

Analysis of Humanistic Learning Theory in Al-Ghazali's Thought: A Study of the Book *Ayyuhal Walad*

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Abstract

This research seeks to examine the alignment of humanistic learning theory within the philosophical perspective of Imam Al-Ghazali, particularly as reflected in his work *Ayyuhal Walad*. It explores how the Sufi educational values conveyed by Al-Ghazali correspond with the core principles of humanistic learning—such as the cultivation of personal potential, spiritual consciousness, and the positioning of learners as active participants in their educational journey. Employing a qualitative approach, this study utilizes library research and content analysis methods to interpret the messages in *Ayyuhal Walad*, supplemented by theoretical insights from key humanistic scholars like Abraham Maslow and Carl Rogers. The findings indicate a significant congruence between Al-Ghazali's educational outlook and the framework of humanistic learning, especially regarding the emphasis on individual experience, value internalization, and the nurturing of moral awareness. Al-Ghazali views education not merely as a vehicle for acquiring academic success, but as a transformative process that fosters ethical and spiritual development. Thus, this study underscores the potential of Al-Ghazali's educational thought to serve as a foundational model for constructing a humanistic approach to Islamic education—one that deeply engages with the full spectrum of human experience and personal growth.

Keywords: *Humanistic Learning Theory, Imam Al-Ghazali, Ayyuhal Walad, Islamic Education, Spiritual Awareness*

Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis teori belajar humanistik dalam pemikiran Imam Al-Ghazali dengan fokus kajian pada kitab *Ayyuhal Walad*. Kajian ini mengungkap relevansi nilai-nilai pendidikan sufistik yang diajarkan Al-Ghazali dengan prinsip-prinsip teori belajar humanistik, seperti pengembangan potensi diri, kesadaran spiritual, dan dalam menjadikan peserta didik sebagai subjek dalam proses pembelajaran. Penelitian ini merupakan penelitian kualitatif dengan melalui metode pustaka, melalui analisis isi terhadap teks *Ayyuhal Walad* serta literatur pendukung dari tokoh-tokoh humanistik seperti Abraham Maslow dan Carl Rogers. Hasil penelitian menyatakan akan pandangan Al-Ghazali sangat selaras teori belajar humanistik khususnya dalam hal penekanan pada pengalaman personal, internalisasi nilai, serta pentingnya kesadaran moral dalam proses belajar. Pembelajaran menurut Al-Ghazali adalah sarana transformasi diri yang mencakup aspek spiritual dan etis, bukan sekadar banyaknya prestasi dan pencapaian akademik. Implikasi dari penelitian ini menegaskan bahwa pemikiran Al-Ghazali dapat menjadi pijakan konseptual dalam merancang pendidikan Islam berbasis humanistik yang lebih menyentuh pada dimensi kemanusiaan secara menyeluruh.

Kata kunci: *Teori Belajar Humanistik, Imam Al-Ghazali, Ayyuhal Walad, Pendidikan Islam, Kesadaran Spiritual*

INTRODUCTION

Education holds the most important role in the civilization of the world. Besides being the foundation for the development of world civilization, the function of education is to shape the human personality as a whole. Through education, a person is directed to become an individual who is able to behave well, think critically, and have an awareness of human values, as explicitly stated in the Law on Religious Education.¹ This, of course, goes through a learning process, meaning that learning becomes the heart of educational activities. However, as theories and approaches in education evolve, psychologists realize that learning is not merely understood as a process of memorizing or receiving information, but as a process of shaping a complete human being, both cognitively, emotionally, and spiritually.

The humanistic learning theory emerged as a critique of behavioristic and psychoanalytic approaches that overly emphasized external aspects of humans, such as responses to stimuli or unconscious drives. Humanistic theory instead emphasizes the importance of self-potential development, awareness, individual responsibility, as well as changes in attitudes, behaviors, and character that reflect self-actualization.² In other words, a person can be said to have truly learned when the knowledge acquired can be practiced in life, not just stored as information.

This thought aligns with the perspective of Islam, especially that conveyed by Imam Al-Ghazali. According to Al-Ghazali, knowledge that is not put into practice is meaningless.³ Education must shape humans who are close to their Creator, possess a pure heart, and are able to live life with full meaning. Values such as sincerity, introspection, moral responsibility, and the pursuit of truth are at the core of the educational process he proposed.⁴

One of Al-Ghazali's works that emphasizes these values is *Ayyuhal Walad*, a book containing advice to his students who were seeking the right path in life. In this book, Al-Ghazali not only stresses the importance of seeking knowledge but also asserts that knowledge must be followed by practice. He reminds us that the value of a person is not measured by the amount of information they possess, but by how far that knowledge shapes their character and brings them closer to Allah.⁵

To avoid acts of plagiarism, the researcher presents several previous studies related to Imam Al-Ghazali's thoughts in his book *Ayyuhal Walad*. One such study is by Nurul Hidayah⁶, entitled "*ANALISIS KONTEKSTUAL KALIMAT NASIHAT IMAM AL-*

¹ Ikhwan Maulana, Rizky Ananda Putra, and Herlini Puspika Sari, "STRATEGI MEMPERKUAT EKSISTENSI PENDIDIKAN ISLAM," *AN NAJAH (Jurnal Pendidikan Islam Dan Sosial Keagamaan)* 04, no. 04 (2025): 36–42, <https://journal.nabest.id/index.php/annajah/article/view/533>.

² Siti Rokhanah, Mustopa, and Nasikhin, "Filsafat Pendidikan Humanis Dan Relevansinya Dengan Pencegahan Korupsi," *ALMAHEER Jurnal Pendidikan Islam* 3, no. 01 (2025): 83–94, <https://journal.stitalazami.ac.id/index.php/almaheer/article/view/192/60>.

³ Siti Maryam, "MERDEKA BELAJAR DALAM PERSPEKTIF IHYA ULUMUDDIN: IMPLEMENTASI DI MAJLIS TA'LIM NURUL JANNAH KOMPLEK PERUMAHAN KELAPA DUA TANGERANG," *Ta'dibiya* 5, no. 1 (2025): 58–69, <https://doi.org/10.61624/japi.v5i1.168>.

⁴ Nurjanna Harahap, "Ilmu Menurut Al-Ghazali Dalam Kitab Ayyuhal Walad" (UIN Syekh Ali Hasan Ahmad Addary Padangsidempuan, 2024), <http://etd.uinsyahada.ac.id/id/eprint/10525>.

⁵ Muhammad Al Ghazali, *Ayyuhal Walad* (Surabaya: Maktabah Imam Surabaya, n.d.).

⁶ Nurul Hidayah, Nihayatus Syafiyah, and Nanang Qosim, "Analisis Kontekstual Kalimat Nasihat Imam Al-Ghazali Dalam Kitab Ayyuhal Walad," *Al-Furqan : Jurnal Agama, Sosial, Dan Budaya* 3, no. 3 (2024): 1010–25, <https://publisherqu.com/index.php/Al-Furqan/article/view/943>.

GHAZALI DALAM KITAB AYYUHAL WALAD”, which explains several pieces of advice contained in Al-Ghazali’s *Ayyuhal Walad* in general. Another is by Hanifa Hafiza⁷, entitled “*PEMIKIRAN IMAM AL-GHAZALI DALAM KITAB AYYUHAL WALAD DALAM PENDIDIKAN KARAKTER ANAK*”, which describes Al-Ghazali’s thoughts in *Ayyuhal Walad* focusing on children’s character education. Both studies take *Ayyuhal Walad* as their main focus, but differ in the research objects examined. In this article, the researcher analyzes the similarities between the concept of humanistic learning theory in general and Al-Ghazali’s thoughts in *Ayyuhal Walad*.

Based on these shared values, the researcher seeks to explore Al-Ghazali’s thoughts in *Ayyuhal Walad* using a humanistic learning theory approach. It is hoped that this research will later serve as a reference in building an educational approach that not only enlightens students but also humanizes individuals and purifies the soul.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research is a qualitative study using the library research method, focusing on Imam Al-Ghazali’s thoughts in his book *Ayyuhal Walad* regarding Humanistic Learning Theory. The primary source is the book *Ayyuhal Walad*, which will be analyzed in depth to identify the alignment of Al-Ghazali’s values and ideas related to concepts within humanistic learning theory, particularly from an Islamic perspective. In addition, this research also employs secondary literature in the form of relevant references on humanistic theory and Al-Ghazali’s thoughts.

Documentation is used as the method of data collection, namely by reviewing, recording, and analyzing written sources related to the topic. The collected data are then classified and systematically examined to find the relevance between the concepts in *Ayyuhal Walad* and the theoretical discussions developed by figures such as Abraham Maslow and Carl Rogers.

The data analysis technique used is content analysis, in which the researcher interprets the underlying meanings of Al-Ghazali’s thoughts in his book. The analysis is carried out descriptively and qualitatively, by presenting the findings narratively and connecting them with the concepts of humanistic learning theory.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Basic Concept of Humanistic Theory

Humanistic comes from the word *human* or *al-insan*, which means human being.⁸ This theory views that every individual has great potential to develop holistically, whether intellectually, emotionally, or spiritually.⁹ The humanistic school of thought emerged in psychology as a response to previous approaches considered too mechanistic,

⁷ Hanifa Hafiza and Aisyah Amatul Qayyum, “Pemikiran Imam Al-Ghazali Dalam Kitab Ayyuhal Walad Dalam Pendidikan Karakter Anak,” *PREMIERE : Journal of Islamic Elementary Education* 4, no. 2 (2022): 67–73, <https://doi.org/10.51675/jp.v4i2.697>.

⁸ Gilang Aldipari, “Analisis Potensi Diri Manusia Dengan Menggunakan Pendekatan Psikologi Humanistik,” *DAWUH Da’wah & Education Journal* 5, no. 3 (2024): 87–95, <https://doi.org/10.62159/dawuh.v5i3.1591>.

⁹ Yusuf Rendi Wibowo and Fatonah Salfadilah, “TANTANGAN PENDIDIKAN HUMANISTIK PADA PROGRAM MERDEKA BELAJAR DI SEKOLAH DASAR,” *ABUYA: Jurnal Pendidikan Dasar TANTANGAN* 3, no. 1 (2025): 30–48, <https://doi.org/10.52185/abuyaVol3iss1Y2025635>.

emphasizing the importance of humanizing humans in the learning process and in life as a whole.¹⁰

According to humanistic figures such as Abraham Maslow and Carl Rogers, learning is a process that involves all aspects of humanity—cognitive, affective, and psychomotor. Learning is not only about collecting knowledge or constructing understanding but also about building meaning, values, and life goals. Therefore, humanistic learning theory is closer to the realms of philosophy and personality psychology rather than merely conventional learning theory.¹¹

The humanistic approach in education emphasizes the importance of emotional relationships, open communication, and human values.¹² Learning is directed toward shaping a whole, balanced, and meaningful personality. In practice, teachers can encourage learners to continually realize that the development of potential is the main factor that needs to be nurtured comprehensively, with an emphasis on values such as honesty, cooperation, creativity, and mutual respect. Thus, humanistic learning theory can achieve its goals of developing intelligence and maturity in spiritual, emotional, and social aspects.

Imam Al-Ghazali's Thought in *Ayyuhal Walad*

Imam Al-Ghazali's thought in *Ayyuhal Walad* makes an important contribution to the development of a humanistic educational paradigm. He emphasized that the essence of learning lies in the learner's ability to understand themselves, actualize their potential, reflect on their knowledge, and apply it wisely in real life.¹³ These principles are highly relevant to the ideas of Carl Rogers and Abraham Maslow, who developed humanistic learning theory, which places learners' experiences, values, and personal growth at the core of meaningful and transformative education.¹⁴

Imam Al-Ghazali, in *Ayyuhal Walad*, asserted that the essence of learning is not merely the ability to understand theories, but more about self-awareness, controlling desires, and striving to reach a higher spiritual level. This reflects the main principle of humanistic learning theory, namely that learning must guide individuals toward holistic personality development. In this context, Abraham Maslow's concept of self-actualization shows a strong relevance, where ideal learning is one that leads a person to recognize and develop their potential within moral and spiritual contexts, not merely cognitive ones.

Furthermore, Imam Al-Ghazali's method of advising his students through a letter or treatise known as *Ayyuhal Walad* illustrates that the educational process should be adapted to the learner's psychological condition and personal experiences. He did not

¹⁰ Norul Hikmah and Chandra Maulana, "MANUSIA DAN PENDIDIKAN Manusia Sebagai Makhluq Yang Bisa Dididik Dan Manusia Sebagai Makhluq Yang Perlu Dididik," *AL MIDAD: Jurnal Ilmu Pendidikan Dan Studi Keislaman* 1, no. 2 (2025): 9–24, <https://ejournal.staidhtlungagung.ac.id/index.php/almidad/article/view/52>.

¹¹ Dian Aprelia Rukmi and Titik Mutiah, "Penerapan Pembelajaran Berdiferensiasi Dalam Perspektif Teori Belajar Humanistik," *Jurnal Pendidikan Dasar Flobamorata* 4, no. 3 (2023): 699–706, <https://doi.org/10.51494/jpdf.v4i3.985>.

¹² Agil Bahsoan et al., *Filsafat Dalam Multiperspektif* (Ideas Publishing, 2025), <https://books.google.co.id/books?hl=id&lr=&id=RZNeEQAAQBAJ&oi=fnd&pg=PR1&dq=>.

¹³ Al Ghazali, *Ayyuhal Walad*.

¹⁴ Nur Adilah Nasution and Muhammad Najari, "Implementation of Carl Rogers' Humanistic Learning Theory in Islamic Religious Education Learning at MIS Miftahul Hasanah Binjai," *Jurnal Riset Ilmu Pendidikan* 5, no. 2 (2025): 347–53, <https://doi.org/10.30596/jcositte.v1i1.xxxx>.

respond to all of his student's questions with theoretical answers, but rather with contextual advice based on spiritual experiences that could be understood gradually.¹⁵ This aligns with Carl Rogers' approach, which emphasizes that education should start from the needs, experiences, and perceptions of the individual in order to build personal meaning in the learning process.¹⁶ In other words, it can be concluded that Imam Al-Ghazali's method reflects a highly humanistic approach, in which learners are placed as the central focus of the educational process, directed toward the attainment of awareness and self-transformation.

Humanistic Learning Theory According to Imam Al-Ghazali in *Ayyuhal Walad*

Imam Al-Ghazali's thought in *Ayyuhal Walad* demonstrates a strong connection with humanistic learning theory. This theory emphasizes the importance of character formation, self-potential development, and the application of knowledge in real life, rather than merely accumulating theoretical knowledge.¹⁷ This is reflected in the story of one of Al-Ghazali's senior students who, despite studying for many years, still felt anxious and confused in living his life. Although he had mastered much knowledge, he felt he had not yet gained the principles of life, and therefore asked Imam Al-Ghazali to give him special advice.¹⁸ This request indicates that cognitive mastery of knowledge does not always align with peace of mind and personal maturity, in line with humanistic principles that emphasize meaning and personal experience in the learning process.¹⁹

Before giving advice, Imam Al-Ghazali first delivered a reflective admonition. He reminded his student not to ask questions about things he had never experienced directly, especially regarding spiritual or *dzauqiyah* aspects, which cannot be explained textually. Imam Al-Ghazali chose to provide contextual advice in accordance with the real experiences his student had gone through.²⁰ This view is consistent with Carl Rogers' humanistic perspective, which emphasizes that education must start from the needs, experiences, and perceptions of the individual in order to build personal meaning in the learning process. In other words, from this explanation it can be concluded that the method used by Imam Al-Ghazali reflects a very humanistic approach, where the learner is positioned as the central focus of education, directed towards awareness and self-transformation.²¹

Furthermore, Al-Ghazali emphasized that possessing vast knowledge without real practice has no substantial value in one's life. In his work, he presented the story of Hatim Al-Ashom who studied for many years under his teacher, Syaqiq Al-Balkhiy. Despite the long duration of study, Hatim only took a few essential lessons from his teacher and made

¹⁵ Al Ghazali, *Ayyuhal Walad*.

¹⁶ Tegar Wahyu Firmansyah and Khadijah, "Integrasi Teori Humanistik Abraham Maslow , Carl Rogers Dan Terapi Transpersonal Dalam Mewujudkan Transformasi Diri Dan Penyembuhan Psikologis," *INNOVATIVE: Journal Of Social Science Research* 5, no. 3 (2025): 4511–26, <https://doi.org/10.31004/innovative.v5i3.18916>.

¹⁷ Sri Astuti, "Paradigma Pendidikan Islam: Teori Dan Praktik Pembelajaran" (UIN Ar-Raniry Banda Aceh, 2024), <https://repository.ar-raniry.ac.id/id/eprint/38834/>.

¹⁸ Al Ghazali, *Ayyuhal Walad*.

¹⁹ Farah Dina Insani, "Teori Belajar Humanistik Abraham Maslow Dan Carl Rogers Serta Implikasinya Dalam Pembelajaran Pendidikan Agama Islam," *As-Salam: Jurnal Studi Hukum Islam & Pendidikan* 8, no. 2 (2019): 209–30, <https://doi.org/10.51226/assalam.v8i2.140>.

²⁰ Al Ghazali, *Ayyuhal Walad*.

²¹ Muhammad Mustofa, *Implementasi Pembelajaran Outcome Based Education (OBE), Aktualisasi Dan Problematika Dalam Pembelajaran*, 2023.

them his life principles. These principles in fact guided Hatim to become a virtuous person.²² This illustrates that meaningful learning is not determined by the quantity of knowledge acquired, but by the extent to which that knowledge becomes a guide for life. This perspective is relevant to humanistic principles that prioritize the quality of internalization and application of values within the individual.

Imam Al-Ghazali believed that the success of education cannot be measured only by the level of theoretical understanding, but must also be reflected in one's daily actions. Abraham Maslow, in his theory, also emphasized that success in learning should be measured by positive character changes such as honesty, responsibility, and the ability to make meaningful decisions. In this context, learning is understood as a holistic transformation process encompassing cognitive, affective, and moral aspects.²³

In addition, Imam Al-Ghazali divided the levels of motivation in seeking knowledge. At the lowest level, people study only to meet basic needs, such as securing work, safety, and social status. Some even pursue knowledge merely for praise, social validation, and recognition.²⁴ This is in line with Maslow's hierarchy of needs, which describes that human beings have several levels of needs: physiological needs, safety, love and belonging, esteem, and self-actualization. Al-Ghazali showed that external motivations in learning alone will not produce true wisdom.²⁵

Al-Ghazali further explained that the peak achievement in learning is when a person is able to subdue desires, control their wants, and use knowledge as a means of self-improvement both spiritually and morally. In this sense, knowledge becomes a tool to increase *taghwa* and faith in Allah.²⁶ This reflects the view that true education not only enlightens the intellect but also purifies the soul and shapes noble character. This aspect becomes an integral part of the humanistic approach, which views humans as rational, emotional, and spiritual beings.²⁷

According to Imam Al-Ghazali, the essence of knowledge is when it can lead someone to self-recognition and the development of their best potential.²⁸ Such knowledge encourages good deeds and the formation of a complete character. In humanistic learning theory, the pinnacle of successful learning is also described through self-actualization, namely when individuals are able to understand and develop their full potential for higher moral and spiritual purposes.²⁹ This shows coherence between Al-Ghazali's thought and modern humanistic perspectives in defining the ultimate goal of education.

Thus, the analysis of Al-Ghazali's thought in *Ayyuhal Walad* demonstrates that his ideas have a strong intersection with humanistic learning theory. Concepts such as

²² Al Ghazali, *Ayyuhal Walad*.

²³ Muchammad Iqbal Chailani et al., "Teori Belajar Humanistik Dan Implikasinya Dalam Pembelajaran PAI," *Jurnal Pendidikan* 33, no. 2 (2024): 583–94, <https://doi.org/10.32585/jp.v33i2.5287>.

²⁴ Al Ghazali, *Ayyuhal Walad*.

²⁵ Insani, "Teori Belajar Humanistik Abraham Maslow Dan Carl Rogers Serta Implikasinya Dalam Pembelajaran Pendidikan Agama Islam."

²⁶ Al Ghazali, *Ayyuhal Walad*.

²⁷ Widada Hamid and Aqil Imammudin, "Humanism Learning Theory : Implementation of the Independent Learning Curriculum in Primary Education / Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Pendahuluan," *GENIUS: Journal of Elementary Pedagogy and Innovation Studies* 1, no. 1 (2025): 1–17.

²⁸ Al Ghazali, *Ayyuhal Walad*.

²⁹ Wibowo and Salfadilah, "TANTANGAN PENDIDIKAN HUMANISTIK PADA PROGRAM MERDEKA BELAJAR DI SEKOLAH DASAR."

personal experience, knowledge application, self-actualization, and spiritual awareness form the essence of an educational process that is not only academic. This book is not merely a collection of advice, but also illustrates a model of learning oriented towards holistic human development through the cultivation of potential. Therefore, Imam Al-Ghazali's thought in this work is highly relevant to the humanistic learning theory pioneered by Abraham Maslow and Carl Rogers.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the discussion, it can be concluded that his thoughts have a strong relevance to the principles of humanistic learning theory. In his work, Imam Al-Ghazali emphasizes the importance of applying knowledge, changing attitudes, and forming spiritual character as indicators of success in the learning process. He rejected an educational approach that is solely oriented toward the accumulation of knowledge, and instead emphasized the values of self-actualization, introspection, as well as moral and religious awareness.

The values contained in this book are highly relevant to the ideas proposed by Maslow and Carl Rogers in humanistic learning theory. Learning in this perspective does not merely involve understanding, but also encompasses all dimensions, namely emotional, spiritual, and social. *Ayyuhal Walad* stands as evidence that classical Islamic education had already integrated humanistic principles long before this theory developed in the Western world.

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