



Al-Ghazali's Psycho-Spiritual Counseling Theory: Guidance and Counseling from the Perspective of Islamic Philosophers

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Abstract

The rapid development of guidance and counseling science and its mutual refinement is a positive trend that needs to be continued. Likewise, Islamic counseling theories need to be introduced and implemented in the science of guidance and counseling. One of the theories that is important to know and glorify is Al-Ghazali's psycho-spiritual counseling theory. This research aims to conduct an in-depth study of Al-Ghazali's psycho-spiritual counseling theory. The research is oriented towards a qualitative approach, utilizing the library research method. Furthermore, it is analyzed by using the content analysis method. The results of this study explain that Al-Ghazali's psycho-spiritual counseling theory focuses on revamping the aspects of *al-nafs*, *al-qalb*, *al-ruh*, and *al-'aql* as an effort to alleviate individual problems. This counseling is carried out through 5 important stages, namely, building good relationships with clients, recognizing themselves and identifying the causes of problems, applying the *tazkiyah al-nafs* approach with the rules of *mujahadah al-nafs (takhalli)*, applying the *tazkiyah al-nafs* approach with the rules of *riyadah al-nafs (tahalli)* and assessment. The results of this study can be one of the guidelines and credible sources regarding the implementation of Al-Ghazali's psycho-spiritual counseling, so that it can be applied as an intervention effort in overcoming individual problems.

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INTRODUCTION

The rapid development of guidance and counseling science worldwide, along with their mutual enhancement, is a positive trend to continue, including in Indonesia. Throughout the current scientific development, Western theories serve as the primary reference for the implementation of counseling worldwide (Sarmani & Ninggal, 2008). Where based on the study, for the past six decades, the implementation of counseling in Malaysia has always relied on western counseling theories and approaches (Ali et al., 2023; Ezdianie & Tajudin, 2019). Similarly, the implementation of counseling in Indonesia, both within and outside of schools, currently relies on western counseling theories and approaches (Amin et al., 2019; Erhamwilda, 2009; Gumilang, 2015).

This study shows that Western theories are quite famous in the development of counseling science in the world. Therefore, for the development of counseling science in a broader direction, we need to introduce one of the counseling theories from Islamic philosophers, which can be a reference for counseling that focuses on spiritual aspects. Islamic counseling currently implemented in Indonesia has not been implemented purely; counselors and researchers adopt theories and approaches from the West and then integrate them with Islamic values in their practice (Muhammad, 2021). Al-Ghazali's psycho-spiritual counseling approach, based on the Qur'an and Hadith, is present and introduced as one of the Islamic counseling theories.

Al-Ghazali's psycho-spiritual counseling theory emphasizes the spiritual aspect of counseling implementation. According to Hamjah (2018), it is important to apply the spiritual aspect in the implementation of counseling. Many psychologists believe that spirituality is the basis for an individual's mental health (Ezdianie & Tajudin, 2019; Tajudin, 2018). In addition, one of the figures who realized that it was important to apply the spiritual aspect in counseling was Carl Jung (Ezdianie & Tajudin, 2019; S. Hamjah, Zainab, et al., 2012). Jung (1933) stated that most of his clients who were experiencing problems eventually referred to the spiritual aspect, especially problems related to religion and life. Likewise, Malik Badri (Hamid & Deraman, 2023) stated that every time behavioral and cognitive therapy is combined with Islamic values and spiritual aspects, there is an improvement in clients that exceeds expectations. Quackenbos et al., (1985) also explained in their research that 79% of clients stated that one of the main topics discussed in counseling sessions was religious and spiritual values. Spiritual values are one thing that can increase the success of counseling. Turnbow (S. Hamjah, 2018) stated that counselors and clients agree that the spiritual aspect of counseling contributes greatly to its success.

Several studies have proven the effectiveness of Al-Ghazali's psycho-spiritual counseling approach. Ali et al. (2023), in their research, explained that Al-Ghazali's counseling approach is effective for increasing individual spirituality. Furthermore, research conducted by Ghani et al. (2024) stated that the Al-Ghazali-based therapy counseling module showed a positive effect in improving mental health and spiritual intelligence, which contributed positively to the individual's positive behavior. Then, research conducted by Hamjah et al. (2020) stated that counseling with Al-Ghazali's

Islamic spiritual approach is effective in improving and developing positive thoughts in individuals. This approach leads individuals to believe that every challenge they face in life possesses wisdom, thereby promoting calmness and positive thinking. In addition, Hartati's research (2018) suggests that Islamic counseling with the *tazkiyatun nafs* approach conceptualized by Al-Ghazali can be implemented as an effort to reduce premarital sexual behavior in adolescents.

Based on the previous study, it can be understood how the positive contribution of Al-Ghazali's psycho-spiritual theory and approach is in alleviating client problems in counseling. However, this study is different from previous studies because its main focus is on an in-depth exploration of Al-Ghazali's psycho-spiritual counseling theory, which has not been fully discussed comprehensively in the context of modern counseling practice. While previous studies have shown the effectiveness of Al-Ghazali-based counseling approaches in improving spirituality and mental health. Therefore, this is the basis for us to see and examine in depth the theory of Al-Ghazali's psycho-spiritual counseling: counseling guidance from the perspective of Islamic philosophers. Following up on that, this study needs to be carried out as a study to become a credible source regarding the spiritual nature and psycho-spiritual counseling process from Al-Ghazali's perspective. This study aims to serve as a guideline and reference for the implementation of the counseling process, particularly for Muslim counselors and clients.

METHOD

This study uses a qualitative approach, utilizing the library research method. The library research method is a research method that is carried out by collecting, reviewing, and examining various literature regarding theories that are relevant to the research to be carried out (Adlini et al., 2022). Data collection is carried out through documentation, namely collecting data related to the problems being studied in the form of notes, books, scientific articles, and others (Arikunto, 2006). The data to be collected is related to the main concepts and procedures for implementing psycho-spiritual counseling from Al-Ghazali's perspective. The data analysis process applies the content analysis procedure, which involves comparing, collecting, and identifying various discussions to find those relevant to the study's focus (Mirzaqon & Purwoko, 2017).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Biography of Al-Ghazali

Al-Ghazali is a leading figure in the arena of philosophy, Sufism, and Islamic law who has superior knowledge and character (Ebrahimi et al., 2021; Poya et al., 2023; Purwanto et al., 2023; Safitri et al., 2023). Apart from that, he is also a very famous figure in the international academic world. According to Mobarak (2022), Al-Ghazali directly or indirectly influenced some of the most important thinkers in the Western world. This shows that Al-Ghazali's influence and thoughts are well known in all corners of the Islamic world and also the West. Al-Ghazali's full name is Abu Hamid bin Muhammad bin Ahmad Al-Ghazali (Fathurrahman, 2020). He was born in the city of Thusi, an area

in Khurasan, which is now in Iran, in 450 AH (1058 AD) (Ismail & Uyuni, 2020; Supriyanto, 2022).

Al-Nadawi (S. Hamjah, 2018) stated that Al-Ghazali was one of the many figures who concentrated quite a lot on efforts to bring society to the spiritual and spiritual aspects. This was done because he realized that weakness in this spiritual aspect was the main cause of moral collapse and made individuals pursue the world to the point of ignoring the afterlife. Al-Ghazali's name is also one of the profiles that is often associated with studies on spirituality. Al-Ghazali's involvement in spiritual studies began when he was little. He studied and deepened spiritual knowledge from his father's friend, who was a Sufi expert. Then, Al-Ghazali also received education regarding spirituality and Sufism from his teacher, Yusuf Al-Nassaj, in Jurjan, so that he became accustomed to spiritual life and always did good deeds (S. Hamjah, 2018). On this basis, Al-Ghazali based his theory and practice more on spiritual principles.

Spiritual Perspective of Al-Ghazali

The discussion of spirituality in Al-Ghazali's perspective emphasizes four main elements, namely *Al-Nafs*, *Al-Qalb*, *Al-Ruh*, and *Al-'Aql* (S. Hamjah, Rozali, et al., 2012; Safitri et al., 2023). Al-Ghazali's view of spirituality must include these four elements. The elements of *qalb*, soul, and *nafs* are elements that have a major influence on the inner nature of humans, while *'Aql* is an element that influences the outer nature of humans. However, the most important element that influences human behavior is the heart (Sarmani & Ninggal, 2008). Regarding these four important elements, it will be explained in more depth.

Al-Nafs, regarding this, there are two meanings according to Al-Ghazali, (2000); first, *Al-Nafs* is interpreted as lust, which includes anger and lust in humans. Sufism experts usually use this definition because lust is the main cause of all human reprehensible behavior (S. Hamjah, 2018). Second, the meaning of *Al-Nafs* is the nature of humans themselves. In this sense, *Al-Nafs* has various characteristics, depending on the circumstances. So, it can be interpreted that lust in the first definition is a very reprehensible lust. In the second definition, lust is praiseworthy, as it represents the human self as a substance and essence, fully aware of Allah and all His attributes. Al-Ghazali (2000) categorizes the human soul into three types: *Al-Nafs Al-Muthmainnah*, which refers to the soul that embodies a calm, peaceful, satisfied, joyful, happy, and free heart (Yaacob, 2013). This type is the highest level of *nafs*, also known as a pious soul (Ahmad & Hassan, 2015). Then *Al-Nafs Al-Lawwamah* is a soul that does not feel perfection in calm (Warsah, 2017) because there is turmoil between good and evil (S. Hamjah, 2018). Furthermore, *Al-Nafs Al-Ammarah* is a soul that is obedient to lust and follows the urges of Satan (S. Hamjah, 2018; Warsah, 2017).

Al-Qalb also has two different versions of meaning from Al-Ghazali, namely physical and spiritual (S. Hamjah, 2018). First, *Al-Qalb* is defined as an elliptical lump of flesh located on the left side of the human chest, also called the physical heart. The second meaning of *Al-Qalb* refers to something subtle, related to divinity (*rabbaniyah*) and spirituality (*ruhaniyah*). The heart is the essence of humans who seek knowledge and

obey Allah SWT's commands while avoiding what He forbids. *Al-Qalb* inspires people to strive for perfection, with the ultimate aim of worshiping Allah SWT (Ezdianie & Tajudin, 2019). *Al-Qalb* is also a place of faith, piety, sincerity, trustworthiness, and other positive qualities. However, we cannot deny the presence of disbelief and hypocrisy. Kindness will channel goodness to the entire human body and vice versa (Yuseri et al., 2010).

Al-Ruh, according to Al-Ghazali, also has two different meanings. The first meaning, Al-Ghazali states, is that the spirit is the center of movement of all blood vessels, which then flow throughout the human body so that with the presence of the spirit and Allah's permission, humans can breathe, move, feel, see, and also hear, as living humans (Ezdianie & Tajudin, 2019). Second, *Al-Ruh* is a subtle nature contained in humans that can know something. *Al-Ruh* is something extraordinary, which is not able to be understood by the human mind to express its essence (S. Hamjah, 2018).

Al-'Aql is a place where knowledge develop's. *'Aql* distinguishes humans from animals. *Aql* is an intellectual power that allows humans to think systematically and rationally. The meaning of *'Aql* in Al-Ghazali's perspective (Jamiah et al., 2017) can be divided into four meanings. First, *'Aql* is like a light that is present in the human heart, which then provides the drive to know various things. *'Aql* is also interpreted as knowledge found in humans that helps to be able to distinguish between something that is possible and impossible. *'Aql* is also interpreted as knowledge obtained from life experiences that make humans wise and mature. *'Aql* is also called human strength in controlling their lusts and as a guide for humans in doing good deeds. In order to see the previous explanation in detail, a picture of the four elements in Al-Ghazali's spiritual perspective is shown in Figure 1.

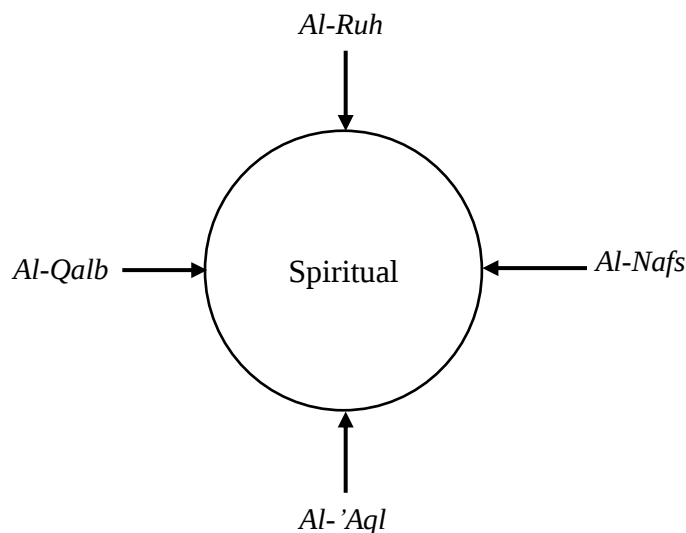


Figure 1. Spiritual Elements of Al-Ghazali's Perspective

Based on previous studies on the four important elements in Al-Ghazali's spiritual perspective, it can be formulated that *Al-Nafs*, *Al-Qalb*, *Al-Ruh*, and *Al-'Aql* are the essence of humans. Al-Ghazali's emphasis in discussing these four spiritual elements of

humans can be proven through his writings, which repeatedly mention this in his various works.

Al-Ghazali's Perspective of Psycho-Spiritual Counseling Theory

The definition of counseling is not explained directly by Al-Ghazali but is examined from his works, which use the term *al-irsyad*. In this case, spiritual counseling according to Al-Ghazali is a method of guiding, teaching, or showing the way to a goal or towards goodness in accordance with Islamic law (Ezdianie & Tajudin, 2019; Fikri, 2024; S. Hamjah, 2018). This method focuses on the spiritual aspects that exist in humans (*Al-Nafs*, *Al-Qalb*, *Al-Ruh*, and *Al-'Aql*) by following a counseling process that includes the rules of *ma'rifah an-nafs* and *tazkiyah al-nafs*, which are not only about solving problems in human life but more than that, namely for the welfare and happiness of the world and the hereafter (S. Hamjah, 2018). Where the basis of this view is also, humans can achieve true happiness by returning to God (Ezdianie & Tajudin, 2019).

The implementation of psycho-spiritual counseling according to Al-Ghazali begins with recognizing oneself (*ma'rifah al-nafs*) and then continues with the struggle of the soul (*mujahadah nafs*). Then after these two processes, one more step is also added, which is called purification of the soul (*tazkiyah al-nafs*), whose ultimate goal is to help clients achieve true happiness, namely the world and the hereafter (S. Hamjah, 2018).

Before applying this theory in the future, it should be reviewed first regarding the steps and process of implementing Al-Ghazali's psycho-spiritual counseling. The steps in implementing psycho-spiritual counseling go through 5 stages, namely: a) building good relationships with clients; b) recognizing yourself and identifying the causes of problems; c) application of the *tazkiyah al-nafs* approach with the principle of *mujahadah al-nafs* (*takhalli*); d) application of the *tazkiyah al-nafs* approach with the principle of *riyadah al-nafs* (*tahalli*); e) assessment and happiness (S. Hamjah, 2022). The following is a flow chart related to the process of implementing Al-Ghazali's psycho-spiritual counseling.

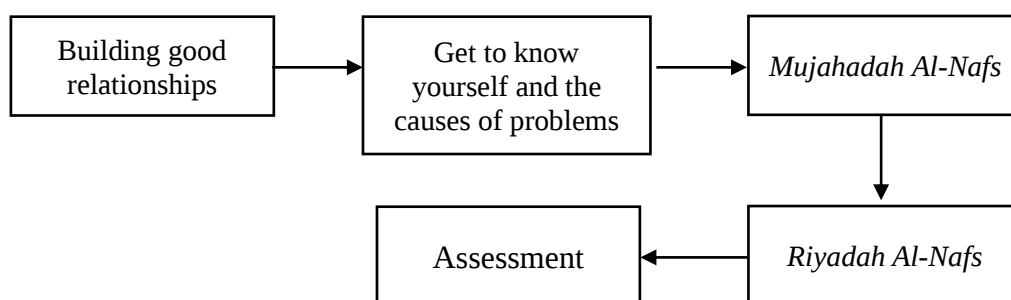


Figure 2. Flowchart of Al-Ghazali's Psycho-spiritual Counseling Process

The first stage is building a positive relationship with the client. According to Hamjah (2022), building a good relationship with the client is critical to start a counseling session. A strong relationship between the counselor and the client is crucial for the success of the counseling process. The success of counseling will be difficult to achieve if the counselor is unable to build a relationship/intimacy with the client (Taufik & Yeni

Karneli, 2017). Building this positive relationship will increase the client's trust in the counselor and create a comfortable feeling during the counseling process (S. Hamjah, 2018). In building a positive relationship with the client, the counselor needs to show curiosity in helping. The counselor's goal at this point is to learn about the client's history and character. The counselor must also show a caring attitude to foster a sense of brotherhood and love for fellow Muslims. At this stage, it is necessary to be sincere, patient, calm, gentle, and affectionate; able to maintain confidentiality; always want to help; be right; empathetic; listen more; and be humble (S. Hamjah, 2018).

The second stage is to recognize yourself and identify the causes of problems in clients. Clients must first recognize their strengths and weaknesses to understand the causes of their issues, which will then be resolved. According to Massuhartono & Mukaromah (2019), knowing yourself is the main key to knowing others. At this stage, the counselor tries to explore the client's problems. The counselor will consider how the client's issues relate to their strengths (*syarf al-nafs*) and weaknesses (*'uyub al-nafs*). Lifting the client's strengths can help them to believe in their abilities in overcoming problems, while knowing their weaknesses will be a lesson so as not to repeat them in solving problems. The counselor must also analyze what the client has said to identify the problem's causes. In Al-Ghazali's view, the things that can be done are a) recognizing the signs of liver disease; b) correctly recognizing where the devil enters the human heart; c) recognizing self-deficiencies; and d) realizing the fact that the heart often turns back and forth.

The third stage involves applying the *tazkiyah al-nafs* approach along with the *mujahadah al-nafs (takhalli)* rules. *Tazkiyah al-nafs* from Al-Ghazali's perspective is an effort to reform or cleanse the human soul, heart, and self from ugliness and vile traits (Arifin & Hamjah, 2017; N. B. Ismail & Hamjah, 2017). In short, *tazkiyah al-nafs* is the process of purifying the soul of all bad qualities or morals that are embedded in an individual through the process of *mujahadah al-nafs (al-takhalli)* and then fertilizing it with pure qualities through the process of *riyadah al-nafs (al-tahalli)* (S. Hamjah, 2022). At this stage, we will apply *mujahadah al-nafs*, which Al-Ghazali identifies as the primary treatment for all liver diseases. *Mujahadah al-nafs* aims to empty the soul, namely eliminating all heart diseases, bad traits, or *mazmumah* traits, and then only filling it by getting closer to Allah SWT. In the third stage, the counselor finds the client's issue, connects it to a spiritual problem, and proposes solutions.

The fourth stage is the application of the *tazkiyah al-nafs* approach with the principle of *riyadah al-nafs (tahalli)*. At this stage, the counselor will explain that when a person has freed his soul from the bad traits that are the cause of the problems he is facing, the next step is to fill the soul with good traits through *riyadah al-nafs (al-tahalli)* (S. Hamjah, 2022). This method combines aspects of strengthening faith (*aqidah*), increasing worship, and implementing *mahmudah* traits (morals) in the soul, which are three important components in Islamic teachings. If the soul is filled with good qualities, it will be a driving force toward goodness and enable the client to live a life full of peace (S. Hamjah, 2018).

The fifth stage involves assessment and happiness. This is the last step in the process of implementing Al-Ghazali's psycho-spiritual counseling. Assessments are made on several things, such as whether the counseling implementation has succeeded in eradicating the client's spiritual problems (S. Hamjah, 2018). The counselor checks whether his client has succeeded in overcoming his problems and evaluates if the client has achieved happiness through increased Islamic knowledge and its application in daily life (S. Hamjah, 2022). Additionally, the counselor assesses the steps and methods taken to achieve *al-sa'adah* (happiness) in the client's life. In this case, it is very necessary to re-evaluate all stages of implementation that have been passed, starting from building intimacy with the client, getting to know yourself and identifying the causes of the problem, and applying the Al-Nafs tazkiyah method with *mujahadah al-nafs (takhalli)* and *riyadah al-nafs (tahalli)*. If there are shortcomings, more counseling is needed to reach the goals.

Based on an in-depth study of the previous psycho-spiritual counseling process, it can be concluded that Al-Ghazali has his own method in overcoming various problems faced by humans, especially by applying the *tazkiyah al-nafs* method, which includes *mujahadah al-nafs* and *riyadah al-nafs*. This theoretical concept should be applied in the future, especially to Muslim counselors, to help clients overcome various obstacles and problems in life. In its application, the provision of services should be accompanied by more varied methods and media and in accordance with student needs to provide better service quality (Wahid & Neviyarni, 2024).

CONCLUSION

Al-Ghazali psycho-spiritual counseling is one of the counseling concepts of the Islamic philosopher Al-Ghazali, which is an alternative in the process of alleviating various client problems by focusing on the spiritual aspect. The four spiritual aspects, which are also the nature of humans according to Al-Ghazali, are *Al-Nafs*, *Al-Qalb*, *Al-Ruh*, and *Al-'Aql*. By directing this aspect to goodness and returning to Allah SWT, the individual will find peace and happiness. Because the concept of this theory says that true happiness will come by getting closer and returning to God. The implementation of Al-Ghazali psycho-spiritual counseling goes through five important stages: building good relationships with clients, recognizing oneself and identifying the causes of problems, implementing the *tazkiyah al-nafs* approach with the *mujahadah al-nafs* principle (*takhalli*), implementing the *tazkiyah al-nafs* approach with the *riyadah al-nafs* principle (*tahalli*), and assessment. From the results of the study, it is hoped that this counseling concept can become more famous among counselors, especially Muslim counselors. So that in the future it can be implemented as an alternative solution in the counseling process to help overcome various client problems.

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