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Soul Education in *Kimiya as-Sa'adah*: Al-Ghazali's Response to Burnout and Existential Emptiness

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ABSTRACT

This research examines the concept of soul education in *Kimiya as-Sa'adah* by Imam Al-Ghazali and explores its relevance to the growing phenomenon of burnout and existential emptiness among the modern generation. The study specifically addresses three core problem formulations: (1) how Al-Ghazali conceptualizes soul education in *Kimiya as-Sa'adah*, (2) how these concepts relate to contemporary issues of burnout and life emptiness, and (3) what implications they offer for the development of psychospiritual well-being today. Using a descriptive qualitative design and a library research approach, this study analyzes primary texts of *Kimiya as-Sa'adah* along with supporting secondary literature. The findings reveal that Al-Ghazali's framework emphasizes purification of the soul, control of desires, and the attainment of true happiness through the integration of knowledge, righteous action, and deep spiritual awareness. Beyond its normative values, this concept has practical significance in shaping character and strengthening mental health. In the contemporary context, Al-Ghazali's teachings remain highly relevant, offering inner balance and spiritually grounded solutions to burnout and existential emptiness. Thus, *Kimiya as-Sa'adah* contributes substantially to the development of soul education capable of addressing modern existential crises.

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INTRODUCTION

The phenomenon of the burnout generation and the emptiness of life has increasingly become an existential crisis affecting contemporary society, particularly Millennials and Generation Z. Burnout is characterized by emotional, physical, and mental exhaustion caused by work pressure, social expectations, and excessive self-demands. Meanwhile, the emptiness of life arises when individuals are unable to find meaning and purpose in life despite being materially fulfilled (Abas & Yusof, 2020). This condition triggers psychological disorders such as anxiety, depression, and even suicidal ideation. Global data show a significant rise in mental health disorders, and in Indonesia, national health surveys also indicate an increasing trend aligned with complex socio-economic dynamics (Harahap & Hendra, 2023).

Existential emptiness represents a condition in which individuals feel that their lives lack meaning, are emotionally hollow, and disconnected from higher values. Viktor Frankl refers to this condition as the existential vacuum, a psychological emptiness that may lead to destructive and nihilistic behaviors. This phenomenon is increasingly prevalent in modern materialistic and secular societies, where spiritual values are marginalized, causing humans to lose their transcendent grounding. Paloutzian emphasizes that neglecting the spiritual dimension can hinder holistic human development (Ferhat, 2020). Thus, the issue is not merely psychological but also spiritual and ontological.

Within this context, soul education becomes an urgent necessity in addressing the challenges faced by the current generation. A Sufi-based approach that emphasizes purification of the heart (tazkiyatun nafs), self-discipline (riyadhah), and existential awareness of God offers a preventive and curative framework for mental well-being. Various studies indicate that spiritual approaches contribute significantly to emotional calmness, psychological resilience, and the rediscovery of life purpose. Therefore, education that

merely focuses on intellectual capacity and technical skills is insufficient for forming holistic human beings without integrating spiritual development (Abas & Yusof, 2020).

Abu Hamid al-Ghazali (1058–1111), a prominent theologian, philosopher, and Sufi within classical Islamic scholarship, contributed significantly to the development of soul education through his monumental work *Kimiya as-Sa'adah* (The Alchemy of Happiness). In this work, Al-Ghazali proposes a framework of true happiness (sa'adah) through self-knowledge, ma'rifatullah, and purification of the soul. The relevance of his ideas remains strong today, as they continue to address existential crises across eras (Akhmad et al., 2021). He conceptualizes the soul as an inner kingdom that must be governed through spiritual struggle against desires and consistent discipline (Afidah, 2021). Concepts such as mujahadah, muraqabah, muhasabah, and strengthening the vertical relationship with God form the core of his educational framework.

However, academic studies that explicitly connect Al-Ghazali's concept of soul education in *Kimiya as-Sa'adah* with the contemporary phenomena of burnout and existential emptiness among modern generations remain limited. Most previous studies focus on the theological, ethical, or historical aspects of Al-Ghazali's thought without linking them to contemporary psychosocial realities—particularly those affecting Millennials and Gen Z in a highly stressful and increasingly meaningless modern setting (Kurniawati et al., 2023). This indicates a clear research gap regarding the relevance of Al-Ghazali's Sufi framework within modern existential psychology.

The novelty of this research lies in its explicit focus on connecting Al-Ghazali's soul education framework with the phenomena of burnout and existential emptiness through a Sufi approach as a preventive and curative solution. Meanwhile, its originality rests in thematically exploring *Kimiya as-Sa'adah* through a contemporary

psychospiritual lens—an approach that has rarely been examined in depth by previous studies. Thus, this research offers not only philosophical analysis but also implications for practical implementation.

Therefore, this study aims to: (1) analyze the concept of soul education in *Kimiya as-Sa'adah*, (2) contextualize it with the phenomena of burnout and existential emptiness among Millennials and Gen Z, and (3) formulate its theoretical and practical

implications within education, psychology, and modern spiritual development. The state of the art of this article is the integration of classical Islamic scholarship with contemporary existential psychological issues through the perspective of soul education, expected to contribute to both theoretical enrichment and practical application in the field of modern psychospiritual studies and mental health development among younger generations.

METHODS

This study uses the Descriptive Qualitative by type Literature Study (Library Research). This approach was chosen because it is relevant to study and understand the concept of soul education contained in classical works *Kimiya as-Sa'adah* works of Imam Al-Ghazali, as well as to contextualize the relevance of his thought to contemporary phenomena such as Burnout Generation and the emptiness of life. This approach is exploratory and interpretive, with the aim of examining in depth the meaning of the text, the structure of thought, and the sufistic context underlying Al-Ghazali's ideas.

The data in this study is sourced from two types, namely primary sources and secondary sources. The primary source used is the text *Kimiya as-Sa'adah*, which is Al-Ghazali's representative work in the fields of ethics, sufism, and soul education. This work was chosen because it comprehensively elaborates on the concept of true happiness (*Sa'adah*) through spiritual approaches and soul coaching, such as *Tazkiyatun nafs*, *Riyadhya*, *São Paulo* and *Ma'rifatullah*. Meanwhile, secondary sources are obtained from scientific literature in the form of nationally and internationally reputable journals that are relevant to the topic, both in the fields of Islamic philosophy, spiritual psychology, Islamic education, and related contemporary issues Burnout and existential emptiness. The journals are selected selectively based on the criteria of having been published in the last five years (2020–2025) and coming from indexed or reputable publishers (Snyder, 2019).

The data collection process is carried out through literature study techniques by studying, selecting, and reviewing texts that are relevant to the research focus. Researchers access these resources through physical libraries and online academic databases such as Google Scholar, ScienceDirect, DOAJ, and accredited campus journals. The search is done using keywords such as: "*Kimiya as-Sa'adah*", "*Al-Ghazali*", "*soul education*", "*spiritual health*", "*Burnout Generation*", and "*existential emptiness*". All documents studied were analyzed based on their suitability with the theme and purpose of the research.

Data analysis is carried out through the Content Analysis (Content Analysis), which is a technique used to interpret the meaning of a text in a given context in a systematic and objective manner. In this case, the researcher mapped out the main concepts in the *Kimiya as-Sa'adah* and relate it to contemporary psychosocial issues. The stages in the analysis process include data reduction, thematic categorization, and interpretive conclusions. Concepts such as: *Cleansing the heart (qalb)*, *Control of desires (nafs)*, *awareness of God's presence* and *Moral Education* be the main thematic focus that is examined in answering the question *Burnout and the emptiness of life in the modern generation*.

To maintain the validity of the data, techniques are used Source triangulation and approaches Intertextuality. Triangulation is done by comparing the contents of the book *Kimiya as-Sa'adah* and various relevant

contemporary research results. This is intended to ensure consistency and richness of interpretation of classical texts and their application in the contemporary context. In addition, validity is also strengthened by

using scientific works from authoritative and academic sources, so that the results of this research have a strong basis both in terms of science and methodology (Matos et al., 2023).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Concept of Soul Education in Kimiya as-Sa'adah

1. Meaning and Purpose of *Chemistryas-Sa'adah*

Kimiya as-Sa'adah is one of the great works of Imam Abu Hamid al-Ghazali which occupies an important position in the treasures of classical Islamic thought, especially in the fields of Sufism and spiritual education. Literally, "*Chemistry*" means chemical science, and "*As-Sa'adah*" means happiness. However, al-Ghazali uses this term metaphorically to refer to the science of spiritual transformation, which is knowledge that can transform the human soul from low qualities to spiritual perfection. In the book, al-Ghazali equates the education of the soul with a chemical process that is able to turn low metals into gold, as a science that can raise the degree of the human soul from lust to purity and closeness to God (N. Safitri & Al-Kaf, 2021).

The main purpose of *Kimiya as-Sa'adah* is not only to provide moral guidance, but more than that, to lead man to true happiness (*sa'adah haqiqiyah*), which in al-Ghazali's view cannot be found in the material world. Happiness in this perspective is transcendental, it can only be achieved through the process of ma'rifatullah (knowledge of God), mujahadah (struggle against lust), and tazkiyatun nafs (purification of the soul) (Safitri & Idrus, 2021).

Al-Ghazali divides happiness into two types: worldly and ukhrawi happiness. However, the true happiness is the one with a spiritual dimension, because this world is only a temporary stopover. Therefore, man must not be deceived by the pleasures of the pseudo-world. He affirmed that those who love

the world too much will be prevented from feeling the sweetness of faith and closeness to God. In this case, soul education is an important bridge to direct the heart not to be complacent in materialistic life (Setiadi, 2024).

Basic structure *Kimiya as-Sa'adah* consists of four main pillars: (1) knowing oneself, (2) knowing God, (3) knowing the world, and (4) knowing the hereafter. These four pillars form an integral framework of thinking in educating the soul. In the first chapter, al-Ghazali emphasizes the importance of knowing oneself as a way to know God. This is in accordance with the hadith: "Whoever knows himself, he will know his Lord" (HR. Al-Baihaqi). The process of soul education, thus, begins with the awareness of one's existence and position in the universe (Imam Al-Ghazali, 2021).

In the introduction to the book, al-Ghazali states that man was not created in vain, but for a great purpose. Although the human body is mortal, its spirit comes from the eternal divine realm. Therefore, the education of the soul must be directed to awaken the divine potential so as not to fall into the humility of animal lust. Through zuhud and spiritual practice, man can attain the highest maqam as a spiritual being who has access to divine essences (Harahap & Hendra, 2023).

Furthermore, al-Ghazali describes the human soul as an inner kingdom, with reason as a wazir (minister), syahwat as a soldier, and qalb as a king. Soul education aims to regulate the relationship between the three so that

there is no chaos in the self. If lust dominates the intellect and qalb, then what is born is spiritual destruction. But if qalb can be controlled by an enlightened intellect, then the soul will gain tranquility and guidance towards God (D. Safitri et al., 2023).

In this context, *Kimiya as-Sa'adah* It is not only a book of moral instruction, but also a comprehensive manual of

spiritual education. He explained that true happiness is not found in the outside world, but through the process of internal transformation. This process requires consistent learning, reflection, and practice. Thus, this work becomes an intellectual and spiritual legacy that is very relevant for the education of the soul across generations (Fazeli & Omidzamani, 2023).

2. Basic Components of Psychiatric Education

In *Kimiya as-Sa'adah*, al-Ghazali compiles the framework of soul education in the form of systematic stages. The first component is *ma'rifatullah*, which is the recognition of Allah as the main purpose of human life. According to al-Ghazali, one will not achieve true happiness without knowing who his God is. This introduction is not only intellectual, but existential, namely consciousness that arises from spiritual experience and deep contemplation (Imam Al-Ghazali, 2021).

The second component is *tazkiyatun nafs*, which is the process of purifying the soul from reprehensible traits such as arrogance, envy, *riya'*, and greed. In this educational framework, *tazkiyah* is a fundamental aspect because cleanliness of the heart is a condition for receiving divine light. A dirty soul is like a mirror covered with dust; it is incapable of reflecting the truth. Therefore, soul training must be directed to cleanse oneself from all forms of liver disease (Setiadi, 2024).

The third component is *S.S. S.S.*, which is a spiritual practice that includes worship, lust control, and moral strengthening. *Riyadhya* In the Sufism tradition, it is a process of spiritual discipline that aims to subdue lust through acts of worship, such as night prayers, sunnah fasting, dhikr, and tafakkur. This spiritual practice has a

significant effect on psychological resilience and stress management in modern individuals (Fazeli & Omidzamani, 2023).

The fourth component is *mujahadah*, which is the struggle against negative impulses in oneself. *Mujahadah* is seen as the greatest jihad, as the Prophet Muhammad PBUH said: "The greatest jihad is jihad against lust." Al-Ghazali emphasized that *mujahadah* requires perseverance, patience, and sincerity because this process is not easy and full of inner challenges.

The fifth component is *muhasabah* and *muraqabah*. *Muhasabah* is daily introspection of deeds, thoughts, and intentions, while *muraqabah* is the constant awareness that Allah watches over every human movement. These two practices serve as reflective mirrors that maintain the integrity of one's intentions and spiritual orientation so that they do not deviate from God's path (N. Safitri & Al-Kaf, 2021).

Overall, these five components form a comprehensive and integral structure of soul education. It not only targets the moral aspect, but also the spiritual and intellectual aspects. By combining the dimensions of rational and irrational, al-Ghazali's version of soul education is able to touch all aspects of humanity within the framework of monotheism (Harahap & Hendra, 2023).

3. The Role of Morals and Spiritual

Morality is the core of the process of soul education in *Kimiya as-Sa'adah*. Al-Ghazali stated that education that does not produce morals is a failed education. Morality in al-Ghazali's view is not just a good habit, but a stable state of mind that produces good deeds spontaneously without being forced. Therefore, morals are not enough to be taught, but must be formed through habituation and example (Al-Ghazali, 2021).

In this context, soul education plays a role as a means of forming spiritual ethics. Ethics in Islam does not only come from social norms, but also from transcendental awareness of the presence of Allah. Therefore, a person who has good morals is not solely because of social rules, but because he is aware that every deed he does will be accountable before God.

Al-Ghazali also taught that moral development must start from the heart (*qalb*). If *the qalb* is clean, then all the limbs will follow in goodness. However, if the *qalb* is dirty, then the outward actions will also be polluted. In this case, moral education cannot be separated from spiritual education. Both complement each other and form a complete individual.

The Relevance of Chemistry as-Sa'adah to the Phenomenon of Burnout and Emptiness of Life

1. Analysis of the *Burnout* Problem from Al-Ghazali's Perspective

Phenomenon *Burnout* is a psychological symptom that is increasingly common in modern society, especially among millennials and Z generations. *Burnout* is generally understood as emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and decreased personal achievement due to continuous work pressure (Maslach & Leiter, 2016). However, more than just a workload, *Burnout* often reflects a loss of meaning

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In addition, spiritual ethics demands a balance between the vertical (*hablum minallah*) and horizontal (*hablum minannas*) dimensions. Al-Ghazali emphasized that a good relationship with God must also be realized in a just, empathetic, and loving relationship with fellow human beings. Noble morals reflect a person's spiritual qualities, and become a mirror of the cleanliness of his soul (Setiadi, 2024).

In the modern era full of moral relativism, al-Ghazali's teachings of spiritual ethics have become very relevant. When many people are experiencing moral crises and losing their grip on life, spiritual-based moral education can be a character-building solution from within. Education that is oriented towards the formation of spiritual character will be more resistant to external pressure because it comes from internal consciousness (Indana & Mustofa, 2024).

Thus, the role of morals and spiritual ethics in soul education is vital. The education of the soul without morals will lose its direction, and morality without spirituality will be easily fragile. In al-Ghazali's view, both are a unity that must be instilled simultaneously in the process of human education (Baharshah et al., 2021).

in daily activities. In Al-Ghazali's frame of thought, this kind of condition is the result of domination *nafs Al-Ammarah* (the soul that commands on evil) and the imbalance between the spiritual and physical dimensions (Imam Al-Ghazali, 2021).

Al-Ghazali emphasized that mental illness begins from forgetting the purpose of human creation. Deep *Kimiya as-Sa'adah*, he stated that man was

created not just to meet worldly needs, but to know and worship God (Imam Al-Ghazali, 2021). When man loses this orientation, he will be trapped in an empty routine and endless restlessness. This is in line with Viktor Frankl's thought in logotherapy, that existential suffering arises when humans lose meaning in life.

Furthermore, Al-Ghazali assessed that the symptoms of anxiety and excessive stress are the result of a dirty heart and an untrained soul (Mazaya & Soleh, 2023). The human soul, according to him, consists of elements of angels, animals, and demons. When the animal and peasant elements dominate

2. Al-Ghazali's Solution Through Soul Education

The solution that Al-Ghazali offers to *Burnout* And the emptiness of life is the education of the soul that is integrated between the dimensions of reason, qalb, and spirit. This education of the soul departs from the introduction of oneself. Deep *Kimiya as-Sa'adah*, Al-Ghazali stated that whoever knows himself, will know his Lord. This process is the first step to realize that true happiness does not lie in external attainment, but in the quality of a spiritual relationship with God (Imam Al-Ghazali, 2021).

Concrete steps in psychic education include *Tazkiyatun nafs* (purification of the soul), *Riyadhya* (spiritual practice), and *São Paulo* (Inner struggle). Al-Ghazali emphasized the importance of dhikr, tafakkur, and consistent worship as a means of purifying the heart from spiritual diseases such as *riya'*, *ujub*, *hasad*, and love of the world. This purification makes the heart

3. Contextualizing with the Needs of the Current Generation

The needs of millennials and Z for the meaning of life are becoming increasingly urgent amid the current of globalization, technology, and

themselves, there is a tendency to gluttony, anger, and anxiety. *Burnout Modern* is a manifestation of the dominance of the human animal dimension that is not controlled by reason and faith (Abas & Yusof, 2020).

In this context, *Burnout* Not only psychological problems, but also spiritual. When a person loves the world too much and makes it the end goal, then he will be easily tormented by the pressure of the world itself. Al-Ghazali said that the world is a test, and whoever is deceived by its glitter will get lost in the darkness of the mind (Ferhat, 2020). It is this spiritual crisis that gives birth to the emptiness of life.

a medium of light, as explained in *Mishkat al-Anwar*, that a clean heart will receive a soothing divine light (Abdelnour, 2024). This method is not only theoretical but also applicable. In the modern world, spiritual practices such as meditation, mindfulness, and contemplation have been shown to be effective in lowering stress and improving quality of life.

Al-Ghazali's psychic education can be contextualized as a comprehensive psychospiritual approach to dealing with psychiatric problems. More than that, soul education aims to strengthen *Himmatul Iradah* (willpower) so that individuals are able to cope with external pressures with inner stability. A trained soul will not be easily swayed by worldly difficulties, for he has found peace in his closeness to God. This is the form of spiritual resilience that is the foundation of true happiness (Moh. Faizin, 2023).

individualism. In various surveys, this generation experiences significant levels of anxiety, depression, and loss of direction in life (WHO, 2022). This is

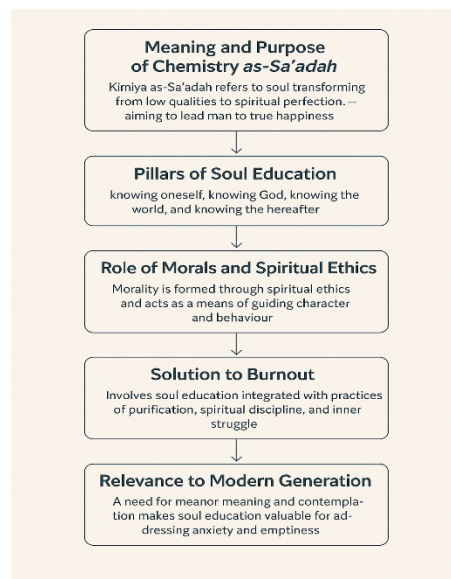
where the relevance of Al-Ghazali's teachings lies, especially in *Kimiya as-Sa'adah*, which emphasizes the importance of self-contemplation and purification of the heart as a path to inner peace. The digital generation tends to live in the acceleration and noise of information, which keeps them away from the dimension of spirituality. Spiritual practices such as dhikr, tafakkur, and introspection within the framework of Al-Ghazali can be offered as alternatives to fill the void. As suggested in modern spiritual approaches, connectedness to something greater than oneself is the main antidote to existential crises (Paloutzian, 2021).

In education, the concept of *Kimiya as-Sa'adah* can be integrated as an ethics and character education curriculum that emphasizes the development of the heart, not just intellectuality. This effort is relevant to the idea of holistic education that brings spiritual aspects closer to students' lives, as developed in various value-based and religious education models (Rahayu, 2021). In addition, the world of work and economic productivity also need to be reviewed in the framework of values. Al-Ghazali taught that worldly work and activities are still important, but must be carried out with the intention of worship and an orientation to the hereafter. This can be a solution to a work culture that only assesses people by results and productivity without paying attention to inner well-being (Octavia Magdalena, 2022).

By adapting Al-Ghazali's spiritual principles, modern generations can build a resilience of the soul that not only endures the pressures of life, but is also able to permeate the deepest meaning of

their existence. The education of the soul in *Kimiya as-Sa'adah* is the answer to the problem of modernity that loses spiritual values in daily life.

The following conceptual model is presented to illustrate the systematic relationship between Al-Ghazali's framework of soul education, its underlying mechanisms, and its relevance to addressing burnout and existential emptiness in the modern context.



After the conceptual table, it can be emphasized that the relationships among Al-Ghazali's components of soul education form a coherent and mutually reinforcing logical sequence. Each stage in the model does not stand alone, but works integratively to produce sustained spiritual and psychological transformation. Thus, the diagram provides a more concise illustration of how the concept of soul education can address the phenomena of burnout and existential emptiness in the modern generation.

CONCLUSION

The study of soul education in *Kimiya as-Sa'adah* shows that Al-Ghazali formulated a comprehensive system of self-cultivation, placing the inner dimension as the center of human transformation toward

true happiness. Soul education is not only related to the purification of the intellect or the enhancement of intellectual capacity, but also encompasses the cleansing of the heart, the control of desires, the habituation of

noble character, and the strengthening of spiritual awareness grounded in a transcendent relationship with God. Its relevance becomes especially evident when connected to the phenomena of burnout and existential emptiness experienced by the modern generation. Through mechanisms such as *tazkiyatun nafs*, *riyadhah*, *muhasabah*, and deepening spiritual connectedness, Al-Ghazali's concept offers a path of inner recovery capable of restoring balance and providing a more transcendent orientation to life.

For academics, this research opens space for expanding psycho-spiritual studies based on classical texts and integrating them with modern psychological theories. Multidisciplinary research that links soul

education with clinical psychology, character education, and existential philosophy needs to be further developed so that the contributions of *Kimiya as-Sa'adah* can be scientifically validated. In the fields of education and spiritual development, the findings affirm the importance of incorporating the practices of reflection, *muhasabah*, moral cultivation, and self-awareness training into learning processes. Spiritual approaches such as *dhikr*, *tafakkur*, and mindfulness are valuable for reducing burnout and fostering mental resilience. An educational ecosystem that balances intellectual, moral, and spiritual dimensions will help shape a generation that is more resilient and possesses a clear sense of direction in life.

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