

Implementing al-Ghazali's Tahdzib al-Akhlaq Curriculum at Pondok Pesantren Futuhiyyah and Its Relevance to Santri Character Formation

Ende Ibrahim¹, Miftahudin¹, Budiyono Saputro¹

¹Faculty of Education and Teacher Training, Universitas Islam Negeri Salatiga - Indonesia

Article History:

Received
2026-06-23

Revised
2026-06-25

Accepted
2026-06-27

Published
2026-06-30

Abstract. This study examines the implementation of al-Ghazali's *Tahdzib al-Akhlaq* curriculum at Pondok Pesantren Futuhiyyah and its relevance to santri character formation. Using a qualitative descriptive-analytical design, data were collected through in-depth interviews, observations, and document analysis involving curriculum leaders, teachers, and santri. As one of the pesantren that systematically integrates classical Islamic scholarship with contemporary character education practices, Futuhiyyah provides a relevant context for examining the application of al-Ghazali's moral framework. The findings reveal that the curriculum is implemented through four interconnected components: moral objectives, moral content, habituation-based methods, and behavioral evaluation. Empirical evidence indicates that continuous participation in classical text study, spiritual exercises, daily discipline, congregational worship, social interaction, and teacher role modeling reinforces the development of discipline, patience, empathy, obedience, and social responsibility among santri. Despite challenges related to digital distractions, inconsistent student commitment, and limited assessment instruments, the curriculum remains relevant for contemporary pesantren education. The study highlights the potential of al-Ghazali's moral framework as a transferable model for strengthening character education in Islamic boarding schools through consistent practice and contextual adaptation.

Keywords: *al-ghazali; character formation; curriculum; islamic boarding school; tahdzib al-akhlaq*

***Corresponding Author:** Ende Ibrahim (assyaebanyel@gmail.com), Faculty of Education and Teacher Training, Universitas Islam Negeri Salatiga - Indonesia



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).

Introduction

Moral education remains one of the central issues in Indonesian Islamic education. The moral decline among young people has become a serious concern, as reflected in bullying, student violence, weak social responsibility, and the erosion of respect toward religious and social norms. Aisyah and Fitriatin (2025) describe this situation as part of a broader moral and ethical crisis among Indonesian youth. Listari (2021) also explains that adolescent moral degradation is closely related to weak moral supervision, social environment, and the rapid circulation of negative content through digital media. In this context, education cannot be limited to the transfer of knowledge. It must also cultivate inner discipline, moral awareness, and spiritual responsibility.

The contemporary social environment has increased the urgency of character education. Globalization gives students access to a wide range of cultural values, lifestyles, and information streams. Some of these influences can support learning, but others may weaken religious commitment, self-control, and respect for local moral traditions. Zein, Hasbilah, and Siregar (2024) argue that adolescent misconduct is influenced by family economic conditions, parenting patterns, peer relations, and school environment. These findings indicate that character formation needs a structured educational ecosystem. It cannot depend only on classroom instruction. It must be supported by habituation, institutional culture, role modeling, and continuous supervision.

Islamic boarding schools, or pesantren, have long played a strategic role in this moral formation. Pesantren education combines religious instruction, teacher authority, daily discipline, communal worship, and social habituation. This combination allows pesantren to form santri not only as learners of religious knowledge, but also as individuals who practice humility, discipline, patience, obedience, and social responsibility. Zahro and Khobir (2025) note that pesantren face serious challenges in the modern era, including declining discipline, the weakening of religious values, and external cultural influences that do not always align with Islamic ethics. Therefore, the pesantren curriculum needs to strengthen its moral foundation while remaining responsive to contemporary conditions.

In the Islamic educational tradition, akhlaq is not a secondary topic. It is the core aim of education. Hidayat (2024) emphasizes that Islamic religious education functions as a medium for building noble character. Parpatih (2025) states that character education in the Qur'anic perspective aims to form a generation with noble morality. Irawan et al. (2025) further explain that akhlaq is inseparable from worship and daily Muslim life. These views show that moral education in Islam is not merely behavioral control. It concerns the purification of the soul, the internalization of virtue, and the formation of a stable moral disposition.

The concept of Tahdzib al-Akhlaq offers a classical Islamic framework for this task. In al-Ghazali's thought, akhlaq is a firmly rooted condition of the soul from which actions emerge easily without prolonged deliberation (Al-Ghazali, 2011). This definition means that true character is not only visible in outward behavior. It is also a stable inner quality that shapes intention, judgment, and action. Therefore, moral education must go beyond advice and theoretical explanation. It must train the soul through discipline, habituation, spiritual awareness, and practical engagement.

Al-Ghazali's moral education is strongly connected with tazkiyatun nafs, or purification of the soul. This process includes removing blameworthy traits, cultivating praiseworthy traits, and deepening awareness of God. In many pesantren traditions, this structure is commonly expressed through takhalli, tahalli, and tajalli. Takhalli refers to the effort to empty the self from negative traits such as arrogance, envy, dishonesty, and uncontrolled desire. Tahalli refers to adorning the self with virtues such as patience, gratitude, sincerity, humility, and trust in God. Tajalli refers to the deeper spiritual realization that moral conduct must be grounded in closeness to Allah. This structure makes al-Ghazali's moral curriculum both ethical and spiritual.

The relevance of al-Ghazali's thought for pesantren education lies in its emphasis on the relationship between knowledge and practice. Knowledge of morality is not enough if it does not appear in daily conduct. Rohayati (1997) notes that al-Ghazali's moral thought places strong attention on the reform of the soul. Dewa, Latifah, and Indra (2023) also show that the curriculum of moral education in Ihya' Ulumuddin includes aims, materials, methods, and evaluation that focus on inner transformation. However, many discussions of al-Ghazali's moral curriculum remain conceptual. They have not always been connected to how pesantren institutions implement those values in concrete curriculum, routines, learning activities, and behavioral assessment.

Recent studies on pesantren character education have provided important contributions. Jailani (2024) found that moral education in a pesantren context can be implemented through role modeling, habituation, stories, advice, reward, and punishment. Bahroni and Asmuni (2024) found that pesantren curriculum can shape students' akhlaq through religious subjects, classical moral texts, teacher example, and pesantren traditions. Baroroh and Khobir (2024) also emphasize that pesantren have an important role in forming youth character in the modern era. These studies show that pesantren remain relevant as institutions of moral education. However, they generally discuss pesantren moral education in a broad sense, rather than examining the implementation of a specific al-Ghazalian moral curriculum.

This research gap is important. On one side, theoretical studies have discussed al-Ghazali's concept of moral education. On the other side, field studies have described pesantren-based character education. Yet there is still limited research that connects both dimensions by examining how al-Ghazali's *Tahdzib al-Akhlaq* is implemented in the actual curriculum of a pesantren and how it relates to character formation among santri. This study addresses that gap by analyzing the implementation of the *Tahdzib al-Akhlaq* curriculum at Pondok Pesantren Futuhiyyah and its relevance to santri character formation.

Pondok Pesantren Futuhiyyah provides a significant setting for this study. The pesantren has a long historical background and was established in the early twentieth century by KH. Abdurrahman bin Qasid al-Haq. It developed from a traditional learning space that taught basic Islamic knowledge, Qur'anic learning, and tasawwuf into a broader educational institution covering various levels of formal and non-formal education. The pesantren also has historical significance in local society and in the struggle for Indonesian independence (Jabar, 2001). This historical, religious, and social background makes Pondok Pesantren Futuhiyyah a relevant locus for studying how classical Islamic moral thought can be implemented in contemporary pesantren education.

The curriculum at Pondok Pesantren Futuhiyyah does not treat moral education as a separate theoretical subject only. It integrates moral formation into learning materials, worship practices, social discipline, and daily interaction. Based on the source document, the pesantren implements moral education through the study of tasawwuf texts, especially works associated with al-Ghazali, and through direct practice in daily routines. Santri are trained to pray in congregation, practice patience in communal life, respect others in shared spaces, and follow pesantren rules. These practices show that moral curriculum operates not only through formal lessons, but also through the hidden curriculum of pesantren life.

A key assumption of this study is that character formation requires consistency between taught values and lived values. If santri learn about patience but do not practice patience in daily routines, the learning remains incomplete. If they study humility but do not see humility in teacher behavior, moral education loses its force. For this reason, pesantren-based moral education needs strong integration between curriculum, teacher modeling, institutional discipline, peer relations, and spiritual practice. Al-Ghazali's *Tahdzib al-Akhlaq* supports this integrative approach because it links moral knowledge with *riyadhah*, *mujahadah*, habituation, and inner purification (Al-Ghazali, 2011).

At the same time, the implementation of a moral curriculum in pesantren faces new challenges. The use of digital devices, especially mobile phones, can distract students from disciplined learning and spiritual practice. The source document notes that some santri still attempt to bring or use phones despite pesantren restrictions. This condition reflects a broader challenge in Islamic education. Character education must now respond to the influence of digital culture, instant communication, entertainment content, and reduced attention span. A moral curriculum that ignores this reality may become normatively strong but practically weak.

Another challenge concerns the assessment of character. Moral formation is difficult to measure because it involves intention, consistency, and inner disposition. However, pesantren still need practical indicators to evaluate the internalization of moral values. The source document shows that Pondok Pesantren Futuhiyyah evaluates moral education through daily behavioral observation, consistency in congregational worship, patience, tolerance, social conduct, and theoretical tests. This indicates that assessment combines visible behavior and cognitive understanding. Still, a more systematic instrument is needed so that moral evaluation can be clearer, more accountable, and more useful for curriculum improvement.

This study is therefore important for three reasons. First, it strengthens the academic discussion on classical Islamic moral thought by connecting al-Ghazali's Tahdzib al-Akhlaq with actual pesantren curriculum practice. Second, it contributes to character education studies by showing how moral values can be internalized through daily routines, spiritual training, and institutional culture. Third, it offers practical recommendations for pesantren curriculum development in the modern era, especially in relation to digital discipline, teacher development, community involvement, and moral assessment.

Based on this background, this article aims to analyze the implementation of al-Ghazali's Tahdzib al-Akhlaq curriculum at Pondok Pesantren Futuhiyyah, to examine its relevance to santri character formation, and to identify the challenges that appear in its implementation. The central argument of this article is that al-Ghazali's Tahdzib al-Akhlaq remains highly relevant for contemporary pesantren education because it provides a moral, spiritual, and practical framework for character formation. However, its effectiveness depends on consistent implementation, teacher role modeling, institutional discipline, contextual adaptation, and systematic evaluation.

Methods

This study used a qualitative approach with a descriptive analytical design. The design was selected because the research focused on understanding the implementation of a moral

curriculum in its natural educational setting. The study did not aim to test a statistical hypothesis. Instead, it aimed to describe, interpret, and analyze how the values of Tahdzib al-Akhlaq were integrated into the curriculum and daily life of Pondok Pesantren Futuhiyyah.

The research site was Pondok Pesantren Futuhiyyah. The participants consisted of pesantren actors who were directly connected to the curriculum and character formation process, including a curriculum manager, a teacher, and a santri. The source document identifies informants such as Kiai Rizal as a curriculum-related informant, Kiai Faizin as a teacher, and Ahmad as a santri. These informants were selected because they represented institutional policy, instructional practice, and student experience in the implementation of moral education.

Data were collected through in-depth interviews, observation, and document analysis. Interviews explored the aims, materials, methods, evaluation practices, and challenges of the Tahdzib al-Akhlaq curriculum. Observation focused on how moral values were practiced in pesantren life, including worship routines, discipline, social interaction, and teacher modeling. Document analysis examined curriculum materials, teaching references, pesantren archives, and related documents concerning al-Ghazali's moral education.

Data validity was strengthened through triangulation. Interview data were compared with observation findings and documents. The data were then analyzed thematically. The analysis involved identifying recurring patterns, classifying themes, interpreting the relationship between curriculum components and character formation, and relating the findings to al-Ghazali's theory of moral education and contemporary studies on pesantren character education.

Table 1.

Data Sources and Analytical Focus

Data source	Research use	Analytical focus
In-depth interviews	To obtain insider explanations from pesantren curriculum actors, teachers, and santri.	Curriculum aims, implementation, character outcomes, and challenges.
Observation	To examine how moral values were practiced in daily pesantren life.	Worship discipline, social behavior, teacher modeling, and habituation.
Document analysis	To review curriculum materials, teaching references, and institutional documents.	Moral materials, learning structure, and links with al-Ghazali's thought.

Results

The findings show that the implementation of the Tahdzib al-Akhlaq curriculum at Pondok Pesantren Futuhiyyah is organized around four curriculum components: aims, materials,

methods, and evaluation. These components are consistent with al-Ghazali's view that moral education should purify the soul, build praiseworthy traits, and guide learners toward closeness to Allah. The curriculum aims to form santri who are not only knowledgeable in religious sciences, but also disciplined, humble, patient, obedient in worship, and responsible in social life.

The first finding concerns the aim of moral education. Pondok Pesantren Futuhiyyah places moral formation as a central educational aim. The pesantren understands akhlaq as a foundation for religious life and social conduct. This aim is aligned with al-Ghazali's view that education should lead human beings toward the pleasure of Allah by improving their relationship with God, other people, and the environment. Therefore, the curriculum does not separate religious knowledge from character formation.

The second finding concerns the moral materials used in the curriculum. The pesantren uses moral and tasawwuf materials that emphasize tazkiyatun nafs. The core materials include takhalli, tahalli, and tajalli. These concepts guide santri to avoid blameworthy traits, cultivate praiseworthy virtues, and deepen spiritual awareness. The pesantren also uses classical Islamic texts, especially al-Ghazali's *Ihya' Ulumuddin*, as an important source for moral learning. This shows that the curriculum combines textual learning with spiritual orientation.

The third finding concerns the method of implementation. Moral education is implemented through theoretical instruction and practical habituation. Teachers explain moral concepts, but the main emphasis is placed on daily practice. Santri are trained through congregational prayer, discipline in daily schedules, patience in shared activities, respect for teachers and peers, and participation in pesantren routines. Teacher modeling also plays a central role because santri observe how teachers embody the values they teach.

The fourth finding concerns evaluation. The pesantren evaluates moral education through observation of daily behavior and through theoretical assessment. Behavioral evaluation includes discipline in worship, patience in social interaction, tolerance, politeness, obedience to rules, and ability to maintain good relations with others. Theoretical evaluation measures students' understanding of moral concepts. However, behavioral observation is more dominant because moral education is considered successful only when values appear in daily conduct.

The fifth finding concerns the relevance of the curriculum to santri character formation. The implementation of the Tahdzib al-Akhlaq curriculum supports the formation of disciplined, patient, empathetic, obedient, and socially responsible santri. These traits appear through repeated practice and institutional culture. Daily routines function as moral laboratories where santri learn to control ego, respect others, practice worship, and internalize religious values. This confirms the relevance of al-Ghazali's moral framework in contemporary pesantren education.

The sixth finding concerns implementation challenges. The pesantren faces challenges from digital distraction, especially unauthorized mobile phone use, and from social influences outside the pesantren. Some santri show inconsistent commitment to pesantren rules and moral discipline. The pesantren also needs more systematic character assessment tools. These challenges do not negate the relevance of the curriculum, but they indicate the need for stronger policy, more contextual guidance, and continuous curriculum development.

Table 2.

Implementation of al-Ghazali's Tahdzib al-Akhlaq Curriculum at Pondok Pesantren Futuhiyyah

Curriculum component	al-Ghazalian basis	Implementation at Futuhiyyah	Character relevance
Aims	Seeking Allah's pleasure through moral purification and balanced relations.	Moral education is placed as a central aim of pesantren education.	Forms spiritually aware, responsible, and socially ethical santri.
Materials	Tazkiyatun nafs, takhalli, tahalli, tajalli, and virtues in Ihya' Ulumuddin.	Santri study moral and tasawwuf materials through classical Islamic texts.	Builds patience, gratitude, humility, and self-control.
Methods	Riyadhah, mujadah, habituation, and teacher example.	Values are practiced through worship, discipline, shared routines, and teacher modeling.	Transforms moral concepts into lived behavior.
Evaluation	Moral success is seen in stable behavior and inner disposition.	Evaluation uses daily observation and theoretical assessment.	Tracks discipline, tolerance, worship obedience, and social conduct.

Discussion

The findings support the argument that al-Ghazali's Tahdzib al-Akhlaq is not only a classical moral concept, but also a practical curriculum framework for pesantren character education. The four curriculum components found at Pondok Pesantren Futuhiyyah, namely aims, materials, methods, and evaluation, correspond with al-Ghazali's view that akhlaq is a stable condition of the soul formed through repeated practice and inner discipline (Al-Ghazali, 2011). This means that moral learning must combine knowledge, habituation, supervision, and spiritual reflection.

The emphasis on tazkiyatun nafs is especially relevant. Modern character education often focuses on visible behavior, while al-Ghazali's framework goes deeper by addressing the condition of the soul. Takhalli teaches learners to identify and remove negative traits. Tahalli trains them to cultivate virtues. Tajalli directs them toward spiritual awareness. This threefold structure

provides a layered model of moral education. It begins with behavioral correction, continues with virtue formation, and culminates in spiritual consciousness. Such a model is important for pesantren because pesantren education aims to form both external discipline and internal piety.

The results also confirm previous studies on pesantren character education. Jailani (2024) found that moral education in pesantren can be strengthened through role modeling, habituation, advice, reward, and punishment. Bahroni and Asmuni (2024) found that pesantren curriculum shapes akhlaq through religious learning, classical texts, and pesantren tradition. The present study extends those findings by showing that the implementation of moral education at Pondok Pesantren Futuhiyyah is specifically connected with al-Ghazali's Tahdzib al-Akhlaq. Thus, this study contributes a more focused theoretical lens to the discussion of pesantren-based character education.

The findings also show that the hidden curriculum is highly significant. Santri character is not formed only through formal lessons. It is formed through prayer routines, shared meals, discipline, interaction, respect for teachers, obedience to rules, and communal responsibility. These activities train santri to practice moral values repeatedly until they become habits. This supports the idea that pesantren is not merely a place of instruction, but a total moral environment. The pesantren system allows moral values to be experienced, not only explained.

However, the challenges found in the study indicate that classical moral education must be adapted to modern realities. Digital distraction is one of the most visible challenges. The mobile phone is not only a communication device. It also carries entertainment, social media, and external cultural influences that may reduce discipline and weaken attention. If pesantren moral education wants to remain effective, it needs a clear digital ethics curriculum. This curriculum should not only prohibit technology, but also teach responsible use, self-control, digital adab, and the ethical consequences of online behavior.

Another important issue is assessment. The pesantren already evaluates santri through daily observation and theoretical tests. This is appropriate because moral education cannot be reduced to written examination. However, a more systematic rubric can help teachers observe moral development more consistently. Such a rubric may include indicators of worship discipline, honesty, respect, patience, cooperation, responsibility, and self-control. A structured instrument can improve curriculum evaluation without ignoring the spiritual depth of akhlaq.

The study also suggests that teacher development is essential. In al-Ghazali's view, moral education requires teachers who practice riyadhah and mujahadah. Teachers must become moral examples, not only knowledge transmitters. If teachers show discipline, humility, patience, and sincerity, santri can observe moral values in living form. Therefore, pesantren curriculum

development should include continuous professional and spiritual development for teachers. This is necessary because the credibility of moral education depends heavily on teacher consistency.

Community and alumni involvement can also strengthen implementation. The source document notes that pesantren hopes its graduates will practice the moral values they learned throughout life. This expectation requires continuity after graduation. Alumni networks, parent involvement, and community-based moral programs can help maintain the values formed in pesantren. Character education becomes stronger when school, family, and society support the same moral direction.

Overall, the implementation of al-Ghazali's Tahdzib al-Akhlaq curriculum at Pondok Pesantren Futuhiyyah demonstrates that classical Islamic moral thought remains academically and practically relevant. Its strength lies in its integrative nature. It combines knowledge, worship, habituation, spiritual purification, social discipline, and teacher modeling. Its weakness lies not in the concept, but in the need for consistent application, contextual adaptation, and stronger evaluation tools.

Conclusion

This study concludes that Pondok Pesantren Futuhiyyah implements al-Ghazali's Tahdzib al-Akhlaq curriculum through the integration of moral aims, moral materials, habituation-based methods, and behavioral evaluation. The curriculum is rooted in the purification of the soul and is practiced through the study of classical Islamic texts, spiritual training, congregational worship, daily discipline, social interaction, and teacher modeling. The implementation is relevant to santri character formation because it supports the development of discipline, patience, empathy, worship obedience, humility, and social responsibility. The findings show that al-Ghazali's moral education remains suitable for contemporary pesantren education because it links knowledge with practice and inner transformation. However, the curriculum needs continuous strengthening through digital ethics education, teacher development, community involvement, and more systematic character assessment instruments. Future studies may compare several pesantren or examine the long-term impact of Tahdzib al-Akhlaq on alumni character in social life.

Reference

- Aisyah, N. N., & Fitriatin, N. (2025). Krisis moral dan etika di kalangan generasi muda Indonesia dalam perspektif profesi guru. 5, 329-337.
- Al-Ghazali, A. H. (2011). *Ihya 'Ulum ad-Din*. Dar al-Minhaj.
- Bahroni, B., & Asmuni, A. (2024). Pelaksanaan kurikulum pesantren dalam membentuk akhlak santri: Studi kasus di Pondok Pesantren Sunan Muria Darul Falah Kecamatan Baradatu

- Kabupaten Way Kanan Propinsi Lampung. *Jurnal Kajian Pendidikan Islam*, 31-41. <https://doi.org/10.58561/jkpi.v3i1.109>.
- Baroroh, A. Z., & Khobir, A. (2024). Peran pondok pesantren dalam membentuk karakter anak muda di era modern. *Jurnal Ekonomi, Akuntansi, dan Perpajakan*, 2(1), 1-13. <https://doi.org/10.61132/jeap.v2i1.721>.
- Dewa, R. S., Latifah, Z. K., & Indra, S. (2023). Konsep kurikulum pendidikan akhlak perspektif Imam Abu Hamid al-Ghazali dalam kitab Ihya Ulumuddin. 5(1).
- Hidayat, S. (2024). Pendidikan Agama Islam sebagai sarana pembentukan karakter dan akhlak mulia. *Jurnal Riset Rumpun Ilmu Pendidikan*, 2.
- Irawan, B., et al. (2025). Pendidikan akhlak dalam perspektif Al-Qur'an. *Jurnal Penelitian Nusantara*, 1(2), 1037-1050.
- Jabar, P. G. S. A. (Ed.). (2001). *Sejarah seabad Pon-Pes Futuhiyyah* (1st ed.). Team Panitia Seabad Pon-Pes Futuhiyyah.
- Jailani. (2024). Implementasi pendidikan akhlak di Pondok Pesantren Al Quran: Analisis dan dampaknya terhadap pembentukan karakter siswa. *IEJ: Islamic Education Journal*.
- Listari, L. (2021). Dekadensi moral remaja: Upaya pembinaan moral oleh keluarga dan sekolah. *Jurnal Pendidikan Sosiologi dan Humaniora*, 12(1), 7-12.
- Parpatih, S. (2025). Pendidikan karakter dalam Al-Quran: Membangun generasi berakhlak mulia. *Jurnal Riset Rumpun Ilmu Pendidikan*, 4(1), 176-189.
- Rizal. (2025). Wawancara dengan pengurus Pondok Futuhiyyah.
- Rohayati, E. (1997). *Pemikiran Al-Ghazali tentang pendidikan akhlak*. 1.
- Zahro, A., & Khobir, A. (2025). Peran pondok pesantren dalam membentuk karakter anak muda di era modern. 2.
- Zein, Hasbilah, N., & Siregar, M. F. Z. (2024). Faktor-faktor kenakalan remaja pada remaja usia 13-15 tahun. *Journal of Educational Research and Humaniora*, 2, 32-42.