Amorti: Jurnal Studi Islam Interdisipliner
Vol. 4, No. 3, Juli 2025, pp. 295-300
http://journal.amorfati.id/index.php/amorti | | ISSN 2962-9209

Interdisciplinary Scope of Contemporary Islamic Studies • Interdisciplinary Islamic Education • Interdisciplinary Islamic Law, Ethics, and Fatwa Studies • Interdisciplinary Islamic Economics, Finance, and Philanthropy • Islam, Society, and Culture • Islam, Politics, Governance, and Public Policy • Islam, Gender, Family, and Human Rights • Islam, Media, Communication, and Digital Da'wah • Islam, Health, Environment, and Sustainable Development • Islam, Science, Technology, Artificial Intelligence, and Digital Transformation

The Concept of Islamic Education Internalization According to Scholars Imam Al-Ghazali and Abdullah Nasih Ulwan: An Experiential Learning Perspective (A Case Study in Public Elementary Schools in Tarokan District, Kediri Regency)

Muhamad Rokim [A,1,*], Muhammad Nur Haris Asyrofi[b,2], Ahmad Dahlan Baidowi[c,3], Hudan Ngisa Anshori[d4],
[A,b,c,] STAI Hidayatut Thullab Kediri, Indonesia: [d] Universitas Islam Negeri Kiai Ageng Muhammad Besari Ponorogo, Indonesia

[1]muhrokim@staihitkediri.ac.id; [2]harizasy@gmail.com; [3]ahdahlanbaidowi@staihitkediri.ac.id; [4] Hudan.anshory@uinponorogo.ac.id:

ARTICLE INFO

Article history
Received:
05-05-2025
Revised:
21-06-2025
Accepted:
23-07-2025

Keywords
Internalization, Education, Islam, Experiential, Learning

ABSTRACT

In the learning process, it is very important to apply appropriate strategies to produce high-quality intellectual cadres. In recent years, particularly in public educational institutions such as public elementary schools, the teaching of morals has been lacking when viewed from the perspective of religious subjects. One of these subjects is Islamic religious education, which is the main foundation for instilling education related to morals. Therefore, it is necessary to internalize Islamic education in every learning activity in order to broaden students' knowledge and understand how that knowledge can be conceptualized in their behavior. Therefore, the researcher chose the research title "The Concept of Internalization of Islamic Education according to the Scholars Imam al-Ghazali and Abdullah Nasih Ulwan from the Perspective of Experiential Learning (a case study at a public elementary school in Tarokan District, Kediri Regency)," with the problem formulation of how to understand the concept of education presented by these scholars and how to implement it. The methodology of this research uses descriptive qualitative research supported by literature research to process the knowledge of these concepts.

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Introduction

The learning process plays a crucial role—including within Islamic education—in contributing to the educational landscape through both theoretical and practical instruction aimed at fostering individuals with noble character (*akhlakul karimah*) (Silmi et al., 2024). Islamic education often serves as a primary foundation within educational institutions (Evi, 2018). Beyond teaching theological concepts, it is expected to impart knowledge regarding societal norms; instruction often involves abstract concepts that translate into practical learning experiences and the cultivation of habits among students—habits regarding speech, behavior, and acts of worship (Berliana, 2023).

The concept of internalization is essential for instilling noble character and embedding Islamic moral values in students' minds; it serves as a vital means of habit formation. This internalization process provides experiences that foster habitual practices in

both worldly and spiritual matters (Arik, 2023). It goes beyond merely knowing or understanding concepts taught by the teacher; the internalization of Islamic education is intended to form a foundational body of knowledge that a child can actively apply (Suradi, 2018).

In a social context, this manifests as adhering to societal norms and possessing the ability to discern which actions are appropriate and which are not (Desi Nopita, 2024). From birth, individuals possess two fundamental human attributes: thought and reasoning. Thought allows one to receive theories presented by teachers or those in their environment, while reasoning acts as a filter for processing and understanding information stored in the brain, enabling one to distinguish between positive and negative elements in life (Azizah, 2021). Consequently, individuals can reflect upon and discern which actions align with prevailing norms and which do not—a process of internal deliberation that guides their ongoing lives (Zulfa, 2025). From the perspective of Abdulloh Nasih 'Ulwan, Islamic education fosters both spiritual and outward qualities that shape a person of noble character, whose conduct serves as a symbolic expression of these virtues ('Ulwan, 2020).

According to Abdul Mujib, Islamic religious education aims to mold individuals into God-fearing people who consistently reflect their piety—both in their relationship with God and in their interactions with those around them ('Ulwan, 2020). Furthermore, Islamic education is grounded in the principle of comprehensively and deeply cultivating individuals of noble character (*akhlaqul karimah*). Its highest goal is to prepare high-quality individuals who embody faith in Allah and whose conduct and knowledge make them well-accepted within society (Muhammad, 2023).

The scholar Imam Al-Ghazali noted that Islamic education teaches humane conduct reflecting obedience to God, while also fostering an understanding of social dynamics, enabling individuals to position themselves appropriately within their community. Moreover, quality education creates outstanding individuals whose positive influence is felt by everyone around them (Mel, 2020).

Islamic education also serves as a primary vehicle for instilling character in students. This is achieved by internalizing Islamic values across all school activities—from the moment of enrollment through to post-school life—thereby fostering habits that are evident in both the school environment and the wider community (Septiyani, 2020).

The concept of internalizing Islamic education is deemed successful when students apply the lessons taught by their teachers—both theoretical and practical—in their interactions with the broader community (Sarah, 2018). This habituation approach aims for students not only to comprehend the teachings but also to put them into practice, creating a tangible impact on their educational setting and society at large.

Personal experience shapes an individual's behavior; indeed, quality education is often grounded in experience, with past actions serving as a fundamental basis for knowledge—a concept known as experiential education (Hikmah, 2020). Experience can be defined as an activity involving interaction with others; such intense interpersonal engagement offers valuable life lessons, enabling individuals to make positive choices when facing similar situations in the future. Fundamentally, all human experiences are positive; it is simply a matter of how one reflects upon and learns from them to build a better future.

Behavior-shaping experiences stem primarily from two sources: the parental environment and the educational environment. Primary educational institutions—such as elementary schools—play a significant role, serving as the starting point for a child's behavioral foundation. Beyond the general environment, these schools provide daily experiences that reinforce the foundations of noble character (*akhlaqul karimah*) (Hikmah, 2020).

However, in state-run elementary schools, formal religious instruction is often minimal. Consequently, religious learning and experience must be fostered outside the standard curriculum—for instance, by cultivating good habits regarding ethics and aesthetics throughout the school day, from arrival to departure. Enhancing these experiences requires

collaboration among educators, the local community, and, most importantly, parents at home (Ahmad, 2024).

Experiences gained outside the home can shape behavior—whether positively or negatively. Negative influences can be countered through religiously oriented experiences; for example, the prospect of consequences for failing to engage in virtuous activities can serve as a deterrent, ultimately helping to mold positive behavior (Ahmad, 2024).

Based on the above, this study aims to examine the concept of internalizing Islamic education, drawing on theories proposed by scholars Imam Al-Ghazali and Abdullah Nasih 'Ulwan, while also incorporating the framework of Experiential Learning—learning grounded in behavior (Khumaidi, 2020). The research focuses on public elementary schools in the Tarokan District of Kediri Regency; given the generally limited religious instruction in these institutions, the study seeks to understand how the concept of educational internalization is implemented within them.

Method

The researcher employs a descriptive qualitative method combined with library research. This study aims to explore theoretical concepts articulated by scholars and apply them to the educational process by fostering habits—both during and prior to actual instruction. Furthermore, the researcher seeks to delve deeply into the Islamic educational concepts of scholars Imam Al-Ghazali and Abdullah Nasih 'Ulwan.

Focusing on experiential learning and the internalization of Islamic educational values, the study examines implementation within public elementary schools in Tarokan District, Kediri Regency. The research involves Islamic Religious Education teachers—as the primary focus—alongside the broader teaching staff. Data collection techniques include observation, interviews, and the analysis of documentation.

Results and discussion

Imam Al-Ghazali's concept of internalizing Islamic education positions education as the primary means of shaping the *insan kamil* (perfect human being) oriented towards drawing closer to Allah SWT; the internalization of values, according to him, encompasses several aspects, including:

1. Education of the heart: The heart is the center of human consciousness; successful Islamic education must touch the inner realm through *dhikr* (remembrance of Allah), acts of worship, and spiritual cultivation.
2. Teacher as a role model: A teacher is not merely a conveyor of knowledge but a moral exemplar who exerts the strongest influence on students.
3. Habituation (*ta'wid*): Children must be accustomed to righteous deeds from an early age to form deeply ingrained habits.
4. Stages of development: Education must be tailored to the students' age and readiness so that the instilled values endure permanently.

Thus, Al-Ghazali's concept of internalizing Islamic education emphasizes psychological and spiritual dimensions, targeting the formation of the heart, morals, and habits.

Abdullah Nashih 'Ulwan's concept of internalizing Islamic education must encompass:

1. Faith education: Instilling *aqidah* (creed) from an early age as the fundamental basis for all behavior.
2. Moral education: Character formation through role modeling, counsel, and supervision.
3. Physical and intellectual education: Guiding children to cultivate a healthy body, sharp intellect, and life skills.
4. Social and psychological education: Nurturing children to possess social sensitivity, empathy, and a sense of responsibility.

5. The role of family and society:

The internalization of religious values cannot occur solely within the school; it requires support from the family environment and the community. Consequently, 'Ulwan's concept emphasizes a holistic approach, wherein the internalization of values involves all aspects of a child's development and collaboration across different environments.

Experiential learning, as a theoretical framework, posits that learning is most effective when grounded in direct experience. The learning cycle comprises four stages:

1. Concrete experience
2. Reflective observation
3. Abstract conceptualization
4. Active experimentation

In the context of Islamic education, this approach is highly relevant; it is insufficient to merely provide children with religious theory—they must experience, reflect upon, understand, and practice these teachings. For instance, learning about *Salah* (prayer) involves not just explanation, but practicing it in congregation, contemplating its meaning, grasping the underlying concepts, and making it a habit in daily life.

When examining the thoughts of Al-Ghazali and Ulwan through the lens of the experiential learning framework, their ideas can be integrated as follows:

1. Concrete experience: Cultivating habits of worship (e.g., *Duha* prayer, morning supplications, greetings, and polite manners). This aligns with Al-Ghazali's concept of *Ta'wid* (habituation) and Ulwan's views on religious upbringing.
2. Reflective observation: Students are encouraged to reflect on the meaning of virtuous behavior through exemplary stories or *muhasabah* (self-reflection). This aligns with Al-Ghazali's method of reflection.
3. Abstract conceptualization: Teachers explain Islamic moral values (such as honesty, discipline, and patience) based on the Qur'an and Hadith. This aligns with Ulwan's approach to character education (*akhlaq*).
4. Active experimentation: Students are given opportunities to practice these values outside the classroom—such as helping parents, engaging in communal cooperation (*gotong royong*), and maintaining environmental cleanliness. This aligns with Ulwan's social approach.

Through this integration, the internalization of Islamic values does not remain merely at the cognitive level but becomes deeply embedded in the students' personalities.

A case study of public elementary schools in the Tarokan District, Kediri Regency, reveals that the internalization of Islamic education in these schools exhibits several characteristics:

1. Limited religious instruction hours: This necessitates reinforcing the internalization of religious values through non-formal activities such as joint prayers, congregational prayers, and a culture of politeness.
2. Habituation programs: Some schools have already implemented practices like exchanging greetings, handshaking, praying before and after lessons, and weekly religious activities.
3. Teacher-parent collaboration: This remains a challenge; the internalization process is often interrupted when children return home, as not all parents provide reinforcement.
4. Social context of the Tarokan community:

Generally religious and supportive of reinforcing Islamic values, making it easier to internalize religion-based learning experiences. If an experiential learning approach is applied, the internalization of religious values can be achieved through:

1. Direct experience: Practicing *Dhuha* (mid-morning) prayer, daily charitable giving (*infaq*), and social activities.
2. Reflection: Sharing experiences regarding acts of worship within the classroom.
3. Conceptualization: Teacher explanations regarding Islamic moral values.
4. Active experimentation: Assigning students tasks to put these values into practice at home or in the community.

Critical analysis:
1. Al-Ghazali emphasizes the psycho-spiritual dimension (the heart, habits, and role models).
2. 'Ulwan emphasizes a comprehensive approach (family, community, social, and intellectual aspects).
3. Experiential learning provides a methodological framework for applying both perspectives within modern education.

Conclusion

The concepts of Islamic educational internalization proposed by Imam Al-Ghazali and Abdullah Nashih Ulwan share a common goal: the formation of the *insan kamil* (perfect human)—an individual who possesses faith and noble character and is capable of practicing Islamic teachings in real life. Imam Al-Ghazali emphasizes the cultivation of the heart, the teacher as a role model, the habituation of righteous deeds, and the alignment of education with the child's developmental stages. In contrast, Abdullah Nashih Ulwan advocates for a more comprehensive approach that encompasses faith, moral, physical, intellectual, and socio-psychological education, alongside support from family and the community.

Viewed from the perspective of experiential learning, these two schools of thought can be integrated by applying the cycle of concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation. This approach ensures that the internalization of Islamic values does not remain merely at the cognitive level but becomes embedded in the child's personality through direct experience, reflection, conceptual understanding, and the habituation of daily practices.

A case study conducted in public elementary schools across the Tarokan District, Kediri Regency, demonstrates that limited religious instruction hours can be overcome through strategies such as religious habituation, the strengthening of school culture, and synergy among teachers, parents, and the community. Thus, the application of experiential learning in the internalization of Islamic education holds the potential to reinforce the development of students' religious character through holistic, conceptual, and sustainable learning..

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