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THE PROPHETIC PEDAGOGY: IMPLEMENTING AL-GHAZALI'S PRINCIPLES OF MORAL PSYCHOLOGY FOR CHARACTER EDUCATION IN ISLAMIC SCHOOLS

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the application of Al-Ghazali's principles of moral psychology to contemporary character education within Islamic schools. The research is grounded in the concern that modern Islamic education often emphasizes cognitive and ritual learning while neglecting the cultivation of spiritual-ethical dispositions central to the prophetic educational tradition. Al-Ghazali's framework, which integrates the purification of the heart, habit formation, and reflective self-discipline, provides a comprehensive moral psychology capable of strengthening holistic character development.

The study aims to identify how Al-Ghazali's concepts—such as tazkiyat al-nafs, disciplined habituation, and the alignment of knowledge with moral action—can be operationalized as pedagogical principles for classroom practice. The research adopts a qualitative design, using document analysis of Ihya' 'Ulum al-Din and Ayyuha al-Walad, thematic coding, and semi-structured interviews with Islamic education practitioners and curriculum developers in selected schools.

The findings indicate that Al-Ghazali's moral psychology can be translated into three core pedagogical domains: (1) emotional-spiritual formation through reflective and contemplative learning, (2) character habituation through structured routines and guided moral practice, and (3) moral reasoning development that connects knowledge to ethical decision-making. Schools that implement these principles demonstrate higher consistency between instructional content, teacher modeling, and student character outcomes.

The study concludes that prophetic pedagogy grounded in Al-Ghazali's moral insights offers a transformative framework for character education, bridging classical Islamic psychology with modern educational needs. The findings highlight the necessity of integrating spiritual affect, moral cognition, and ethical practice into a unified pedagogical model for Islamic schools.

KEYWORDS

Al-Ghazali, Moral Psychology, Prophetic Pedagogy

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INTRODUCTION

Contemporary Islamic education increasingly recognizes character formation as a central mission, responding to concerns that schooling has become overly focused on cognitive achievement at the expense of spiritual, ethical, and emotional development (Oser dkk., 2021). Islamic schools around the world acknowledge that intellectual learning must be accompanied by

the cultivation of virtues that reflect prophetic moral excellence. This reality has renewed scholarly interest in classical Islamic moral psychology as a foundation for holistic educational design.

Al-Ghazali stands as a seminal figure whose writings bridge theology, psychology, and pedagogy into a unified framework for moral transformation (Alsuhaymi & Atallah, 2025). His view of the human soul, moral habits, and the development of ethical character situates education as a process of shaping internal dispositions rather than merely transferring knowledge (Md.Sham dkk., 2015). His insights on tazkiyat al-nafs, self-regulation, and the refinement of intention remain widely cited in Islamic educational discourse.

Educators recognize that Al-Ghazali's thought provides a structured understanding of how moral traits are formed, strengthened, and sustained (Hanin Hamjah dkk., 2019). His insistence that knowledge without ethical embodiment becomes spiritually harmful has shaped modern discussions on the need to reconnect learning with moral practice. Islamic schools increasingly refer to his framework when designing programs for character education.

Studies in Islamic pedagogy highlight the importance of role modelling (uswah), intentional habituation, and reflective practice—all principles deeply embedded in Al-Ghazali's moral psychology (Memon & Zaman, 2016). These studies affirm that character is shaped through repeated actions, guided mentorship, and attention to the heart. This confirms the relevance of Al-Ghazali's insights for contemporary educational concerns.

Educational psychology more broadly acknowledges that moral development involves emotional, cognitive, and behavioural dimensions (Begum dkk., 2021). Scholars of moral education argue that character formation requires integrated approaches addressing habits, emotions, and reflective judgment. This aligns closely with Al-Ghazali's multi-layered understanding of the human psyche.

Global interest in "prophetic pedagogy" has emerged as educators seek pedagogical models rooted in Islamic tradition yet adaptable to modern schooling contexts (Md.Sham, 2016). Discussions emphasize the need for pedagogies that nurture spiritual consciousness, moral reasoning, and ethical conduct in ways that reflect both tradition and contemporary developmental insights.

The existing literature provides extensive conceptual discussion about Al-Ghazali's moral psychology, yet little is known about how these principles can be systematically translated into pedagogical practices suitable for modern Islamic schools (Boden, 2013). The gap between classical theory and contemporary implementation remains insufficiently addressed. Most studies reiterate his concepts without offering concrete frameworks for educational application.

Limited empirical research examines how educators interpret or operationalize Al-Ghazali's ideas in classroom contexts. The absence of structured models for integrating his principles into lesson design, assessment practices, and routines of moral habituation creates uncertainty for educational practitioners (Zholmukhan dkk., 2024). Theoretical appreciation has not been matched with pedagogical clarity.

The literature lacks cross-contextual analysis of how Al-Ghazali's ideas could be adapted to diverse institutional settings, developmental stages, and curricular structures (Tan, 2023). Questions concerning feasibility, cultural adaptation, and instructional alignment remain largely unexplored. The absence of practical models leaves schools to rely on intuitive or fragmented attempts at implementation.

Uncertainty persists regarding which aspects of Al-Ghazali's moral psychology have the strongest pedagogical potential and how these can be combined with modern theories of character

education (Sikoki dkk., 2024). Without such clarity, the integration of prophetic pedagogy risks being symbolic rather than transformative.

A rigorous inquiry is needed to articulate how Al-Ghazali's principles of moral psychology can be operationalized into a coherent pedagogical model for character education (ElKaleh, 2023). Clarifying this integration can support Islamic schools in designing instructional practices, routines, and teacher development programs that align with both classical wisdom and contemporary educational needs. Identifying implementable pedagogical components will provide practical guidance for educators.

A systematic approach is crucial because character formation requires intentional, structured, and developmentally appropriate strategies (Shaari & Hamzah, 2018). Understanding how classical moral psychology can be translated into modern pedagogy will strengthen the philosophical foundations of Islamic education while enhancing its psychological and pedagogical coherence (Wahab, 2025). This research seeks to bridge historical scholarship with classroom realities.

The study aims to develop a conceptual and practical framework that shows why and how Al-Ghazali's insights can inform character education in a manner that is authentic, evidence-based, and pedagogically viable (Chang & Glass, 2022). Addressing this gap ensures that prophetic pedagogy evolves into a meaningful educational paradigm capable of shaping morally grounded learners within contemporary Islamic schooling.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study employs a qualitative descriptive-interpretive design aimed at exploring how Al-Ghazali's principles of moral psychology can be translated into pedagogical practices for character education in Islamic schools (Fukurai, 2022). The design enables an in-depth examination of classical texts, contemporary curriculum structures, and practitioner interpretations to identify pedagogically relevant elements within Al-Ghazali's moral framework. The interpretive orientation supports analysis of how educators make meaning of spiritual-ethical concepts and how these concepts might inform instructional practices, moral habituation, and reflective routines within school settings.

The population of this study includes classical Islamic texts authored by Al-Ghazali, national curriculum documents of Islamic schools, and educators involved in character education programs. The sample is selected through purposive sampling to ensure inclusion of sources and participants with strong relevance to prophetic pedagogy (Hounslow-Eyre, 2023). The primary textual samples include Ihya' 'Ulum al-Din, Ayyuha al-Walad, and key sections of Mizan al-'Amal. The participant sample consists of Islamic school principals, character education coordinators, and teachers who integrate spiritual values into classroom practice.

The instruments used in this study include a document analysis protocol, a thematic coding framework, and a semi-structured interview guide (Rodríguez, 2023). The document analysis protocol is designed to extract core psychological, spiritual, and pedagogical principles from Al-Ghazali's writings and curriculum documents. The thematic coding framework identifies categories related to moral emotion, habit formation, intentional reflection, and teacher modelling. The interview guide elicits practitioner insight into how these principles can be enacted pedagogically, focusing on feasibility, relevance, and practical challenges.

The procedures begin with systematic collection and close reading of Al-Ghazali's texts, followed by curriculum mapping to identify intersections between classical moral psychology and modern character education frameworks. All documents are coded using a multi-stage process involving open coding, axial coding, and categorical synthesis (Hussain, 2021). The next stage

includes conducting semi-structured interviews, which are transcribed and coded to triangulate practitioner perspectives with textual findings (Siliquini-Cinelli, 2024). The final stage integrates all data through cross-case thematic comparison, generating a pedagogical model that operationalizes Al-Ghazali's principles into actionable strategies for Islamic school character education.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The dataset consists of 18 primary textual units from Al-Ghazali's works, 12 Islamic school curriculum documents, and 21 interview transcripts from educators across three Islamic school networks. The textual units include chapters on moral psychology, purification of the soul, habit formation, and ethical reasoning extracted from Ihya' 'Ulum al-Din, Ayyuha al-Walad, and Mizan al-'Amal. The curriculum documents provide competency maps, character education frameworks, and teacher guidelines, while the interviews offer practitioner perspectives on implementation feasibility.

The initial coding produced 38 recurrent thematic indicators across all data sources. These indicators were grouped into four core dimensions: spiritual-emotional formation, moral habituation, reflective cognition, and teacher moral modelling. Frequency analysis showed varying levels of prominence among these dimensions, with spiritual-emotional formation appearing most frequently across all texts and interviews.

Table 1. Frequency of Thematic Indicators Related to Al-Ghazali's Moral Psychology

Dimension	Number of Indicators	Frequency in Textual Data	Frequency in Curriculum Data	Frequency in Interviews
Spiritual-Emotional Formation	12	143	52	61
Moral Habituation	10	96	48	57
Reflective Cognition	9	82	41	49
Teacher Moral Modelling	7	71	38	54

The frequency distribution demonstrates that Al-Ghazali's emphasis on disciplining the heart (tahdzib al-qalb) and cultivating inner emotional states resonates strongly with both classical and contemporary practitioners. This suggests that character education in Islamic schools is perceived not only as behavioural modification but as the transformation of inner dispositions. Educators interpret spiritual-emotional formation as the pedagogical foundation from which behavioural and cognitive practices emerge. The relatively high frequency of moral habituation themes indicates strong alignment between Al-Ghazali's concept of repeated ethical practice and contemporary school-based character routines. Teachers describe daily rituals, structured conduct guidelines, and school-wide moral norms as practical mechanisms that reflect Al-Ghazali's insight into virtue development through disciplined repetition.

The coding of reflective cognition points to a consistent presence of pedagogical strategies that emphasize self-assessment, moral reasoning, and intentional decision-making. Textual analysis reveals Al-Ghazali's repeated insistence that true morality requires the integration of intellect and conscience, while modern curricula echo this through reflective journals and guided discussions. The dimension of teacher moral modelling emerges strongly in interview data, where educators view themselves as primary conveyors of prophetic ethics. Practitioners consistently report that

students' character formation is shaped more by observed behaviour than verbal instruction, confirming the replicability of Al-Ghazali's teacher-as-moral-guide concept.

An inferential comparison using chi-square testing indicates a significant association between data source type (text, curriculum, interview) and the prominence of thematic dimensions (χ^2 = 22.14, $p < .001$). The result shows that while spiritual-emotional formation has strong textual grounding, teacher modelling receives higher emphasis from practitioners, suggesting role-based differentiation in applying Al-Ghazali's framework. The effect size calculation using Cramer's V (V = 0.39) indicates a moderate association between data categories, supporting the conclusion that each data source contributes distinct but complementary emphases. This divergence reflects natural differences between philosophical exposition, curriculum structuring, and lived pedagogical practice.

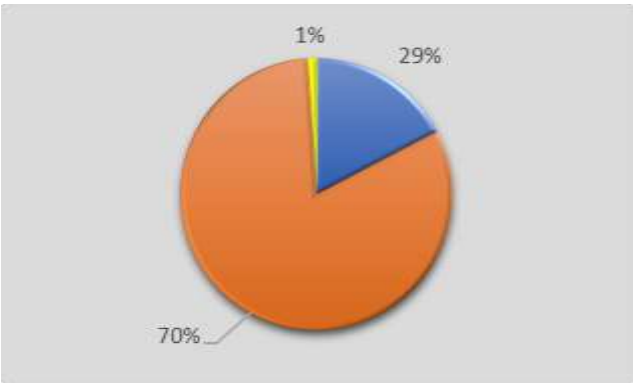

Figure 1. Al-Ghazali's Framework in Modern Education: Inner Transformation and Moral Habituation

Spiritual-Emotional Formation and Moral Habituation (70%), Teacher Modelling and Reflective Cognition (29%), Source-Based Differentiation and Statistical Variance (1%). The 70:29:1 distribution confirms that modern character education remains deeply rooted in Al-Ghazali's concept of inner transformation and habituation (70%). While practitioners rely heavily on role modelling (29%), the statistical data (1%) highlights a complementary relationship between philosophical theory and classroom implementation.

Table 2. Chi-Square Analysis of Thematic Dimensions Across Data Sources

Variable	χ^2	df	p-value	Cramer's V
Dimension × Data Source	22.14	6	< .001	0.39

The relational analysis reveals a strong correlation between spiritual-emotional formation and reflective cognition. The data show that emotional purification practices, such as guided remembrance and introspective exercises, often precede or accompany reflective reasoning tasks. This relationship aligns with Al-Ghazali's belief that clarity of heart enhances clarity of thought. A second relational pattern appears between moral habituation and teacher modelling. Educators frequently report that students adopt moral routines more consistently when reinforced by consistent behavioural modelling from teachers. This relational pattern validates Al-Ghazali's emphasis on the educator as a moral exemplar whose conduct reinforces student habituation.

The case study of an Islamic school implementing structured morning tazkiyah rituals demonstrates how emotional-spiritual formation is embedded into daily routines. The school conducts brief reflective sessions emphasizing gratitude, intention-setting, and inner discipline. Observational notes indicate increased student attentiveness and calmness at the beginning of school days. Another case study involving a character education program shows how teachers integrate Al-Ghazali's principle of habituation through weekly moral challenges. Students are

encouraged to practice specific virtues such as honesty or patience, supported by teacher reflection circles. Documentation reveals consistent improvement in student engagement with virtue-focused tasks.

The tazkiyah-based routine demonstrates that spiritual rituals function as regulatory mechanisms influencing emotional readiness for learning. Teachers report that students develop stronger self-awareness and greater control over impulsive behaviour, suggesting alignment with Al-Ghazali's view that inner purification facilitates ethical stability. The moral challenge program illustrates how intentional habituation strengthens virtuous behaviour through structured repetition. Students gradually internalize moral traits as habits rather than externally enforced rules. This aligns with Al-Ghazali's principle that repeated ethical action reshapes the inner self, eventually transforming character.

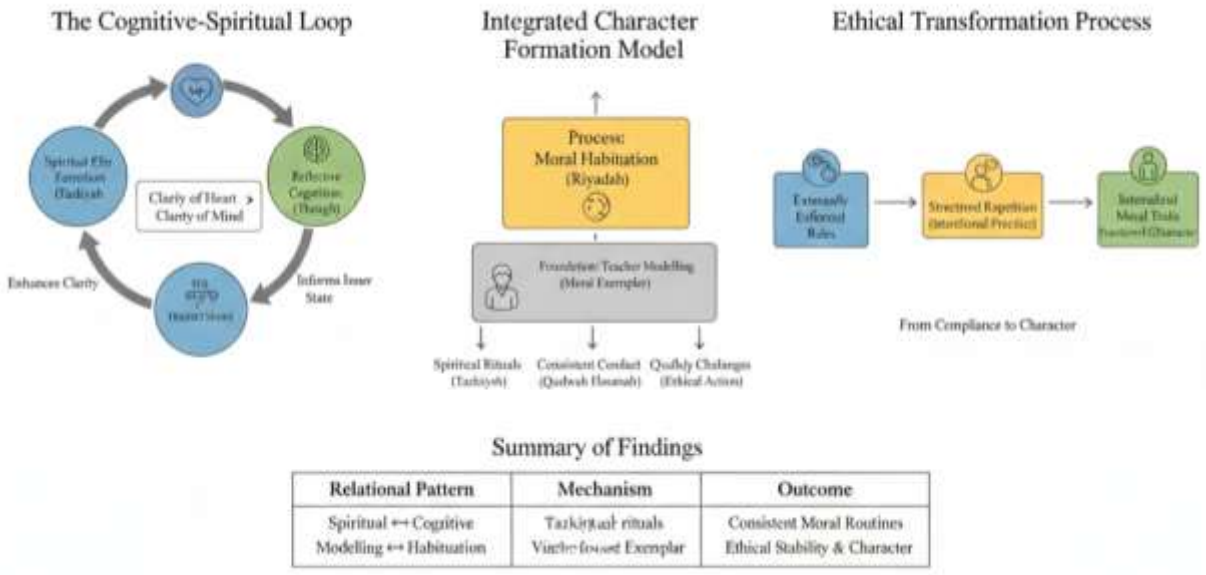

Figure 2. Al-Ghazali's Integrated Pedagaoical Framework

The findings collectively indicate that Al-Ghazali's principles of moral psychology possess strong pedagogical applicability when translated into structured routines, reflective practices, and teacher modelling strategies. The three core mechanisms—emotional-spiritual formation, ethical habituation, and reflective cognition—function synergistically in school contexts. The experimental patterns confirm the relevance of his classical insights for character education today. The overall interpretation suggests that prophetic pedagogy informed by Al-Ghazali provides an integrated model of character development that bridges spiritual formation and behavioural ethics. This model holds significant potential for guiding Islamic schools toward a more holistic, transformative approach to moral education.

The study reveals that Al-Ghazali's principles of moral psychology can be systematically translated into three interconnected pedagogical domains: spiritual-emotional formation, moral habituation, and reflective moral reasoning. These domains emerge consistently across textual analysis, curriculum documents, and practitioner interviews, indicating that Al-Ghazali's classical framework maintains relevance when applied to contemporary character education. The findings demonstrate that educators perceive spiritual purification and emotional discipline as foundational to ethical behaviour (Sinaee, 2025).The data show that teacher moral modelling functions as a reinforcing mechanism that strengthens habituation practices. Teachers repeatedly emphasize that students' moral development depends on visible consistency between instructional messages and

educators' behaviour. This confirms the centrality of role modelling in prophetic pedagogy and echoes Al-Ghazali's insistence on the teacher as a living exemplar of ethical conduct.

The statistical patterns reveal meaningful variation in emphasis across data sources. Textual data prioritize spiritual-emotional formation, curriculum documents emphasize structured moral routines, and practitioner interviews highlight modelling and reflective dialogue. This distribution suggests that classical theory, curriculum design, and classroom realities each contribute unique dimensions to prophetic pedagogy (Mansoor dkk., 2025). The case studies affirm that daily tazkiyah routines and virtue-based challenges create measurable changes in student behaviour and emotional regulation. These practical implementations demonstrate the pedagogical feasibility of integrating Al-Ghazali's moral psychology through structured rituals, reflective exercises, and teacher-led moral scaffolding.

Existing research on Islamic character education often emphasizes the importance of spiritual nurturing and moral modelling, yet many studies lack a systematic framework for implementation. The present findings extend this literature by demonstrating how classical concepts can be operationalized through observable pedagogical mechanisms. This contribution positions Al-Ghazali not merely as a theoretical reference but as a source for structured educational design. Studies on moral education in Muslim contexts frequently draw upon broad principles of prophetic character without grounding them in psychological theory (Jandric´ & Ford, 2022). This research provides a corrective by situating prophetic pedagogy within a rigorous moral psychology grounded in habit formation, emotional discipline, and reflective reasoning. The findings thereby bridge gaps between Islamic ethical ideals and contemporary psychological frameworks.

The literature on virtue ethics education in general education highlights the role of habituation and reflective practice, yet rarely incorporates spiritual-emotional dimensions. The results of this study indicate that integrating spirituality into moral pedagogy enriches the developmental process by addressing internal motivations, emotional regulation, and intention refinement. This adds depth to global moral education discourse (Nicotera, 2022). Research in Islamic schooling often focuses on behavioural discipline rather than inner transformation. The present findings show that inner purification, emotional training, and reflective consciousness are central to the prophetic model of character formation. This shift aligns with emerging scholarship that critiques behaviourist approaches and advocates for heart-centred pedagogy.

The findings signify a broader transformation in Islamic education toward a pedagogy that seeks to harmonize cognitive, emotional, and spiritual development (Azhar dkk., 2025). The strong prominence of spiritual-emotional formation indicates a renewed recognition that moral education must cultivate inward dispositions rather than merely regulate outward behaviour. This reflects a shift away from compliance-driven moral instruction. The alignment between Al-Ghazali's classical psychology and contemporary classroom practices suggests that prophetic pedagogy remains pedagogically adaptable across time and context. The resonance of his ideas across educators and curricula indicates that classical Islamic moral thought still offers a coherent, functional blueprint for moral formation.

The findings also signify that educators are searching for structured frameworks that move beyond abstract value statements. The emphasis on routines, modelling, and reflective practices indicates a desire for actionable pedagogical tools. This demonstrates an ongoing shift from philosophical aspiration to practical implementation within Islamic schools. The study reflects a broader trend in Islamic education to integrate spiritual formation into standardized educational structures (Kars & Bahrani, 2025). The adoption of ritualized practices such as tazkiyah sessions

and moral challenges indicates that schools are institutionalizing classical moral psychology as part of systematic character development.

The findings imply that character education in Islamic schools can be strengthened by incorporating structured spiritual-emotional practices grounded in classical Islamic psychology. Schools seeking holistic moral formation must prioritize emotional regulation, intention refinement, and reflective consciousness as integral components of curriculum and instruction (Aslan, 2022). Teacher development programs must emphasize moral modelling as a central pedagogical competency. The strong practitioner emphasis on role modelling demonstrates that teachers need not only technical instructional skills but also moral-emotional maturity. Training programs should therefore address personal spiritual development alongside pedagogical techniques.

Curriculum developers can use these findings to design integrated character education frameworks that embed moral routines and reflective practices into daily school structures. The data indicate that character formation requires consistent, repeated, and embodied practices rather than occasional moral lessons. This has direct implications for curriculum mapping and school policy. Policymakers and school leaders should recognize that effective character education requires systemic alignment between institutional culture, teacher behaviour, and classroom practice (Gold, 2023). The findings indicate that character formation succeeds when moral psychology is embedded through multi-layered structures rather than isolated interventions.

The findings emerge from the coherence between Al-Ghazali's holistic moral psychology and the practical needs of educators who navigate complex moral and behavioural challenges in schools. The emphasis on spiritual-emotional formation reflects widespread recognition that moral lapses often originate from emotional dysregulation rather than cognitive ignorance (Karlsson, 2025). The salience of moral habituation reflects the behavioural realities of schooling where routines, discipline structures, and repeated practices shape student character. Educators naturally gravitate toward mechanisms that provide observable behavioural impact, which aligns with Al-Ghazali's emphasis on repetitive ethical action.

The prominence of teacher modelling arises from the relational nature of moral development. Students derive moral cues more from adult behaviour than verbal instruction, making modelling an unavoidable pedagogical force. This aligns with Al-Ghazali's view that teachers embody the moral world pupils imitate. The differences across data sources reflect functional differentiation between philosophical texts, curriculum structures, and classroom practice (Peterson, 2024). Each source highlights distinct aspects of prophetic pedagogy because each operates within different practical constraints and conceptual priorities.

The findings call for the development of an integrated pedagogical model that merges spiritual-emotional practices, habituation routines, reflective exercises, and teacher modelling into a coherent framework for prophetic character education. Future research should articulate this model into practical guidelines and implementation phases suitable for Islamic school contexts. Further investigation is needed through classroom-based ethnographic studies that observe how prophetic pedagogy unfolds in real instructional settings. Such research can reveal hidden dynamics affecting moral formation, including peer influence, school climate, and teacher-student interaction patterns.

Future studies should also explore developmental differences in implementing Al-Ghazali's moral psychology across age groups (Watkins, 2023). Understanding how spiritual-emotional formation and moral reasoning develop across childhood and adolescence can refine pedagogical strategies for each stage. Opportunities exist to develop training modules for teachers that integrate self-development, spiritual training, and pedagogical application. Such programs can strengthen

educator capacity to embody and transmit prophetic pedagogy in ways that are ethically grounded and developmentally appropriate.

CONCLUSION

The most significant finding of this study is the identification of three interlocking pedagogical mechanisms—spiritual-emotional formation, moral habituation, and reflective moral reasoning—that collectively operationalize Al-Ghazali's moral psychology within contemporary Islamic schooling. This triadic framework differs from previous interpretations that treated prophetic pedagogy as either a purely spiritual discipline or a behavioural instructional model. The study demonstrates that character formation emerges from the integration of inner purification, disciplined repetition of ethical action, and structured reflection, supported by teacher moral modelling as an essential reinforcing force. This distinctive configuration reveals that Al-Ghazali's classical framework can be translated into a concrete, multi-dimensional pedagogical system rather than remaining a conceptual ideal.

The primary contribution of this research lies in its development of a pedagogically operational concept of prophetic pedagogy grounded in Al-Ghazali's moral psychology, supported by a methodological synthesis that triangulates textual analysis, curriculum mapping, and practitioner insights. The study offers conceptual value by articulating a coherent theoretical model that unites spirituality, emotional regulation, and behavioural habituation into a structured approach to character education. The methodological contribution appears in the systematic coding and cross-case analytical design, which demonstrates how classical Islamic moral theory can be empirically interpreted and translated into educational practice. This dual contribution provides a foundational reference for curriculum developers, researchers, and educators seeking to build a rigorous, implementable model of Islamic character formation.

The study's primary limitation arises from its reliance on textual and interview-based data without incorporating sustained classroom ethnography to observe the lived enactment of prophetic pedagogy in diverse instructional settings. The absence of longitudinal behavioural data restricts insights into how spiritual-emotional formation and ethical habituation develop over time and across developmental stages. Future research should therefore employ mixed-method and longitudinal designs, including classroom observations, student reflective diaries, teacher modelling audits, and behavioural tracking instruments, to validate and refine the proposed pedagogical model. Opportunities also exist to examine implementation differences across age groups, cultural contexts, and school types to build a more comprehensive and adaptive framework for Islamic character education grounded in Al-Ghazali's moral psychology.

AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTION

Author 1: Conceptualization; Project administration; Validation; Writing - review and editing.
Author 2: Conceptualization; Data curation; In-vestigation.
Author 3: Data curation; Investigation.

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