

The Relevance of Character Education in Ihya' Ulumuddin to Overcome the Academic Integrity Crisis of Generation Z

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INFORMASI ARTIKEL	ABSTRAK
Article History: Received: 26 February 2026 Revised: 04 April 2026 Accepted: 06 April 2026 Published: 27 July 2026 Kata Kunci: Pendidikan Karakter Ihya' Ulumuddin Krisis Integritas Akademik Al Ghazali Generasi Z	Fenomena krisis integritas akademik pada generasi Z di era digital saat ini ditandai oleh maraknya praktik plagiarisme, fabrikasi data penelitian, dan publikasi semu. Kondisi tersebut semakin kompleks dengan didukung oleh pesatnya perkembangan teknologi, seperti: Artificial Intelligence (AI), Augmented Reality (AR), dan Virtual Reality (VR). Berbagai studi telah menunjukkan akan urgensi dan relevansi pemanfaatan teknologi terhadap perilaku akademik. Meskipun demikian, beberapa kajian tersebut masih terbatas pada aspek normatif semata dan belum ditemukan kajian yang secara spesifik mengintegrasikan pendekatan spiritual sebagai mekanisme pembentukan integritas akademik. Oleh karena itu, penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menelaah, mensintesis, dan menganalisis relevansi konsep pendidikan karakter dalam kitab Ihya' Ulumuddin karya Imam Al Ghazali sebagai solusi atas krisis integritas akademik generasi Z saat ini. Penelitian ini masuk pada kategori penelitian kepustakaan (Library research) dengan model analisis isi (Content analysis). Hasil temuan penelitian menunjukkan bahwa nilai-nilai karakter dalam Ihya' Ulumuddin, seperti amanah, tanggung jawab, religiusitas, dan kemandirian, tidak hanya bersifat normatif, tetapi memiliki relasi fungsional melalui internalisasi nilai-nilai tasawuf (riyadhah, mujahadah al-nafs, dan tazkiyah al-nafs) yang berkontribusi dalam membentuk self-regulation dan moral awareness. Kedua aspek tersebut menjadi fondasi utama dalam membangun integritas akademik, khususnya dalam menghadapi tantangan penggunaan teknologi digital. Penelitian ini menawarkan kebaruan berupa integrasi konsep pendidikan karakter berbasis tasawuf dengan pendekatan psikologis modern dalam kerangka konseptual yang operasional. Sedangkan, secara praktis, temuan ini memberikan kontribusi pada pengembangan kurikulum dan strategi pembelajaran yang kontekstual dengan menekankan pada pembentukan integritas akademik melalui internalisasi nilai spiritual secara sistematis.
Keywords: Character Education; Ihya' Ulumuddin; Academic Integrity Crisis Al Ghazali; Generation Z	ABSTRACT The phenomenon of the academic integrity crisis among Generation Z in today's digital age is marked by the prevalence of plagiarism, research data fabrication, and ghost publishing. This situation is further complicated by rapid technological advancements, such as Artificial Intelligence (AI), Augmented Reality (AR), and Virtual Reality (VR). Various studies have highlighted the urgency and relevance of leveraging technology to address academic misconduct. Nevertheless, some of these studies remain limited to normative aspects alone, and no research has yet been found that specifically integrates a spiritual approach as a mechanism for fostering academic integrity. Therefore, this study aims to examine, synthesize, and analyze the relevance of the concept of character education in the book *Ihya' Ulumuddin* by Imam Al-Ghazali as a solution to the current academic integrity crisis among Generation Z. This study falls under the category of library research using a content analysis model. The research findings indicate that the character values in *Ihya' Ulumuddin*, such as trustworthiness, responsibility, religiosity, and independence, are not merely normative but possess a functional relationship through the internalization of Sufi values (riyadhah, mujahadah al-nafs, and tazkiyah al-nafs), which contribute to the development of self-regulation and moral awareness. These two aspects serve as the primary foundation for building academic integrity, particularly in addressing the challenges of digital technology use. This

study offers a novel approach by integrating the concept of Sufi-based character education with modern psychological approaches within an operational conceptual framework. Meanwhile, practically, these findings contribute to the development of contextual curricula and learning strategies by emphasizing the cultivation of academic integrity through the systematic internalization of spiritual values.

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1. Introduction

Generation Z, or often referred to as Gen Z, was born and developed in the digital era, where the development of technology, information, and digitalization is a fundamental and integral need in their learning process (Liang, 2024; Parry & Battista, 2019; Sakashita, 2020; Shirazian et al., 2025). This condition is increasingly comprehensive supported by the rapid development of artificial intelligence, such as: Artificial Intelligence (AI), Augmented Reality (AR), and Virtual Reality (VR) which have now become important axes in various sectors of human life dynamics, one of which is in the field of education (de Oliveira et al., 2023; Karabatak et al., 2025; Lampropoulos, 2025). According to international survey data from 2024, Indonesia is recorded as the country with the highest level of AI use in the learning process, at 95%, followed by two other Asian countries, namely Malaysia at 90% and Saudi Arabia at 89%. Of these, around 86% of Indonesian students use AI to complete academic assignments (Yonatan, 2025).

Meanwhile, at the national level, various studies show that the academic integrity crisis in Indonesia is mostly caused by the misuse of technological developments. The articulation refers to the findings of the 2024 Education Integrity Assessment Survey (SPI) released by the Corruption Eradication Commission (KPK). The results show that cheating is still rampant, with an average of 78% occurring in schools and 98% in universities. This confirms that the culture of cheating still dominates the learning process. In addition, SPI 2024 found evidence of plagiarism: 43% of respondents admitted to plagiarism in the campus environment, while 6% stated that the same is vulnerable to occur in schools (Wardiana, 2025). The data from these findings were then legitimized by the research of Mulenga & Shilongo (2024), which stated that the use of AI Tools, in addition to providing convenience in working on papers, also risks increasing plagiarism. Similarly, research conducted by Song (2024) revealed that the widespread use of AI tools by students has triggered an increase in plagiarism, data fabrication, and pseudo-publications. In addition, research by Hartono & Prima (2023) through the analysis of student essays using the iThenticate device also found that there was mosaic and verbatim plagiarism.

This condition emphasizes the importance of strengthening character education as a strategic effort in overcoming the academic integrity crisis in Generation Z. One relevant approach is to examine the integration of the concept of character education in the book *Ihya' Ulumuddin* by Imam Al-Ghazali. Al-Ghazali, in each of his works, emphasizes the importance of character formation through the internalization of Sufism values, such as spiritual practice (*riyadhah*), control of lust (*mujahadah al-nafs*), and purification of the soul (*tazkiyah al-nafs*), which are oriented towards the formation of noble morals as a *kamil* person. Therefore, the concept has relevance in building moral awareness and academic responsibility in the midst of the challenges of using digital technology today.

A number of previous studies have examined the relevance of Imam Al Ghazali's thought in the context of character education with various study focuses. The study by Yah et al. (2023) examines

the relationship between the concept of character education in Ihya' Ulumuddin and the implementation of the Pancasila Student Profile Strengthening Project (P5). Meanwhile, the research of Isbir et al. (2022) focuses on the relevance of the concept of moral education by Al-Ghazali to the development of character education in the 2013 Curriculum. In contrast to the research conducted by Dewa et al. (2023), it emphasizes more the aspect of the spiritual dimension by stating that moral education according to Al-Ghazali is a process of soul formation that is directed to get closer to Allah SWT. Through the practice of moral *karimah* consistently. However, based on the exposure of these various previous studies, there has been no study that specifically discusses the integration of character education in the book of Ihya' Ulumuddin, especially those that examine the relevance of Sufism values such as spiritual practice (*riyadhah*), control of lust (*mujahadah al-nafs*), and purification of the soul (*tazkiyah al-nafs*). Given that these concepts have a very important role to be integrated in character education, especially as an effort to overcome the problems of integrity crises experienced by Generation Z today, this research seeks to offer a new paradigm in dealing with the academic integrity crisis in Generation Z through exploring the relevance of the concept of character education in the book Ihya' Ulumuddin by Imam Al-Ghazali. The purpose of this research is to explore in depth the relevance of the concept in overcoming the academic integrity crisis in Generation Z.

2. Research Methods

The research on the relevance of character education in the book Ihya' Ulumuddin by Imam Al-Ghazali falls under the category of Library Research (Özden, 2024). Research data is collected through a literature review of research report databases, such as Google Scholar, Scopus, Semantic Scholar, ScienceDirect, Consensus, several conference proceedings, E-books, and other relevant documents, both in print and online (Permadi et al., 2025; Surya & Anshori, 2025). The analysis technique is based on the guidelines of content analysis techniques (Content Analysis) by identifying the core concepts in the book Ihya' Ulumuddin that have close relevance to character education. Then, an analysis and synthesis of the relevance of character education contained in the book Ihya' Ulumuddin was carried out to overcome the academic integrity crisis of Generation Z.

The researcher presents a research framework to facilitate understanding of the flow of the methods used. The framework developed refers to Permadi's research (2026), which is a reference in the implementation of the stages of literature study.

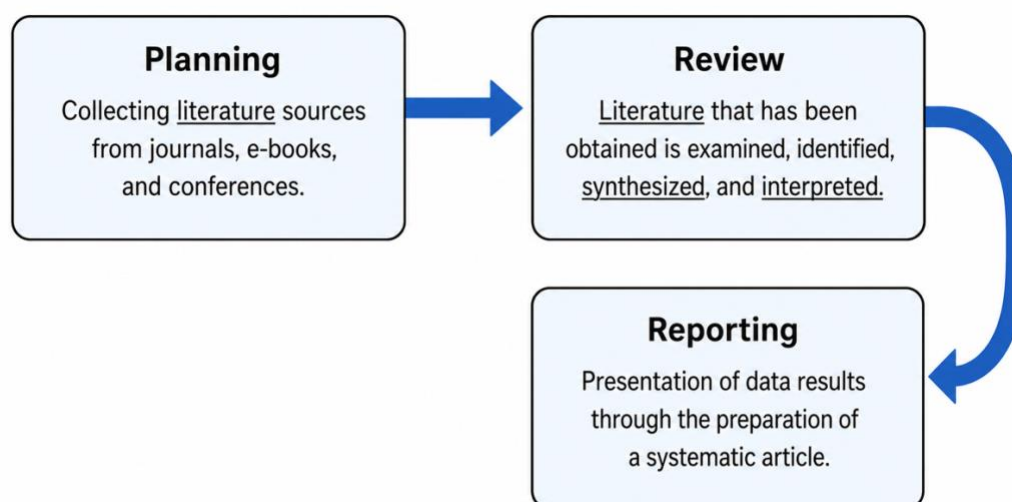


Figure 1. Stages of Research Literature Study Content Analysis Model

The next step is to establish criteria to assess whether the data collected is relevant as a source of research literature. The following research criteria were used as a reference in selecting relevant data.

Table 1. Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria for Literature Data

No	Inclusions	Exclusion
1	All articles that discuss the concept of character education and the study of the book of Ihya' Ulumuddin	All articles that do not discuss the concept of character education and the study of the book of Ihya' Ulumuddin
2	All article sources that have a DOI	All sources of articles that do not have a DOI
3	Articles published between 2018 and 2025	Artikel yang tidak diterbitkan antara tahun 2018 dan 2025
4	All articles written in English and Indonesian.	All articles not written in English and Indonesian.

Once the data has been identified based on inclusion and exclusion criteria, the next step is to analyze the key concepts related to character education in Al-Ghazali's book *Ihya'*. This analysis focuses on the concept of the core concept of the substance of the discussion of the book of *Ihya' Ulumuddin*, such as the discussion of *Rub'ul Ibadah*, *Rub'ul 'Adat*, and *Rub'ul Muhlikat* which later from the three basic concepts of substance will be relevant to the concept of character education as a form of effort to overcome the Academic Integrity Crisis of Generation Z. The main reason why the researcher chose the Book of *Ihya' Ulumuddin* as the object of study in this study is because of the scope of the sub-chapter of the discussion Quite comprehensive. This book not only explains the guidelines for performing worship but also emphasizes the importance of refraining from sinful deeds (immorality) and upholding good ethics and manners when interacting with parents, teachers, and friends. Therefore, with the characteristics of the substance of this comprehensive discussion, the researcher views this book as relevant to be understood, analyzed, and used as a guideline to highlight the phenomenon of the academic integrity crisis in Generation Z.

3. Results and Discussion

The Concept of Strengthening Character Education in the Book of *Ihya' Ulumuddin*

The book of *Ihya' Ulumuddin* is one of the monumental works owned by the Hujjatul Islam (Al Ghazali, 2008), which consists of 40 discussion subchapters arranged in four volumes of books. The first volume discusses the problem of *Rub'ul Ibadah*, which covers various aspects of Islamic law, such as the obligation to seek knowledge, the principles of faith, the procedures of purification, prayer, zakat, fasting, hajj, as well as the manners of reading the Qur'an, dhikr, and prayer. Meanwhile, the second volume discusses the problems of *Rub'ul 'Adat*, which contains ethics, manners of eating and drinking, marriage, work ethics, halal and haram provisions, manners of getting along with friends, the practice of *uzlah*, the procedures for traveling, and the implementation of *amar ma'ruf nahi munkar*.

In the third volume, the Book of *Ihya' Ulumuddin* discusses the problems of *Rub'ul Muhlikat*, namely matters related to *Qolbun* (heart). In it, there is an explanation of the greatness of the heart, the training of the soul, and the various dangers of liver diseases that can damage human faith, such as *ujub*, *takabbur*, anger, envy, and miserliness. In addition, it also discusses some despicable behaviors that are often internalized in human personality, such as arrogance, *riya*, and *bakhil*. The fourth volume of the discussion of the book *Ihya' Ulumuddin* discusses *Rub'ul Munjiyat*, which

contains guidance for a servant to purify himself so that he is always close to Allah SWT. This discussion includes spiritual values such as repentance, patience, gratitude, (*Khauf*) fear of Allah, always hoping in Him, *zuhud*, *tawakkal*, honesty, sincerity, *muhasabah*, self-reflection, and awareness of death.

In general, the scope of discussion in the book of *Ihya' Ulumuddin* does not only focus on the procedure of worshipping Allah, but also discusses several rules and principles in purifying the soul (*tazkiyatun nafs*). This book is one of Imam Al-Ghazali's most monumental works, alongside *Bidayatul Hidayah*, *Kimiya' Sa'adah*, and *Minhaj Al-Abidin*. The name *Ihya' Ulumuddin*, which means "reviving religious sciences," was given by Al-Ghazali because at that time Islamic science was almost marginalized by the dominance of other sciences, especially Greek philosophy. Islamic thinkers such as Al-Farabi, Ibn Sina, and others also paid great attention to philosophy. Especially Greek philosophy, which at that time was known as *Ulumul A'wail*, which means the knowledge of ancient people.

Included in the systematics of the content of the book of *Ihya' Ulumuddin*, as explained earlier, there are four main topics of discussion (*Rub'ul*), namely: *Rub'ul Ibadah*, *Rub'ul 'Adat*, *Rub'ul Muhlikat*, and *Rub'ul Munjiyat*. The complexity of the discussion is marked by the presence of various *hikayahs* that help enrich the content of the book. One of the *hikayahs* that can be used as inspiration, exemplary sisters, as well as life lessons (*'ibrah*) is found in the discussion of *Rub'ul Ibadah*, especially in the Knowledge Chapter. This section is relevant for use as a reference in the development of religious character education. In *Juz I* of the Science Chapter, the stories presented emphasize the values of character education, such as the glory of knowledge, the urgency of seeking knowledge, the obligation to practice knowledge, and the importance of internalizing these values in daily life.

The first story is told by Salim bin Abi Ja'id. He said: "A master bought me for a third of a hundred dirhams and set me free. After that, I asked him, 'What should I do?'" The master replied, "Do it by seeking knowledge." Hearing the command, I hurried to pursue knowledge earnestly. However, at that time I felt that one year was not enough to study in depth. Even if there was a leader of Medina visiting, I would not allow him to enter, because I felt that it was not appropriate to receive guests, let alone a leader, before completing the obligation to study (Ma'arif & Maulana, 2022).

The story contains the values of character, trust, and responsibility. Trust is reflected in the slave's willingness to seek knowledge according to his master's orders, as he said: "Then it is not enough for me to study for a year." The responsibility is seen in his statement: "If the leader of Medina visits, then I do not allow him to enter." This attitude shows his awareness as a freed slave that he is not yet worthy to receive guests, even a leader of Medina, before completing his obligation to study (Ma'arif & Maulana, 2022).

One day the Prophet PBUH went out to the Prophet's Mosque and found two assemblies of friends with different activities. The first assembly did *dhikr*, glorified the name of Allah SWT, and asked for their wishes to be granted. The second assembly studied *fiqh* in the context of *thalabul 'ilmi*. Seeing this, the Prophet PBUH said: "These two assemblies are both good, but one of them is more important." He pointed to the *dhikr* assembly and said: "They pray and hope in Allah SWT. If Allah wills, their prayers will be granted; if not, then it is not granted." Next, he pointed to the *taklim* assembly and said: "They are learning about the provisions of religion and teaching knowledge to the common people. Indeed, I was sent as a *mu'allim* (teacher). They are the ones who are the priority." After that, the Prophet PBUH joined the *taklim* assembly and sat with those who discussed *halal* and *haram* issues. (*fiqh*) (Ma'arif & Maulana, 2022).

The story affirms the character value of religiosity. This can be seen in the first assembly that worships and prays to Allah SWT with love, and the second assembly that studies *fiqh*. The Prophet

PBUH said: "These two assemblies are equally good, but one of them is more important." He then affirmed: "Indeed, I was sent to teach knowledge to mankind." These words show that the Prophet PBUH carries the main mission as a teacher of religious knowledge. This story contains *ibrah* that studying knowledge has a more important position than just worship. Worship is personal, a direct relationship between the servant and his God, while knowledge has a broader social dimension because it can be practiced, taught, and shared with others.

The third story was narrated from Sufyan al-Sauri (may Allah have mercy on him) when he visited a village called '*Asqolan*. While there, he was pensive because no one came to ask about science. Seeing this, he said: "Show me the way out of this land, for this land has died from the knowledge of Allah." The character values contained in this story are independence and responsibility. Independence is reflected in Sufyan al-Sauri's attitude of steadfastly maintaining the dignity of knowledge even though no one asks or demands knowledge from him. Responsibility is evident from his concern for the community that no longer makes knowledge the main need, so he emphasized that a country will lose its spiritual life if knowledge is no longer upheld (Ma'arif & Maulana, 2022).

The Condition of Academic Integrity of Generation Z in the Digital Era

Generation Z was born and grew up in an era of technology, information, and digitalization developments that allow them to access various social media platforms and information resources quickly and widely. This condition opens up great opportunities for creativity, innovation, and collaboration across cultures and globals. However, behind these opportunities, there are various serious challenges, especially related to psychological pressure due to excessive use of social media, such as anxiety, fear of missing out (FoMO), and mental burnout (Larisu, 2024; Marciano et al., 2022; Yüksel et al., 2025).

Furthermore, the phenomenon of digital overload and the tendency to seek social validation through digital media encourage the formation of an instant mindset and dependence on external recognition. This has an impact on decreased self-control, increased anxiety, and the emergence of identity crises due to social comparisons in cyberspace (Xia et al., 2024). This condition shows that digital connectedness is not always accompanied by emotional closeness and can even exacerbate social isolation and reduce individuals' psychological well-being (Akbar et al., 2024; Liang, 2024).

In the academic context, this condition has an impact on the weakening of academic integrity, which is characterized by an increase in dishonest behaviors such as plagiarism, cheating, and unethical use of technology. Low self-control and dominance of instant orientation are the main factors that encourage these deviations. Therefore, an approach that is not only cognitive, but also touches the affective and spiritual dimensions in the formation of students' character is needed.

In this case, the concept of Sufism-based character education offers a more comprehensive alternative approach. Values such as *riyadhah* (spiritual practice), *mujahadah al-nafs* (self-control), and *tazkiyah al-nafs* (purification of the soul) play an important role in shaping moral awareness and individual self-regulation. These values are not only relevant in the context of character building, but also have direct implications for strengthening academic integrity through self-regulation and moral awareness mechanisms.

The following researcher presents a conceptual framework for the integration of Sufism values and the formation of academic integrity, as follows:

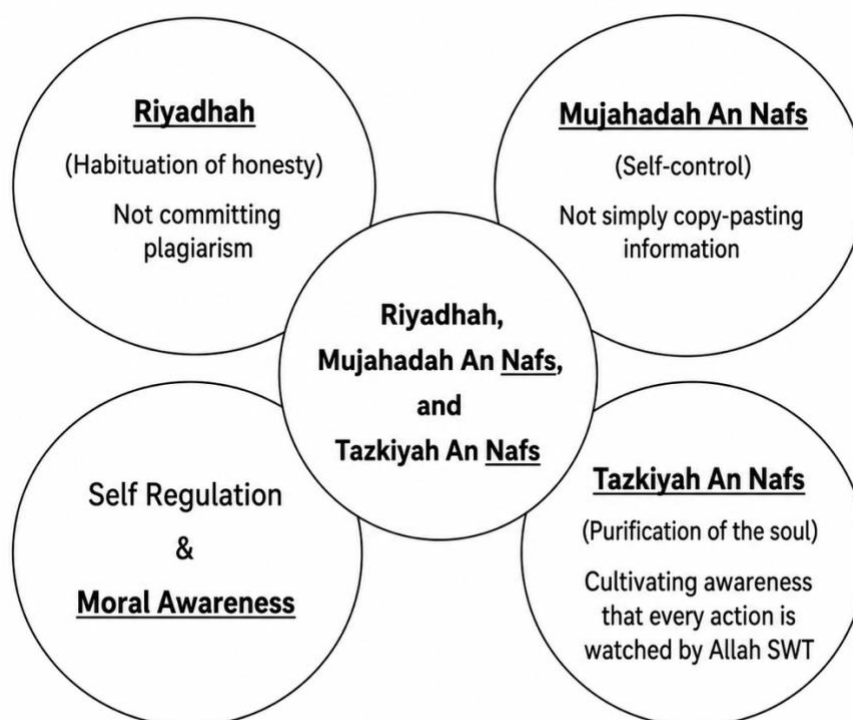


Figure 2. Conceptual Framework for the Integration of Sufism Values and the Formation of Academic Integrity

The conceptual framework in Figure 2 shows that the integration of Sufism values in the formation of academic integrity includes: *Riyadhah* values are interpreted as the process of habituating honest behavior in academic activities, such as avoiding plagiarism and cheating. Meanwhile, *mujahadah al-nafs* refers to the effort to control immediate impulses that arise from the ease of digital technology, such as copy-paste practices and the use of artificial intelligence without regard for academic ethics. The *tazkiyah al-nafs* functions in forming an individual's spiritual awareness that every action is under the supervision of Allah SWT, thus encouraging the birth of moral responsibility in the learning process.

These three values are then internalized through two main mechanisms, namely self-regulation and moral awareness. Self-regulation plays a role in controlling individual behavior to remain in accordance with academic norms, while moral awareness forms the individual's ability to distinguish between right and wrong actions in the context of using technology. The integration of these two mechanisms is the main foundation for building students' academic integrity. Thus, this conceptual framework emphasizes that strengthening academic integrity in Generation Z in the digital era is not enough just through a cognitive approach. But it requires a systematic and continuous internalization of spiritual values. However, the implementation of this model still requires adequate education system support, such as strengthening digital literacy, academic regulations, and educator examples, so that these values can be optimally actualized in learning practices.

The Relevance of the Concept of Strengthening Character Education to Overcome the Academic Integrity Crisis of Generation Z in the Digital Era

The phenomenon of the academic integrity crisis of Generation Z in the digital era, such as: excessive anxiety due to the demands of the accumulated academic workload so that it feels difficult to complete it, not to mention the fierce competition in the academic world that further clouds the

academic integrity condition of Generation Z in the current digital era to do various things to achieve their goals, such as: abusing various AI Tols to commit plagiarism by copying directly without do proofreading first. Not to mention the rampant cases of ethical violations in the world of research, such as fabrication of research data and pseudo-publications. Observing the phenomenon of the phenomenon of academic integrity crisis, the relevance of the concept of strengthening character education in the book *ihya' ulumuddin* which is internalized through the *hikayat* in the sub-chapter of the discussion of the content of the book is a necessity in providing solutions to the problems of the academic integrity crisis that occur in generation Z. From the 3 stories or stories that have been articulated above, we can synthesize them into 4 main concepts of strengthening character education In the book of *Ihya' Ulumuddin*, it includes:

a. Trust and Responsibility

As reflected in the first story told by Salim Bin Abi Zaid, the value of the concept of strengthening character education that is internalized in the story is the attitude of trust and responsibility. The attitude of trust is reflected in the willingness of the slave to seek knowledge as his master commands, as he says, "Then it is not enough for me to seek knowledge for a year." The attitude of responsibility is evident in his statement, "If the leader of Medina visits, then I will not allow him to enter." This shows his awareness as a freed slave that he was not yet worthy of receiving guests, not even a visiting leader of Medina (Ma'arif & Maulana, 2022).

The attitude of trust and responsibility reflected in the story of the book *Ihya' Ulumuddin* can be relevant as a concept of strengthening character education for Generation Z in the current digital era. The crisis of academic integrity marked by rampant acts of plagiarism, data fabrication, and pseudo-publication has led to a decline in academic quality. This condition is increasingly complex because Generation Z is increasingly exposed to the digital world, which offers immediate gratification through social media, online games, and other forms of entertainment (Akbar et al., 2024; Liang, 2024). Such excessive exposure has the potential to disrupt their mental stability in the learning process, as many of them are trapped in excessive digital consumption, resulting in anxiety and dependence. Responding to this phenomenon, strengthening character education is the main solution to suppress the academic integrity crisis. As a study conducted by Darmiany et al. (2021) shows, strengthening character values through experiential learning has been proven to be able to reduce cheating behavior in universities. Hidayat's findings (2024) also corroborate this, showing that honesty programs such as the "honesty canteen" at the elementary school (SD) level can improve integrity practices, although some students still need follow-up assistance to cultivate honesty consistently.

Strengthening character education through the emphasis on trust and responsibility allows Generation Z to control the use of digital platforms more wisely. Thus, they are expected to be able to refrain from the urge to constantly check digital media without an urgent need, as well as form more productive habits.

b. Religiosity

As also reflected in the second story in the book *Ihya' Ulumuddin*, the value of the concept of strengthening character education contained in the story is the attitude of religiosity. This can be seen in the first assembly who worship and pray to Allah SWT with love, while the second assembly is carrying out scientific studies. Then the Prophet PBUH said: "These two assemblies are equally good. However, one assembly is more important." Then the Prophet PBUH said again by saying, "Indeed, I was sent to teach knowledge to mankind." The word affirms that he is a messenger of Allah SWT who carries a mission to convey and teach knowledge to his people.

The attitude of religiosity reflected in the story of the book *Ihya' Ulumuddin* can be relevant as the concept of strengthening character education for Generation Z in the digital era. In addition to the crisis of academic integrity, other problems also arise in the form of anxiety disorders, fear of missing out (FoMO) behaviors, and mental burnout (Larisu, 2024; Marciano et al., 2022; Yüksel et al., 2025). Academic pressures and the demands of an uncertain future further muddy the situation (Akbar et al., 2024; Liang, 2024). In addition, the presence of fierce academic competition, heavy workload, and the demands of achieving career success from an early age often make adolescents and youth experience chronic stress and are at risk of mental burnout (Matilda et al., 2025). Given this phenomenon, strengthening character education through religiosity is urgent and cannot be delayed. This is important considering the influence of excessive digital consumption can disrupt the academic mental stability of Generation Z, cause anxiety, and create dependence. Therefore, strengthening religious attitudes is a necessity that must always be maintained. In line with the research of Aksan et al., (2025) and Sugiarto et al., (2024), religious values-based character education is seen as a "moral shield" to sort out digital influences, maintain norms, and protect the mental health of generation Z. Fauziah's research, (2024) also emphasized that strengthening religious literacy and religiosity is relevant to improve moral integrity, responsibility, and ethical behavior in the midst of the rapid flow of digital information. The findings of Putri et al. (2025) and Salahudin (2024) also strengthen this argument by stating that religious values such as *akhlakul karimah*, *mahabbah-muraqabah*, and piety are the basis for the formation of character education, self-control, social empathy, and ethical awareness for Generation Z.

c. Independence

As the story is reflected in the third story in the book *Ihya' Ulumuddin*, which was narrated from Sufyan al-Sauri (may Allah have mercy on him) when he visited a village called 'Asqolan. While there, he was pensive because no one came to ask about science. Seeing this, he said: "Show me the way out of this land, for this land has died from the knowledge of Allah." The value of the concept of strengthening character education contained in the story is an attitude of independence.

The attitude of independence reflected in the story of *Ihya' Ulumuddin* can be relevant as a conceptual foundation for strengthening the character education of Generation Z in the digital era. The problems of academic crises and the weakening of scientific integrity in this generation have created vulnerability to mental health issues, which has implications for low psychological resilience in facing academic demands. The findings of the study on junior high school students (Gen Z) indicate a relatively low level of independence and significant gender and demographic inequalities. This condition emphasizes the urgency for educational institutions to carry out character strengthening through intensive inculcation of independence values as a strategy to prepare students to face the complexity of future challenges. In line with this, research by Jefri & Marzuki, (2025) and Suardi, (2023) shows that the Pancasila Student Profile Strengthening Project (P5) at the high school level has been proven to be able to improve initiative, time management skills, and courage to take leadership roles in generation Z. These findings indicate the development of self-reliance as one of the important dimensions in contemporary character education.

4. Conclusion

Generation Z in the current digital era is influenced by various factors, such as anxiety disorders, fear of missing out (FoMO) behavior, and mental burnout, which have an impact on declining self-control and moral awareness in academic activities. This research aims to explore in depth the relevance of the concept of strengthening character education in the book *Ihya' Ulumuddin* by Imam Al Ghazali as a solution to the emergence of an academic integrity crisis in Generation Z. The main findings of this research are the concept of character education in *Ihya' Ulumuddin*, including the

value of trust, responsibility, religiosity, and independence, The value of these values is not only a normative explanation, But it has an operational mechanism through the internalization of Sufism values such as *Riyadhah*, *Mujadah al-Nafs*, and *Tazkiyah al-Nafs*. This mechanism has been shown to contribute to the development of self-regulation and moral awareness, which are the main foundations for strengthening the academic integrity of Generation Z in the digital era.

Theoretically, this research contributes in the form of a new paradigm synthesis in strengthening character education that integrates spiritual and moral dimensions into a more contextual conceptual framework. Meanwhile, the practical contribution of this research is realized through the development of a character education curriculum based on classic stories by scholars, making *hikayat* as *ibrah* relevant to overcoming academic problems in the contemporary era. The limitations of this research lie in the focus of the study, which highlights the phenomenon of the academic integrity crisis of Generation Z in the digital era by referring to one main literature. Therefore, further research is recommended that draws on more literature and diverse approaches to provide a more comprehensive picture of the academic integrity crisis, especially among Generation Z.

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