphasize the need to integrate spiritual values into the design of higher education. In other words, Islamic moral education that is relevant today is neither merely textual nor merely spiritual, but an education capable of connecting spiritual depth, normative reference, everyday practice, and social responsibility at the same time.

In practical terms, schools, pesantren, and Islamic universities need to design moral education that combines four elements at once, namely knowledge of values, habituation through practice, spiritual formation, and social orientation. Findings on the positive relationship between akhlaq, life satisfaction, positive emotions, and low stress show that morality is not only normatively important, but also has a real impact on student well-being. For this reason, this article is highly relevant because it shows that the thought of al-Ghazali and Ibn Taymiyyah can still be used to address the problems of contemporary Islamic education, as long as their ideas are read in a complementary manner and translated into learning designs that are living, contextual, and measurable.

## CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that the internalization of moral education values in Sufism cannot be adequately understood as a purely cognitive or normative process, but must be viewed as a multidimensional transformation involving both inner restructuring and outward discipline. Through a comparative analysis of Imam al-Ghazali and Ibn Taymiyyah, this study confirms that both thinkers share a common objective of forming morally grounded individuals, yet they differ significantly in their epistemological orientation and methodological emphasis. Al-Ghazali conceptualizes moral internalization as a process of inward transformation rooted in tazkiyat al-nafs, spiritual discipline, and the gradual cultivation of the heart, in which Sufism functions as a systematic path of inner education. In contrast, Ibn Taymiyyah positions moral internalization within the framework of tawhid, emphasizing the purification of faith, the alignment of intention, and disciplined adherence to the Qur'an and Sunnah as the foundation of moral formation. These differences highlight two distinct but complementary pathways: one that moves from inner awareness to action, and another that moves from normative commitment to internal discipline.

The main contribution of this study lies in proposing an integrative conceptual understanding of moral education that bridges these two orientations. Rather than positioning them in opposition, this study argues that effective moral education requires the simultaneous integration of spiritual depth and normative discipline. This synthesis offers a more comprehensive framework for understanding how values are internalized into stable character, addressing the persistent gap between moral knowledge and moral practice in contemporary education. From a theoretical perspective, this study contributes to the discourse on value internalization by introducing a dual-process model that combines inward transformation and normative regulation. From a practical perspective, it provides a conceptual foundation for designing Islamic educational practices that integrate reflective spiritual development, structured habituation, and value-based learning environments.

Future research should move beyond conceptual analysis toward empirical investigation to examine how this integrative framework can be implemented in real educational settings, including classrooms, pesantren, and higher education institutions. Such efforts are essential to ensure that moral education does not remain at the level of discourse, but becomes a lived reality that shapes both individual character and social responsibility.

### AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS STATEMENT

**RFL** took the lead in conceptualizing the study, designing the research framework, conducting the comparative analysis, and writing the original draft of the manuscript. **Zal** contributed to data curation, including the selection, organization, and verification of primary and secondary sources relevant to the study. **Mur** contributed to the development of the theoretical framework and supported the interpretation of the findings, particularly in relation to Sufism and moral education. **BN** provided supervision throughout the research process, critically reviewed the manuscript, and contributed to refining the final version for intellectual coherence and academic rigor.

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