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A Comparative Analysis of Al-Ghazali and Montessori's Principles of Child Education

Analisis Komparatif terhadap Prinsip-prinsip al-Ghazali dan Montessori dalam Pendidikan kanak-kanak

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Abstract

Childhood education goes with a lot of innocence, searching and exploring the environment that surrounds the young learners. The amount of energy and inquisitiveness displayed by children at this tender age is a marvel to many parents and teachers alike. This small-scale research represents a sincere attempt to contrastively analyze Montessori and Al-Ghazali's ideas on child education. The ideas of the two scholars, one from the West and the other from the East, till these days have great significance to their respective communities. In a way, this study should be seen as an initiative undertaken in the absence of a study discussing the differences and commonalities found in the ideas of the two scholars pertaining to child education. By employing the textual analysis method and using Montessori's principles of child education as the framework, the researchers conducted a comparative analysis. In the course of analyzing the data, the researchers had identified six emerging themes in the ideas of Montessori and Al-Ghazali. The findings have also indicated that the principles of these two prominent scholars either intersect with each other or stand in total isolation.

Keywords: Child education, Montessori, Al-Ghazali, Contrastive Analysis, Emerging Themes.

Abstrak

Pendidikan kanak-kanak berlaku melalui proses pencarian dan penerokaan terhadap persekitaran mereka. Keceriaan dan sifat ingin tahu yang dipamerkan oleh

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kanak-kanak dalam proses tersebut amatlah penting bagi para ibubapa dan guru. Pandangan-pandangan Montessori dan Al-Ghazali tentang pendidikan kanak-kanak telah meninggalkan kesan yang amat penting dalam komuniti Barat dan Timur hingga ke hari ini. Kajian ini dilakukan untuk membandingkan pandangan kedua-dua cendekiawan ini tentang pendidikan kanak-kanak. Secara tidak langsung, ia boleh dilihat sebagai usaha untuk mengisi kekurangan dalam bidang kajian. Kajian ini menggunakan kaedah analisa tekstual dan prinsip pendidikan kanak-kanak Montessori sebagai rangka kajian. Daripada kajian ini, terdapat enam tema yang boleh digarapkan daripada pandangan kedua-dua cendekiawan yang didapati secara bersilang atau terpisah di antara satu sama lain.

Kata Kunci: Pendidikan kanak-kanak, Montessori, Al-Ghazali, Analisa Perbandingan (Kontrastif), Tema-tema yang Terhasil.

Introduction

Perhaps, one of the most appropriate ways to describe the idea that child education starts at birth and continues on all throughout adulthood, as evident in the works of Al-Ghazali and Montessori, is by using Piaget's¹ theory on cognitive development. In his theory, Piaget explains that each child goes through, at a varied pace, four stages of cognitive development.

The first stage according to Piaget,² is from birth to two years of age. This stage is called the sensorimotor period during which, a child develops a cognitive system that is limited to the motor reflexes. The second stage, known as the preoperational stage, begins at the age of two until a child reaches six or seven years old. During this stage, a child starts using mental imagery and becoming egocentric. At the age of six or seven, a child enters the third stage, known as the concrete operational stage until the age of 11 or 12. As pointed by Piaget, Santrock,³ and Fancher,⁴ this is the time when a child is capable of taking another person's views and incorporates more than one perspective simultaneously. From the age of 11 or 12 and all the way through adulthood, a child advances to the fourth stage, the formal operational stage, during which the child accomplishes logical thinking as well as abstract and theoretical thinking abilities. Such idea on the starting point and continuum of child

¹ Piaget, Jean. *The Essential Piaget*. H.E. Gruber, J.J. Voneche (Eds.) NY: Basic Books. 1977

² Ibid

³ Santrock, John. W, *A Topical Approach to Lifespan Development (8th ed.)* (NY: McGraw-Hill, 2016).

⁴ Fancher, Raymond E., & Rutherford, Alexandra, *Pioneers of Psychology: A History*. (NY: W.W. Norton, 2012).

education signifies the role that should be played by adults in child education.

In his views regarding child education, Al-Ghazali places a great emphasis on the roles of parents who, according to him, should observe their children's education since birth.⁵ This is explained further in *Ihya' Ulum ad-Din*⁶ which spells out that parents are accountable for their children, whose hearts are uncorrupted, pure and untainted, and therefore would accept and be inclined towards whatever is given to them. Al-Ghazali asserts further that children who are raised in good manners would grow up to become good human beings for which their parents, teachers, or guardians deserve the reward from God.⁷ On the contrary, parents who deprive their children from proper education are liable for their bad behaviour as they grow into adulthood. The aim of education, according to Al-Ghazali, is ultimately to develop learner's character and personality by enabling them to distinguish between true and false, good and bad, right and wrong.

Similarly, following her belief that adulthood is the reflection of what one has learned and experienced during his or her childhood, Montessori asserts that the adults (parents and teachers) should respect children in their process of growing up and cater for the needs of children⁸. Montessori further disagrees with the tradition of paying greater attention to a laboring mother compared to the newly born infant. The infant, as stated by Montessori, has equally gone through a difficult time coming through a narrow passage from the mother's womb, and has gone through life and death before coming into this world. Reflecting on her own experiences in dealing with children, such dilemma prolongs with the adults' failure to view children from the children's perspectives and consequently unable to provide proper child education⁹.

Studies on child education based on the views of Al-Ghazali and Montessori have spurred various ideas, methods and approaches to child

⁵ Soussi, Khalid, "Al Ghazali Cultivates Education: A Comparison with Modern Theories," *International Journal of Education and Research*, (4:11, 2016): 425-436.

⁶ Al-Ghazali, *Ihya' Ulum ad-Din (The Revival of The Religious Science)*, 4 vols (Cairo: Al-Matba'a al-Azhariya, 1898/1316H).

⁷ Ibad, Fareeda, "Ghazali's Educational Perspective: Myths and Realities," *Pakistan Business Review* (July 2016): 527-540. Retrieved September 2017 from <http://journals.iobmresearch.com/index.php/PBR/article/download/827/164>

⁸ Morrison, George. S, *Early Childhood Education Today (11th edn.)* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Merrill Pearson, 2009), pp. 140-143.

⁹ Montessori, Maria, *The Secret of Childhood* (NY: Ballantine Books, 1974).

education. While it is evident that there have been attempts to match the Montessori methods with traditional teaching methods¹⁰, the Montessori approach with religious education¹¹, the views of Al-Ghazali with modern theories¹², Al-Ghazali with Egan's views¹³, as well as Al-Ghazali with Friere's views¹⁴, little is known about the comparison between Al-Ghazali and Montessori's concepts of child education. In addition, as opposed to the way the Montessori's principles of child education method have been presented in the literature, not much has been said regarding the more systematic approach for presenting Al-Ghazali's principles of child education method.

Maria Montessori (1870-1952)

In her book "The Secret of Childhood," Maria Montessori (1870-1952) highlighted many of the problems faced by children in Italy during her time. Montessori, who started as the first female medical doctor in Italy later ventured herself into psychology and ended her career as a well-known educationist. At the time the book was written, she realized that children of her time have been deprived of their social rights in education. In her observation, she found out that children have been subjected to do many insurmountable hard tasks. They were shown little affection and respect as growing individuals. During her time, the plight of children in Italy was a very disheartening thing for her to witness. The state paid much attention to the rights of the adults compared to that of the children. Children's social well-being and education were not given serious consideration by the state. The quote below depicts the exact scenario of what children have to go through in their lives:

¹⁰ Maryam Ghaffari, Sara Mohammadi, and Firooz Sadighi, "Montessori and Conventional Teaching Methods in Learning English as A Second/Foreign Language: An Overview," *Journal of Applied Linguistics and Language Research*, (4:5, 2017): 209-218.

¹¹ Jassiem, Shamiemah, Montessori and Religious Education in Western Cape Preschools. Master thesis. University of Cape Town. (2016) https://open.uct.ac.za/bitstream/item/27850/thesis_hum_2017_jassiem_shamiemah.pdf?sequence=1

¹² Soussi, Khalid, 425-436

¹³ Mohammadi, M. Mahmoud and Khan, Ali H., "Comparative Analysis of Ghazali and Egan's Views on Imagination and Education: The Mythic Understanding and Children Learning," *International Journal of Humanities* (18: 2, 2011): 19-35.

¹⁴ Ayoub Mahmoudi, Chadegani, Mehrdad, A., Heidari, Mohammad H. and Zohreh Shafiei, "Comparative Analysis of Paulo Freire & Al-Ghazali's Pedagogical Comments," *Journal of Education and Practice*, (5:14, 2014): 106-113.

“Many children came to school wearied from tasks they had already performed. Some had walked for several miles before school distributing milk to customers; others had sold newspapers on the streets or had worked at home. They thus came to school tired and hungry. Nonetheless these same children were frequently punished for being inattentive and failing to understand the teacher. The latter, concerned with his responsibilities and still more with his authority, sought to awaken their interest by scolding them. He exacted obedience with threats or humiliated his charges in the presence of their companions by reproaching them with their lack of ability or weakness of will. Children thus spent their lives being exploited at home and punished in school.”¹⁵

Besides the above, she felt very sad on how teachers and the families take a similar stand in inflicting punishment upon a child to correct their mistakes and behaviour. According to her, children in Italy and elsewhere in the world were subjected to some of the inhumane adult behaviours.

“They are insulted, scolded, slapped, beaten, banished to dark rooms, threatened with even greater punishments, and deprived of the little amusements and recreations, like that of playing with other children or eating candy or fruit, which constitute their sole refuge and the only compensation for so many sufferings unconsciously endured. Then, too, they are forced to go to bed without their supper and thus pass a troubled night because of their grief and hunger.”¹⁶

Montessori felt very pathetic towards seeing children suffer in the hands of adults. She strongly believed that much of the problems faced by children in the world were not well understood by adults. She further explained that the major shortcoming of adults was to see things only from their point of view and not looking at a problem from the children’s point of view. She is of the opinion that teachers, parents and society must show sympathy and empathy towards problems faced by children. In her book, Montessori dwelt at great length on issues that relate to childhood and children. To her, childhood constitute a very important element in an adult’s life. Adulthood is the reflection of what one has learned and experienced during his or her childhood. As such, parents should avoid mistakes in the process of bringing up their children towards adulthood.

¹⁵ Montessori, *The Secret of Childhood*, 211.

¹⁶ *Ibid*, 213.

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“We shall die, but our children will suffer the consequences of our errors. Whatever affects a child affects humanity, for it is in the delicate and secret recesses of his soul that a man's education is accomplished.”¹⁷

The primary aim of Montessori education is mainly focused on the discovery and freeing of the child. The major concerns of the new approach brought by Montessori in education are:

- a) The child's existence.
- b) Providing the child with the necessary aid as he/she advances towards maturity (proper environment for the child's growth on the one hand and minimizing the obstacles on the other hand).
- c) Respect for the child's personality.

Montessori promotes a child-centered education. Each child is left alone to engage in an activity that interest the child most. The teacher acts as passive supervisor/director in the classroom. A teacher should pay attention to students on an individual basis. Being in the noble profession of educating young children, the teacher should perform his/her duty without any biasness or prejudice. The teacher should not only prepare himself/herself intellectually by studying about children, but also about him/her. A good teacher is not one who acts as a tyrant or a king who impose stringent rules upon the children. On the other hand, he must perfect himself by studying his/her own shortcomings and make the necessary adjustments. He must be less judgmental when dealing with children and able to rid his heart from anger and pride.

Montessori's first school for small children between the ages of three and six was opened on the 6th of January 1907. The first batch of fifty students comes from very poor background. They were ragged and timid. They were children of illiterate parents. These children were provided with a clean classroom which is a pleasant environment for imparting knowledge and education. Besides learning in a peaceful and conducive atmosphere, little tables and stools were made available to the infant learners to suit their height. Teachers were calm with spiritual humility and had intellectual purity necessary for the understanding of a child.

¹⁷ Ibid, 4.

The preference of a child in the Montessori school is as follow:¹⁸

What he/she likes:

- Repetition of the exercise
- Free choice
- Control of error
- Analysis of movements
- Good manners in social contracts
- Order in the environment
- Care for personal cleanliness
- Training of the senses
- Writing before reading
- Reading without books
- Discipline in free activity

What he/she rejects:

- Rewards and punishments
- Spellers
- Lesson in common
- Programs and examinations
- Toys and sweets
- A teacher's desk

Maria Montessori is a renowned Italian educator and physician who developed a methodology for child education in the early 1900s that was later accepted worldwide.¹⁹ Believing that children learn at their own pace through manipulation of objects, Montessori had invented a sensory-based pedagogy which she initially devised alongside her teaching philosophy while working with children with special needs in the Psychiatric Department at the University of Rome. Her teaching method had made it possible for her patients who were diagnosed as mentally deficient and unable to learn to successfully complete the Italian standardized public school exams within two years.²⁰ According to Montessori, learning is promoted when children are able to choose from a variety of developmental activities.

A Montessori lesson is defined as any interaction between an adult and a child, and the techniques that serve as guidance for the adults to work with the children.²¹ The Montessori's method was designed to promote independent learning and support normal development in children. She connected the context of the classroom to the laws of nature and the environment for creating students who are problem-solvers with

¹⁸ Montessori, *The Secret of Childhood*, 138-139.

¹⁹ Maryam, et al., *Montessori and Conventional Teaching Methods*, 214-218.

²⁰ *Ibid*, 209-212.

²¹ Morrison, *Early Childhood Education Today*, 140-143.

critical-thinking skills. The primary purpose of Montessori education is ultimately to assist each child development from childhood to adulthood and develop a set of predetermined skills. Its educational approach supports a child's natural development and enables a child to learn how to solve problem, develop social responsibility, acquire time management skills, and eventually become a fulfilled adult.

Al-Ghazali (1058-1111)

Al-Ghazali, whose real name is Abu Hamid Muhammad bin Muhammad Al-Ghazali, hailed from a place called Ghazalah in the outskirts of Thus, Khurasan. Other than being the student of Imam al-Haramyn, Abu Al-Ma'ali Al-Juwaini, Al-Ghazali was an expert in the field of Fiqh al-Shafi'i and Kalam al-Ash'ari. He taught at University of Nizamiyah, Baghdad and was a renowned Islamic philosopher who had published hundreds of books.²² Al-Ghazali was one among the many scholars in the Muslim world, who wrote on human nature and the ways how one can purify one's soul. Besides being a theologian, he was also well-known as a Sufi scholar, thinker and a philosopher. As a result of his travel and introspection of his personal life he attained the enlightenment of his soul. Upon achieving peace and serenity of his mind through Sufi practices, he wrote his magnum opus the *Ihya' Ulum al-din* (Revival of the Religious Sciences). According to Mohammad²³ and Soussi,²⁴ Al-Ghazali, in many of his works, emphasized vehemently the role of parents in nurturing a child into adolescent. In Al-Ghazali's views, a child is the trust of God given to parents. Furthermore, he metaphorically explained that a child is an 'uncut diamond' in the hands of the parents. It is the duty of the parents to bring the sparkle/glitter from that diamond given to them by God. As such, parents should guide and mould the child into good character and personality. In order to produce good individual, parents should pay attention to a child's education right from the day it comes to see the light of the day. Al-Ghazali also called for elementary curriculum to focus on religious fundamentals, memorization of verses of the Quranic, reading, writing, grammar, arithmetic and moral teaching.

²² Soussi, Al-Ghazali Cultivates Education, 425-436.

²³ Mohammadi, M. Mahmoud and Khan, Ali, H, "Comparative Analysis of Ghazali and Egan's Views on Imagination and Education: The Mythic Understanding and Children Learning," *International Journal of Humanities* (18: 2, 2011): 19-35.

²⁴ Soussi, Al-Ghazali Cultivates Education, 425-436.

The Present Study

The dearth of literature that categorizes the salient principles of Al-Ghazali's method of child education appears to be greatest challenge in conducting a comparative analysis between Montessori and Al-Ghazali's concepts of child education. This is added by the striking differences, on the surface, in the approach to spiritual and religious teachings, for instance, between the concepts of child education by these two scholars.

In the present study, the concepts and principles of child education by Al-Ghazali, particularly those reflected from his major work, *Ihya' Ulum ad-Din*, were gathered from the various studies and literatures. These concepts and principles were later grouped according to themes. As shown in **Table 1** below, the principles of Al-Ghazali's method of child education can be presented in six emerging themes which are values and behaviours (*akhlak*), face & respect for children, play, good practices, reward and teachers (attribute and quality). These six emerging themes are considered Al-Ghazali's major principles of child education.

Table 1 - Principles (Emerging themes) of Al-Ghazali's Method of Child Education

Al-Ghazali (Ihya' Ulum ad-Din)

- Values and behaviours (*akhlaq*):
 - teach children to be humble and modest among friends
 - teach children to give (noble), not receive (disgraceful)
 - teach children not to mix with bad people
 - teach children not to be too comfortable
 - teach children not to lie
 - teach children not to eat *haram* food
 - teach children not to beg sympathy
 - teach children the disadvantages of stealing
- Respect for Children (as trust from Allah)
 - educate and respect children as a trust from Allah
 - be strict with children
 - avoid degrading children or focusing on their weaknesses
 - occupy children's leisure time
 - teach children based on their capability
 - do not insult but advise children for their bad behaviour

- Play
 - encourage children to play
 - means of learning about & making sense of the world
 - promotes mastery as children practice skills
 - play develops children's bodies & strengthen their muscles
 - play makes children feel happy
 - play is a form of relaxation after study
 - Good practices
 - teach children appropriate religious rituals e.g. praying
 - teach children the eating rituals
 - teach children about religion, both in theory and practical
 - Reward
 - reward children for good behaviour;
 - reward children for being obedient to the adults;
 - reward children for having good interactions with their peers
 - Teacher (Attribute & Quality):
 - a teacher should be a role model to children / walk the talk
 - a teacher should regards teaching as *amal jariah (charity)*
 - a teacher should demonstrate love toward children
 - a teacher does not insult but advise children for their bad behaviour
 - a teacher teaches children based on their capability
-

Leveraging the Montessori's five principles of child education, a comparative analysis was carried out between the concepts of Montessori and Al-Ghazali. The Montessori's principles of child education (see **Table 2** below) consist of respect the children, absorbent mind, sensitive period, prepared environment, auto education. An additional theme, Teacher (Role) is added to the existing Montessori principles for the purpose of the present study. Furthermore, the concept of teacher in child education is extensively discussed in both the literature on Montessori and Al-Ghazali.

Table 2 - Principles of Montessori's Method of Child Education*Montessori*²⁵

- Respect for children (as trust from God)
 - Children should be educated with respect and be taken care of as a trust from God
 - Children should neither be treated like adults nor forced to accept ideas
 - Children should be helped to do activities of their own choices
- Absorbent mind
 - Children learn using physical attributes/senses
 - Children learn from the people around them
 - Children's experience and prepared materials determine the type & quality of learning
- Sensitive period
 - Children learn behaviours more effectively
 - Children go through rapid development in terms of physical & language
- Prepared environment
 - Children learn to be independent
- Auto education
 - Children learn by themselves while doing activities
 - Children learn something, execute reflections, and gain self-satisfaction
- Teacher (Role)
 - Observe
 - Provide minimal supervision
 - Does not compliment children as the goal is to gain self-reward & intrinsic motivation
 - Admit the existence of sensitive periods;
 - Learn how to detect them;
 - Provide experiences in developing children's potential

²⁵ Montessori, *The Secret of Childhood*; Morrison, *Early Childhood Education Today*.

According to the studies by Montessori, all children have universal characteristics which include having absorbent minds, having to go through sensitive periods, having the desire to learn and to be independent, learning by playing and working, and having to go through various stages of development.

Discussion of Analysis & Findings

The five principles of Montessori, with one added theme, were used as the analysis framework in the present study. Although not much was known about the themes for unifying Al-Ghazali's concepts of child education in the literatures, it was found that most of his concepts and views on child education, when juxtaposed alongside the principles of Montessori, seem to highlight the similarities and differences between the concepts of the two scholars.

Respect for children (as trust from God)

According to Montessori, children deserve well treatment from the adults, as children and not as adults. In addition to that, the adults should not force children to accept their ideas. Meanwhile, teachers and parents must respect children such as by helping them with the learning activities of their own choice. Children who get to choose could develop their skills and capabilities which are the foundations of effective learning, autonomy and positive self-recognition.

Montessori is one of those scholars in the West that acknowledges the existence of the soul and its important role in the proper functioning of the human body. She calls on parents not to be the makers of the child but as his guardians. They must not play the role of 'God' in the process of educating him towards adulthood, but be his guardians. They must take care of him as a trust given on to them by God. With this mindset, they must provide safety, security and protection in bringing him up. They must pay extra attention in exposing the child to nature as well as to nurture him by providing education in a holistic manner. Their mission in life as parents should yield good results in producing children who will be good and responsible individuals of the society. This in turn will produce a healthy society free from all social ills.

In the case of Al-Ghazali, the concept of respect for the children as trust from Allah is represented by his ideas on how adults should treat children as trust from Allah and thus educate them accordingly as well as avoid degrading the children or focusing on their weaknesses. At the same time, Al-Ghazali suggests that the adults should be strict with chil-

dren and teach them about religion, both in theory and practical even if the children dislike it. This reflects the Islamic views on the significance of Islamic teachings which include both the theory and practical. Furthermore, the adults would be liable for the ignorance of their children regarding the religion. Based on the above, the concept of Respect for Children (as trust from God) intersects with Al-Ghazali's Respect for Children (as trust from Allah) and Good Practices.

Absorbent mind

According to Montessori, children gain knowledge differently from adults. While adults use their thinking to gain knowledge, children use their physical attributes or senses. From the age of three until six, children use their conscious absorbent mind to select information gained from their environment and enhance their senses. At this stage, children could grasp several skills including differentiating, matching, and grading colours. Since born until the age of three, children's thinking is termed as unconscious absorbent mind which is developed through their senses. The people around the children determine what they learn such as the way they talk, act, and respond to the others. As asserted by Montessori, children's existing experience and the materials prepared for them also determine the type and quality of learning. As stated in the preceding discussion, Montessori acknowledges the existence of the soul and its important role in the proper functioning of the human body. In this sense she does not subscribe to the materialist notion of a human being. She further elucidates in her book that man's physical existence is pretty much driven by the energy produced in his psychic warehouse. This psychic life in a child later determines the type of personality the child inherits in his/her adult life. In comparing the life of man and animal, this is what she says:

“An animal is like an object that has been mass produced. Each individual possesses the special characteristics of its particular species. A man, on the other hand, is like an object turned out by hand. Each one is different from the other. Every man has his own creative spirit that makes him a work of art.”²⁶

The principle of Absorbent Mind by Montessori intersects with Al-Ghazali's principles of Respect for Children (as trust from Allah) and Play. With regard to the absorbent mind principle, Al-Ghazali suggests that adults ensure the children's leisure time is occupied. This can be

²⁶ Montessori, *The Secret of Childhood*, 31.

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done by cheering the children to play. The desire for play, according to Al-Ghazali, is common among all children. Play should therefore be encouraged because it is a means for learning about and making sense of the world. In addition to that play not only promotes mastery as children would practice some skills, but also develops children's bodies and strengthens their muscles and senses. Furthermore as suggested by *Ihya Ulum ad-Din*, play makes children feel happy, and it is also a form of relaxation after study.

Sensitive Periods

This principle intersects with Al-Ghazali's Good Practices and Values & Behaviours (*Akhlaq*) principles. Montessori believes that all children go through, but at different times, the sensitive periods during which, they learn a few behaviours more effectively. According to Montessori, parents and teachers should detect these sensitive periods and provide experiences to develop the children's skills. Observing, asserts Montessori, is more important than testing the children. Sensitive periods usually occur during the initial stage of life and more often than not, manifest in the rapid development of physical and language within a children. Nonetheless, little is known regarding the age bracket during which the sensitive periods are expected to occur.

Meanwhile, from Al-Ghazali's point of view, it is apparent that the sensitive periods could possibly occur between the age of seven and twelve. This is based on two arguments. Firstly, in Islam, a children can be forced to perform prayers (*Solat*) at the age of seven, an age during which children, as described by Montessori, would learn certain behaviours more effectively. Thus, Al-Ghazali's suggestions are deemed fit in the contexts of Montessori's principle of sensitive periods. The suggestions include teaching children to be humble and modest among friends, not to lie, to give (which is noble) and not to receive (disgraceful). Al-Ghazali's view that this is the best time to teach children appropriate religious rituals e.g. praying. Secondly, the seven to twelve years old age bracket is also justified by Montessori's description of the rapid development of physical and language within children. The age of twelve generally signifies the beginning of the *akil baligh* phase, during which physical development in a child is commonly evident.

Prepared environment

A prepared environment, as evident in the works of Montessori²⁷ and Morrison²⁸, leads to a better learning of a child. Such environment could be in a classroom, at home, at a nursery or a playground. The main purpose of providing a prepared environment is to enable children to be independent and not depend on adults. In the process of the psychic development, the environment plays a vital role. It must cater for the education of the child. During the “sensitive period” (it last from birth till they are almost five), a child is an active observer. As such he/she is attracted to images through his senses. According to Montessori, a child is strongly attracted to light, colours and sound. Parents and others who come in close contact with the child must expose the child to new and different things and experiences. This principle intersects with the Values & Behaviours (*Akhlaq*) principle of Al-Ghazali.

The concepts of Al-Ghazali that resembles this principle are his suggestion that children should not be encouraged to beg sympathy and should be taught the disadvantages of stealing, as stated in his *Ihya' Ulum ad-Din*. A child's ability to refrain from begging sympathy and stealing would actually develop him or herself to become an independent person along the journey toward adulthood. The habit of begging sympathy indicates that a child is dependent upon others in achieving what he/she wishes for. Similarly, the thought of stealing indicates that a child is dependent upon the belonging of others to satisfy the needs and the fastest way to fulfill it is by taking what belongs to others. Such thought could nurture a child to gradually become dependent on others.

Auto education

Auto education refers to the children's ability to educate themselves during learning activities in a prepared environment. Their involvement in such activities, could help children to learn something, execute reflections, and gain self-satisfaction. This principle intersects with Al-Ghazali's principles of Good Practices as well as Values & Behaviours (*Akhlaq*)

The views of Al-Ghazali which fit the auto education principle include the suggestions that children should be taught not to mix with bad people, not to be too comfortable and not to eat haram food. Al-Ghazali also recommends that children are taught the eating rituals.

²⁷ Montessori, *The Secret of Childhood*.

²⁸ Morrison, *Early Childhood Education Today*.

These suggestions by Al-Ghazali lead children to get themselves involved in activities that promote learning, executing reflections and gaining self-satisfaction.²⁹

Teachers

This theme is added into the framework as the views of Montessori and Al-Ghazali on teachers in child education are given a great emphasis in the literature. Perhaps because Montessori's principles are 'child-centred,' Montessori places more emphasis on the 'role' of a teacher. Meanwhile, since Al-Ghazali's principles, as suggested by some, are 'teacher-centred,'³⁰ his emphasis is more on the 'quality and attribute' of a teacher. Although the emphases are different, the concepts of teachers in child education by Montessori and Al-Ghazali do not stand in total isolation as, to a certain extent, they intersect with each other.

Teachers (Role) - Montessori

According to Montessori, a teacher's roles include to admit the existence of sensitive periods and learn how to detect them. A teacher should also provide experiences in developing children's potential. A teacher should observe and provide minimal supervision. Montessori asserts further that a teacher does not compliment children as the goal is to gain self-reward & intrinsic motivation.

Teachers (Attribute & Quality) – Al-Ghazali

Al-Ghazali believes that a teacher should walk the talk. This is line with his view that a teacher should be a role model to the children or students. Meanwhile Al-Ghazali also advises teachers to regard teaching as *amal jariah* (charity) and to demonstrate love toward teaching.³¹ In addition, Al-Ghazali also advises that a teacher should not insult children but advise them for their bad behaviour. A teacher should also teach children based on their capability. Otherwise children would feel intimidated.

²⁹ *Ihya' Ulum ad-Din*.

³⁰ Fazli Rabbi, "Education philosophy Al-Ghazali's perspective," *Al-Baseera* (2, 1:2, 2012): 1-16.

³¹ Alkanderi, Latefah. Exploring Education in Islam: Al-Ghazali's Model of the Master-Pupil Relationship Applied to Educational Relationships within the Islamic Family. *Doctoral thesis. Pennsylvania State University*. (2001)

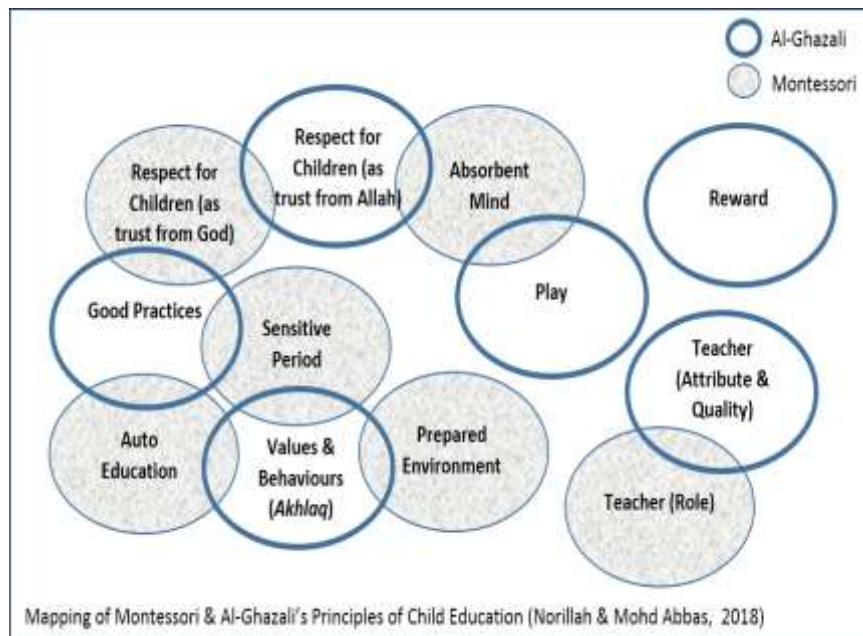
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Reward

The present study has established that Al-Ghazali's principle of reward stand in total isolation from Montessori's principles. Apart from the lack of literature on the concept of reward in child education by Montessori, she has also implied that a teacher does not compliment children as the goal is to gain self-reward & intrinsic motivation. On the contrary, Al-Ghazali views compliment as a form of reward through his recommendation that a teacher should praise children in public for good manners so that the children are happy. This indicates that Al-Ghazali stresses on rewarding children. However, when children accidentally make mistakes, teachers or parents should talk to them nicely and advise them not to repeat the mistake.

The overview of the comparative analysis is summarized in the **Appendix** below. Meanwhile the intersections and isolation of Montessori & Al-Ghazali's principles are illustrated in the **diagram** below.

Diagram - Intersecting & Isolated Principles of Montessori & Al-Ghazali



Conclusion

The lack of unifying themes to present Al-Ghazali's concepts of child education has proven to be the biggest challenge in the attempt to conduct a comparative analysis between his and Montessori's concepts. Although the concepts of Al-Ghazali are seemingly scattered, the six emerging themes found in the present study are deemed the most appropriate representations of his views on child education. Leveraging Montessori's five principles added with another theme (teacher's role) and Al-Ghazali's six emerging themes, it has now become more apparent that they are pertinent similarities, to a certain extent, and differences in the child education concepts of these two scholars. This is proven by the intersections and isolation of the principles.

It is noteworthy that both scholars regard child education as the trust from God and therefore children should get the respect they deserve from the adults and be educated accordingly. This salient principle is applicable to the educator, teacher or parent and the children themselves.

The six emerging themes for Al-Ghazali's concepts of child education, nonetheless, require further studies. It is recommended that more studies are carried out to refine the themes which will become the unifying principles of Al-Ghazali's views and perspectives on child education.

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Appendix

A Comparative Analysis on Montessori & Al-Ghazali's Concepts of Child Education

Montessori (1974); Morrison (2009)

Al-Ghazali (Ihya' Ulum ad-Din (1898))

- | | |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (Respect for children) • Children should neither be treated like adults nor forced to accept ideas • Children should be helped to do activities of their own choices • (Absorbent mind) • Children learn using physical attributes/senses • Children learn from the people around them • Children's experience and prepared materials determine the type & quality of learning | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be strict with children • Teach children about religion, both in theory and practical • Avoid degrading children or focusing on their weaknesses • Occupy children's leisure time • Encourage children to play because play: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ means of learning about & making sense of the world ○ promotes mastery as children practice skills ○ develops children's bodies & strengthen their muscles ○ makes children feel happy ○ is a form of relaxation after study • Teach children: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ to be humble and modest among friends ○ not to lie ○ to give (noble), not receive (disgraceful) ○ appropriate religious rituals e.g. praying |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (Sensitive period) • Children learn behaviours more effectively • Children go through rapid development in terms of physical & language | |

Education

- | | |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (Prepared environment) • Children learn to be independent • (Auto education) • Children learn by themselves while doing activities • Children learn something, execute reflections, and gain self-satisfaction • Teacher (Roles): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ to observe ○ to provide only minimal supervision ○ should not compliment children as the goal is to gain self-reward & intrinsic motivation ○ to admit the existence of sensitive periods; ○ to learn how to detect them; ○ to provide experiences in developing children's potential | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do not encourage children to beg sympathy • Explain to children the disadvantages of stealing • Remind children: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ not to mix with bad people ○ not to be too comfortable ○ the eating rituals ○ not to eat <i>haram</i> food • A teacher: should be a role model to children <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ does not insult but advise children for their bad behaviour ○ teaches children based on their capability (otherwise intimidate children) ○ walks the talk ○ regards teaching as <i>amal jariah</i> ○ demonstrates love toward children ○ should reward children for good behaviour, obedience & good interaction with peers |
|--|--|
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