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Fitrah, Habituation, and Environment: Reconstructing the Concept of Parenting from Al-Ghazali and Ibn Khaldun

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Abstract

This conceptual article aims to reconstruct the concept of child-rearing through the dialectic of three key concepts, *fitrah*, habituation, and environment, as formulated by al-Ghazali in *Ihya' Ulum al-Din* and *Ayyuha al-Walad*, and by Ibn Khaldun in the *Muqaddimah*. This study employs a qualitative approach using library research methods through the collection of primary texts, scientific journals, and relevant academic sources. Data were analyzed using content analysis techniques with a descriptive-comparative approach. The findings indicate that al-Ghazali regards *Fitrah* as a sacred potential preserved through *Riyadhah* and early moral habituation, with environment functioning as a supporting or corrupting factor, while Ibn Khaldun positions habit *('Adah)* and social environment *('Umran)* as more determinative forces in character formation, understanding *fitrah* in more neutral terms. A synthesis of both frameworks yields a three-pillar parenting model, safeguarding *fitrah*, systematic habituation, and environmental engineering as a collective responsibility, positioning caregivers as active architects of children's formative environments. The novelty of this study lies in its integrative synthesis of a theological-normative classical framework and a sociological-empirical classical framework into a single operational parenting model relevant to Muslim families and Islamic educational institutions, including pesantren, in addressing parenting challenges in the contemporary digital era.

Keywords: *Fitrah*, Habituation, Environment, Parenting, Islamic Education

Abstrak

Artikel konseptual ini bertujuan untuk merekonstruksi konsep pengasuhan anak melalui dialektika tiga konsep kunci, yaitu *fitrah*, pembiasaan, dan lingkungan, sebagaimana dirumuskan oleh al-Ghazali dalam *Ihya' Ulum al-Din* dan *Ayyuha al-Walad*, serta oleh Ibn Khaldun dalam *Muqaddimah*. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan metode penelitian perpustakaan melalui pengumpulan teks-teks primer, jurnal ilmiah, dan sumber-sumber akademis yang relevan. Data dianalisis menggunakan teknik analisis isi dengan pendekatan deskriptif-komparatif. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa al-Ghazali memandang *Fitrah* sebagai potensi suci yang dilestarikan melalui *Riyadhah* dan pembiasaan moral sejak dini, dengan lingkungan berfungsi sebagai faktor pendukung atau perusak, sementara Ibn Khaldun menempatkan kebiasaan *('Adah)* dan lingkungan sosial *('Umran)* sebagai kekuatan yang lebih menentukan dalam pembentukan karakter, serta memahami *fitrah* dalam istilah yang lebih netral. Sintesis dari kedua kerangka kerja tersebut menghasilkan model pengasuhan tiga pilar, yaitu pelestarian *fitrah*, pembiasaan sistematis, dan rekayasa lingkungan sebagai tanggung jawab kolektif, yang menempatkan pengasuh sebagai arsitek aktif dari lingkungan pembentukan karakter anak-anak. Keunikan penelitian ini terletak pada sintesis integratif antara kerangka klasik teologis-normatif dan kerangka klasik sosiologis-empiris menjadi satu model pengasuhan operasional yang relevan bagi keluarga Muslim dan lembaga pendidikan Islam, termasuk pesantren, dalam menghadapi tantangan pengasuhan di era digital kontemporer.

Kata Kunci: *Fitrah*, Pembiasaan, Lingkungan, Pengasuhan, Pendidikan Islam.

Introduction

The issue of child-rearing in contemporary Muslim families is increasingly discussed through modern developmental psychology frameworks, such as attachment theory and Baumrind's parenting styles[1], or Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems approach[2], all rooted in Western scholarly traditions. This approach is not mistaken, but it risks overlooking the fact that classical Islamic intellectual traditions had already discussed the formation of children's character in a deep and systematic manner, even preceding the modern Western tradition. Two representative figures in this regard are Abu Hamid Al-Ghazali and Abdurrahman Ibn Khaldun.

Scholars have increasingly questioned the universal applicability of Baumrind's typology of parenting styles, authoritarian, permissive, and authoritative, when applied to Muslim families, since her model was developed primarily within Western, middle-class populations and may not adequately capture the culturally distinct norms of authority, obedience, and spiritual accountability that characterize child-rearing in many Muslim societies. Attempts have been made to reconcile Baumrind's framework with Islamic sacred sources, for instance by synergizing parenting-style categories with Qur'anic and Hadith-based principles of authority and mercy[3], or by examining how authoritarian parenting, often viewed negatively in Western literature, may carry different moral and religious legitimacy within an Islamic frame

[1]Diana Baumrind, "The Influence of Parenting Style on Adolescent Competence and Substance Use," Journal of Early Adolescence 11, no. 1 (1991): 56-95.

[2]Urie Bronfenbrenner, The Ecology of Human Development: Experiments by Nature and Design (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979).

[3]Khairun Nisa Sofia Rouzi, M. Chirzin, Munirul Ikhwan Anis, and M. Azhar, "Synergizing Parenting Style between Sacred Text and Baumrind's Context," International Journal of Scientific & Technology Research 9, no. 2 (2020): 1421.

of obedience and respect for parental authority[4]. These efforts demonstrate a growing scholarly awareness that parenting theory cannot be adequately understood by importing Western categories wholesale, but must instead be grounded in the epistemological and ethical resources internal to the tradition being studied.

Interestingly, Ibn Khaldun's thought has itself begun to attract renewed attention within religious education scholarship, particularly regarding the transmission and memorization of sacred texts and its formative role in shaping character and cognition[5]. This line of scholarship shows that Ibn Khaldun's framework was never confined to sociology or political history alone, but carried direct pedagogical implications that religious education scholars are only beginning to recover systematically. However, this renewed interest has generally proceeded independently of parallel efforts to recover Al-Ghazali's pedagogical thought, leaving the two traditions to develop along separate scholarly tracks rather than being read together as complementary resources for a unified theory of Islamic parenting.

The urgency of this study is heightened when confronted with the realities of contemporary parenting. Uncontrolled exposure to gadgets from an early age has been shown to weaken the effectiveness of parenting, including parenting grounded in Islamic values[6]. This phenomenon is compounded by the limited readiness of many millennial parents to navigate their children's digital environment, causing parenting to become reactive rather than deliberately planned[7]. At the same time, cross-cultural research indicates that structured Islamic parenting contributes positively to children's mental health[8], underscoring the need for a conceptually robust framework before parenting practices can be properly evaluated or improved.

In the Indonesian context, the pesantren has long served as a social laboratory in which parenting does not occur solely within the nuclear family, but is partly transferred to the figure of the kiai and ustadz as a second parent for santri living far from home[9]. This reality affirms that parenting within the Indonesian Islamic tradition has long operated according to a logic closer to Ibn Khaldun's framework, namely character formation through a deliberately engineered social environment ('umran), rather than the dyadic parent-child logic that dominates Western parenting literature.

Efforts to directly compare the thought of Al-Ghazali and Ibn Khaldun are not new in academic literature. Several studies have compared the two thinkers' views within the context of education systems in general[10], or examined Ibn Khaldun's

[4]Dwi Hastuti, M. Siregar, S. Fatonah, and M. Miftah, "An Authoritarian Parenting of Early Childhood in Islamic Perspective: A Case Study in Sleman District, Yogyakarta," Al-Ta Lim Journal 29, no. 2 (2022): 107-17.

[5]Benaouda Bensaid and Salah ben Tahar Machouche, "Memorizing the Words of God: Special Reference to 'Abdul Rahman Ibn Khaldun (d. 1406 A.D.)," Religious Education 112, no. 4 (2016): 339-50.

[6]Andini Eka Dheasari, Laily Fajriyah, and Riska Riska, "Tantangan Orang Tua dalam Mendidik Anak di Era Digital," Al-Athfal: Jurnal Pendidikan Anak 3, no. 1 (2022): 25-35.

[7]Aslan, "Peran Pola Asuh Orangtua di Era Digital," Jurnal Studia Insania 7, no. 1 (2019): 20-34.

[8]Saira Ahmed, Mona M. Amer, and Amal Killawi, "Islamic Parenting Practices and Child Mental Health: A Systematic Review," Journal of Child and Family Studies 30, no. 8 (2021): 1847-1862.

[9]Ilma Sinthia et al., "Pola Asuh Pondok Pesantren terhadap Kedisiplinan Santri pada Shalat Berjamaah," Atthulab: Islamic Religion Teaching & Learning Journal 5, no. 2 (2020): 163-174; La Hadisi et al., "Peran Pesantren dalam Pembentukan Karakter Kedisiplinan Santri," Edukasi Islami: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam 11, no. 1 (2022): 1213-1228.

[10]Amna Saleem et al., "Influential Thoughts of Muslim Thinkers about the Education System; Imam Ghazali and Ibn-Khaldun," Perennial Journal of History 2, no. 1 (2021): 17-34.

concept of education specifically[11]. Nevertheless, studies that specifically reconstruct the two thinkers' ideas within the frame of parenting, applicable to Muslim families and contemporary Islamic educational institutions, remain scarce. This article addresses that gap by formulating three research questions: (1) how are the concepts of *fitrah*, habituation, and environment understood by Al-Ghazali? (2) how are these three concepts understood by Ibn Khaldun? and (3) how can a reconstruction of parenting be synthesized from the dialectic of these two schools of thought, and what are its implications for contemporary Islamic education? This study aims to provide a comprehensive, integrative reading of these two classical frameworks, contributing to academic discussion and practical guidance for Muslim families and Islamic educational institutions.

Literature Review

This study rests on three interrelated key concepts. First, *fitrah,* etymologically meaning creation or an original condition, is understood in Islamic educational discourse as the basic human potential inclined toward truth and goodness from birth[12]. The contemporary *fitrah* based education movement operationalizes this concept into an early childhood education approach that emphasizes nurturing the *fitrah* of faith through exemplary conduct[13]. Second, habituation, namely the process of repeating an action until it becomes a second nature *(tabi'at tsaniyah).* Within the tradition of character education, habituation is regarded as the most effective method for the internalization of values, as demonstrated by various studies on the habituation of worship and morals in Islamic educational institutions[14]. Third, environment *('umran)*, namely the social-physical space in which the individual interacts and is shaped. In Ibn Khaldun's thought, this concept encompasses the geographical, economic, and social conditions that shape the collective character of a society[15]. These three concepts form the analytical framework used to examine the thought of Al-Ghazali and Ibn Khaldun in parallel in the Findings and Discussion section below.

Prior comparative literature has largely focused on education broadly, covering epistemology, curriculum, and teaching methods, without specifically targeting parenting as a distinct unit of analysis[16]. Studies on *fitrah*, meanwhile, tend to stand alone without being placed in dialogue with the sociological concepts of habit and environment articulated by Ibn Khaldun, while studies on habituation remain largely descriptive-empirical without tracing the concept's genealogy within the classical tradition. This gap is precisely what the present study seeks to address through a thematic-comparative reading of the two thinkers' primary texts. This study is grounded in three interrelated concepts: *fitrah*, habituation, and environment, which provide an analytical framework for reconstructing parenting within Islamic educational thought. *Fitrah* refers to the innate human disposition

[11]Azlan Ihza Agustian, Andi Prastowo, and Saripudin, "The Concept of Education in Ibn Khaldun's Thought and Its Implications for Today's Islamic Education," Al-Afkar, Journal for Islamic Studies 9, no. 2 (2026): 730-741.

[12]Ahmad Susanto Sholichah, "Konsepsi Pendidikan Anak Berbasis *Fitrah* dalam Perspektif Al-Qur'an," Mumtaz: Jurnal Studi Al-Qur'an dan Keislaman 1, no. 2 (2019): 69-86.

[13]Harry Santosa, *Fitrah* Based Education (Jakarta: Yayasan *Fitrah* Wirabumi Madani, 2021).

[14]Muhammad Ahsanulkhaq, "Membentuk Karakter Religius Peserta Didik melalui Metode Pembiasaan," Jurnal Prakarsa Paedagogia 2, no. 1 (2019): 21-33.

[15]Abdurrahman Ibn Khaldun, The Muqaddimah: An Introduction to History, trans. Franz Rosenthal, abridged ed. N. J. Dawood (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015), 91-95.

[16]Amna Saleem et al., "Influential Thoughts," 20.

associated with the potential for spiritual and moral development. In Al-Ghazali's educational philosophy, human development involves spiritual purification, moral cultivation, and appropriate educational guidance.[17] Accordingly, parenting entails nurturing children's innate potential through religious instruction, exemplary conduct, and meaningful educational experiences. Contemporary *fitrah*-based education similarly emphasizes the importance of parental involvement and supportive family interactions, although modern interpretations must be distinguished from the specific formulations of classical Muslim scholars.

Habituation refers to the repeated practice of actions through which behaviors gradually develop into relatively stable dispositions, commonly associated with the concept of *tabi'at tsaniyah*, or second nature. Within Al-Ghazali's thought, moral formation requires disciplined practice, the regulation of desires, and consistent efforts to cultivate virtuous character. In parenting, these principles are reflected in daily practices that nurture honesty, responsibility, patience, respect, and religious commitment.[18] Nevertheless, effective habituation involves more than repetition; it requires parental consistency, exemplary conduct, and the gradual internalization of moral values. Studies of habituation in Islamic educational institutions have similarly highlighted its contribution to discipline and the internalization of religious values.

The environmental dimension is examined through Ibn Khaldun's concept of '*umran*, which encompasses social organization and the conditions influencing human and collective development. His sociological perspective highlights the significance of geographical, economic, cultural, and social circumstances in shaping human behavior. Applied to parenting, this perspective emphasizes that children's development is influenced not only by parental guidance but also by family relationships, community traditions, and broader social interactions. Supportive environments can reinforce the values cultivated within the family, whereas contradictory social influences may complicate their internalization. Thus, parenting involves establishing constructive conditions that support children's moral, spiritual, and social development.

Previous comparative studies have examined Al-Ghazali and Ibn Khaldun in relation to educational objectives, knowledge, curriculum, moral formation, and the relationship between education and society. However, the integration of *fitrah*, habituation, and environment as interconnected dimensions of parenting remains an important area for further conceptual investigation. This study addresses that gap through a thematic-comparative analysis of the two scholars' intellectual contributions. Al-Ghazali's emphasis on spiritual and moral cultivation is examined alongside Ibn Khaldun's insights into social formation and environmental influences. The resulting framework reconstructs parenting as an integrated educational process involving the nurturing of innate human potential, the cultivation of virtuous dispositions, and the establishment of supportive social environments, while distinguishing historical interpretation from contemporary application.

Method

[17] Husna Husna et al., "Integrating Maqāṣid Al-Sharī'ah into Islamic Religious Education Curriculum A Framework for Sustainable Character Development," *Ar-Rayyan: Journal Of Islamic Education* 2, no. 1 (2025): 52–70, https://doi.org/10.67899/ar.v2i1.216.

[18] Kana Nur Ahyai et al., "Analysis of the Learning Design Concept of Islamic Religious Education from the Perspective of Constructivist Theory," *At-Ta'lim: Journal of Islamic Studies* 3, no. 1 (2026): 1–25, https://doi.org/10.67899/at-talim.v3i1.832.

This study employs a qualitative approach using library research as the primary research method. This approach is considered appropriate because the object of study, the thought of Al-Ghazali and Ibn Khaldun on *fitrah*, habituation, and environment, is recorded in written texts requiring close reading and contextual interpretation, rather than field data collection. The data collection process was conducted by identifying and selecting relevant literature. Primary data sources include original works and authoritative translations of Ihya' Ulumuddin and Ayyuha al-Walad by Al-Ghazali, as well as the Muqaddimah by Ibn Khaldun in Franz Rosenthal's translated edition[19]. Secondary data sources include books and accredited journal articles relevant to the research theme, as is common practice in similar library research[20].

Data analysis in this study employed content analysis techniques with a descriptive-comparative approach through three stages: data reduction and categorization, thematic-comparative analysis, and conceptual synthesis to formulate a reconstruction of an integrative parenting model. To ensure the validity and credibility of the findings, the researcher applied source triangulation, namely cross-checking the interpretation of primary texts against secondary literature and prior academic studies discussing the thought of both figures.

Result and Discussion

Fitrah, Habituation, and Environment in the Thought of Al-Ghazali

For Al-Ghazali, a newborn child is likened to a pure, uncarved gemstone, free of any inscription, yet receptive to whatever is inscribed upon it and inclined toward whatever it is directed toward[21]. This metaphor affirms that *fitrah* is not a truly blank tabula rasa, but rather a sacred potential carrying an original inclination toward goodness, which nevertheless remains vulnerable to external interventions capable of tarnishing it.

From this foundation, Al-Ghazali stresses the importance of *riyadhah al-nafs* as the primary method of parenting, a gradual process of habituation moving from outward behavior toward inward awareness. In Ayyuha al-Walad, he asserts that knowledge without practice is futile[22], affirming that the formation of a child's character must proceed hand in hand between cognitive instruction and behavioral habituation[23].

Regarding habit, Al-Ghazali states that good character may be attained through two paths: as an innate gift of *fitrah* from birth, or through *mujahadah* and *riyadhah*, forcing oneself to perform actions consistent with the desired character until it becomes a second nature[24]. Concerning environment, he affirmed that a child habituated toward goodness will grow up happy, with the reward flowing to the

[19]Ibn Khaldun, The Muqaddimah.

[20]Milya Sari and Asmendri, "Penelitian Kepustakaan (Library Research) dalam Penelitian Pendidikan IPA," Natural Science: Jurnal Bidang Penelitian IPA dan Pendidikan IPA 6, no. 1 (2020): 41-53.

[21]Haidar Bagir, Pendidikan Karakter Menurut Al-Ghazali (Yogyakarta: Pustaka Pelajar, 2019), 45.

[22]Al-Ghazali, Ayyuha al-Walad (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, n.d.), 12.

[23]Gilang Gunawan and Ade Lestari, "Al-Ghazali's Thoughts on Education and Its Relevance to Islamic Education in the Millennial Era," AJIS: Academic Journal of Islamic Studies 6, no. 1 (2021): 108, https://doi.org/10.29240/ajis.v6i1.2091.

[24]Al-Ghazali, Ihya' Ulumuddin, vol. III: Kitab *Riyadhah al-nafs* wa Bayan Akhlaq al-Nabuwwah (Cairo: Dar al-Syuruq, n.d.), 58.

parents and educators who raised him; conversely, a child habituated toward evil will come to grief, with the sin also borne by the guardian who raised him[25].

Fitrah, Habituation, and Environment in the Thought of Ibn Khaldun

Ibn Khaldun approaches the question of human character from a more empirical-sociological standpoint. In the Muqaddimah, he develops the concept of 'umran as a grand framework for understanding how human beings are shaped by the geographical, economic, and social conditions in which they live[26].

Ibn Khaldun's central concept in character formation is *al-'adah* (habit), which he positions as nearly equivalent to a second nature. He argued that human beings are the product of the habits and environment in which they are raised, rather than solely a product of innate character or lineage[27].

Interestingly, Ibn Khaldun also criticized teaching methods that were overly harsh and repressive toward children, arguing that harshness in education can constrict the soul, extinguish enthusiasm, encourage laziness, and teach children to lie out of excessive fear. He emphasized gradual learning *(tadarruj)* and the cultivation of value-based habits *(malakah)*[28]. As for *fitrah*, he viewed human beings as possessing a natural baseline capacity that is neutral and highly malleable, easily shaped by external forces such as habit and social environment[29].

Comparative Analysis: Points of Convergence and Divergence

A comparison of the two frameworks reveals both significant points of convergence and divergence, as summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Comparison of Al-Ghazali's and Ibn Khaldun's Views

Aspect	Al-Ghazali	Ibn Khaldun
View of *Fitrah*	Sacred potential inclined toward goodness; must be protected	Neutral natural capacity; highly malleable
Role of Habituation	Path to restore the purity of *fitrah* (*riyadhah*)	Forms a genuine second nature ('adah)
Role of Environment	Supporting or corrupting factor for *fitrah*	Primary formative force ('umran)
Orientation of Parenting	Protective-conservative	Constructive-proactive
Unit of Analysis	Individual and family	Broader social structure

The first point of convergence is the shared belief that a child's character is not something final at birth, but rather the result of an ongoing process of formation; both thinkers agree that habit possesses an extraordinary power to shape a person's

[25]Hana Sholihah and Siti Nurhayati, "Prevention of Violence Against Children in School Through Islamic Parenting Styles," Society 10, no. 2 (2022): 630, https://doi.org/10.33019/society.v10i2.255.

[26]Ibn Khaldun, The Muqaddimah, 91-95.

[27]Young-Jin Ahn and Zuhriddin Juraev, "Connecting Ibn Khaldun's Educational Philosophy to Modern Child-Centered Perspectives," Journal of Education in Muslim Societies 7, no. 1 (2025): 148, https://doi.org/10.2979/jems.00044.

[28]Agustian, Prastowo, and Saripudin, "The Concept of Education," 735.

[29]Amna Saleem et al., "Influential Thoughts," 25.

second nature. The second point of convergence is an equally strong emphasis on the caregiver's responsibility in determining the direction of a child's formation, Al-Ghazali within the framework of reward and sin in the hereafter, Ibn Khaldun within the framework of worldly social-psychological consequences, yet both reject the notion that parenting can proceed passively without deliberate intervention.

As shown in Table 1, the most fundamental point of divergence lies in the meaning attributed to *fitrah* and the relative weight given to innate potential versus environmental power. Al-Ghazali imbues *fitrah* with a strong theological-normative charge as a sacred potential that must be protected, rendering his approach to parenting protective-conservative in nature. Ibn Khaldun views *fitrah* in a more naturalistic-neutral sense and positions environment and habit as the primary formative forces, rendering his approach to parenting constructive-proactive in nature.

Reconstructing the Concept of Parenting: A Synthesis of Al-Ghazali and Ibn Khaldun

Based on the comparative analysis above, this article proposes a reconstruction of an integrative parenting model that combines the normative-protective strength of Al-Ghazali with the descriptive-constructive strength of Ibn Khaldun, built upon three interwoven pillars: safeguarding *fitrah* as the starting point, systematic habituation as the primary method, and environmental engineering as a collective responsibility. These three pillars affirm a shift in the caregiver's role, from a passive guardian of *fitrah* toward an active architect of the child's formative environment. The relationship among these three pillars and the two underlying frameworks from which they derive is visualized in Figure 1.

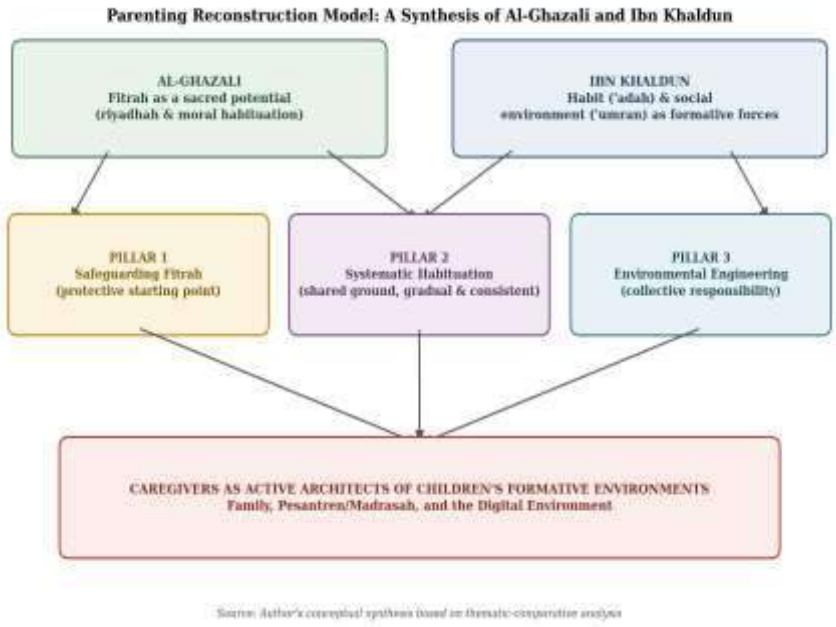


Figure 1. The Three-Pillar Parenting Reconstruction Model: A Synthesis of Al-Ghazali and Ibn Khaldun

As visualized in Figure 1, the two sources of thought do not stand as two separate tracks, but rather converge at Pillar 2 (systematic habituation) as their methodological meeting point, before all three pillars converge on a single orientation: the caregiver's role as an active architect of the child's formative

environment, whether within the family, the pesantren or madrasah, or the contemporary digital environment.

Positioning the Three-Pillar Model within Global Parenting Scholarship

The three-pillar model proposed above also invites direct comparison with the parenting frameworks that dominate the global literature, particularly Baumrind's typology and Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory introduced at the outset of this article. Baumrind's authoritative style, characterized by a balance of parental warmth and behavioral control, bears a structural resemblance to Pillar 2 (systematic habituation) in this model, since both reject the extremes of permissiveness and authoritarianism in favor of firm yet affectionate guidance. However, where Baumrind's model remains largely silent on the metaphysical status of the child being shaped, a gap that has motivated recent attempts to reconstruct it in dialogue with Islamic sacred sources[30], the three-pillar model developed here supplies Pillar 1 (safeguarding *fitrah*) as an explicit theological anchor: the child is not simply an empty behavioral system to be optimized, but a bearer of a sacred, pre-existing inclination toward goodness that parenting must protect rather than merely shape from without.

This theological anchor also helps explain a persistent ambiguity in cross-cultural parenting research, namely why authoritarian-style parenting, generally associated with poorer developmental outcomes in Western samples, does not always produce the same negative effects within Muslim family contexts[31]. Read through the three-pillar model, apparent authoritarian practices in Muslim households may in some cases represent an attempt, however imperfectly executed, at Pillar 3 (environmental engineering), namely the deliberate construction of a disciplined moral environment, rather than an absence of parental warmth as such. This suggests that instruments developed within Baumrind's paradigm may misclassify practices that are legible only within a framework, such as the one reconstructed here, that treats environment and habituation as purposeful moral engineering rather than as a mere parenting-style variable.

Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory, meanwhile, converges more directly with Pillar 3 of the present model, since both frameworks reject a narrow dyadic view of parent-child interaction in favor of nested, mutually influencing environmental systems. Yet Ibn Khaldun's concept of 'umran, developed centuries before Bronfenbrenner, already anticipated this systemic insight while embedding it within a normative account of character formation that Bronfenbrenner's originally secular-developmental framework does not provide. Recent scholarship examining Ibn Khaldun's continuing relevance to religious pedagogy, particularly regarding the formative power of structured textual transmission and habituated practice[32], lends further support to reading 'umran as a genuine forerunner of ecological-systemic thinking rather than a merely analogous but unrelated concept. Positioning the three-pillar model within this global comparative frame therefore does more than situate the present study academically; it demonstrates that classical Islamic thought offers not an alternative to established developmental theory but an anterior, and in several respects more integrative, articulation of insights that Western parenting scholarship arrived at independently and considerably later.

[30]Rouzi et al., "Synergizing Parenting Style," 1421.
[31]Hastuti et al., "An Authoritarian Parenting," 112.
[32]Bensaid and Machouche, "Memorizing the Words of God," 345.

Implications for Contemporary Parenting Practice and Islamic Education

For Muslim families, this model affirms that permissive parenting contradicts the spirit of both thinkers, just as authoritarian-repressive parenting is also explicitly criticized by Ibn Khaldun; the point of balance lies in habituation that is firm yet full of affection[33]. For Islamic educational institutions such as pesantren and madrasah, this model reinforces the argument that the institutional environment is not merely a site for the transfer of knowledge, but a vehicle for character formation through systematic habituation, as reflected in the pesantren tradition, which positions the kiai and ustadz as authority figures who take the place of biological parents in the caregiving role[34].

In the digital era, Ibn Khaldun's concept of environment ('umran) needs to be expanded to encompass the virtual environment, which now significantly shapes children's habits and character. Contemporary parents and educators are required to consciously engineer, rather than merely passively monitor, the digital environment their children consume[35]. This model is also relevant for the development of character education curricula and educator training, so that prospective educators are equipped not only with cognitive teaching methods, but also with a deep understanding of how to safeguard learners' *fitrah* and design effective and humane habituation.

Positioning the Three-Pillar Model within Modern Parenting Theory

Situating the three-pillar model within the broader landscape of developmental psychology clarifies both its convergence with, and its departure from, dominant Western frameworks. Baumrind's typology of authoritative, authoritarian, and permissive parenting styles[36] maps loosely onto the balance the three-pillar model seeks between firmness and affection in Pillar 2 (systematic habituation): the model's rejection of both permissive neglect and authoritarian harshness echoes Baumrind's authoritative style as the empirically preferred middle path. However, the three-pillar model departs from Baumrind's framework in one crucial respect: where authoritative parenting is typically theorized as an individual caregiver's behavioral orientation, Pillar 1 (safeguarding *fitrah*) introduces an explicitly theological starting premise, namely that the child's disposition is not neutral but already inclined toward goodness, a premise with no direct equivalent in secular developmental psychology.

The three-pillar model's third pillar, environmental engineering, bears a stronger resemblance to Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory[37], particularly its emphasis on nested layers of environmental influence, family, institution, and broader social system, upon the developing child. Ibn Khaldun's concept of 'umran anticipates this ecological logic by several centuries, treating the child's formation as inseparable from the surrounding social and economic order rather than as an isolated dyadic process. Where Bronfenbrenner's model remains largely descriptive

[33]Dedi Romli Triputra, "Early Childhood Parenting in the Review of Islamic Religious Perspectives in Songgom Brebes," International Journal of Emerging Issues in Early Childhood Education 2, no. 1 (2020): 38, https://doi.org/10.31098/ijeiece.v2i1.207.

[34]La Hadisi et al., "Peran Pesantren," 1220.

[35]Dwi Herlina and Guntur Jaya Setiawan, Digital Parenting: Mendidik Anak di Era Digital (Yogyakarta: Samudra Biru, 2018).

[36]Baumrind, "The Influence of Parenting Style," 61.

[37]Bronfenbrenner, The Ecology of Human Development, 22.

of environmental influence, however, Ibn Khaldun's framework, as reconstructed here, is explicitly normative: it assigns caregivers, institutions, and communities an active duty to engineer that environment deliberately, rather than treating environmental influence as an empirical fact to be measured after the event.

The three-pillar model also responds to a limitation increasingly acknowledged within attachment theory itself, namely its origins in a culturally specific, historically situated conception of the child as an autonomous individual, a conception that does not automatically extend to communal, multi-caregiver societies of the kind found in much of the Muslim world. By grounding its account of environment in the pesantren's tradition of distributed, multi-caregiver socialization, in which the kiai, ustadz, and peer community jointly assume parental functions, the three-pillar model offers a culturally grounded alternative to the dyadic parent-child unit implicitly assumed by much attachment research. In this sense, the model's theoretical contribution lies not merely in reviving classical Islamic thought for its own sake, but in offering a genuinely non-Western, empirically plausible account of distributed caregiving that mainstream developmental psychology has only recently begun to theorize seriously.

Taken together, these points of contact suggest that the three-pillar model should not be read as a rejection of Western developmental psychology, but as a complementary and, in some respects, corrective framework. It shares with Baumrind and Bronfenbrenner an underlying premise that character is shaped through an interaction between disposition and environment rather than by either alone, while offering, through Al-Ghazali and Ibn Khaldun, an account of that interaction that is theologically grounded, historically prior, and more attuned to the communal caregiving structures characteristic of Muslim societies such as those found in Indonesia. Future empirical research could productively test elements of this model, for instance, whether pesantren environments organized around the three pillars produce measurably different character outcomes than those that do not, using instruments adapted from both Islamic parenting scales and mainstream developmental psychology

Conclusion

This article reconstructs the concept of parenting through a comparative analysis of Al-Ghazali's and Ibn Khaldun's intellectual perspectives on fitrah, habituation, and environment. Drawing on classical Islamic educational philosophy and sociological thought, the study examines how innate human potential, the cultivation of moral dispositions, and environmental influences interact in the formation of children's character. Al-Ghazali emphasizes the spiritual and moral dimensions of human development, viewing fitrah as an innate potential that requires appropriate guidance, riyadhah (spiritual and moral discipline), and habituation to virtuous conduct. From this perspective, the family environment plays a significant role in nurturing moral excellence or facilitating the development of undesirable dispositions. Ibn Khaldun, meanwhile, highlights the formative influence of social interaction, habitual practices, and prevailing environmental conditions on individual character. His sociological perspective underscores how customs, social structures, and patterns of human association contribute to the development of personal dispositions within particular historical and cultural contexts. A comparative synthesis of these perspectives provides the conceptual foundation for a three-pillar parenting framework integrating the nurturing of fitrah, the cultivation of virtuous habits, and the intentional construction of a supportive environment. Within this framework, parents and other caregivers are understood not merely as transmitters of knowledge but as active facilitators of children's spiritual, moral, intellectual, and social development. The framework offers theoretical implications for Muslim families and Islamic educational institutions, particularly pesantren, in addressing contemporary parenting challenges while maintaining the relevance of classical Islamic intellectual traditions. Nevertheless, its practical applicability requires further investigation through empirical research examining family practices, educational contexts, and sociocultural diversity in Indonesia.

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