

RECONSTRUCTION AL-GHAZĀLĪ'S CONCEPT OF SA'ĀDAH AS A NORMATIVE FRAMEWORK FOR CONTEMPORARY ISLAMIC EDUCATION

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Abstract

This article examines al-Ghazālī's concept of *sa'ādah* in *Kīmīyā' al-Sa'ādah* and reconstructs it as a normative framework for contemporary Islamic education. The study responds to modern educational orientations that increasingly emphasize instrumental, utilitarian, academic, and economic achievement, often at the expense of moral formation, spiritual cultivation, and students' sense of meaning. Methodologically, this study employed a Systematic Literature Review combined with textual-hermeneutic analysis. The review followed PRISMA 2020 procedures, including database searching, duplicate removal, title and abstract screening, full-text eligibility assessment, inclusion and exclusion criteria, quality appraisal, and thematic synthesis. The primary source was the 2022 edition of *Kīmīyā' al-Sa'ādah*, while the secondary sources consisted of peer-reviewed studies and scholarly works on *sa'ādah*, *al-qalb*, *ma'rifat Allāh*, the integration of *'ilm* and *'amal*, *mujāhadah*, *riyāḍah*, *tazkiyat al-nafs*, the role of the *murabbī*, and contemporary Islamic education. The findings reveal four major themes: *sa'ādah* as the teleological aim of education grounded in the perfection of the heart through *ma'rifat Allāh*; the integration of knowledge, action, and spiritual striving; the moderation of anger, desire, and knowledge as the basis of virtue formation; and the role of *tazkiyah*, *riyāḍah*, and the *murabbī* in self-formation. The study concludes that al-Ghazālī offers a coherent conceptual basis for reorienting Islamic education toward holistic ethical, spiritual, and intellectual development.

Keywords: *Al-Ghazālī; Sa'ādah; Islamic Education; Systematic Literature Review; Moral-Spiritual Formation.*

Abstrak

Artikel ini mengkaji konsep sa'ādah dalam Kīmīyā' al-Sa'ādah karya al-Ghazālī dan merekonstruksinya sebagai kerangka normatif bagi pendidikan Islam kontemporer.



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Kajian ini merespons orientasi pendidikan modern yang semakin menekankan capaian instrumental, utilitarian, akademik, dan ekonomi, yang sering kali mengabaikan pembentukan moral, pengembangan spiritual, dan pemaknaan hidup peserta didik. Secara metodologis, penelitian ini menggunakan Systematic Literature Review yang dipadukan dengan analisis tekstual-hermeneutik. Tinjauan literatur mengikuti prosedur PRISMA 2020, yang mencakup penelusuran database, penghapusan duplikasi, penyaringan judul dan abstrak, penilaian kelayakan teks penuh, kriteria inklusi dan eksklusi, penilaian kualitas, serta sintesis tematik. Sumber primer penelitian ini adalah Kīmīyā' al-Sa'ādah edisi 2022, sedangkan sumber sekunder terdiri atas artikel peer-reviewed dan karya ilmiah yang membahas sa'ādah, al-qalb, ma'rifat Allāh, integrasi 'ilm dan 'amal, mujāhadah, riyāḍah, tazkiyat al-nafs, peran murabbī, dan pendidikan Islam kontemporer. Temuan penelitian menunjukkan empat tema utama: sa'ādah sebagai tujuan teleologis pendidikan yang berlandaskan penyempurnaan hati melalui ma'rifat Allāh; integrasi pengetahuan, tindakan, dan perjuangan spiritual; moderasi amarah, hasrat, dan pengetahuan sebagai dasar pembentukan kebajikan; serta peran tazkiyah, riyāḍah, dan murabbī dalam pembentukan diri. Studi ini menyimpulkan bahwa al-Ghazālī menawarkan dasar konseptual yang koheren untuk mereorientasi pendidikan Islam menuju pengembangan etis, spiritual, dan intelektual secara holistik.

Kata Kunci: *Al-Ghazālī; Sa'ādah; Pendidikan Islam; Systematic Literature Review; Pembentukan Moral-Spiritual.*

INTRODUCTION

Scholars have highlighted the dominance of instrumental, utilitarian, and commercial paradigms that orient education toward credentials, employment, and economic productivity while neglecting holistic human development (Osberg & Biesta, 2020). This tendency has marginalized the moral, spiritual, and existential dimensions of education, raising serious concerns about students' well-being, sense of meaning, and inner fulfillment (Hossain et al., 2023). Reports indicate that approximately 3,800 bullying cases have been recorded in educational settings, with nearly half occurring in schools and pesantren (Elaine, 2026). Recent studies also report that, alongside the rapid growth of student enrolment and scientific output in Indonesian higher education, the number of students experiencing poor mental well-being has increased (Kotera et al., 2022). Consistent with findings from other countries, the mental well-being of university students in Indonesia has become a serious concern: 37% to 53% of undergraduate students report high levels of stress, 25% experience depression, and 51% report anxiety. High levels of loneliness have also been reported among Indonesian university students (Ekawati et al., 2025).

From a global perspective, contemporary discourse increasingly frames happiness in worldly and temporally oriented terms (Joshnloo & Weijers, 2024).

These tendencies have renewed scholarly interest in happiness and in broader questions of human well-being and flourishing. In most cases, such discussions are framed within secular and psychological perspectives, although they may also intersect with religious worldviews and ethical visions (Zambelli et al., 2025). Islamic education has historically understood education as a transformative process aimed at forming morally responsible, spiritually grounded, and ethically cultivated individuals, and thus possesses a rich intellectual heritage capable of responding to these contemporary challenges (Briliant & Mustofa, 2025). Among the classical works that articulate a holistic vision of human development, al-Ghazālī's *Kīmīyā' al-Sa'ādah* occupies a significant place by positioning *sa'ādah* (happiness) at the center of ethical and spiritual formation, thereby offering a strong foundation for rethinking the aims and orientation of contemporary Islamic education (Bintar Asror Syaffutra et al., 2025).

Although al-Ghazālī's intellectual legacy has received increasing scholarly attention, *Kīmīyā' al-Sa'ādah* has largely been examined within the domains of Sufism, Islamic ethics, and moral philosophy rather than being systematically explored as a foundational source for educational theory and practice (Husni et al., 2025). Existing studies tend to emphasize its spiritual and ethical teachings at the individual level, while paying insufficient attention to their pedagogical implications for the aims, processes, and outcomes of education (Soleh, 2024). Consequently, contemporary scholarship in Islamic education still lacks a coherent and integrated framework that explicitly conceptualizes happiness (*sa'ādah*) as an educational aim grounded in Islamic epistemology (Husaen & Negara, 2026). This gap is further exacerbated by the growing reliance on imported models of well-being and character education, which are often misaligned with the normative purposes and anthropological assumptions of Islamic education (Alhail et al., 2025). As a result, an unresolved tension persists between the rich moral-spiritual vision embedded in classical Islamic texts and the conceptual foundations underlying contemporary Islamic educational discourse (Muhammad et al., 2022).

In response to these challenges, this study aims to critically examine al-Ghazālī's *Kīmīyā' al-Sa'ādah*, with particular attention to its relevance for contemporary Islamic education. More specifically, the study seeks to analyze the conceptualization of happiness (*sa'ādah*) articulated in the text and to identify the core educational values and pedagogical principles embedded in al-Ghazālī's ethical and spiritual discourse. Furthermore, this study endeavors to reconstruct these insights into a coherent conceptual framework that places happiness as a central educational goal, thereby offering a normative yet analytically grounded model for Islamic education (Jalaldean & Al-Hidabi, 2025). Through this approach, the study

aspires to contribute to the refinement of the aims and orientation of Islamic education by providing a theoretically informed framework that holistically integrates moral, spiritual, and educational dimensions (Saepudin, 2024).

A review of the existing scholarship reveals a clear gap between studies on al-Ghazālī's *Kīmīyā' al-Sa'ādah* and contemporary discourse in Islamic education (Arif et al., 2024). Recent scholarship on *Kīmīyā' al-Sa'ādah* has predominantly focused on textual, ethical, and spiritual interpretation, with only limited attention to its systematic educational implications (Muhammad Afada Rifqiya & Abdullah Hosseinienskandian, 2024). On the other hand, studies in Islamic education increasingly address themes such as character formation, moral education, and student well-being, yet many of these studies are framed through modern educational or psychological approaches and do not always explicitly engage classical Islamic epistemology (Syafii & Azhari, 2025). Consequently, integrative research that bridges classical Islamic ethical texts and contemporary educational theory remains limited, particularly in articulating happiness (*sa'ādah*) as a clearly defined educational aim (Azzahra et al., 2025). This gap underscores the need for a conceptual study that not only revisits al-Ghazālī's thought but also reconstructs it within a coherent framework capable of informing the aims and orientation of contemporary Islamic education.

To address this gap, the present study applies a Systematic Literature Review combined with textual-hermeneutic analysis. This methodological choice is important because previous studies on al-Ghazālī's *Kīmīyā' al-Sa'ādah* often rely on descriptive textual exposition, while studies on Islamic education and well-being frequently adopt modern psychological frameworks without systematic engagement with classical Islamic epistemology. By using PRISMA 2020 procedures, this study maps recent scholarship in a transparent and replicable manner, identifies dominant themes and limitations in existing research, and integrates them with a close reading of *Kīmīyā' al-Sa'ādah*. Therefore, this study aims to analyze al-Ghazālī's concept of *sa'ādah*, identify its educational values and pedagogical principles, and reconstruct it as a normative framework for contemporary Islamic education. The novelty of this study lies in repositioning *Kīmīyā' al-Sa'ādah* not merely as a work of Sufism or moral philosophy, but as a systematic source of educational theory that clarifies the aims, processes, and formative orientation of Islamic education.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employed a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) combined with textual-hermeneutic and conceptual synthesis. The SLR was used to identify, screen,

appraise, and synthesize recent scholarship on al-Ghazālī, *sa'ādah*, moral-spiritual formation, and contemporary Islamic education (Abdalla, 2025; Jalaldeen & Al-Hidabi, 2025; Jenuri et al., 2025; Muhammad Afada Rifqiya & Abdullah Hosseineskandian, 2024; Soleh, 2022, 2024). Textual-hermeneutic analysis was used to interpret the primary text, namely al-Ghazālī's *Kīmīyā' al-Sa'ādah* (Jalaldeen & Al-Hidabi, 2025; Muhammad Afada Rifqiya & Abdullah Hosseineskandian, 2024). Conceptual synthesis was then used to reconstruct the concept of *sa'ādah* as a normative framework for contemporary Islamic education (Jaakkola, 2020; Sahin, 2018). This design was selected because the study does not merely summarize prior studies, but develops a theoretically grounded reconstruction from a classical Islamic text and contemporary educational literature (Abdalla, 2025; Jaakkola, 2020; Jalaldeen & Al-Hidabi, 2025; Jenuri et al., 2025; Snyder, 2019; Thomas & Harden, 2008).

The review was reported according to PRISMA 2020 to ensure transparency in the identification, screening, eligibility assessment, and inclusion of sources (Page, McKenzie, et al., 2021; Page, Moher, et al., 2021). The SLR procedure was also informed by methodological literature on systematic review design, literature review as a research methodology, thematic analysis, thematic synthesis, and conceptual article development (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Gough et al., 2017; Jaakkola, 2020; Snyder, 2019; Thomas & Harden, 2008; Xiao & Watson, 2019). The review protocol was prepared before the screening process and contained the research questions, databases, search strings, eligibility criteria, screening procedure, data extraction categories, appraisal criteria, and synthesis strategy. The protocol was not registered in PROSPERO because this study is a conceptual and humanities-oriented review rather than a clinical or health intervention review. The review was guided by three research questions. First, how has recent scholarship conceptualized al-Ghazālī's *sa'ādah* in relation to happiness, moral formation, spiritual discipline, and Islamic educational thought? Second, what educational values and pedagogical principles can be extracted from the selected literature and from *Kīmīyā' al-Sa'ādah*? Third, how can *sa'ādah* be reconstructed as a normative framework for contemporary Islamic education?

The primary source was the 2022 edition of al-Ghazālī's *Kīmīyā' al-Sa'ādah* published by Maktabah Bilhill. This text was not counted as an included study in the PRISMA flow because it functioned as the primary object of textual interpretation. The SLR corpus consisted of secondary literature published from January 2016 to June 2026. This time frame was selected to capture recent developments in Islamic education, moral-spiritual education, student well-being, educational flourishing, and contemporary studies on al-Ghazālī.

The literature search was conducted on 26 June 2026 through Scopus, Web of Science, ERIC, DOAJ, Crossref, and Google Scholar. Scopus was treated as the primary database because of its broad coverage of peer-reviewed international journals. Web of Science and ERIC were used to strengthen coverage in education and the humanities. DOAJ was used to identify open-access peer-reviewed journals, while Crossref was used to verify DOI metadata. Google Scholar was used only as a supplementary source and was limited to the first 300 results sorted by relevance. Additional records were identified through backward and forward citation tracking from key articles and through direct searches on relevant publisher and journal websites.

Table 1. Sources of Records Identified in the Initial Search

Source	Search Coverage	Records Identified
Scopus	peer-reviewed records indexed in Scopus	386
Web of Science	Peer-reviewed journal articles and reviews	154
ERIC	Education-related journal articles and reports	87
DOAJ	Open-access peer-reviewed journals	171
Crossref	DOI-based metadata verification	138
Google Scholar	First 300 results sorted by relevance	300
Citation tracking	Backward and forward citation searching	41
Publisher and journal websites	Manual search of relevant journals	21
Total	Database and other sources	1,298

The inclusion criteria were as follows: peer-reviewed journal articles, review articles, academic books, and book chapters that discussed al-Ghazālī, *Kīmīyā' al-Sa'ādah*, *sa'ādah*, Islamic happiness, *tazkiyat al-nafs*, *riyāḍah*, *mujāhadah*, *murabbī*, Islamic educational philosophy, moral-spiritual education, student well-being, or educational flourishing; publications issued between January 2016 and June 2026; sources written in English, Indonesian, Malay, or Arabic; and full-text documents accessible for analysis. The exclusion criteria were duplicate records, non-scholarly web materials, popular essays, editorials, book reviews, sources outside the publication window, sources that mentioned al-Ghazālī only incidentally, studies unrelated to education or moral-spiritual formation, and sources without accessible full text.

Table 2. Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Criterion	Included	Excluded
Publication type	Peer-reviewed articles, review articles, academic books, book chapters	Popular articles, editorials, book reviews, blog posts, non-scholarly web materials
Publication period	January 2016 to June 2026	Publications outside the time frame, except primary classical text and methodological authorities
Language	English, Indonesian, Malay, Arabic	Sources in languages not accessible to the researcher
Thematic relevance	Al-Ghazālī, <i>sa'ādah</i> , Islamic education, moral-spiritual formation, <i>tazkiyah</i> , <i>riyāḍah</i> , <i>mujāhadah</i> , <i>murabbī</i> , flourishing	Sources unrelated to the research questions
Accessibility	Full text available	Full text unavailable
Academic quality	Clear scholarly argument, method, source base, or conceptual contribution	Weakly documented, repetitive, or non-academic materials

The selection process followed four PRISMA 2020 stages. In the identification stage, 1,298 records were identified from databases and other sources. Before screening, 312 duplicate records were removed, and 104 records were removed because they were outside the publication period, did not meet the document type criteria, or lacked basic bibliographic information. In the screening stage, 882 records were screened by title and abstract. A total of 738 records were excluded because they were not relevant to al-Ghazālī, *sa'ādah*, Islamic education, moral-spiritual formation, or contemporary educational aims. In the eligibility stage, 144 reports were sought for retrieval. Nine full texts could not be retrieved. The remaining 135 full-text reports were assessed for eligibility. A total of 93 reports were excluded for specific reasons. In the inclusion stage, 42 studies were included in the final thematic synthesis. These 42 studies were analyzed together with the primary text of *Kīmīyā' al-Sa'ādah*. The 42 included studies refer only to the sources that entered the final thematic synthesis. The primary text, methodological references, and contextual sources used to frame the introduction and research design were cited in the manuscript but were not counted as included studies in the PRISMA flow.

Table 3. PRISMA 2020 Selection Process

PRISMA Stage	Description	Number
Identification	Records identified from databases	1,236
Identification	Records identified from citation tracking and journal or publisher websites	62
Identification	Total records identified	1,298
Before screening	Duplicate records removed	312
Before screening	Records removed because of date, document type, or incomplete metadata	104
Screening	Records screened by title and abstract	882
Screening	Records excluded after title and abstract screening	738
Eligibility	Reports sought for retrieval	144
Eligibility	Reports not retrieved	9
Eligibility	Full-text reports assessed for eligibility	135
Eligibility	Full-text reports excluded with reasons	93
Included	Studies included in final thematic synthesis	42
Included	Primary text analyzed separately	1

Table 4. Reasons for Full-Text Exclusion

Reason for Exclusion	Number
The study discussed al-Ghazālī generally but did not address <i>sa'ādah</i> , happiness, or moral-spiritual formation	28
The study was not connected to Islamic education, educational philosophy, or pedagogy	22
The study focused only on secular psychology or general well-being without normative or educational relevance	14
The study had weak academic quality or insufficient methodological transparency	11
The study did not add a clear conceptual contribution to the synthesis	10
The content overlapped substantially with another included source	8
Total excluded full-text reports	93

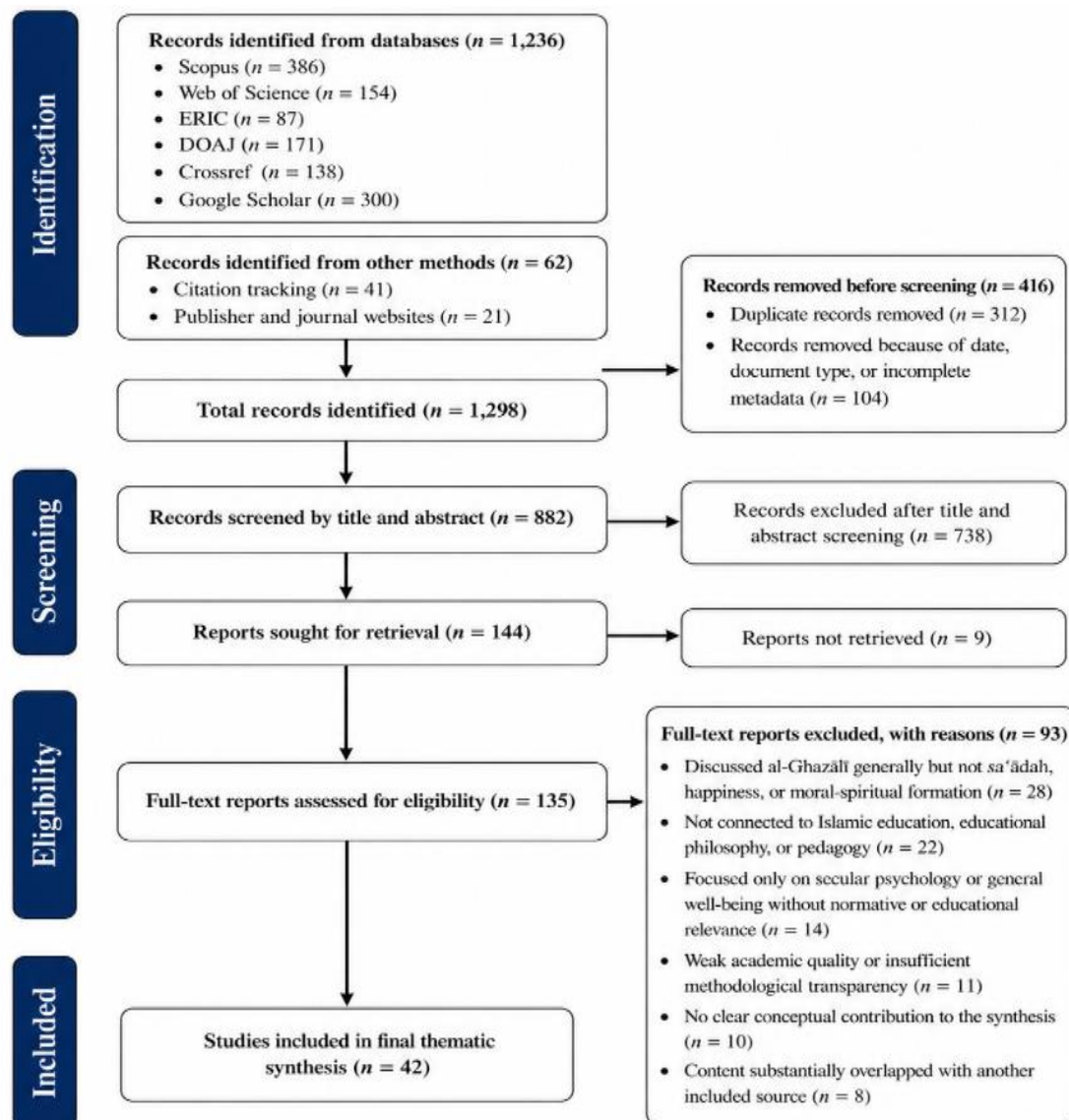


Figure 1. PRISMA 2020 Flow Diagram for the Systematic Literature Review on the Reconstruction of Al-Ghazālī's Concept of *Sa'ādah* as a Normative Framework for Contemporary Islamic Education

Data extraction was conducted using a structured extraction matrix. The matrix recorded author, year, title, publication type, database source, DOI or URL, research focus, methodological approach, key concepts, findings, relevance to *sa'ādah*, relevance to Islamic education, and contribution to the conceptual reconstruction. The extraction process focused not only on bibliographic information, but also on conceptual relationships among happiness, the heart,

knowledge, action, purification, moral discipline, teacher guidance, and educational purpose.

The quality appraisal process was adjusted to the nature of the included sources. Empirical studies were appraised using criteria adapted from the Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool, especially clarity of research questions, appropriateness of design, adequacy of data sources, transparency of analysis, and coherence between findings and conclusions (Hong et al., 2018). Conceptual and theoretical articles were appraised based on conceptual clarity, use of primary or authoritative sources, analytical coherence, originality, relevance to the research questions, and contribution to educational theory (Jaakkola, 2020). Studies were not excluded solely because they used different research designs. They were excluded only when they lacked sufficient relevance, credibility, or conceptual contribution to the review.

The analysis used thematic synthesis and textual-hermeneutic interpretation. Thematic synthesis was conducted through repeated reading of selected studies, initial coding, grouping of codes, development of descriptive themes, refinement of analytical themes, and integration of themes into a conceptual framework (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Thomas & Harden, 2008). The coding process was both deductive and inductive. Deductive coding was guided by key concepts in *Kīmiyā' al-Sa'ādah*, including *sa'ādah*, *al-qalb*, *ma'rifat Allāh*, *'ilm*, *'amal*, *mujāhadah*, *riyāḍah*, *tazkiyat al-nafs*, and *murabbī*. Inductive coding was used to capture concepts emerging from contemporary literature, such as holistic education, student well-being, flourishing, moral education, spiritual development, self-regulation, and character formation.

The final synthesis generated four analytical themes. The first theme was *sa'ādah* as the teleological aim of Islamic education. The second theme was the integration of *'ilm*, *'amal*, and *mujāhadah* as a transformative educational process. The third theme was the moderation of anger, desire, and knowledge as the basis of virtue formation. The fourth theme was *tazkiyah*, *riyāḍah*, and the role of the *murabbī* as mechanisms of moral-spiritual formation. These themes were then interpreted through the primary text of *Kīmiyā' al-Sa'ādah* and reconstructed into a normative framework for contemporary Islamic education.

Trustworthiness was strengthened through transparent documentation of the search process, explicit inclusion and exclusion criteria, structured data extraction, quality appraisal, and an audit trail of screening decisions. To reduce selection bias in a single-author review, screening and coding were conducted in two rounds using the same criteria. Ambiguous records were reassessed through full-text reading before final inclusion or exclusion. The consistency of the themes was checked by comparing the extracted data, the Arabic textual evidence from *Kīmiyā' al-Sa'ādah*,

and contemporary educational literature. Since the study relied exclusively on published documents and did not involve human participants, formal ethical approval was not required.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

The thematic synthesis of the selected literature, combined with textual-hermeneutic analysis of al-Ghazālī's *Kīmīyā' al-Sa'ādah*, generated four major themes concerning the reconstruction of *sa'ādah* as a normative framework for contemporary Islamic education. These themes are: (1) *sa'ādah* as the teleological aim of Islamic education (Soleh, 2022, 2024), (2) the integration of *'ilm*, *'amal*, and *mujāhadah* as a transformative educational process (Hasib & Khasanah, 2025), (3) the moderation of anger, desire, and knowledge as the basis of virtue formation (Arroisi & Hanifi, 2025) and (4) *tazkiyah*, *riyāḍah*, and the role of the *murabbī* as mechanisms of moral-spiritual formation (Hafidz Khusnadin & Shihab, 2025). These themes provide the analytical structure for presenting the findings and discussing their implications for contemporary Islamic education.

The first theme identifies *sa'ādah* as the ultimate telos of human existence and as the normative aim of education rooted in the heart (*al-qalb*). In al-Ghazālī's framework, the heart is not merely the locus of feeling, but the center of human formation and the organ created for the affairs of the hereafter (Bintar Asror Syaffutra et al., 2025).

The first theme identifies *sa'ādah* as the ultimate telos of human existence and as the normative aim of education rooted in the heart (*al-qalb*). In al-Ghazālī's framework, the heart is not merely the locus of feeling, but the center of human formation and the organ created for the affairs of the hereafter (Layalia, 2025). Its true happiness lies in *ma'rifat Allāh* (knowledge of God), as clearly stated in the following passages:

”...والقلب مخلوق لعمل الآخرة طلبا لسعادته، وسعادته معرفة ربه عز وجل”

Translation: “The heart was created for the work of the hereafter in seeking its happiness, and its happiness lies in knowing its Lord, the Mighty and Exalted.”

He further states:

”إن اللذة والسعادة لابن آدم معرفة الله سبحانه وتعالى”

Translation: “The delight and happiness of the children of Adam are in knowing Allah, Glorified and Exalted is He.”

These passages are foundational because he establishes *sa'ādah* not as affective satisfaction, but as the teleological fulfillment of the heart through *ma'rifat Allāh*. This point has significant educational implications. If the true happiness of the human being lies in the proper perfection of the heart, then education cannot be limited to the cultivation of skills, information, or social competence alone (Martela, 2024). It must also direct the learner toward inner formation, moral purification, and spiritual orientation. In this respect, al-Ghazālī offers an important alternative to dominant educational paradigms that define success in primarily instrumental terms (Kristjánsson & VanderWeele, 2025). His view repositions education within a teleological framework: education is valuable not only because it enables worldly achievement, but because it orients the human person toward ultimate fulfillment (D'Olimpio & De Ruyter, 2025). This teleological perspective is precisely what is often absent from modern discussions of educational success.

The second theme concerns the inseparability of knowledge, action, and moral-spiritual transformation. In al-Ghazālī's framework, the heart is not merely an emotional center but the locus of perception, discernment, and moral-spiritual becoming (Hariyanto et al., 2025). Thus, knowledge is not treated as detached cognition (Hasib & Khasanah, 2025). It is meaningful only when it transforms the self and directs it toward right orientation.

This is evident in al-Ghazālī's discussion of *mujāhadah*, in which he emphasizes that genuine guidance is inseparable from disciplined striving:

“لأن الدين هو المجاهدة، والمعرفة علامة الهداية كما قال سبحانه وتعالى: (وَالَّذِينَ جَاهَدُوا فِينَا لَنَهْدِيَنَّهُمْ سُبُلَنَا). ومن لم يجتهد حق اجتهاده لم يجوز أن يتحدث معه في معرفة حقيقة الروح. وأول أسس المجاهدة أن تعرف عسكر القلب؛ لأن الإنسان إذا لم يعرف العسكر لم يصح له الجهاد.”

Translation: “For religion is *mujāhadah*, and *ma'rifah* is a sign of guidance, as He, the Exalted, has said: ‘And those who strive for Us—We will surely guide them to Our ways.’ Whoever does not strive with the striving that is due cannot properly be spoken to about the true reality of the spirit. The first foundation of *mujāhadah* is to know the forces of the heart; for if a person does not know these forces, his striving cannot be sound.”

This passage indicates that true knowledge is inseparable from disciplined striving. Knowledge here functions not merely as cognition, but as guidance that directs action and shapes the soul (Ghazali et al., 2025).

The third theme shows that sa'ādah depends on the disciplined balance of three inner faculties: anger, desire, and knowledge (Arroisi & Hanifi, 2025).

He writes:

“تمام السعادة مبني على ثلاثة أشياء: قوة الغضب، قوة الشهوة، قوة العلم ... فإذا توسطت القوتان بإشارة قوة العلم دل على طريق الهداية”

Translation: “*Perfect happiness is built upon three things: the faculty of anger, the faculty of desire, and the faculty of knowledge. If the first two faculties are maintained in moderation under the guidance of the faculty of knowledge, this indicates the path of guidance.*”

This formulation shows that happiness is attained when anger and desire are moderated under the guidance of knowledge (van den Bekerom et al., 2025). In this framework, *quwwat al-‘ilm* serves as the regulating and normative faculty that enables the emergence of stable virtues (Yahya et al., 2025).

He then explains that when anger and desire are moderated under the guidance of knowledge, the path of guidance becomes possible (Arroisi & Hanifi, 2025). This is a crucial insight because it demonstrates that al-Ghazālī’s educational vision rests on a sophisticated moral psychology.

For contemporary Islamic education, this framework is especially valuable because it offers a richer model of moral formation than approaches that focus exclusively on behavior. Moral education, in al-Ghazālī’s sense, is not reducible to outward compliance (Hafidz Khusnadin & Shihab, 2025). It concerns the internal balance of the soul, from which stable virtues emerge. Wisdom, patience, courage, chastity, and contentment are not isolated moral lessons; they are the fruit of a rightly ordered inner life (Rahmawati & Ikhwan, 2025).

This also suggests that educational reform in Islamic institutions should move beyond moral exhortation alone. Learners must be helped to understand how anger, desire, thought, and intention operate within the self (Jenuri et al., 2025). In this sense, ethical education requires a pedagogy of self-knowledge.

The fourth theme identifies tazkiyah, riyāḍah, and guidance by a murabbī as formative mechanisms for attaining sa'ādah (Syafii & Azhari, 2025). Al-Ghazālī emphasizes that desire and anger are not to be abolished, but disciplined and redirected:

“وتخلص نفسك من قيد الشهوة والغضب، وتعلم أن هذه الصفات لأي شيء ركبت فيك؛ فما خلقها الله تعالى لتكون أسيرها، ولكن خلقها حتى تكون أسرك، وتسخرها للسفر الذي قدامك، وتجعل إحداها مركبك، والأخرى سلاحك؛ حتى تصيد بها سعادتك.”

Translation: “Free your soul from the shackles of desire and anger, and understand for what purpose these traits were placed within you. Allah Most High did not create them so that you would become their captive; rather, He created them so that they would become your captives, enabling you to harness them for the journey that lies ahead of you, making one of them your mount and the other your weapon—so that through them you may attain your happiness.”

Al-Ghazālī also describes the heart as a mirror that reflects higher realities when purified from worldly attachments:

“وتحتاج أن تعرف في ضمن ذلك أن القلب مثل المرآة، واللوح المحفوظ مثل المرآة أيضا؛ لأن فيه صورة كل موجود، وإذا قابلت المرآة بمرآة أخرى حلت صور ما في إحداها في الأخرى، وكذلك تظهر صور ما في اللوح المحفوظ إلى القلب إذا كان فارغا من شهوات الدنيا، فإن كان مشغولا بما كان عالم الملكوت محجوبا عنه.”

Translation: “Alongside this, you need to understand that the heart is like a mirror, and the Preserved Tablet is also like a mirror, for it contains the image of everything that exists. When one mirror is set before another, the image in one is impressed upon the other. In the same way, the images contained in the Preserved Tablet appear in the heart when it is empty of worldly desires. But if the heart is occupied by them, then the unseen realm—the angelic kingdom—is veiled from it.”

In addition, al-Ghazālī stresses that this path cannot be fully attained through verbal instruction alone:

“...تنفتح باليقظة لمن أخلص الجهاد والرياضة...”

Translation: “Through wakeful awareness, it opens to those who are sincere in spiritual striving and discipline.”

“...وهذه الطريق لا تفهم إلا بالتجربة، وإن لم تحصل بالدوق لم تحصل بالتعليم...”

Translation: “*This path cannot be understood except through experience; if it is not attained through direct taste, it cannot be attained through instruction.*”

These findings indicate that the attainment of *sa'ādah* requires self-purification, disciplined training, and experiential knowledge (Zahir & Qoronfleh, 2025). The text further highlights the importance of a guiding educator, as reflected in al-Ghazālī's analogy of iron that must be cleansed, polished, or reforged in order to become a mirror, and in his explicit call for the seeker to find a mature and knowledgeable *shaykh*. Accordingly, the educator appears not merely as an instructor, but as a *murabbī* who supports the learner's moral-spiritual formation (Iskandar et al., 2025).

Discussion

Sa'ādah as the Teleological Aim of Islamic Education

The first finding confirms that al-Ghazālī's *Kīmīyā' al-Sa'ādah* offers a coherent teleological conception of education in which *sa'ādah* serves as the highest aim of human and educational development (Hariadi et al., 2023). This is important because it departs from dominant contemporary educational models that define success primarily in terms of academic performance, employability, and economic productivity (Habiburrahman et al., 2025). This argument is consistent with recent debates in educational philosophy that place flourishing and well-being at the center of educational aims, while also showing that Islamic education requires a distinct normative foundation that is not reducible to secular accounts of flourishing (Curren et al., 2024; D'Olimpio & De Ruyter, 2025; Kristjánsson & VanderWeele, 2025; Martela, 2024). In al-Ghazālī's framework, happiness is not psychological satisfaction alone, but an enduring and normative condition rooted in the heart and fulfilled through *ma'rifat Allāh* (Iskandar, 2024). This interpretation strengthens the view that Islamic education is fundamentally oriented toward holistic human formation rather than merely instrumental achievement (Hidayat et al., 2025). It also extends earlier scholarship by demonstrating that *Kīmīyā' al-Sa'ādah* may be read not only as a spiritual or ethical text, but also as a systematic source of educational theory.

The Integration of 'Ilm, 'Amal, and Mujāhadah as Transformative Education

The second finding shows that the relationship between *'ilm*, *'amal*, and *mujāhadah* is central to al-Ghazālī's educational vision. Knowledge is not reduced to abstract cognition, and action is not treated as a secondary application of theory.

This finding is also supported by recent studies on Islamic education that emphasize the need to reconnect knowledge acquisition with spiritual formation, moral responsibility, and the development of the learner as a whole person (Abdalla, 2025; Jenuri et al., 2025; Sahin, 2018). Rather, the two are integrated within a transformative process of moral-spiritual striving. This finding supports classical Islamic conceptions of education in which knowing and doing are inseparable (Luthfiyyah, 2025). It also offers a more precise framework for contemporary discussions of Islamic moral and character education (Maulida et al., 2025). In this regard, the purpose of knowledge is not simply intellectual mastery or outward conformity, but the disciplined formation of the self in pursuit of *sa'ādah* (Sulisno, 2025). This gives the educational process a clear spiritual and ethical direction.

Inner Balance and the Formation of Virtue

The third finding highlights al-Ghazālī's triadic structure of the soul: anger, desire, and knowledge (Nurfitroh et al., 2025). This framework is pedagogically significant because it shows that education is not merely the transmission of content, but the cultivation of internal balance under the guidance of *quwwat al-'ilm*. When anger and desire are regulated proportionately, virtues such as wisdom, patience, courage, chastity, and contentment emerge as stable dispositions (Kim et al., 2024). When they are left unregulated, moral excess or deficiency follows (Lubis, 2025). This insight is highly relevant to contemporary Islamic education because it provides a more integrated moral psychology than many current educational frameworks, which often separate cognition from virtue formation (Jia & Wu, 2025). Al-Ghazālī's model suggests that ethical education should be aimed at the balance of the inner faculties, not merely at behavioral compliance (Syafii & Azhari, 2025).

Tazkiyah, Riyāḍah, and Experiential Spiritual Learning

The fourth finding underscores the importance of *tazkiyah* and *riyāḍah* as formative mechanisms in the attainment of *sa'ādah* (Ali & Syahidin, 2024). Al-Ghazālī's treatment of the heart as a mirror implies that the quality of spiritual knowledge depends on the condition of the inner self (Syafii & Azhari, 2025). Knowledge of higher realities is not available to a heart that remains dominated by worldly attachments (Aprilia et al., 2024). For this reason, purification is not peripheral to education, but a condition of meaningful knowing. Likewise, his insistence that this path cannot be understood through instruction alone but requires *tajribah* and *dhawq* points to an experiential epistemology (Aulia et al., 2025). This insight is especially significant in the context of contemporary education, where learning is often confined to content delivery and measurable

outcomes (Indriani et al., 2024). Al-Ghazālī's framework suggests that Islamic education must also cultivate reflection, self-restraint, inner attentiveness, and disciplined spiritual practice. In this way, learning becomes not only cognitive, but also transformative (Mutholingah et al., 2025).

The Role of the Murabbī in Contemporary Islamic Education

Another important implication of the findings concerns the role of the educator. The analysis shows that, in al-Ghazālī's thought, the path toward *sa'ādah* requires guidance because human beings possess *fiṭrah* that needs refinement, discipline, and direction (Amir et al., 2025). The analogy of iron becoming a mirror illustrates that innate potential must be cultivated through *tahdhīb* (Muzaki et al., 2025). Thus, the educator is not simply a transmitter of knowledge, but a *murabbī* assists learners in recognizing moral-spiritual obstacles, sustaining discipline, and progressing toward inner maturity (Andriya et al., 2025). This interpretation is consistent with broader Islamic educational traditions, yet the present study sharpens the point by showing that the *murabbī* emerges directly from al-Ghazālī's teleological conception of happiness (Putri Utami Istiqomah & Rifai, 2025). If the aim of education is readiness for *ma'rifat Allāh*, then the teacher must guide not only understanding, but also purification and moral formation (Amir et al., 2025). This has practical implications for teacher education in contemporary Islamic institutions, which should include ethical-spiritual competence, exemplarity, and the ability to guide reflective self-discipline (Lilik Noer Laili et al., 2025).

Theoretical and Practical Implications for Contemporary Islamic Education

Theoretically, this study contributes to Islamic educational philosophy by reconstructing *sa'ādah* as a central educational aim rooted in classical Islamic epistemology. The proposed framework integrates four elements: the telos of *ma'rifat Allāh*, the formative integration of 'ilm and 'amal, the disciplining of inner faculties through *mujāhadah* and *riyāḍah*, and the guiding role of the *murabbī*. This reconstruction shows that Islamic education cannot be reduced to knowledge transmission, character instruction, or institutional performance. It must be understood as a process of moral, spiritual, and intellectual formation directed toward the perfection of the heart. In this sense, the framework proposed in this study contributes to contemporary discussions of educational flourishing by offering an Islamic normative account of happiness that integrates the perfection of the heart, moral discipline, spiritual awareness, and intellectual responsibility (Curren et al., 2024; D'Olimpio & De Ruyter, 2025; Kristjánsson & VanderWeele, 2025; Martela, 2024). Practically, this framework suggests that Islamic educational

institutions should align curriculum design, pedagogy, teacher formation, and assessment with the cultivation of ethical-spiritual maturity. Curriculum should include heart-oriented aims, pedagogy should foster internalization and reflective discipline, teacher education should strengthen the role of the educator as *murabbī*, and assessment should consider moral-spiritual growth alongside academic achievement.

Limitations of the Study and Directions for Future Research

Despite its analytical contributions, this study has several limitations. First, although the review followed PRISMA 2020 procedures, the final synthesis remains conceptual and interpretive because it aims to reconstruct a normative educational framework rather than test an empirical intervention. Second, the primary textual analysis focuses on *Kīmiyā' al-Sa'ādah* and does not offer a systematic comparison with al-Ghazālī's other major works, such as *Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn*, *Mizān al-'Amal*, or *Ayyuhā al-Walad*. Third, the proposed framework of education for *sa'ādah* has not yet been implemented or evaluated in specific educational settings. Future research should examine how this framework can be operationalized in Islamic schools, pesantren, and higher education institutions. Comparative studies may also explore its relationship with contemporary theories of well-being, character education, and human flourishing.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that al-Ghazālī's *Kīmiyā' al-Sa'ādah* provides a coherent teleological foundation for Islamic education by positioning *sa'ādah* as its highest aim. Through a Systematic Literature Review combined with textual-hermeneutic analysis, the study identified four major themes: *sa'ādah* as the perfection of the heart through *ma'rifat Allāh*; the integration of *'ilm*, *'amal*, and *mujāhadah*; the moderation of anger, desire, and knowledge as the basis of virtue formation; and the role of *tazkiyah*, *riyāḍah*, and the *murabbī* in self-formation. These findings show that *sa'ādah* in al-Ghazālī's thought is not temporary emotional pleasure or material satisfaction, but an enduring normative condition rooted in moral balance, spiritual awareness, and knowledge of God. Accordingly, education is not merely the transmission of information, but a formative process that guides learners toward ethical maturity, spiritual refinement, and responsible knowing. The reconstructed framework offers a conceptually grounded basis for reorienting contemporary Islamic education toward holistic ethical, spiritual, and intellectual development. Future studies may test this framework in Islamic schools, pesantren, and higher

education institutions through empirical, curriculum-based, or comparative research.

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