

Al-Ghazali's Empirical–Rational–Spiritual Epistemology and Its Implications for Contemporary Islamic Religious Education

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to analyze Ghazali's integrative empirical–rational–spiritual epistemology and its relevance to contemporary Islamic Religious Education as well as to identify possible implications thereof. This study is literature-based and employs philosophical-hermeneutic approaches to engage with Ghazali's works and relevant academic writings. Results of this study indicate that Ghazali's epistemology is hierarchical and integrative in that empirical and rational knowledge is foundational and is perfected by ma'rifah (spiritual knowledge) as its zenith. The combination of the latter three dimensions (knowledge) directs the knowledge to the cultivation of ethics, divine consciousness, and wholeness of personality. This result demonstrates that the epistemic crisis in Islamic Religious Education is in dire need of integrative epistemology that and crisis. This study contributes to the body of knowledge by proposing a conceptual framework to inform holistically and transformational Islamic Education pedagogy and curriculum development.

Keywords: Al-Ghazali's Epistemology; Holistic Islamic Education; Integrative Epistemology; Islamic Religious Education; Spiritual Knowledge;



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INTRODUCTION

In the contemporary milieu, Islam-based schooling is being rationalized mainly within the framework of a rationally instrumental paradigm, resulting in an epistemological crisis. Education, as the formation of the whole person, is being reframed to a scoreable outcome in the acquisition of knowledge and skills, and these reframing disregards the ethical and the spiritual (Ahida, 2022). Because of the predominance of Western empiricism and rationalism, the definition of 'truth' is relegated to what is verifiable and logically defensible, without which the spiritual is a non-issue. Renaldi (2025) mentions that such positivistic epistemology discounts as educated a person who relies on intuition, a position contrary to that of al-Ghazali, who argues that in knowledge, spiritual intuition and revelation are a sine qua non. This is the reason that in religious education, information transfer is predominant (Ghazzālī, 1937), to

what (Subandi et al., 2024) term the 'dehumanization of education, where the person is stripped of being a thinking being, a valued rational entity.

This crisis can be seen in the lack of knowledge, ethics, and spirituality in PAI (Islamic Education). The influence of the empirical-rational paradigm has shifted the purpose of education from moral formation to technical efficiency-setting the tone to Cartesian rationalism and Comtean positivism (Ahida, 2022). The empirical absolute, disregarding the human being, spirit, and moral, has been rejected by Western and Muslim scholars such as Kant, Husserl, and al-Ghazali. Al-Ghazali argued that reason is important but must be guided to the truth by divine education (*ta'lim rabbānī*) (Ghazzālī et al., 1927) (Hasib & Khasanah, 2025)

As a response, Al -Ghazali suggested an integrative epistemology, which included empirical, rational, and spiritual knowledge within a hierarchy that is oriented towards *ma'rifah*-a divine knowledge that goes beyond mere cognition (Palem et al., 2025). Contemporary studies recognize the relevance of the model. Subandi et al. (2024) labeled it as a cure to the 'spiritual heart' of knowledge devoid of the divine. Addzaky et al., (2025) have applied it within Islamic STEM education by contextualizing revelation as the normative guidance, and Asri et al. (2025) have connected it to the design of a curriculum based on *maqāsid al-Qur'ān*.

The connection between intellect, ethics, and spirituality is integrated within the works of al-Ghazali(Ghazzālī, 1937). In the text of *Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn*, the intellect is seen as the "physician of the soul...that directs and balances the moral attributes and takes the heart to divine truth"(Zolondek, 2023) (Vasalou, 2022); (Wahab, 2025). Harmonizing knowledge and experience lead to happiness (*sa'ādah*), and knowledge furthers ethical principles and may draw one closer to the Creator (Soleh, 2022)

Several Western philosophers and several Muslim thinkers have articulated critiques of positivism and its self-professed universal applicability. Vasalou (2022) reminds us that Kant and Husserl dismiss pure empiricism since it lacks recognition of consciousness, intentionality, and morality. Within the Islamic context, the importance of al-Ghazali's rejection of rationalistic absolutism is that the intellect is seen as a means to the truth, but not as the ultimate source of truth, which must conform to divine revelation (*ta'lim rabbānī*) (Hasib & Khasanah, 2025). These critiques indicate a need for a pedagogy conceptually nested in integrated epistemology that brings together ethics, reason, and the spiritual.

This is precisely the kind of synthesis that al -Ghazali provides, firstly in the integration of empirical sensory, rational, and spiritual knowledge, and secondly in his hierarchical ordering of knowledge toward *ma'rifah*, which is divine knowledge that lies beyond conceptual knowledge (Palem et al., 2025). Both rational and empirical inquiries, while important, must be derived through a perfected spiritual intuition to avoid reductionism. This rational-empirical-spiritual framework is now empirically evidenced, which explains Subandi et al. (2024, pp. 219-220) referring to al-Ghazali's epistemology as a solution to the "spiritual heart" of knowledge that is disconnected from the Divine, and Addzaky et al. (2025)

incorporating revelation into the Islamic STEM curricula, and Asri et al. (2025) providing a strong case for *maqāṣid al-Qur'ān* as the foundational source of *tauhid*-based education.

Al-Ghazali considers knowledge ethically blended and integrated with spirituality and rationality. In *Ihyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn*, reason is the "physician of the soul" and is meant to lead toward moral and spiritual equilibrium through the *tazkiyat al-nafs* (Zolondek, 2023). For al-Ghazali, happiness (*sa'ādah*) is seen to occur due to equilibrium, as it is only achieved through rational and spiritual harmony and the restoration of knowledge toward the attainment of virtue and proximity to God (Soleh, 2022).

In discussions such as the integration of religion and science, Nasr, Al-Attas, and Barbour primarily focus on the operationalization of al-Ghazali's empirical-rational-spiritual quintessence within Islamic education. These studies of *tasawuf*, ethics, *adab*, and *niyyah*, including those of Khasawneh et al. (2022) and Attaran (2015), offer very helpful insights but remain far from reconstructing al-Ghazali's epistemology as a complete conceptual framework.

Thus, this research aims to systematically analyze al-Ghazali's framework of epistemology, examine its significance, and postulate the possibilities of such an integrated structure being relevant in modern Islamic education. Using library research along with philosophical-hermeneutics, the study aims to interpret al-Ghazali's major works to integrate a paradigm of knowledge and spirituality aimed at producing a person of knowledge, virtue, and spirituality.

METHOD

This research employs qualitative library research methodology based on philosophy-hermeneutics. This approach is due to the conceptual-philosophical aspect of the study's object, Ghazali's epistemology and its impact on present Religious Education (PAI). Epistemology, especially within the classical Islamic framework, requires a methodology that goes beyond surface reading to one that appreciates and interprets deeper meanings, nested structures, and standard principles. The hermeneutical philosophy of being allows for a dialogical interpretation of classical texts and contemporary pedagogical theory to reposition Ghazali's thinking as an epistemological paradigm that is relevant (Hasib & Khasanah, 2025); (Addzaky et al., 2025).

The interpretive act establishes a dialectical relationship between the author's horizon and that of the researcher, which is the basis for the understanding of the text. In the works of al-Ghazali, this configuration is articulated in the interplay of reason, revelation, and the spiritual intuition that forms the triad, which he calls *ta'lim rabbānī*-an educational model that is ethically and spiritually transformative. This method, according to Vasalou (2022), aims to reinstate the Sufic and ethical aspects that have been overlooked in the educational systems based on Positive philosophy. Therefore, the methodology of this study is descriptive-analytical; even though it is also reflective-critical, it is directed at reconstructing the epistemology of Islamic education.

Primary and secondary sources provide the main types of information pertinent to this study. The foundational works of al-Ghazali comprise his three most important texts that provide a holistic account of his epistemic vision. They are *Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn*, *Mi'yar al-'Ilm*, and *al-Munqidh min al-Ḍalāl*. Each exemplifies a synergistic epistemic dimension with the others. *Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn* incorporates the integration of knowledge with ethics and spirituality, *Mi'yar al-'Ilm* delineates the rational-logical structure of knowledge, and *al-Munqidh min al-Ḍalāl* narrates his odyssey of the intellect from doubt to enlightenment. These works are the building blocks of the empirical-rational-spiritual structure of al-Ghazali's Epistemology.

Contemporary literature focusing on the integration of knowledge and religion and Islamic educational epistemology forms the secondary sources. These works pertain to the critiques of modern science and spirituality (Nasr, 1996), Islamization of knowledge and *adab* Al-Attas (1995), modern epistemology (Sardar, 2010), and science and religion (Barbour, 2000). Recent peer-reviewed studies on al-Ghazali and Islamic education, like Khasawneh et al. (2022) and Palem et al. (2025) are also major sources. The secondary literature provides a diachronic and comparative framework embedding al-Ghazali's thought within contemporary pedagogy.

The collection of data concerns fundamental ideas, structures of arguments, and epistemological assumptions, requiring close reading of texts. This involves the examination of texts that include, but are not limited to, ḥiss (sense perception), 'aql (intellect), *kashf* (spiritual intuition), *ma'rifah* (knowledge), *tazkiyat al-nafs* (purification of the soul), and *waḥdat al-'ulūm* (unity of sciences). This is done with full consideration of the texts' internal context and al-Ghazali's intellectual and historical context. This is the same method that Renaldi (2025) utilizes in describing al-Ghazali's transformation of epistemology within the context of al-Ghazali's thought.

In addition to conceptual identification, contextual interpretation places al-Ghazali's thought within the concerns of grounded contextual epistemology, primarily the concern with the empirical-rational paradigm of modern educational systems and its implications for PAI. This research does not seek to reproduce classical ideas but excavates them to understand their normative and practical implications. This method has indeed proven effective in many other studies Addzaky et al. (2025) that utilized al-Ghazali's epistemology to develop curricula.

The data gathered will be analyzed in two different stages; the first will be conceptual, and the second will be comparative. Al-Ghazali's epistemology will first be dissected during the conceptual stage. This involves clarifying the logical and hierarchical structures of that epistemology, which will consist of rational, empirical, and spiritual elements. This ensures that there will be no one-sided or oversimplified interpretations, and it will also help show the unifying and ethical dimensions of the epistemology in question (Vasalou, 2022).

Comparative studies bridge al-Ghazali's archetypal assumptions and contemporary educational models. His work is contrasted with the integration theories of Nasr, Al-Attas, Sardar, and Barbour, not to establish equivalence, but to elucidate the points of al-Ghazali's educational epistemology contribution. This separation or disaggregation is what Laude

(2024) and Sibawaihi (2022) cited, attending to the contextualization of classical epistemology with respect to the transcendent and theological aspects.

In the final stage, the integration of contemporary educational theories and practices with al-Ghazali's epistemological principles is achieved. This integration results in a framework that embodies how al-Ghazali's empirical-rational-spiritual epistemology advances a holistic model of PAI comprising the cognitive, affective, and spiritual dimensions. At this stage, the findings from al-Ghazali's texts and modern educational theories, particularly on *adab*, *niyyah*, and character formation (Attaran 2015); (Khasawneh et al., 2022) are merged. This integration attempts to provide a foundational theory to assess the viability and usefulness of al-Ghazali's epistemology in the modern Islamic educational system. To conclude, the methodology adopted showcases both the philosophical maturity and the applicable educational significance of the research. Reconciling library research with philosophical/hermeneutical and conceptual/comparative methods, the research seeks to construct al-Ghazali's thought on epistemology as a paradigm within a given context, and as one that is constantly evolving. This positions al-Ghazali's model as a valuable asset to contemporary educational discourse on the interdependence and synergy of knowledge, ethics, and spirituality. This research carries al-Ghazali's educational paradigm into contemporary classrooms and thus contributes to the global discourse.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

RESULTS

The Structure of Al-Ghazali's Epistemology

Upon philosophically analyzing al-Ghazali's most decisive works: *Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn*, *Mi'yār al-'Ilm*, and *al-Munqidh min al-Ḍalāl*, an integration of an epistemological system can be discovered. Al-Ghazali viewed knowledge not as a single track but as a multi-dimensional entity that incorporated the empirical, the rational, and the spiritual. Knowledge starts from the sensory level, then ascends through rational analysis, and in the end, transcends to the spiritual level. According to Chusyairi (2024), al-Ghazali's integrative and value-based educational philosophy remains highly relevant in the twenty-first century, offering a moral and spiritual framework for addressing the ethical crises of modern knowledge systems. This holistic epistemology—anchored in the balance of reason and spirituality—resonates with contemporary debates on the moral foundations of emerging technologies and education. Also, Mahmudulhassan et al. (2025) reinforce its usefulness in international education concerning multi-dimensional ethics and multicultural education, affirming that the spiritual is international pedagogy. Therefore, using al-Ghazali's model, Islamic education can also produce an *insān kāmil*, a complete human with a balanced mind, character, and faith, which is applicable in contemporary multi-religious settings.

Empirical knowledge forms the basic foundational level of al-Ghazali's epistemology. Through the faculties of the senses, humans have the ability to perceive the external world and form factual knowledge about it. However, al-Ghazali viewed this level as the most superficial level, and the mind grasps only the external form. Subandi et al. (2024) explain that empiricism

devoid of reason and spirit is liable to reduce reality to mere observation devoid of moral substance.

The second layer of knowledge is rational. The intellect (aql) organizes and structures sensory data to distinguish causality and build logical coherence. Al-Ghazali emphasized reason's role in avoiding errors of intellect and directing ethical reasoning in *Mi'yār al-'Ilm*. In this sense, rational knowledge joins together empirical observation and moral reasoning. However, al-Ghazali is also clear about the danger of inflated reason (Ghazzālī et al., 1927). Renaldi (2025) elucidates that al-Ghazali's criticism of rationalism is due to the fact that it does not answer fundamental questions of meaning and truth. At the top of this hierarchy of knowledge is the spiritual knowledge that is accessed through *kashf* (unveiling) and *ma'rifah* (agnosis). Intuitive knowledge is the only kind of knowledge that is also acquired through *tazkiyat al-nafs* (the purification of the heart) and is perfect, surpassing reason (Ghazzālī et al., 1939). For al-Ghazali, this means that *ma'rifah* is not in opposition to rationality, but rather completes it in the sense that it directs knowledge toward the ethical and the transcendent. Subandi et al. (2024) characterize this as the remedy for the "epistemic pathology" in modern knowledge, i.e., knowledge that is disconnected from the moral guidance of the soul.

This structured approach also fits al-Ghazali's classification of certainty into *'ilm al-yaqīn* (conceptual knowledge), *'ayn al-yaqīn* (direct perception), and *ḥaqq al-yaqīn* (realized truth). Based on the sequence, it appears that rational knowledge eventually transforms into insight and culminates in divine light (Renaldi, 2025). According to Laude (2024), this model presents non-dual theism (a form of monotheism that sees God as a 'unity' and incorporates empirical and transcendental without dismissal of either).

The Role of Knowledge and Its Epistemological Consequences

The true purpose of knowledge in al-Ghazali's epistemology is not the pursuit of knowledge itself but the integration of self through disciplines that transform and elevate one morally closer to the divine. Knowledge serves as a medium of moral refinement rather than as a means of domination, which is the prevailing view in contemporary epistemology (Ghazzālī, 1937). Ahida (2022) postulates that contemporary epistemology encourages mechanistic and value-void pedagogy. This reductionist approach is also evident in Nakissa (2020) who connects it to the crisis of meaning in our contemporary age. Absent spiritual insight (*dzauq*), human reasoning is unable to recognize the essence of the subject matter. This outlook leads to a technocratic approach to education that is morally bankrupt, which is Renaldi (2025) view. Al-Ghazali's solution to this problem is to declare divine guidance as the ultimate value, upon which rational and empirical knowledge should be founded (Ghazzālī et al., 1927).

The social dimensions of al-Ghazali's emancipatory epistemology also impact his social thinking. Mansour (2022) analyzes this phenomenon by capturing Zaynab al-Ghazali's spiritual activism where, in his view, liberation from social and patriarchal domination is prompted by transcendental awareness. Hence, spiritual epistemology is not passive but

active and cultivates a quest for justice and human dignity. This is also a critical contribution of this study. Al-Ghazali's critique of the idolization of rationality is a key focus. Reason, unlike that of al-Ghazali, was limited for Western philosophers like Kant and Husserl as it was incapable of grasping consciousness and moral value Vasalou (2022). Al-Ghazali, however, contended that rationality is only legitimate if it functions in the shadow of divine guidance (*ta'lim rabbānī*) (Hasib & Khasanah, 2025). According to Wahab (2025), both Kant and al-Ghazali abolish rationality without morality, but al-Ghazali surpasses Kant by positioning spirituality as the apex of true rationality. The study further concludes that al-Ghazali's epistemology merges the empirical, rational, and spiritual. Knowledge, in this manner, is to be used not merely to comprehend reality but to direct human life toward the good and the transcendent. This epistemology of al-Ghazali serves as a corrective paradigm against modern reductive epistemology, re-establishing the oneness of intellect, ethics, and spirituality as the essence of Islamic education.

The Importance of Al-Ghazali's Epistemology to Islamic Education

There exists a notable lack of harmony between rationality and spirituality in contemporary Islamic education. The excessive focus on the cognitive-instrumental aspect of education has limited the teaching of religion to the imparting of concepts and legalities, without any attention to inner transformation and spiritual cultivation. In this regard, Al-Ghazali's epistemology provides a conceptual and relevant foundation to restore the connection between knowledge, ethics, and spirituality in Islamic education. Such epistemology may be operationalized in education through knowledge, emotion, and spirit-focused holistic and integrated curricula. The teacher, in this paradigm, does not serve merely as a teacher but as a murabbi, a guide toward the refinement of the heart (Khasawneh et al., 2022). Values such as tauhid, ethics, and spirituality, as well as their intricacies, can indeed be structured into the curricula, even during the foundational stages of education (Asri et al., 2025). In the same spirit, Jenuri et al. (2025) argue that to achieve the desired outcome of an individual who possesses both an intact intellect and spirituality, curriculum development ought to be centered on al-Ghazali's understanding of a human being as an integration of rationality, heart, and spirit.

Integrating spiritual epistemology in Islamic education has garnered empirical support (Purwanto et al., 2023). For instance, the incorporation of al-Ghazali's tasawuf in higher education encourages the development of moderation, empathy, and a well-rounded moral character. Furthermore, Attaran (2015) contended that divinely oriented moral development produced a more stable set of virtues than secular character education did. Additionally, spiritual epistemology in STEM Addzaky et al. (2025) revealed heightened ethical awareness and intrinsic motivation. To an extent, these empirical findings validate the applicability of al-Ghazali's epistemology in PAI (Islamic education) and show its practicality.

Integrating the Findings

This study demonstrates that al-Ghazali's epistemology is hierarchical and integrative (i.e., empirical, rational, and spiritual). It avoids the mistake of separating science from religion and focuses on integrating the two. Within this framework, knowledge is more than just an intellectual attainment as it facilitates moral perfection and nearness to the Divine. An explication of these findings is captured in a conceptual table and a diagram that outlines al-Ghazali's epistemology as a hierarchy compared to the modern worldview that is epistemologically fragmented.

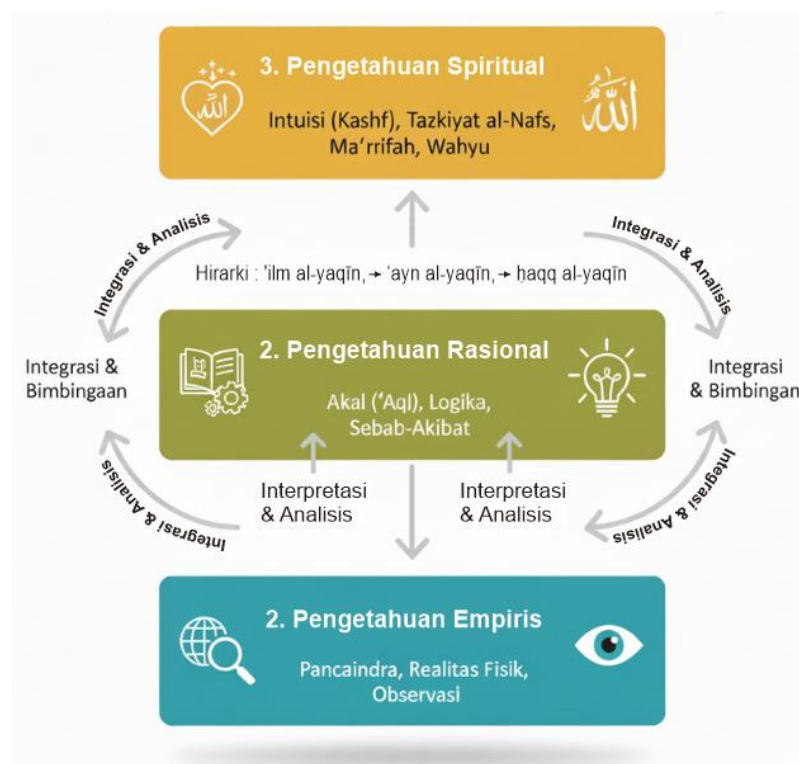


Figure 1. The Hierarchical Structure of Al-Ghazali's Epistemology: The Integration of Empirical, Rational, and Spiritual Knowledge.

The diagram characterized Al-Ghazali's methodology in ascending cognitive achievement which he referred to as an interrelated sequencing of activities in interpreting, analyzing and integrating. At the base level of the hierarchy, knowledge is obtained through the five senses and physical world observations. The data captured from an observation requires an interpretation and analysis from the rational to keep the analysis from being superficial. The next level in the hierarchy is the rational knowledge level. At this level, the investigator rationally interprets the empirical observations captured and identifies the interrelated causal dependencies. However, the intellect is limited in its scope of understanding to the essence of the truth. The intellectual process requires the integration of spiritual elements to realize the essence of the truth. The prose of spiritual knowledge is intuitive and is characterized by the purification of the soul and, within the Islamic tradition, through revelation. At this stage the interpretation of the data transcends to an inner imploded

understanding. The spiritual knowledge supervises and integrates the intellect with the two other hierarchal levels of knowledge to realize the integration as an functional unit to reach the pinnacle of knowledge which is referred to as *'ilm al-yaqīn*, *'ayn al-yaqīn* and, to complete, *haqq al-yaqīn*. Hence the complete cycle of the process is as a result of the dynamic empirically driven rational process and intellectually culminating in an integrated illumination of the illuminating spiritual knowledge.

Table 1. Comparison between Modern Epistemology and Al-Ghazali's Epistemology in Education.

Comparative Aspect	Modern Epistemology	al-Ghazali's Epistemology
Source of Knowledge	Empirical and rational as the primary sources of knowledge	Empirical, rational, and spiritual (revelation, <i>kashf/ma'rifah</i>) as an integrated unity
Epistemological Structure	Non-hierarchical or fragmented; often separated between science and values	Hierarchical and integrative: empirical → rational → spiritual
Role of Reason (<i>'Aql</i>)	Reason is autonomous and often absolutized	Reason is important but limited; it must be guided by revelation and spirituality
Position of Spirituality	Generally marginalized or considered subjective	Constitutes the peak of knowledge and the perfection of reason
Purpose of Knowledge	Mastery of reality, efficiency, and technological advancement	Moral perfection (<i>akhlāq</i>) and closeness to God
Educational Orientation	Cognitive-instrumental and technocratic	Humanistic-transcendental and transformative
Role of the Teacher	Instructor and transmitter of knowledge	<i>Murabbī</i> and spiritual-moral mentor
Expected Outcome	Technically competent individual	Learned, ethical, and spiritually conscious individual
Curricular Implications	Focus on academic achievement and skills	Integration of cognitive, affective, and spiritual dimensions
Paradigmatic Risks	Reductionism, loss of meaning, and value-neutrality	Relatively minimal, as it is ethically and transcendently oriented

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study demonstrate that Al-Ghazali's epistemology constitutes an integrative and hierarchical structure that unifies empirical, rational, and spiritual dimensions of knowledge. This integrative model challenges the fragmentation of modern epistemology, particularly within contemporary Islamic Religious Education, where cognitive-instrumental approaches often dominate educational practices. The discussion section therefore elaborates how Al-Ghazali's epistemological framework contributes not only to philosophical discourse but also to the reconstruction of Islamic educational theory, pedagogy, curriculum, and character formation.

Unlike modern secular epistemology that frequently separates reason from ethics and spirituality, Al-Ghazali positions knowledge within a transcendental and moral orientation aimed at the cultivation of *insān kāmil*. In this regard, the following discussion systematically examines the empirical, rational, and spiritual dimensions of Al-Ghazali's epistemology and explores their implications for contemporary Islamic education in relation to learning methodology, curriculum development, teacher-student relations, and character education.

The Basic Concept of Integrative Epistemology of Al-Ghazali

Al-Ghazali's Integrative Epistemology is a framework of knowing that combines the empirical, the rational, and the spiritual in a hierarchical unity. The three do not stand in parallel but reinforce each other. The conceptualization of *wahdat al-'ulūm* is a rejection of the dichotomy of the modernist science-religion and the avoidance of a spiritual reductionism that proxy the rational and the empirical (Palem et al., 2025). Thus, this epistemology provides a comprehensive conceptual foundation for the advancement of knowledge and education.

The Empirical Layer in the Pursuit of Knowledge.

The empirical layer is in the first position because the sense experience is the entrance of a human being to reality. By way of observation and experience, an individual is able to acquire factual data to be the foundation of knowledge. In Islamic Education (IE), the empirical dimension facilitates students to comprehend the phenomenon of religion and the socio-religious practices in a concrete way. However, Al-Ghazali emphasizes the limits of empiricism—that the senses are of relative and cannot penetrate the deepest, the meaning (Ahida, 2022). In this sense, he criticized modern education for being too empirically driven, thus mechanistic with the absence of ethical spirit. Thus, the empiricism in IE must be guided by rationality and spirituality so that it is not shallow.

Rational Layer: The Function of the Mind as Scientific Reasoning

The mind (*'aql*) serves to process empirical data and make it meaningful and coherent. In Al-Ghazali's epistemology, the mind is a divine gift to distinguish truth from error and to grasp the moral implications of knowledge. Wahab (2025) asserts that Ghazali's rationality is normative and ethical in nature, as it is directed by revelation. In PAI, the rational functions to cultivate critical, reflective, and dialogical thinking, encouraging students to grasp the wisdom and purpose of the law and to avoid blind imitation and narrow-minded fanaticism.

The Spiritual Layer (Ma'rifah) as the Apex of Knowledge

The spiritual layer represents the apex of Al-Ghazali's epistemology and the main point of differentiation from modern epistemology. Spiritual knowledge (*ma'rifah*) is attained through *kashf* and *tazkiyat al-nafs*, the purification of the soul, wherein the soul is able to grasp divine truths. This is knowledge that does not negate the use of the mind, yet goes beyond discursive rationality (Ghazzālī et al., 1939). Vasalou (2022) describes true knowledge as therapeutic, it heals the mind of intellectual arrogance and also the soul of its illnesses. In PAI,

the spiritual dimension is the essence of education, as it orients the learning process toward divine consciousness; otherwise, religious education runs the risk of becoming formalistic and superficial.

The Hierarchical and Synergistic Relation Amongst the Dimensions

The three tiers of epistemology—empiricism, rationalism, and spirituality—function hierarchically and synergistically as follows. The empirical component offers data while the rational one provides interpretation while the spiritual one provides an orientation of value. Such relations construct an equilibrium among the objectivity of the knowledge, ethical reflection, and the transcendental orientation. Renaldi (2025) pinpoints the holistic and integrative nature of Al-Ghazali's epistemology as opposed to the fragmentary nature of modern epistemology. This model in education, in particular, prevents unilateral dominance of one dimension in learning in order to avert getting trapped in dry rationalism or unreasoned spiritualism.

Al-Ghazali's Empiricism and Its Implications on PAI

In the PAI context, Al-Ghazali's empiricism is implemented as experiential learning. Through social observation, religious practice, and community engagement, the teachings of the religion can be interconnected with concrete realities. The learners are able to recognize that the principles of Islam are not normatively theoretical but are actually applicable. However, the empirically driven experiences need to be guided by rational and spiritual reflection in order for it to not be superficial.

Al-Ghazali's Rationalism and Its Implications on PAI

With Al-Ghazali, rationalism places the faculty of reason as a necessary instrument of understanding revelation and the realities. The use of an argumentative (*burhānī*) model and scientific dialogue in teaching is very much relevant to fostering reflective, open-minded, and critical thinking among learners. Rationality is supposed to be used in order to explore the wisdom of the text and not to negate it. In line with Al-Ghazali's criticism of rationality without ethics, this approach cultivates a healthy social tolerance and accountability, and prevents a narrow literalism in religious practices.

Al-Ghazali's Spirituality and Its Relevance for PAI

From Al-Ghazali's perspective, the core of Islamic education is spirituality. The incorporation of worship, self-reflection, and ethical practices develops spiritual intelligence as the foundation of moral awareness. Learners become aware that every action has ethical and spiritual consequences. Purwanto et al. (2023) proved that the integration of tasawuf values in Islamic education improves moderation in religion and social empathy. Al-Ghazali's spirituality is relevant in responding to the crisis of morals and social polarization in the contemporary world.

The Integration of Epistemology in PAI Learning

The integration of empirical, rational, and spiritual dimensions results in a transformative model of learning: from 'knowledge about religion' to 'experiencing religion' which shapes attitudes, values, and inner consciousness. Learning becomes a place for reflection and character building. Therefore, PAI serves as a means of internalizing values and not merely transmitting information, while striking a balance between the scientific, the reflective, and the spiritual.

The Implications for the Development of PAI Curriculum

These findings highlight the need for PAI to have a curriculum that is integrated with the triad of knowledge, faith, and action. Curriculum should not only have a cognitive dimension, but also an affective and moral dimension. Khasawneh et al. (2022) emphasizes that the evaluation of Islamic education in the contemporary world should ideally reflect behavioral change and the enhancement of spiritual awareness. With Al-Ghazali's epistemology, the PAI curriculum is aimed to shape students who are intellectually mature and emotionally balanced, with a strong spiritual foundation. This is the essence of education in Islam in the contemporary era.

Relevance for Islamic Character Education

Al-Ghazali posits an epistemology wherein the understanding of a phenomenon incorporates the empirical, the rational, and the spiritual dimensions and suggests that the critical dimension of any Islamic education is the inclusion of the empirical, rational, and spiritual factors. Knowledge construction that incorporates the experiential element of social life is essential in overcoming the affective obstacles required to engage in the values of justice, empathy, and responsibility. Enhancing reflective, rational knowledge develops intellectual ethics that avert dogmatism and fanaticism. The character, however, has a transcendent orientation; the spiritual dimension motivates divine morality with a consciousness of God's presence. The integration of these three levels transforms Islamic character education from mere behavioral habituation into holistic moral consciousness (Purwanto et al., 2023); (Wahab, 2025).

***Insān Kāmil* as a Holistic Personality**

The integration of empirical-rational-spiritual epistemology leads to the formation of *insān kāmil*-a balanced individual of intellect, morality, and spirituality. For Al-Ghazali, knowledge without purification of the soul remains incomplete. The ideal of *insān kāmil* is relevant to modern Islamic education, which often fragments intellect and morality. PAI thus aims to cultivate graduates who are academically capable, ethically sound, and spiritually aware, embodying harmony between knowledge and virtue.

Redefining the Objectives of Islamic Education

Al-Ghazali's epistemology calls for shifting Islamic education from mere knowledge transmission to *ta'dīb* (moral cultivation) and *tazkiyah* (self-purification). Education is an

existential transformation oriented toward God. Success, therefore, is not only cognitive achievement but also moral and spiritual growth. This redefinition aligns with critiques of modern utilitarian education that has lost ethical and spiritual purpose (Ahida, 2022); (Subandi et al., 2024). True education civilizes the self rather than merely producing skilled labor.

Al-Ghazali's Critique of Modern Epistemology

Al-Ghazali criticized the modern exaltation of positivism and autonomous rationality devoid of divine guidance. Rationality detached from revelation, he argued, breeds intellectual arrogance and fragmented knowledge—a problem still evident today in value-neutral education. Hasib & Khasanah (2025) affirm that the crisis in modern education lies not in method but in epistemic orientation. Hence, Al-Ghazali's critique does not reject reason but restores it to its ethical and theocentric purpose.

Integrative Epistemology as a Solution to the Crisis of Modern Education

An integrative empirical-rational-spiritual paradigm counters the dehumanization in modern education. Learning becomes a way to reach human wholeness instead of just obtaining efficiency when combined with spirituality. Attaran (2015) speaks of the need for the divine in moral education, whereas Renaldi (2025) states that irrationality needs to be complemented with spirituality. Through such integration, Islamic education provides a space for value formation and meaning amid modern materialism.

A Holistic Approach to Learning Methodology

We would ideally be able to experience learning as outlined in Al-Ghazali's epistemology within all three aforementioned dimensions at once. Education must intersperse the analysis of texts with features of self-reflection (*muhāsabah*), as well as contemplation (*tadabbur*), and together with the application of such values within the social sphere. Learning thus becomes an existential experience that unites knowledge and moral formation. PAI should not end at normative comprehension but promote deep internalization of ethical and spiritual values.

Teacher-Student Relationship in Epistemological Perspective

In Al-Ghazali's view, the teacher-student relationship is both ethical and spiritual. The teacher (*murabbi*) serves not merely as an instructor but as a moral exemplar and spiritual mentor. Education transforms from the transfer of knowledge to the transmission of wisdom. Khasawneh et al. (2022) stress that a teacher's authority stems from moral integrity and spiritual depth rather than academic rank alone.

The Role of Ethics in the Validity of Knowledge

Muslim scholars consider the ethics of knowledge an integral factor as well as the logical and empirical aspects. Knowledge that brings no goodness to a person is an epistemic illusion. Al-Ghazali held that knowledge is one that brings one nearer to God and serves as a

means of character polishing. This was a criticism of the modern split of the mind and the moral, and with ethics as an epistemic criterion, it restored virtue in knowledge.

Relevance of Al-Ghazali to Global Education

In a globalized, competitive, and materialistic educational landscape, Al-Ghazali's integrated epistemology offers a humanistic alternative grounded in universal values. Many secular contexts can certainly benefit from the ethical and spiritual dimensions which Al-Ghazali's thought can contribute. It assists with global educational discourse and enriches it. As quoted by Jenuri et al. (2025), Al-Ghazali's thought transcends his time and is rooted in universal pedagogy.

Challenges of Implementation in Contemporary PAI

Applying integrative epistemology in Islamic education faces challenges such as dualistic systems, secular dominance, and outcome-centered orientations. Addressing these requires repositioning Islamic epistemology within national curricula and pedagogy. Without paradigm reform, epistemological integration risks remaining theoretical with limited practical impact.

Novelty of the Research

This study's novelty lies in formulating the Integrative Empirical-Rational-Spiritual Epistemology of Al-Ghazali as an operational framework for Islamic education reform. Unlike prior descriptive or normative studies, it synthesizes classical epistemology with modern educational needs, offering a theoretical foundation for curriculum, pedagogy, and character education that harmonizes faith, reason, and experience in a globalized age.

CONCLUSION

This study confirmed that Al-Ghazali's epistemology proposes a model of knowledge that is hierarchically and integratively structured through the synthesis of the empirical, rational, and spiritual. This study was able to demonstrate that, through a philosophical analysis of Al-Ghazali's major works, the three sources of knowledge are not dichotomous but are instead synergistic in their contributions to the understanding of the ontology and purpose of knowledge. The empirical knowledge is the basis of factual acquaintance, the rational aspect is the ethical consideration, and the spiritual insight is the apex that gives knowledge a moral direction and is oriented toward the proximity of the Divine.

The findings of this study bear considerable significance for what has, up to this point, been a thoroughly cognitively-instrumentally dominated Religious Education. Al-Ghazali's Integrative Epistemology presents a conceptual framework that counters this one-dimensional orientation and advocates for interdisciplinary and holistic human development by striking a balance between the cognitive, spiritual, and moral. Education is framed as an act of *ta'dīb* and *tazkiyah* that encompasses the idea of knowledge as a mere transitive element.

The major contribution of this study lies in developing an epistemological model that bridges Classical Islamic scholarship and the demands of modern education; thus, enriching the field of Islamic educational epistemology and its associated empirical research, especially the application of Al-Ghazali's epistemology in the curriculum, pedagogy, and policy of Islamic Education in different educational institutions.

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