



## **The Concept of Children's Education in Islamic and Western Perspectives: A Comparative Study of the Thought of Imam Al-Ghazali and Jean Jacques Rousseau**

**Mas Ayu Ainun Nisa'\***

Universitas Islam Negeri Sunan Ampel Surabaya

e-mail: [masayunisaaa@gmail.com](mailto:masayunisaaa@gmail.com)

**M. Yunus Abu Bakar**

Universitas Islam Sunan Ampel Surabaya

e-mail: [elyunusy@uinsa.ac.id](mailto:elyunusy@uinsa.ac.id)

### **Abstract**

*This study aims to examine in depth and compare the concept of children's education according to two great figures from two different intellectual traditions, namely Imam Al-Ghazali as a classical Islamic thinker and Jean-Jacques Rousseau as a philosopher from the modern Western world. Al-Ghazali emphasized that children's education should be oriented towards the formation of a whole human being, not only through intellectual development, but also through the spiritual and moral dimensions. According to him, the focus of education lies in the cultivation of faith, the development of noble morals, and self-control through exemplary methods, positive habituation, advice, supervision, and motivation. Rather, Rousseau viewed education as a natural process that leads children to grow according to their nature, by providing space for freedom, hands-on experience, and the development of independence without excessive intervention. This research uses a qualitative approach with the library research method, through the analysis of primary and secondary works of both figures. The results of the study show that although both depart from different civilization contexts and philosophical paradigms, there is a common view in viewing children as individuals who have natural potential that must be appreciated and developed gradually. Furthermore, the study found that Al-Ghazali and Rousseau's thinking could be integrated to form a holistic paradigm of children's education. The integration results in an approach that balances cognitive, affective, spiritual, and moral aspects, making it relevant to be applied in a contemporary education system oriented towards character formation and humanity.*

*Keywords: Child education; Al-Ghazali; Rousseau; Islam; Western*

### **Abstrak**

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji secara mendalam dan membandingkan konsep pendidikan anak menurut dua tokoh besar dari dua tradisi intelektual yang berbeda, yaitu Imam Al-Ghazali sebagai pemikir Islam klasik dan Jean-Jacques Rousseau sebagai filsuf dari dunia Barat modern. Al-Ghazali menekankan bahwa pendidikan anak harus berorientasi pada pembentukan manusia yang utuh, tidak hanya melalui pengembangan intelektual, tetapi juga melalui dimensi spiritual dan moral. Fokus pendidikan menurutnya terletak pada penanaman iman, pembinaan akhlak mulia, serta pengendalian diri melalui metode keteladanan, pembiasaan positif, nasihat, pengawasan, dan pemberian motivasi. Sebaliknya, Rousseau memandang pendidikan sebagai proses alamiah yang menuntun anak untuk tumbuh sesuai kodratnya, dengan memberikan ruang kebebasan, pengalaman langsung, dan pengembangan kemandirian tanpa intervensi berlebihan. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan metode studi kepustakaan (library research), melalui analisis terhadap karya-karya primer dan sekunder dari kedua tokoh. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa meskipun keduanya berangkat dari konteks peradaban dan paradigma filsafat yang berbeda, terdapat kesamaan pandangan dalam memandang anak sebagai individu yang memiliki potensi alami yang harus dihargai dan dikembangkan secara bertahap. Lebih lanjut, penelitian ini menemukan bahwa pemikiran Al-Ghazali dan Rousseau dapat diintegrasikan untuk membentuk paradigma pendidikan anak yang holistik. Integrasi tersebut menghasilkan pendekatan yang menyeimbangkan aspek kognitif, afektif, spiritual, dan moral, sehingga relevan untuk diterapkan dalam sistem pendidikan kontemporer yang berorientasi pada pembentukan karakter dan kemanusiaan.

Kata Kunci: Pendidikan Anak; Al-Ghazali; Rousseau; Islam; Barat

\*Corresponding author

Copyright (c) 2025 Mas Ayu Ainun Nisa', M. Yunus Abu Bakar



## INTRODUCTION

The development of modern education theory shows that there are fundamental differences in the perspective of the nature of children, educational goals, and the learning methods used.<sup>1</sup> In this context, the concept of children's education is an important issue that continues to be reviewed, especially when faced with the paradigm difference between Islamic and Western thought. Islam through its figures such as Imam Al-Ghazali emphasizes that children's education should be directed at the formation of a whole personality, which includes a balance between intellectual, moral, and spiritual aspects.<sup>2</sup> Meanwhile, Western thought represented by Jean-Jacques Rousseau focused on the freedom and natural nature of the child, rejecting excessive intervention from the environment or educational authorities.<sup>3</sup> This paradigm difference raises fundamental questions about how the two views interpret the nature of children, educational goals, and the role of educators in the process of developing children's potential.

In addition, relevance problems arise when the two concepts are faced with the reality of today's education which is colored by the challenges of globalization, technological advances, and moral crises.<sup>4</sup> Can Al-Ghazali's educational values based on spirituality and morality still be implemented in a modern education system that tends to be rational and secular? On the contrary, to what extent can Rousseau's ideas of the freedom and nature of the child be reconciled with the religious and moral values on which Islamic education is based? Therefore, this study seeks to examine and compare the concept of children's education according to Imam Al-Ghazali and Jean-Jacques Rousseau in depth to find common points and conceptual differences that can be the basis for the development of a more integrative and contextual model of children's education in the modern era.

Studies on the concept of children's education have been carried out by various researchers, both from Islamic and Western perspectives. Research conducted by Syovinatus Sholicha highlights Al-Ghazali's view of children's education as a process of forming a holy morals and soul. He emphasized that education according to Al-Ghazali is a means to bring people closer to Allah SWT through the control of lust and good moral habits.<sup>5</sup> Meanwhile, Melissa Moschella in his study on humanistic education emphasized that views education as a

---

<sup>1</sup> Airin Parvin, "Comparative Analysis of Child Development Approaches across Different Education Systems Globally," *Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences Studies* 7, no. 4 (2025): 95–113.

<sup>2</sup> Mohammad Syaiful and Rifqi Khairul Anam, "The Concept Of Moral Education According To Imam Al Ghazali And Relevance To Education In Indonesia," *At-Tajdid: Jurnal Pendidikan Dan Pemikiran Islam* 8, no. 2 (2024): 601–15.

<sup>3</sup> Chidi Paul Orji, "A CRITIQUE OF JEAN-JACQUES ROUSSEAU'S CONCEPTION OF INEQUALITY AND IT'S IMPACT ON CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY," *JASSD-Journal of African Studies and Sustainable Development* 5, no. 1 (2024), [https://www.apas.africa/journal\\_article.php?j=ochendo-124](https://www.apas.africa/journal_article.php?j=ochendo-124).

<sup>4</sup> Ivan Bakhov et al., "Cultural Challenges in Education: Strategies for Consideration of Various Intercultural Aspects in the Educational Process," *Multidisciplinary Science Journal* 6 (2024), <https://malque.pub/ojs/index.php/msj/article/view/1934>.

<sup>5</sup> Syovinatus Sholicha, "Husnul Huluq Al-Ghazali Concept as the Core of Student Character Education," *JIE (Journal of Islamic Education)* 9, no. 2 (2024): 526–40.

natural process that must free children from social pressure, so that their natural potential develops independently without coercion.<sup>6</sup> Another study by Widia Hosnita Ningsih emphasized the need for a synthesis between spiritual values and rationality in modern education.<sup>7</sup> This research is relevant because it opens up space for comparative studies between Islamic and Western thinkers, including between Al-Ghazali and Rousseau. In addition, Nurhikmah in her research on the Character Education Islam From the Views of Imam Al-Ghazali concluded that Al-Ghazali provides a normative and ethical basis for the formation of children's character through the methods of example, habituation, and advice.<sup>8</sup> Meanwhile, in the Western context, Sonia Maria Pavel, explains that the ideal education is an education that respects the freedom of the child and cultivates morality naturally without the domination of the teacher's authority.<sup>9</sup> This study is important because it provides an overview of how the values of freedom and independence are central to the modern Western educational paradigm.

This research has a fundamental difference compared to previous studies that have discussed the concept of children's education from Islamic and Western perspectives. Most previous research, however, has focused solely on Imam Al-Ghazali's thought in the context of Islamic education, with an emphasis on moral, moral, and spiritual aspects without making cross-civilizational comparisons. Meanwhile, other research focuses more on Rousseau's ideas of the natural education and freedom of the child in the context of modern Western philosophy, without linking it to Islamic educational values. Thus, these studies are still partial because they have not explored the conceptual dialogue between the two different traditions of thought. The novelty of this research lies in its comparative-integrative approach that connects two great traditions of thought Islam and the West through a conceptual analysis of the thought of Imam Al-Ghazali and Jean-Jacques Rousseau in the context of children's education. Different from previous studies that tended to highlight the thoughts of the two figures separately and monodisciplinarily, this study presents a new perspective by placing the two in an equal and critical philosophical dialogue. This approach not only compares theoretical aspects, but also examines the practical implications of the synthesis of Islamic spiritual values and Western humanistic principles on today's children's education system.

## RESEARCH METHOD

The methodology of this research uses a qualitative approach with the type of library research. This approach was chosen because the research focuses on a conceptual and comparative analysis of the thinking of two great figures, namely Imam Al-Ghazali and Jean-Jacques Rousseau, in understanding the concept of children's education. Literature studies

---

<sup>6</sup> Melissa Moschella, "Natural Law, Parental Rights and Education Policy," *The American Journal of Jurisprudence* 59, no. 2 (2014): 197–227.

<sup>7</sup> Widia Hosnita Ningsih, "The Contribution of Islamic Education to Moral and Intellectual Development," *Journal of Multidisciplinary in Islam* 1, no. 1 (2025): 31–40.

<sup>8</sup> Nurhikmah Nurhikmah, "Character Education Islam From the Views of Imam Al-Ghazali," *Jurnal Al Burhan* 4, no. 1 (2024): 53–66.

<sup>9</sup> Sonia Maria Pavel, "A Systematic Political Philosophy of Education" (PhD Thesis, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2025), <https://dspace.mit.edu/handle/1721.1/163277>.

allow researchers to explore, interpret, and compare the ideas of the two figures in depth through authoritative literature sources.<sup>10</sup> With this approach, research can explore philosophical, spiritual, and pedagogical values from Islamic and Western perspectives in a systematic and rational manner. Research data sources consist of two types, namely primary sources and secondary sources. Primary sources include the original works of the two figures who are the object of study. Meanwhile, secondary sources include books, scientific journals, articles, dissertations, and the results of previous research that are relevant to the theme of children's education according to the two figures. Secondary sources serve to enrich perspectives and strengthen analysis by reviewing how other scholars interpret and assess the thought of Al-Ghazali and Rousseau.

The data collection technique is carried out through the documentation method, namely by collecting, reading, and studying various written sources that are relevant to the research topic. The data analysis technique used is comparative-descriptive analysis.<sup>11</sup> Descriptive analysis is used to describe in detail the thinking of children's education according to Al-Ghazali and Rousseau, while comparative analysis is used to identify similarities and differences between the two.

In addition, this research also uses a philosophical and pedagogical approach. A philosophical approach is used to understand the epistemological and ontological foundations of the two figures' thoughts, especially in looking at the nature of human beings and the purpose of education. Meanwhile, a pedagogical approach is used to assess the practical relevance of these ideas to the theory and practice of children's education today. Through these two approaches, the research is expected to not only produce theoretical analysis, but also contribute to the development of holistic education.<sup>12</sup> To ensure the validity of the data, this study applies the source triangulation technique, which is by comparing and confirming various different literature to obtain objective and in-depth conclusions. Contextual analysis is also carried out so that the interpretation of Al-Ghazali and Rousseau's thought is inseparable from the social, cultural, and historical context that influenced the birth of their ideas. With this comprehensive methodology, research is expected to be able to make a significant contribution in enriching the treasures of education, especially in bridging Islamic and Western thinking about children's education.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **The Concept of Children's Education According to Imam Al-Ghazali**

In Islam, children's education serves to form a person who believes and fears Allah SWT, is physically and spiritually healthy, and is devoted to parents. The goal is that when they grow up, they grow up to be qualified, creative, and beneficial individuals for the nation, state, and

---

<sup>10</sup> John W. Creswell and Cheryl N. Poth, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing among Five Approaches* (Sage publications, 2016), <https://books.google.com>.

<sup>11</sup> cAbd Hakim Atang MA dan Jaih Mubarak and ROSDA, *Metodologi Studi Islam* (Rosda, 2017).

<sup>12</sup> Matthew B. Miles, "Qualitative Data Analysis: An Expanded Sourcebook," *Thousand Oaks*, 1994, <https://books.google.com>.

religion.<sup>13</sup> According to the Islamic view, education does not only focus on the transfer of knowledge, but also includes the formation of morals and the development of spiritual aspects.<sup>14</sup> Imam Al-Ghazali, or Abu Hamid Muhammad bin Muhammad Al-Ghazali, came from Ghazalah in the region of Thus, Khurasan. He is known as an expert in Shafi'i jurisprudence and Ash'ariyah theology. Al-Ghazali taught at Nizamiyah University, Baghdad, and produced hundreds of writings.<sup>15</sup> The work of Imam al-Ghazali was a major influence in shaping and developing Islamic thought, making him one of the most influential figures in the history of Islamic scholarship.<sup>16</sup> He spent the rest of his life teaching until his death on 14 Jumadil Akhir 505 H (1111 AD).<sup>17</sup> Imam Ghazali produced the great work *Ihya' Ulumuddin* which until now has become an important reference in the Islamic world. This shows Al-Ghazali's great concern for moral education. Some other works related to education include *Mizan al-Amal*, *Ayyuha al-Walad*, *Fatihah al-Ulum*, *Bidayah al-Hidayah*, and *Al-Mursyid al-Amin*.<sup>18</sup>

Through his great works, especially *Ihya' Ulumuddin*, Al-Ghazali paid great attention to children's education, both from spiritual, moral, and intellectual aspects. He not only discussed the importance of knowledge, but also how it forms a pious and noble personality from an early age. The educational concepts he offers can be categorized as including goals, principles, and methods of children's education. Therefore, the following discussion will outline Imam Al-Ghazali's thoughts in formulating the education of Islamic children according to the perspective of Imam Al-Ghazali.

To understand the concept of education according to Imam Al-Ghazali comprehensively, it is necessary to begin by studying the purpose of education that he formulated. Goals are a crucial element in the educational process that must be formulated clearly and have the right direction.<sup>19</sup> The purpose of children's education, according to Imam al-Ghazali, is closely related to the formation of a spiritual relationship between children and their God. Al-Ghazali emphasized that education is not only aimed at acquiring knowledge, but more deeply knowledge must lead a person to the knowledge and closeness to Allah.<sup>20</sup> Thus, children's

---

<sup>13</sup> Ahmad Abdur Rokhim and M. Yunus Abu Bakar, "A Comparative Study of the Concept of Children's Education in Islam According to Buya Hamka and Abdullah Nashih Ulwan," *Al Murobbi Journal* 6, no. 2 (2021): 73–91.

<sup>14</sup> Homam Altabaa, *Journal of Islam in Asia*, 2018, <https://journals.iium.edu.my/jiasia/index.php/jia/article/download/759/357>.

<sup>15</sup> Altabaa, *Journal of Islam in Asia*.

<sup>16</sup> Adelia Fitri et al., "Islamic Parenting and the Character of Early Childhood Discipline," *Al Fitrah: Journal Of Early Childhood Islamic Education* 3, no. 2 (2020).

<sup>17</sup> Hati Murdani1 Ahmad Fauzi, "Developing Noble Morals in Children through Al-Ghazali's Concept of Moral Education," *BESTARI*, 2024, <https://riset-iaid.net/index.php/bestari/article/view/1550>.

<sup>18</sup> Widad Sef and M. Yunus Abu Bakar, "The Relevance of Al-Ghazali Perspective Education to the Islamic Education Paradigm in Indonesia," *Al-Hikmah: Journal of Religion and Science* 21, no. 1 (2024): 93–107.

<sup>19</sup> Arinah Arinah et al., "Integrative Holistic Education in Early Childhood at Yaa Bunayya Kindergarten, Bima City," *Multidisciplinary Studies: Journal of Islamic Studies* 11, no. 2 (2024): 45–56.

<sup>20</sup> I. A. H. Al-Ghazali, "Revival of Religion's Sciences: Ihya'Ulum Ad-Din (Volume 1: The Quarter of The Acts of Worship) Translated by Mohammad Mahdi al-Sharif, Vol. 1," *Berut Lebanon: Dar Al-Kotob Al-Llmiah*, 2011.



education should be directed not only to the intellectual aspect, but also to the spiritual aspect. Furthermore, in the quote, "If he is accustomed and taught to do good, then he grows up to do good and be happy in this world and the hereafter".<sup>21</sup> Al-Ghazali emphasized that the purpose of children's education is to form good character that leads to happiness in this world and salvation in the hereafter. Education is not only for the life of the world, but also as a way to get closer to Allah through knowledge, charity, and morals.

After knowing the purpose of his education, the next step is to identify the basic principles that underlie Imam Al-Ghazali's view of education. Education must be directed to form children as balanced individuals, not only intellectually intelligent, but also strong in faith, noble in morals, civilized in social relations, and physically healthy. The integration of faith, morals, intellect, social ability, and physical health is essential in the educational process. Imam Al-Ghazali emphasized that children's education must be based on comprehensive and integrated basic principles. First, faith education needs to be started from an early age, by instilling basic values such as monotheistic sentences and the pillars of faith through memorization, habituation, and consistent practice. According to Al-Ghazali, faith must be spoken, believed in the heart, and manifested in real actions, so that the formation of faith becomes a process that involves all aspects of the child's self. Second, moral education has a central role in character formation. Morality is understood as a strong mental condition that is able to give birth to spontaneous actions.

Moral education must be instilled through good example and constant supervision so that moral values are integrated in children and form a noble personality naturally. Third, aqliyah or intellectual education occupies an important position because reason is the source of knowledge. Al-Ghazali described reason as the light that illuminates the path to knowledge and truth. Therefore, intellectual education is not only directed at mastering knowledge, but also at strengthening spiritual intelligence and moral awareness. Fourth, social education is emphasized by training children to be polite, listen to older people, and speak as necessary. Children need to be accustomed to respecting others and understanding social ethics in order to grow up to be civilized and empathetic individuals. Fifth, physical education should also not be neglected. Al-Ghazali suggested that children should be accustomed to moving and doing physical activity, especially during the day, to avoid laziness and form a healthy body. These physical activities contribute to the formation of discipline as well as a balance between physical and spiritual development.<sup>22</sup> Thus, the principles of children's education according to Imam Al-Ghazali include holistic coaching of all aspects of children's personalities, so that they grow into balanced, intelligent, and noble human beings.

In line with the goals and principles that have been set, the educational methods used by Imam Al-Ghazali also play an important role to be further analyzed. Teaching methods play an important role, both as an external motivational tool that encourages students' enthusiasm for learning, strategies in delivering materials, and as a means to facilitate the achievement of educational goals. methods in children's education are one of the most important and most

---

<sup>21</sup> Al-Ghazali, "Revival of Religion's Sciences."

<sup>22</sup> Al-Ghazali, "Revival of Religion's Sciences."

mandatory things to pay attention to. Children are a mandate for both parents.<sup>23</sup> Their pure hearts are like precious jewels, still innocent and clean of all forms of carvings and images. He can accept any form of carving given to him, as well as incline in whichever direction he is directed.

The first method is the exemplary method. This method is considered very effective, especially for children who are still at the stage of imitating the behavior of the adults around them. Imam Ghazali explained that the Child is a precious trust with a pure heart, like a pure and clean jewel. He is ready to receive teachings and is easily formed according to the education given. Parents and teachers act as role models, where their attitudes and morals will naturally be imitated by children, making example a real form of education that is more than just speech. The second is the Habituation Method. Imam Ghazali explained this method of habituation in his book, If a child is accustomed to goodness, he will grow into a good person and achieve happiness in the hereafter, and his educator will be rewarded. On the contrary, if left in squabbles without being educated, it will be corrupted.<sup>24</sup> Third, the Advice Method. Children need to be accustomed to listening to and learning advice from the Qur'an, hadith, and the life stories of pious people. This method aims not only to form intellectual intelligence, but also to foster children's personalities so that they grow into figures with noble character and fear of Allah.<sup>25</sup>

Fourth, Supervision Methods. Imam Ghazali wrote in his book that the supervision of children must begin from an early age, including in parenting and breastfeeding. Children should be breastfed by women who are religious and eat halal food, because milk from haram sources can reduce blessings and affect children's growth and development, encouraging bad behavior.<sup>26</sup> Fifth, Motivation Method by Giving Gifts. Al-Ghazali explained that children who do good need to be rewarded such as praise, gifts, or flattery in front of respected people as motivation. On the other hand, punishment should not be given hastily, as it can make children underestimate advice. Dads should maintain authority when advising, and mothers should cultivate the child's reluctance to father and give wise reprimands when necessary.<sup>27</sup> From the above description, it can be concluded that the method of children's education according to Imam Al-Ghazali is a structured and integral system, which aims to form the character of children as a whole from an early age. By applying these methods appropriately and consistently, children's education not only serves as a means of intellectual development, but also as a way to form noble morals and strong personalities.

---

<sup>23</sup> Al-Ghazali, "Revival of Religion's Sciences."

<sup>24</sup> Al-Ghazali, "Revival of Religion's Sciences."

<sup>25</sup> Nasokah Nasokah, "The Concept of Al-Ghazali's Thought on Children's Education in Islam (Study of the Book of Ihya'Ulumuddin)," *Manarul Qur'an: Scientific Journal of Islamic Studies* 19, no. 2 (2019): 115–24.

<sup>26</sup> Al-Ghazali, "Revival of Religion's Sciences."

<sup>27</sup> Nasokah, "The Concept of Al-Ghazali's Thought on Children's Education in Islam (Study of the Book of Ihya'Ulumuddin)."

### **The Concept of Children's Education According to Jean-Jacques Rousseau**

Jean-Jacques Rousseau was an important figure of the 18th century known as the pioneer of the French Revolution. He opposed feudalism and social inequality, and advocated freedom, equality, and education as a means of changing society.<sup>28</sup> As a philosopher of education, Rousseau poured many of his ideas in the book *Émile*, in which he explained the importance of child development and placed the child at the center of education. He is known for his "Back to Nature" thinking.<sup>29</sup> The term "natural man" includes two main meanings, namely being able to act according to his conscience, and being free from the power of others so that he is equal to others. His thoughts were then considered to have a great influence on the next generation of educational figures. Figures from various countries, such as Pestalozzi, John Dewey, Maria Montessori, and Friedrich Froebel are said to have been inspired by some of the ideas of education inherited by Rousseau.

In contrast to Islamic thinkers, Western educational thought also has important figures such as Jean-Jacques Rousseau, who started his ideas from the formulation of educational goals. The goal of education is also natural, namely individuals who are free and balanced in their physical and spiritual development. These humans are not bound or oppressed by social structures, in contrast to past humans who lived under the pressure of privileged classes. Rousseau opposed the feudal system which he considered to shackle the freedom of thought and human nature. Therefore, he supports the formation of a social human being who remains natural, that is, an individual who develops according to his own natural nature and impulse. Rousseau aims to create an education system that supports the growth of children's natural goodness through direct experience and interaction with the environment.<sup>30</sup> In the process, education must be adapted to the characteristics of each age stage, since each stage has a different focus on development. According to Rousseau, education aims to free children from destructive cultural influences, as well as to provide space for children to develop their own natural goodness.<sup>31</sup> Rousseau emphasized that a naturally educated child will grow up independent and use his intellect to direct action. In this process, the child's mind and body work in harmony to make sense of the world around him.<sup>32</sup> Through education that is in harmony with nature, children will form their own thoughts and desires, without being controlled by the will of others.

---

<sup>28</sup> Yawei Lu, "Exploring Jean-Jacques Rousseau's Nature Education Thought from *Emile*," 2019 *International Conference on Management, Education Technology and Economics (ICMETE 2019)*, Atlantis Press, 2019, 419–22, <https://www.atlantis-press.com/proceedings/icmete-19/125908441>.

<sup>29</sup> Styo Mahendra Wasita Aji et al., "Jean Jacques Rousseau: Life, Educational Thought, and Educational Review in Indonesia," *Briliant: Journal of Research and Conceptual* 8, no. 1 (2023): 38–47.

<sup>30</sup> Evaristus C. Obioha and Vincent Nwanosike Oguguo, "THE URGENCY OF REDISCOVERING QUALITY EDUCATION FOR DEVELOPMENT IN THE LIGHT OF JEAN JACQUES ROUSSEAU," *Oracle of Wisdom Journal of Philosophy and Public Affairs (OWIJOPPA)* 3, no. 1 (2019), <https://acjol.org/index.php/owijoppa/article/view/3635>.

<sup>31</sup> I. Putu Ayub Darmawan, "Education 'Back to Nature': Jean Jacques Rousseau's Thoughts on Education," *Satya Widya* 32, no. 1 (2016): 11–18.

<sup>32</sup> Christopher Peckover, "Realizing the Natural Self: Rousseau and the Current System of Education.," *Philosophical Studies in Education* 43 (2012): 84–94.



To systematically explore Rousseau's thought, it is necessary to understand the principles of education that are the main foothold in his approach. The basic principle of education according to Rousseau is to adapt education to the nature and needs of children. His natural desires should not be suppressed because the child is born in good circumstances, and becomes bad as a result of misguided guidance from adults, such as harsh discipline and poor example. Rousseau believed that the essence of education is to follow the principles of nature, which is to help humans develop their nature to achieve true freedom. He emphasized the importance of the practical aspect, by teaching knowledge and life skills that are truly useful. Knowledge is chosen based on its function, since only those that are useful support physical, mental and developmental health are balanced, so that a person is independent and not dependent on others. For him, the most important thing is not the amount of knowledge, but the benefits in life.

Rousseau's analogy through the character of Émile emphasizes the importance of attention and assistance according to the stage of child development. He believes that freedom is necessary for children's potential to develop intact through experience and interaction with nature.<sup>33</sup> Rousseau explained in his book *Emile* that education and character formation at an early age are crucial. Mistakes in educating in this phase can be deeply ingrained and difficult to correct in the future. Rousseau strongly emphasized that education and character formation at an early age are crucial. Mistakes in educating in this phase can be deeply ingrained and difficult to correct in the future. The importance of the direct involvement of adults in understanding children, not only in theory but through real and loving relationships. He also emphasized that the people closest to the child (such as parents, teachers, caregivers) have a big role because it is through intense relationships that they learn to understand the child and how to communicate appropriately.<sup>34</sup> Rousseau believed that the source of knowledge came from feelings, reflected in his educational view that emphasized nature. He argued that education must follow the principles of nature, so that the body and soul of children develop freely according to human nature.

As a concrete application of his goals and principles, Rousseau also offers distinctive and relevant educational methods to be studied in depth. Rousseau rejected rigid and coercive education, and emphasized the importance of adapting learning to the nature of the child. It encourages fun learning activities to foster interest and enrich sensory experiences. Three important points in the method: first, education must follow the natural nature of the child, provide space for exploration according to age while maintaining good nature and character; second, rejecting coercion and the feudal system, with an approach that arouses interest and independence of learning; Third, the importance of exemplifying educators through concrete

---

<sup>33</sup> Evaristus C. Obioha and Vincent Nwanosike Oguguo, "THE URGENCY OF REDISCOVERING QUALITY EDUCATION FOR DEVELOPMENT IN THE LIGHT OF JEAN JACQUES ROUSSEAU," *Oracle of Wisdom Journal of Philosophy and Public Affairs (OWIJOPPA)* 3, no. 1 (2019), <https://acjoi.org/index.php/owijoppa/article/view/3635>.

<sup>34</sup> Megan J. Lavery, "CAN YOU HEAR ME NOW? JEAN-JACQUES ROUSSEAU ON LISTENING EDUCATION," *Educational Theory* 61, no. 2 (2011): 155–69, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-5446.2011.00397.x>.

actions.<sup>35</sup> Rousseau's pedagogy is child-centered, rejects traditional lecture methods, and emphasizes hands-on experience and individualized approaches.

In order for children to recognize their identity, they need to be given the freedom to explore and fulfill their curiosity, desires, and needs. When children are given space for it, they grow up to be independent and able to rely on themselves. However, it is often difficult for educators to avoid the desire to instill knowledge, behaviors, and emotions by rote because of ego drive. Many educators mistakenly believe that children only learn from what they are taught. As a result, they tend to shape children according to their own self-image.<sup>36</sup> The community also strengthens this pattern by giving appreciation to educators who succeed in making children imitate what has been taught.

Rousseau's contribution to education is evident through his methods that emphasize the importance of motivation, problem creation, and the use of children's senses and activities. His ideas of freedom, growth, interests, and activities exist as a form of resistance to the authoritarian and absolute education system. Rousseau emphasized the importance of a gradual learning process according to the child's development. He believes that education that starts from the needs and experiences of children will form strong maturity in various aspects of life. According to him, the failure of the education system occurred because it was too restrictive. As a solution, Rousseau proposed an approach that gives children the freedom to learn through direct interaction with nature, so that children gain meaningful life experiences. Child-centered education, according to him, is able to prevent the birth of socially immature individuals. It can be concluded that the purpose of education according to Rousseau is to form a natural person. Its educational principles emphasize useful knowledge and life skills, in harmony with nature. The methods recommended by Rousseau include both physical and intuitive learning, in which knowledge gained through direct experience is considered more effective for the child's development.

### **Comparative Analysis of the Concept of Children's Education of Al-Ghazali and Rousseau: Its Relevance to Today's Children's Education**

The concept of children's education put forward by Imam Al-Ghazali and Jean-Jacques Rousseau represents two great paradigms born from different social, cultural, and religious contexts. Al-Ghazali as a Muslim scholar conceived the concept of children's education based on the framework of Islamic values, while Rousseau as an 18th-century Enlightenment philosopher built his educational framework on the philosophy of humanism and European rationalism. Nevertheless, both pay great attention to the world of children and have a progressive view of the role of education in shaping the whole human being.

Imam al-Ghazali views that the main purpose of children's education is to form a person of faith, noble character, and close to Allah. According to him, education must guide children to

---

<sup>35</sup> PAULINUS IKECHUKWU OGARA and VICTOR SUNDAY EZEMA, *RELEVANCE OF JEAN JACQUES ROUSSEAU'S NATURAL LEARNING TO PRIMARY EDUCATION SYSTEM IN NIGERIA*, n.d., accessed December 2, 2025, <https://www.researchgate.net>.

<sup>36</sup> Peckover, "Realizing the Natural Self."

obtain happiness in this world and the hereafter.<sup>37</sup> Therefore, education is not only an intellectual effort, but a process of purification of the soul and character formation that is rooted in Islamic values. Meanwhile, Jean-Jacques Rousseau saw the goal of education as an effort to form free, rational, and independent human beings. Rousseau rejected an education system that curtailed children's freedom and placed more emphasis on the formation of a natural character that was honest and balanced with the child's nature.

In his educational principles, Al-Ghazali emphasized the importance of integration between faith, morals, intellect, physical, and social. He believes that children's education must cover all aspects of life, starting from instilling faith values, character building, strengthening intellect, and habituating disciplined, simple, and useful life. The principles of education for Rousseau emphasized more freedom, individuality, and moral formation through direct experience, rather than from dogma or outside authority.<sup>38</sup> According to him, children must be given the freedom to learn from nature and experience, without repressive interventions. In terms of methods, Al-Ghazali emphasizes the importance of example, habituation, advice, supervision, and motivation with praise or gifts. He believes that children learn from what they see and experience, so teachers and parents must be good examples in words and deeds. Rousseau emphasized the method of education that was natural and free from coercion. He rejects the use of punishment and prefers an experimental approach through direct interaction with the environment. If Al-Ghazali emphasizes the consistent internalization of values through habits and the development of the soul, then Rousseau emphasizes the exploration and independence of the child in discovering his own knowledge and morality.

Aspects	Imam Al-Ghazali	Jean-Jacques Rousseau
<b>Purpose</b>	Creating closeness to Allah, forming noble morals, and achieving happiness in this world-hereafter.	Creating natural, free, and independent human beings according to their nature.
<b>Principle</b>	Education that integrates faith, morals, intellect, social, and physical.	Education is natural, stress-free, and based on real experience.
<b>Method</b>	Example, habituation, advice, supervision, and motivation through appreciation.	Free exploration, fun learning, hands-on experience, and freedom of learning.

Table 1.1 Comparative Analysis of the Concept of Children's Education of Al-Ghazali and Rousseau

<sup>37</sup> Muhammad Hambal, "Hadith Education in Forming Character of Early Childhood," *Journal of Chemical Information and Modeling* 4, no. 1 (2020): 1–11.

<sup>38</sup> Kamola Iskandarova, "ROUSSEAU'S INFLUENCE ON MODERN EDUCATIONAL THOUGHT," *Web of Humanities: Journal of Social Science and Humanitarian Research* 2, no. 6 (2024): 82–88.

Thus, although both recognize the importance of education that is appropriate for the development of the child, Al-Ghazali's approach is rooted in Islamic spiritual and moral values, while Rousseau's approach is grounded in freedom, nature, and natural human reason. The thoughts of Imam al-Ghazali and Jean-Jacques Rousseau in children's education are very important to be studied and used as a reference in the development of an education system that is balanced between spiritual values and individual development. Al-Ghazali's thinking that emphasizes education as a means of forming faith, morals, and closeness to God is very relevant in the midst of the moral and spiritual crisis that occurs in modern society.<sup>39</sup> In the current context, children's education is not only required to produce individuals who are intellectually intelligent, but also have character, integrity, and are oriented towards the values of kindness and social responsibility. Al-Ghazali's educational principles that emphasize the balance between intellect, heart, and behavior can be a solution to an education system that sometimes focuses too much on the cognitive aspect alone and forgets the spiritual and moral side of the child.

Meanwhile, Rousseau's ideas of an education that values freedom, the nature of the child, and a nature-based approach also remain relevant in the context of humanist and child-centered learning.<sup>40</sup> In the fast-paced era of technology and information, Rousseau's approach can be a reminder for educators to make room for children to explore, ask questions, and develop according to their respective potentials. The concept of education that adapts to the stage of child development and fosters creativity and independence is needed to face the challenges of the times that require children to be flexible, adaptive, and able to think critically. Thus, the ideas of Al-Ghazali and Rousseau can complement each other in building a complete children's education system, namely education that fosters the values of faith and noble morals while developing children's individual potential freely and responsibly.

## **CONCLUSION**

This study concludes that the concepts of children's education proposed by Imam al-Ghazali and Jean-Jacques Rousseau reveal both fundamental differences and meaningful points of convergence between Islamic and Western educational thought. Al-Ghazali emphasizes moral purification, spiritual development, and disciplined character formation rooted in divine guidance, highlighting the child's need for ethical nurturing to achieve both worldly and spiritual success. In contrast, Rousseau underscores the natural goodness of the child, advocating for freedom, experiential learning, and minimal intervention so that the child's innate potential can unfold naturally. Despite these distinctions, the comparison demonstrates that both thinkers recognize the importance of early education, the role of the environment, and the need to respect the developmental stages of children. The study ultimately shows that integrating the ethical-spiritual orientation of al-Ghazali with the humanistic-experiential approach of Rousseau can provide a more holistic educational framework—one that nurtures

---

<sup>39</sup> Iskandarova, "ROUSSEAU'S INFLUENCE ON MODERN EDUCATIONAL THOUGHT."

<sup>40</sup> Jessica Ann Clausen, "Nature Pedagogy and the Enactment of Settler Colonialism in Ontario Forest Schools and Nature-Based Kindergartens: A Study of Three Sites" (PhD Thesis, University of Toronto (Canada), 2020), <https://search.proquest.com/openview>.

moral integrity while also fostering autonomy, creativity, and emotional well-being. Such a synthesis offers valuable insights for contemporary educational models aiming to balance character formation with personal growth.

## REFERENCES

- Aji, Styo Mahendra Wasita, Yeni Rakhmawati, Sutinah Sutinah, Farah Alvian Ghofar Rahmat, and Jumardin Jumardin. "Jean Jacques Rousseau: Kehidupan, Pemikiran Pendidikan, Dan Tinjauan Pendidikan Di Indonesia." *Briliant: Jurnal Riset Dan Konseptual* 8, no. 1 (2023): 38–47.
- Al-Ghazali, I. A. H. "Revival of Religion's Sciences: Ihya'Ulum Ad-Din (Volume 1: The Quarter of The Acts of Worship) Translated by Mohammad Mahdi al-Sharif, Vol. 1." *Berut Lebanon: Dar Al-Kotob Al-Llmiah*, 2011.
- Altabaa, Homam. *Journal of Islam in Asia*. 2018. <https://journals.iium.edu.my/jiasia/index.php/jia/article/download/759/357>.
- Arinah, Arinah, Abdurrahman Yusuf, and Anwar Sadat. "Integrative Holistic Education in Early Childhood at Yaa Bunayya Kindergarten, Bima City." *Studi Multidisipliner: Jurnal Kajian Keislaman* 11, no. 2 (2024): 45–56.
- Atang, cAbd Hakim, MA dan Jaih Mubarak, and ROSDA. *Metodologi Studi Islam*. Rosda, 2017.
- Bakhov, Ivan, Yurii Terebushko, Olha Osaulchyk, Olena Ryhina, and Vitalii Vedenieiev. "Cultural Challenges in Education: Strategies for Consideration of Various Intercultural Aspects in the Educational Process." *Multidisciplinary Science Journal* 6 (2024). <https://malque.pub/ojs/index.php/msj/article/view/1934>.
- Clausen, Jessica Ann. "Nature Pedagogy and the Enactment of Settler Colonialism in Ontario Forest Schools and Nature-Based Kindergartens: A Study of Three Sites." PhD Thesis, University of Toronto (Canada), 2020. <https://search.proquest.com/openview/ef088cfcac20ae198579a8e978047482/1?pq-origsite=gscholar&cbl=18750&diss=y>.
- Creswell, John W., and Cheryl N. Poth. *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing among Five Approaches*. Sage publications, 2016. <https://books.google.com>.
- Darmawan, I. Putu Ayub. "Pendidikan 'Back To Nature': Pemikiran Jean Jacques Rousseau Tentang Pendidikan." *Satya Widya* 32, no. 1 (2016): 11–18.
- Fauzi, Hati Murdani1 Ahmad. "Developing Noble Morals in Children through Al-Ghazali's Concept of Moral Education." BESTARI, 2024. <https://riset-iaid.net/index.php/bestari/article/view/1550>.
- Fitri, Adelia, Zubaedi Zubaedi, and Fatrica Syafri. "Parenting Islami Dan Karakter Disiplin Anak Usia Dini." *Al Fitrah: Journal Of Early Childhood Islamic Education* 3, no. 2 (2020).
- Hambal, Muhammad. "Hadith Education in Forming Character of Early Childhood." *Journal of Chemical Information and Modeling* 4, no. 1 (2020): 1–11.
- Iskandarova, Kamola. "ROUSSEAU'S INFLUENCE ON MODERN EDUCATIONAL THOUGHT." *Web of Humanities: Journal of Social Science and Humanitarian Research* 2, no. 6 (2024): 82–88.
- Laverty, Megan J. "CAN YOU HEAR ME NOW? JEAN-JACQUES ROUSSEAU ON LISTENING EDUCATION." *Educational Theory* 61, no. 2 (2011): 155–69. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-5446.2011.00397.x>.
- Lu, Yawei. "Exploring Jean-Jacques Rousseau's Nature Education Thought from Emile." *2019 International Conference on Management, Education Technology and Economics*



- (ICMETE 2019), Atlantis Press, 2019, 419–22. <https://www.atlantispress.com/proceedings/icmete-19/125908441>.
- Miles, Matthew B. "Qualitative Data Analysis: An Expanded Sourcebook." *Thousand Oaks*, 1994. <https://books.google.com>.
- Moschella, Melissa. "Natural Law, Parental Rights and Education Policy." *The American Journal of Jurisprudence* 59, no. 2 (2014): 197–227.
- Nasokah, Nasokah. "Konsep Pemikiran Al-Ghazali Tentang Pendidikan Anak Dalam Islam (Studi Kitab Ihya'Ulumuddin)." *Manarul Qur'an: Jurnal Ilmiah Studi Islam* 19, no. 2 (2019): 115–24.
- Ningsih, Widia Hosnita. "The Contribution of Islamic Education to Moral and Intellectual Development." *Journal of Multidisciplinary in Islam* 1, no. 1 (2025): 31–40.
- Nurhikmah, Nurhikmah. "Character Education Islam From the Views of Imam Al-Ghazali." *Jurnal Al Burhan* 4, no. 1 (2024): 53–66.
- Obioha, Evaristus C., and Vincent Nwanosike Oguguo. "THE URGENCY OF REDISCOVERING QUALITY EDUCATION FOR DEVELOPMENT IN THE LIGHT OF JEAN JACQUES ROUSSEAU." *Oracle of Wisdom Journal of Philosophy and Public Affairs (OWIJOPPA)* 3, no. 1 (2019). <https://acjol.org/index.php/owijoppa/article/view/3635>.
- Obioha, Evaristus C., and Vincent Nwanosike Oguguo. "THE URGENCY OF REDISCOVERING QUALITY EDUCATION FOR DEVELOPMENT IN THE LIGHT OF JEAN JACQUES ROUSSEAU." *Oracle of Wisdom Journal of Philosophy and Public Affairs (OWIJOPPA)* 3, no. 1 (2019). <https://acjol.org/index.php/owijoppa/article/view/3635>.
- OGARA, PAULINUS IKECHUKWU, and VICTOR SUNDAY EZEMA. *RELEVANCE OF JEAN JACQUES ROUSSEAU'S NATURAL LEARNING TO PRIMARY EDUCATION SYSTEM IN NIGERIA*. n.d. Accessed December 2, 2025. [https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Paulinus-Ogara/publication/374738376\\_RELEVANCE\\_OF\\_JEAN\\_JACQUES\\_ROUSSEAU'S\\_NATURAL\\_LEARNING\\_TO\\_PRIMARY\\_EDUCATION\\_SYSTEM\\_IN\\_NIGERIA/links/652bf1e71a05311a23044bb8/RELEVANCE-OF-JEAN-JACQUES-ROUSSEAU'S-NATURAL-LEARNING-TO-PRIMARY-EDUCATION-SYSTEM-IN-NIGERIA.pdf](https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Paulinus-Ogara/publication/374738376_RELEVANCE_OF_JEAN_JACQUES_ROUSSEAU'S_NATURAL_LEARNING_TO_PRIMARY_EDUCATION_SYSTEM_IN_NIGERIA/links/652bf1e71a05311a23044bb8/RELEVANCE-OF-JEAN-JACQUES-ROUSSEAU'S-NATURAL-LEARNING-TO-PRIMARY-EDUCATION-SYSTEM-IN-NIGERIA.pdf).
- Orji, Chidi Paul. "A CRITIQUE OF JEAN-JACQUES ROUSSEAU'S CONCEPTION OF INEQUALITY AND IT'S IMPACT ON CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY." *JASSD-Journal of African Studies and Sustainable Development* 5, no. 1 (2024). [https://www.apas.africa/journal\\_article.php?j=ochendo-124](https://www.apas.africa/journal_article.php?j=ochendo-124).
- Parvin, Airin. "Comparative Analysis of Child Development Approaches across Different Education Systems Globally." *Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences Studies* 7, no. 4 (2025): 95–113.
- Pavel, Sonia Maria. "A Systematic Political Philosophy of Education." PhD Thesis, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2025. <https://dspace.mit.edu/handle/1721.1/163277>.
- Peckover, Christopher. "Realizing the Natural Self: Rousseau and the Current System of Education." *Philosophical Studies in Education* 43 (2012): 84–94.
- Rokhim, Ahmad Abdur, and M. Yunus Abu Bakar. "Studi Komparasi Konsep Pendidikan Anak Dalam Islam Menurut Buya Hamka Dan Abdullah Nashih Ulwan." *Jurnal Al Murobbi* 6, no. 2 (2021): 73–91.
- Sef, Widad, and M. Yunus Abu Bakar. "Relevansi Pendidikan Perspektif Al-Ghazali Terhadap Paradigma Pendidikan Islam Di Indonesia." *Al-Hikmah: Jurnal Agama Dan Ilmu Pengetahuan* 21, no. 1 (2024): 93–107.
- Sholicha, Syovinatus. "Husnul Huluq Al-Ghazali Concept as the Core of Student Character Education." *JIE (Journal of Islamic Education)* 9, no. 2 (2024): 526–40.

*The Concept of Children's Education in Islamic and Western Perspectives:  
A Comparative Study of the Thought of Imam Al-Ghazali and Jean Jacques  
Rousseau*

---

*Mas Ayu Ainun Nisa' and M. Yunus Abu Bakar*

Syaiful, Mohammad, and Rifqi Khairul Anam. "The Concept Of Moral Education According To Imam Al Ghazali And Relevance To Education In Indonesia." *At-Tajdid: Jurnal Pendidikan Dan Pemikiran Islam* 8, no. 2 (2024): 601–15.

*The Concept of Children's Education in Islamic and Western Perspectives:  
A Comparative Study of the Thought of Imam Al-Ghazali and Jean Jacques  
Rousseau*

---

*Mas Ayu Ainun Nisa' and M. Yunus Abu Bakar*