

Muhasabah and the Construction of Moral Subjectivity: Al-Ghazali's Influence on Ta'dzim among Santri in Islamic Boarding Schools

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Abstract

This study aims to examine how al-Ghazali's concept of muhasabah (self-introspection) can foster an attitude of ta'dzim (respect) in students in Islamic boarding schools. The concept of muhasabah in al-Ghazali's thinking is the main foundation in the education of morals and spirituality of a person. In the context of Islamic boarding school education, the value of ta'dzim is a fundamental character that is instilled in students from the beginning, especially in respecting teachers (Kiai), knowledge, and fellow students and their surroundings. This study uses qualitative (library research) this study analyzes classical texts from al-Ghazali's works and related Islamic education literature. The results of the study show that the practice of muhasabah strengthens ethical and spiritual awareness, fosters humility (tawadhu'), manners, and deep respect for teachers, knowledge, and fellow students. This article offers a spiritual-ethical framework based on Al-Ghazali's thinking to strengthen character education in Islamic boarding schools and answer contemporary moral challenges.

Keywords: *Muhasabah, Al-Ghazali, Ta'dzim Santri, Boarding School Education*

Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji bagaimana konsep *muhasabah* (introspeksi diri) Al-Ghazali dapat menumbuhkan

sikap *ta'dzim* (rasa hormat) pada santri di lingkungan pesantren. Konsep muhasabah dalam pemikiran Al-Ghazali menjadi fondasi utama dalam pendidikan akhlak dan spiritualitas seseorang. Dalam konteks pendidikan pesantren, nilai *ta'dzim* merupakan karakter fundamental yang ditanamkan kepada santri sejak awal, terutama dalam menghormati guru (Kiai), ilmu, serta sesama santri dan lingkungan sekitarnya. Penelitian ini Menggunakan penelitian kepustakaan (*library research*) kualitatif, studi ini menganalisis teks-teks klasik dari karya Al-Ghazali dan literatur pendidikan Islam terkait. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan praktik *muhasabah* memperkuat kesadaran etika dan spiritual, menumbuhkan kerendahan hati (*tawadhu'*), adab, serta penghormatan yang mendalam terhadap guru, ilmu, dan sesama santri. Artikel ini menawarkan kerangka spiritual-etis berbasis pemikiran Al-Ghazali untuk memperkuat pendidikan karakter di pesantren dan menjawab tantangan moral kontemporer.

Kata Kunci: *Muhasabah; Al-Ghazali; Ta'dzim; Santri; Pendidikan Pesantren*

Introduction

Indonesia is one of the countries with the largest Muslim population in the world, which directly influences the formation of values, character, and culture that develop within Indonesian society. One of the main forums in the formation of Islamic character and values is pesantren education, a traditional education system that has grown and spread widely in various regions along with the development of Islam in the country.¹ Indonesia's Islamic boarding schools (pesantren) have long served as bastions of moral and spiritual education, with *ta'dzim* (profound respect for teachers, knowledge, and peers) standing as a cornerstone of their pedagogical philosophy. This tradition represents more than mere etiquette—it embodies a holistic worldview where knowledge transmission is sacred and the teacher-student relationship forms the bedrock of moral development. However, as Indonesia navigates the currents of modernization, this time-honored value faces unprecedented challenges from educational paradigms that prioritize

¹ Sayyidah Syaehotin and Akhmad Yunan Athoâ, "Ta'zim Santri Kepada Kiai (Studi Makna Penghormatan Murid Kepada Guru Di Pesantren)," *Al Qodiri: Jurnal Pendidikan, Sosial Dan Keagamaan* 18, no. 1 (2020): 240–48.

intellectual achievement over character formation and reconfigure teacher roles from spiritual guides to mere “learning facilitators”.²

However, in the midst of the fast-paced modernization trend, this kind of mannerist values are increasingly marginalized. Modern education tends to position teachers as mere learning companions, and in many cases, focuses on intellectual intelligence that overlooks the importance of character formation and affective values of learners. As a result, the prestige and respect for teachers that were once highly respected are now starting to lose their place in the contemporary education system. In fact, a number of modern education circles criticize the traditional approach that emphasizes the subjection and obedience of students to the teacher, and considers it an ancient form of education that is irrelevant to today. Therefore, serious and systematic efforts are needed to revive the value of ta'dzim in the students consciously.³

One of the relevant approaches to forming the awareness of ta'dzim is through strengthening the value of muhasabah (self-introspection), as taught by Imam Al-Ghazali. Al-Ghazali emphasized the importance of muhasabah as a process of introspection or self-evaluation that must be carried out continuously so that humans are not negligent in living their spiritual lives. In his book *Ihya' Ulum al-Din*, he explains that a person who never corrects himself is a person who is far from guidance, and therefore it is difficult to achieve moral glory. In the context of Islamic boarding schools, muhasabah can be an effective means in forming the awareness of students to be ta'dzim, because introspection will encourage a person to recognize one's shortcomings and foster respect for others.

The tension between preserving ta'dzim and adapting to contemporary educational values reflects a broader crisis in moral education. Modern pedagogical approaches often critique traditional models that emphasize obedience as potentially stifling critical thinking, while simultaneously struggling to fill the moral vacuum created by their own emphasis on cognitive development alone. Within this context, Imam Al-Ghazali's concept of muhasabah (self-introspection) emerges as a compelling framework to revitalize ta'dzim not as blind submission, but as conscious spiritual discipline born from self-awareness.

² Muhamad Nur Zaman and Muhammad Munadi, “Modernization of Islamic Boarding School Education Institutions According to Azyumardi Azra,” *Al-Afkar, Journal For Islamic Studies* 8, no. 1 (2025): 317–26.

³ Kurnia Muhajarah, “Krisis Manusia Modern Dan Pendidikan Islam,” *Al Ta'dib* 7, no. 2 (2018): 188–204.

Thus, this paper aims to examine in depth the role of the concept of muhasabah according to Al-Ghazali's view in shaping the awareness of ta'dzim of students. This study is expected to be able to make a theoretical and practical contribution to the development of character education in the pesantren environment, as well as a reference in formulating a holistic educational approach between spiritual, intellectual, and moral aspects.

Method

Contains the method used. The method should be appropriate to the research question. Written in one paragraph This research uses a qualitative approach. According to Bogdan and Taylor,⁴ a qualitative approach is a research method that produces descriptive data in the form of written or spoken words from individuals and observed behaviors. The method used in this study is the literature study method (library research), which is a qualitative approach that focuses on collecting data from various written sources, such as books, scientific journals, articles, theses, dissertations, documents, and other references, both in print and digital form, without conducting direct observations in the field.⁵ This literature study was conducted to explore Al-Ghazali's thoughts on muhasabah (self-introspection) and to understand the concept of ta'dzim in the context of pesantren education and the formation of student character.

Results and Discussion

Definition of the Concept of Muhasabah (Intropy) According to Al-Ghazali

According to the thought of Imam Al-Ghazali, as stated in the book *Ihya' Ulumiddin* juz 38, the concept of muhasabah or self-introspection is discussed in depth. Al-Ghazali explained that muhasabah is an assessment of oneself that is not based on personal desires, but refers to the Qur'an and the Hadith of the Prophet. He interprets muhasabah as the process of observing in detail all the deeds that have been done or will be planned. This practice of muhasabah is an important means of improving the condition of the heart, training it, and purifying and purifying it.⁶ In the book, it is also emphasized

⁴ Burhan Bungin, "Metodologi Penelitian Kualitatif: Aktualisasi Metodologis Ke Arah Ragam Varian Kontemporer," 2007, <https://library.stik-ptik.ac.id/detail?id=8736&lokasi=lokal>.

⁵ Milya Sari and Asmendri Asmendri, "Penelitian Kepustakaan (Library Research) Dalam Penelitian Pendidikan IPA," *Natural Science: Jurnal Penelitian Bidang IPA Dan Pendidikan IPA* 6, no. 1 (2020): 41-53.

⁶ R. Rofa'ah, "Akhlak Keagamaan Kelas XII," 2020, <https://repository.deepublish.com/publications/590417/akhlak-keagamaan-kelas-xii>.

that belief in the calculation of charity on the Day of Resurrection requires a person to immediately evaluate himself and prepare himself as best as possible.

Etymologically, the word muhasabah comes from the Arabic *hasaba-yuhasibu-hisaban*, which means to count. In the Arabic-Indonesian Dictionary, muhasabah is interpreted as calculation or introspection.⁷ While terminologically, muhasabah refers to the act of examining or paying attention to and contemplating all the good and bad things that have been done, including paying attention to the intention and purpose behind an action, as well as weighing the advantages and disadvantages. In his book explains that muhasabah is a process of self-evaluation, in which a Muslim recognizes himself, understands his actions, and strengthens his relationship with God through faith manifested in deeds and worship.⁸

Muhasabah in Contemporary Islamic Educational Theory Al-Attas' *Ta'dib: Discipline as Holistic Education* Al-Attas redefines Islamic education as *ta'dib*—instilling *adab* (righteous discipline) to cultivate the “good man” (*insan adabi*), who harmonizes knowledge, justice, and spiritual awareness. Muhasabah operationalizes *ta'dib* by: Hierarchical self-awareness: Recognizing one's place in the cosmic and social order (e.g., students submitting to teachers' guidance as part of *adab*). Institutional discipline: Regular self-reflection in schools mirrors Al-Attas' vision of education as “soul governance”. While *ta'dib* empowers moral autonomy, its institutionalization risks rigidity if *ta'dzim* (respect for authority) suppresses critical inquiry. For instance, santri might internalize discipline but lack tools to challenge outdated norms.⁹ Muhasabah can be interpreted as self-reflection to calculate what has been done before Allah SWT hisab one's deeds on the day of retribution, contemplation, introspection, self-reflection and then making improvements and improving achievements as much as possible.¹⁰

⁷ Asad M. Al-Kali, “Kamus Indonesia-Arab,” Jakarta: Bulan Bintang, 1989.

⁸ Khairunnas Rajab, *Agama Kebahagiaan: Energi Positif Iman, Islam Dan Ihsan Untuk Menjaga Kesehatan Psikologi Dan Melahirkan Kepribadian Qurani* (Yogyakarta: Pustaka Pesantren, 2012).

⁹ Farah Ahmed, “An Exploration of Naquib Al-Attas' Theory of Islamic Education as *Ta'dib* as an ‘Indigenous’ Educational Philosophy,” *Educational Philosophy and Theory* 50, no. 8 (July 3, 2018): 786–94, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00131857.2016.1247685>.

¹⁰ “Kegiatan Muhasabah Wa Tarbiyah Sebagai Upaya Membentuk Kedisiplinan Santri Di Pondok Pesantren Askhabul Kahfi Semarang: Analisis Bimbingan Konseling Islam - Walisongo Repository,” accessed May 30, 2025, <https://eprints.walisongo.ac.id/id/eprint/14522/>.

Imam Al-Ghazali suggested four methods that a person can apply in conducting muhasabah or self-involvement, in order to be aware and know the shortcomings that exist in him. These methods are:

1. Consult a *shaykh* or spiritual guide who is able to see and identify one's shortcomings and weaknesses. From this person, one can ask for advice and direction to recognize and correct their shortcomings.
2. Ask for the help of honest and religious friends, so that they are willing to observe, advise, and remind if there are shortcomings in themselves. This method has become a habit among pious people and previous scholars in maintaining morals and improving themselves.
3. Making criticism from the enemy as material for self-evaluation. People who have hatred or hostility tend to be more sensitive in seeing the weaknesses of others. Therefore, criticism and reproach from them can be used as a sharper and more useful introspection material than praise from friends who are always justified.
4. Expand socialization and relationships. In daily interactions, a believer can learn from the behavior of the people around him. He can take lessons from good actions to be used as an example, as well as stay away from bad deeds that he witnesses so as not to fall into them.¹¹

According to Imam Al-Ghazali, the concept of Muhasabah or self-introspection is the process of evaluating oneself, both before and after doing an act, both outwardly visible and inward. Muhasabah aims to examine a person's intentions, goals and behavior, in order to find out whether these actions provide additional value for goodness or actually reduce it. This process is carried out consistently throughout life in this world, because every deed will be held accountable in the hereafter. The practice of muhasabah has actually been known since the time of the previous Ummah, long before the compilation of the book *Ihya' Ulum al-Din*, as part of efforts to purify the soul and a means to recognize one's shortcomings, so that the same mistakes are not repeated and people are made aware of the negligence due to following misleading desires.¹²

Therefore, every individual is encouraged to always associate with honest people, learn from the words of people who are hostile to themselves

¹¹ 140402167 Ainul Mardziah Binti Zulkifli, "Konsep Muhasabah Diri menurut Imam Al-Ghazali (Studi Deskriptif Analisis Kitab *Ihya' Ulumiddin*)" (skripsi, UIN Ar-Raniry Banda Aceh, 2018), <http://library.ar.raniry.ac.id>.

¹² Ninda Nurhasanah, "Peran muhasabah dalam meningkatkan prestasi belajar (Studi Kasus Santri di Pondok Pesantren Darul Hikmah Cisauk Tangerang Banten)" (bachelorThesis, FU, 2022), <https://repository.uinjkt.ac.id/dspace/handle/123456789/66152>.

and learn from the surrounding social environment. With this, a person will be encouraged to introspect themselves more often and process becoming a pious servant of Allah.

The Concept of Ta'dzim (Manners/Respect)

The word *ta'dzim* comes from Arabic with its interpretation *Addzama-Yu''addzimu-Ta'diman*. Ta'dzim is a form of respect and a form of obedience to a figure who is respected by someone, in this case, of course, a teacher or a kiai.¹³ From this, the attitude of ta'dzim is very closely related to the learning process for students. Ta'dzim does not mean restricting students to think critically or ask questions openly to their teachers, but rather emphasizing obedience and respect that are manifested through ethics when speaking and behaving in front of teachers. In discussing the attitude of ta'dzim, it cannot be separated from the concept of morality, because ta'dzim is part of morality itself.

According to Al-Ghazali, morality is a condition that remains firmly in a person's soul, so that it arises when a person performs an act. If the deeds that appear are good, it is called commendable morality. On the other hand, if what is seen is bad behavior, then it includes reprehensible morals.¹⁴ The attitude of *Ta'dzim* is not only aimed at the teacher, but also at both parents. But, ta'dzim to the teacher occupies a more important position.

In the book *Hidayatul Al-Bidayah*, several forms of students' attitudes to their teachers are explained, including:

- 1) When meeting or confronting the teacher, the student should precede by giving a greeting as a form of respect.
- 2) It is not appropriate to talk about things that are not useful in front of the teacher, especially if the conversation can offend the teacher.
- 3) When asking questions, students should ask permission first and avoid questions that test or challenge the teacher. Students are also not allowed to show their strengths excessively as if they are smarter than the teacher. If the teacher makes a mistake, the student should rebuke in a polite and thoughtful manner, not in a defiant attitude
- 4) Avoid joking with teachers excessively, as it can reduce respect.

¹³ Sayyidah Syaehotin and Akhmad Yunan Athoâ, "Taâ€™™ Dzim Santri Kepada Kiai (Studi Makna Penghormatan Murit Kepada Guru Di Pesantren)," *Al Qodiri: Jurnal Pendidikan, Sosial Dan Keagamaan* 18, no. 1 (2020): 240-48.

¹⁴ Yoke Suryadarma and Ahmad Hifdzil Haq, "Pendidikan Akhlak Menurut Imam Al-Ghazali," *At-Ta'dib* 10, no. 2 (2015), <https://ejournal.unida.gontor.ac.id/index.php/tadib/article/view/460/417>.

- 5) Don't ask irrelevant questions, especially when the teacher is open or has a lot of business.
- 6) Students should not stand in front of the teacher who is sitting without obvious needs, or behave rudely which can create an impression of disrespect.
- 7) Do not invite teachers to talk in public or street about lessons or things that are not important. It's a good idea to meet the teacher in a more appropriate place, such as his home or another appropriate location.
- 8) Do not have a bad prejudice against teachers, because this can damage relationships and reduce the blessings of knowledge.

In the book *Ta'limul Muta'alim* by Shaykh Az Zarnuji, several procedures for respecting or *ta'dzim* to a teacher (Kiai) are also explained:

- 1) A student should not walk in front of the teacher, except in very important circumstances
- 2) Students are forbidden to sit in the teacher's seat because it is not good manners
- 3) Students should not start a conversation with the teacher unless they have permission from the teacher.
- 4) A student should not talk much in front of the teacher, especially things that are not important or can disturb the teacher
- 5) Students are not allowed to ask the teacher questions when the teacher is feeling tired or bored, as it can interfere with the teacher's break time.
- 6) When visiting the teacher at home, students should not knock on the door continuously, but must wait until the teacher comes out and knows the right time.¹⁵

Thus, a student is obliged to seek the pleasure or willingness of a teacher. Students realize that the knowledge obtained will not be perfect without the guidance of the teacher, because the teacher is the intermediary of knowledge. Therefore, knowledge and teachers cannot be separated. If a person has knowledge without a teacher, then the teacher is a satanic. On the other hand, teaching or learning from people who are not knowledgeable is futile. So, respect (*ta'dzim*) for Kiai or teachers is respect for knowledge itself. In this case, *ta'dzim* to teachers has a meaning as respect for knowledge, seeking blessings, hoping for the teacher's pleasure, and showing obedience

¹⁵ Basri Hasan, "Penanaman Sikap Ta'dzim Dalam Membentuk Kepatuhan Pada Santri Di Pondok Pesantren Darul A'mal Metro" (Undergraduate, UIN Raden Intan Lampung, 2021), <https://repository.radenintan.ac.id/13589/>.

to the teacher.¹⁶ A student must avoid actions that can make the teacher angry and always obey his orders as long as it does not conflict with religion.

The Role of Muhasabah as the Formation of Ta'dzim Awareness

In Islamic teachings, muhasabah or self-intuition is a highly recommended practice. As one of the recommended forms of worship, muhasabah has extraordinary benefits. This practice is believed to be able to provide inner peace and create harmony in a person's soul. In addition, muhasabah also plays an important role in guiding individuals towards a more meaningful life and fostering the spirit to continue to get closer to Allah SWT.

Imam Al-Ghazali said that muhasabah is the main foundation in the formation of spiritual character. In his work *Ihya' 'Ulum al-Din*, he explained that a person is obliged to evaluate himself every day, because without muhasabah, the human heart will be closed by sin and pride.¹⁷ In the context of pesantren education, muhasabah is a tool to form the self-awareness of a student as the role of seeker of knowledge. This awareness fosters a humble attitude and submission to the noble values of the pesantren, especially in fostering ta'dzim to teachers and knowledge. Students who are aware of their weaknesses as human beings will find it easier to be respectful and *tawadhu'* to people who are more knowledgeable.

In addition, muhasabah strengthens self-control and internal supervision of students. Al-Ghazali also taught the importance of *muraqabah*, which is feeling always watched by Allah, which arises after a person is accustomed to muhasabah. This sense of supervision can foster ethics in behavior, including in maintaining verbal behavior, body attitude, and how to behave towards teachers and fellow students. Ta'dzim that is reflected in manners is not only an outward expression, but the result of spiritual awareness formed by muhasabah.¹⁸

The practice of muhasabah also shapes the moral character of the students as a whole. In Al-Ghazali's view, knowledge without morals will be useless, and morality will not be formed without consistent self-evaluation.¹⁹

¹⁶ Sayyidah Syaehotin and Akhmad Yunan Athoâ, "Taâ€™Dzim Santri Kepada Kiai (Studi Makna Penghormatan Murid Kepada Guru Di Pesantren)," *Al Qodiri: Jurnal Pendidikan, Sosial Dan Keagamaan* 18, no. 1 (2020): 240–48.

¹⁷ Al-Ghazali, *Ihya' 'Ulum al-Din* (Terj. Oleh H. Ihsan Dan H. Soleh). (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-Ilmiyyah, 2008).

¹⁸ H, Zarkasyi, *Konsep Pendidikan Tasawuf: Analisis Pemikiran Al-Ghazali Tentang Penyucian Jiwa*. (Yogyakarta: Pustaka Pelajar, 2010).

¹⁹ Al-Ghazali, *Ihya' 'Ulum al-Din* (Terj. Oleh H. Ihsan Dan H. Soleh).

Therefore, muhasabah not only improves the vertical relationship of students with Allah, but also horizontal relationships with fellow humans. The attitude of ta'dzim towards the teacher is the fruit of refined morals, which grows along with the process of purification of the soul through introspection. Students who deliberate will be more self-aware in speech, respect the teacher's time and presence, and not be rash in acting.

By doing self-reflection, a student is expected to be able to understand and know himself deeply, so that he can adjust both in interacting with others and in dealing with various life problems. The benefits that can be taken from the attitude of muhasabah are, humans are able to understand themselves, always feel like they want to always improve themselves, far from arrogance, muhasabah will be easy to do righteous deeds and stay away from something that Allah forbids. By praying a lot sincerely for the sake of Allah, it will ease the hisab on the Day of Resurrection. Even Umar bin Khattab once said to be self-absorbed before being inhaled at the end of the apocalypse.²⁰

Thus, Muhasabah encourages spiritual awareness in students. This awareness is reflected in the attitude of accepting criticism, being open to correction, and being able to position themselves in a balanced manner in the pesantren environment. Al-Ghazali said that a person who never evaluates himself will be easily trapped in arrogance, while if the student deliberates, he will continue to improve his intentions and attitudes.²¹ Thus, muhasabah is not only an individual practice, but also a means in moral education that plays an important role in shaping the character of the ta'dzim of students as a whole.

Conclusion

Muhasabah (Intropy) in Al-Ghazali's view is an important foundation in the formation of an individual's spiritual and moral personality, especially in the context of pesantren education. This concept encourages a person to purify the soul, improve morals, and maintain harmony between speech and action. In this case, muhasabah is the main means in forming awareness of the importance of ta'dzim (attitude of respect/adab) to teachers. Students who are accustomed to muhasabah will have a more tawadhu' soul, be humble, and realize their limitations as seekers of knowledge.

²⁰ Khaizul Hidayah, "Pembinaan Kesadaran Beribadah dan Sikap Muhasabah pada Santri Al-Hikmah 2 Benda Sirampog Kabupaten Brebes" (other, IAIN SALATIGA, 2024), <http://e-repository.perpus.uinsalatiga.ac.id/20131/>.

²¹ Abuddin Nata, *Akhlak Tasawuf: Telaah Atas Pemikiran Al-Ghazali* (Jakarta: Raja Grafindo Persada, 2003).

The process of muhasabah must be equipped with muraqabah (awareness of Allah's supervision), because only by feeling supervised can a person build self-control and maintain his morals, including in behaving towards teachers and fellow students. Ta'dzim is seen as a manifestation of appreciation for knowledge, teachers as his benefactors, and Allah as the source of all knowledge. Thus, this article shows that the relationship between muhasabah and ta'dzim is an important foundation in moral and spiritual education in the pesantren environment. Both form the personality of students who are knowledgeable, civilized, and responsible, both in front of humans and gods.

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