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The Intellectual Legacy of Al-Ghazali: Eight Decades of Research Trends and Thematic Impact (1948–2026)

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ABSTRACT

This bibliometric analysis investigates the adoption and development of research concerning Al-Ghazali's thought using 269 Scopus-indexed documents published between 1948 and March 12, 2026, refined from an initial set of 270 documents after excluding irrelevant regional marine science records. The research, conducted using Biblioshiny in R, examines publication trends, key contributors, and thematic patterns via keyword mapping and conceptual structures. Results demonstrate a steady increase in research output, particularly subsequent to 2019, driven by the growing scholarly interest in integrating classical Islamic frameworks into contemporary contexts. Dominant themes centre on Islamic law, Islamic jurisprudence, and comparative Islamic philosophy (focusing on Avicennian traditions), alongside a specialised niche emphasis on ethical philosophy and legal theory. Citation analysis identifies foundational studies and reveals that scholarship remains firmly rooted in traditional humanities practices, characterized by a high prevalence of single-authored documents (72.1%) and a modest international co-authorship rate (5.56%), indicating significant opportunities for future cross-border and interdisciplinary collaboration. This study provides a structured overview of the field and identifies directions for future inquiry, supporting educators and policymakers in advancing evidence-based applications of Al-Ghazali's intellectual legacy.

1. INTRODUCTION

The intellectual legacy of Abu Hamid Al-Ghazali has profoundly shaped Islamic jurisprudence, theology, and ethical philosophy for over nine centuries. In contemporary academic discourse, the complex intersection of classical Islamic thought with modern societal, financial, and organisational challenges has garnered significant scholarly attention. Within this context, Al-Ghazali's "intellectual legacy" is operationally defined and scoped in this study around five core domains of his scholarship: Islamic law

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(shari'ah), jurisprudence (fiqh), legal theory (usul al-fiqh), ethical philosophy (akhlaq), and spiritual psychology (Sufism). Despite its historical origins, Al-Ghazali's conceptual frameworks, such as his models of ethical reasoning, psychological nature of man, and public interest (maslahah), remain highly relevant in contemporary applied fields, including Islamic finance, character education, and legal theory (Shamsudheen & Rosly, 2018; Sidani & Al Ariss, 2015). Recent scholarship emphasizes that classical Islamic virtue ethics specifically Al-Ghazali's principle of trust (Amanah) provides a robust moral foundation for establishing ethical governance and human responsibility in artificial intelligence systems (Serevan, 2025). Understanding how this specific multidimensional corpus of literature has evolved in modern scholarship is critical for guiding future theoretical integrations and practical applications.

Bibliometric analysis has emerged as a rigorous, data-driven methodology for systematically mapping, organising, and visualising the evolutionary trajectories, collaborative networks, and conceptual structures of scientific domains over time (Boyack & Klavans, 2014; Zupic & Čater, 2015). While bibliometric studies have successfully mapped general themes within Islamic scholarship such as global trends in Islamic poverty research (Mustafar et al., 2025) or wisdom-based cultural environments in Islamic education (Lahmar, 2020) a dedicated, comprehensive bibliometric mapping of Al-Ghazali's specific legal, ethical, and theological frameworks in contemporary indexed literature is still entirely lacking. This represents a significant gap in the literature. Without a structured scientometric map, contemporary researchers cannot objectively identify which dimensions of Al-Ghazali's thought have consolidated into mainstream "motor themes" or which critical areas remain isolated as "niche themes."

This study addresses this empirical gap by pursuing three key research objectives designed to map the intellectual domain comprehensively. First, the study aims to analyse the annual scientific production and shifting thematic patterns within Al-Ghazali studies to trace the historical and conceptual evolution of the field over time. Second, it seeks to identify the most influential contributors shaping this academic landscape, specifically examining highly productive authors, leading source journals, and the geographical distribution of publications. Finally, the research evaluates the scholarly impact and direct citation structures specifically through Global Citations (GC) and Local Citations (LC) to uncover the intellectual foundations of the scholarship while assessing current authorship patterns and evaluating the potential for expanding cross-border, interdisciplinary networks. Together, these objectives provide a comprehensive, structured roadmap of how research on Al-Ghazali's intellectual legacy has developed over the past eight decades (1948–2026), laying a foundation for future cross-disciplinary and cross-cultural scholarship.

2. METHODOLOGY

The methodological framework of this study is systematically structured to ensure high replicability and analytical rigour. Rather than utilising qualitative systematic reviews which are often prone to subjective interpretation, this study employs quantitative bibliometric mapping a science-mapping approach designed to visually structure and quantify the academic output of a designated domain over time (Zupic & Čater, 2015). This approach aligns with recent scientometric trends that utilize Scopus-indexed bibliometric mapping to trace the intellectual evolution and global publication patterns within Islamic and religious studies(Embong et al., 2026). To achieve this, the methodology is divided into three main phases: the

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database search protocol, the PRISMA-compliant document screening and cleaning, and the configuration of the bibliometric analysis software.

3. SCOPE OF THE RESEARCH

To compile a high-quality dataset, the Scopus database was selected due to its comprehensive coverage of peer-reviewed literature in the humanities, social sciences, and theology. The search query was executed on March 12, 2026. The search string was constructed using Boolean operators (AND, OR) and restricted to the fields of Title, Abstract, and Keywords (TITLE-ABS-KEY). The query targeted the intersections of Al-Ghazali's identity with major legal and ethical themes:

("Al-Ghazali" OR "Abu Hamid" OR "Ghazali") AND ("Islamic law" OR "Islamic jurisprudence" OR "ethical philosophy" OR "legal theory" OR "Islamic theology" OR "Sufism")

The initial search was filtered to retrieve journal articles and books published between 1948 and March 12, 2026, across relevant subject areas including Arts and Humanities, Social Sciences, Theology, and Decision Sciences. This initial extraction yielded a corpus of 270 documents. The detailed search protocol is summarised in Table 1.

Table 1 Search Protocol

Aspect	Description
Study Period	1948 – March 12, 2026
Access Date	March 12, 2026
Database	Scopus
Keyword	TITLE-ABS-KEY (("Al-Ghazali" OR "Abu Hamid" OR "Ghazali") AND ("Islamic law" OR "Islamic jurisprudence" OR "ethical philosophy" OR "legal theory" OR "Islamic theology" OR "Sufism"))
Inclusion Criteria	Subject Area: Arts and Humanities, Social Sciences, Theology, Decision Sciences. Document Type: Journal Article, Book Language: English, Arabic, Malay (and others indexed)
Exclusion Criteria	Editorials, Conference Proceedings, Errata, Short Surveys
Initial Retrieval	270 documents
Cleaned Dataset	269 documents (after PRISMA screening)

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4. DOCUMENT SCREENING AND DATA CLEANING (PRISMA)

To safeguard the validity of the scientometric metrics, a rigorous screening and data cleaning phase was implemented, aligned with the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) guidelines (Page et al., 2021). A manual review of the 270 retrieved documents was conducted to check for thematic relevance.

During this screening phase, one false-positive record was identified: Lyons et al., (2015) titled "Microbial water quality and sedimentary faecal sterols as markers of sewage contamination in Kuwait" published in the Marine Pollution Bulletin. This document had entered the dataset due to an author name matching overlap in Scopus Boolean indexing, where one of the study's co-authors, Abdul Hamid, S. A., triggered a false-positive match against the targeted query term "Abu Hamid". Because its empirical focus on marine pollution and environmental microbiology is entirely unrelated to Al-Ghazali's legal, theological, or ethical scholarship, this document was manually excluded from the corpus. The final cleaned dataset, comprising 269 highly relevant documents, was exported in a comma-separated values (.csv) format containing full metadata (including abstracts, citations, and references) for downstream processing.

5. DATA ANALYSIS AND SOFTWARE CONFIGURATION

To map the conceptual structure of the domain, the analysis focused on standardised English-language abstract bigrams (two-word phrases extracted from the English abstracts provided in the Scopus metadata across all 269 documents) to bypass the limitations of author keywords and capture deeper thematic nuances. Utilising the standardised English abstracts ensured linguistic consistency across multi-lingual original documents (Arabic and Malay publications) and prevented algorithmic noise during automated natural language processing.

The software configuration was tailored with precise parameters, beginning with the activation of word stemming (stemming = TRUE) via the English Porter Stemmer algorithm to group morphological variants with identical semantic roots, such as merging the terms "Islamic law" and "Islamic legal" into a single cohesive node. Furthermore, to eliminate low-frequency noise and retain only the most significant conceptual associations, the threshold for minimum word occurrence was set at two (minfreq = 2), with the total number of mapped words capped at 250 (n = 250). Finally, thematic clusters were detected using the Louvain community detection algorithm, where the spatial coordinates for the thematic map were normalised and plotted based on Callon's Centrality to measure relevance to the broader network, and Callon's Density to evaluate the internal maturity of each respective theme.

Third, to evaluate the scholarly impact and direct citation structures, direct citation analysis was performed using Biblioshiny to evaluate the scholarly impact of the publications. This involved calculating Global Citations (GC) representing total citations accumulated across the entire Scopus database and Local Citations (LC), which measure internal citations generated strictly within this 269-document dataset (Zupic & Čater, 2015).

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6. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

6.1 Overview of the Cleaned Dataset

Following the systematic screening and removal of irrelevant false-positive records (specifically excluding environmental science data such as Lyons et al., 2015), the finalised corpus comprises 269 highly relevant documents published across 161 distinct sources. The dataset reflects robust academic engagement with 390 active authors. Solitary scholarship remains a dominant characteristic in this domain, with 194 single-authored documents (72.1%) being identified, indicating that a significant portion of Al-Ghazali research continues to rely on independent philosophical and textual analysis.

The dataset displays a low level of international collaboration, recording an average of only 1.65 co-authors per document and a notably low international co-authorship rate of 5.56%. These indicators suggest that while Al-Ghazali's legacy is studied globally, research efforts remain largely compartmentalised within regional or national institutional boundaries. The average document age of 7.17 years and an audited average citation rate of 3.92 per document reflect a mature yet steadily evolving field, with a substantial portion of the output published within the last decade.



Figure 1 Main information of the retrieved dataset.

6.2 Annual Scientific Production

The annual publication trends from 1948 to March 12, 2026, illustrate the historical and conceptual evolution of research on Al-Ghazali's thought (Figure 2). The timeline begins with sporadic and minimal output, maintaining fewer than three publications annually for several decades. This pattern suggests that during the early and mid-twentieth century, Al-Ghazali studies were primarily restricted to traditional historical and theological circles.

However, a critical turning point is associated with the year 2019, which recorded a sharp increase to 22 publications. Rather than demonstrating a sudden causal shift, this surge suggests a growing academic interest in applying classical Islamic ethical and legal frameworks to modern socio-economic challenges. This upward momentum has been sustained, with output peaking consistently at 31 documents in 2022, 32 in 2023, 34 in 2024, and 35 in 2025. The steady growth in recent years reflects a broader theoretical transition from purely historical translation to active contemporary application.

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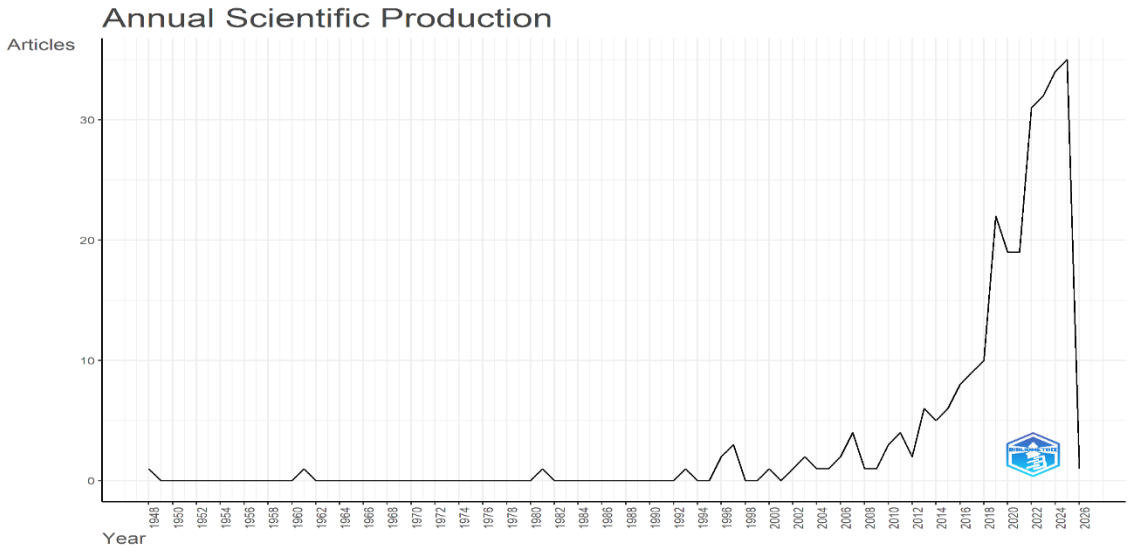


Figure 2 Annual scientific production (1948–March 12, 2026)

6.3 Keyword Co-Occurrence

The keyword co-occurrence network (Figure 3) maps the thematic linkages and conceptual clusters within the field. The network is organised into distinct, color-coded clusters that highlight the primary areas of scholarly focus.

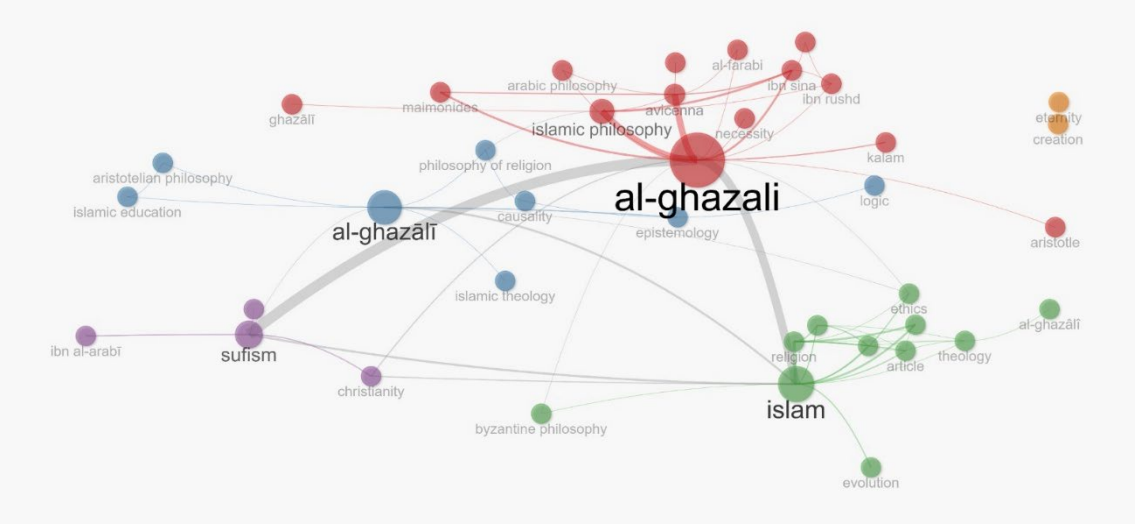


Figure 3 Keyword co-occurrence network based on abstract bigrams.

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The red cluster represents the core backbone of the discipline, anchored on "Islamic law" and "Islamic jurisprudence," which are strongly associated with "Islamic scholars" and "Islamic economic". This pattern reflects the sustained scholastic emphasis on utilising Al-Ghazali's legal theories to address modern legal and financial frameworks. The blue cluster focuses on comparative philosophy, grouping studies that examine Al-Ghazali's historical dialogues with Ibn Sina (Avicenna) and Ibn Rushd (Averroes), and "Islamic philosophy," which represents ongoing historical initiatives to map medieval intellectual dialogues.

The green cluster, characterised by "Muslim scholars" and "Islamic education," indicates research surrounding pedagogical and character-development frameworks. The purple cluster (terms like "abū ḥāmid" and "Islamic theology") serves as a conceptual anchor for dogmatic theological debates. Finally, the brown cluster represents a highly specialised applied domain featuring "ethical philosophy," "ethical decision-making," and "Islamic banking," reflecting modern efforts to adapt Al-Ghazali's virtue ethics to address contemporary professional dilemmas, particularly within Islamic finance.

6.4 Thematic Map Analysis

To evaluate the maturity and significance of the identified research themes, a thematic map was constructed based on Callon's Centrality (measuring the degree of a theme's external connection to other parts of the network) and Callon's Density (measuring the internal development and cohesion of the theme). The themes are categorised into four distinct quadrants: motor themes (upper-right), niche themes (upper-left), emerging or declining themes (lower-left), and basic themes (lower-right), as visualised in Figure 4.

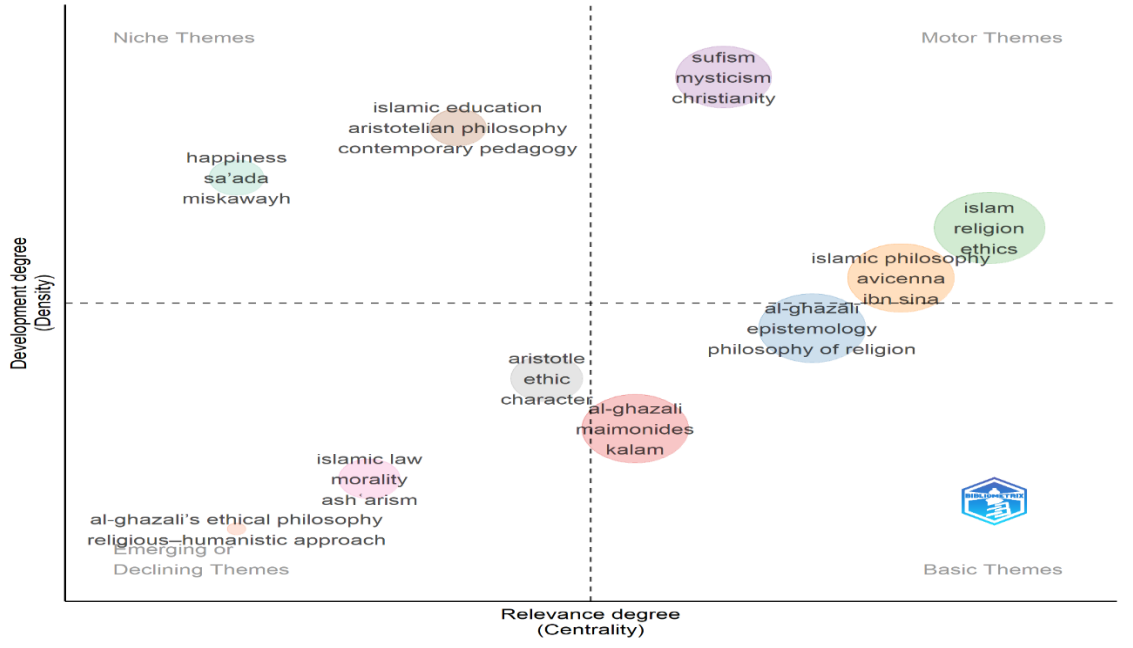


Figure 4 Thematic map of Al-Ghazali studies based on abstract bigrams.

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The analysis reveals that "Islamic law" and "Islamic jurisprudence" are situated within the motor themes quadrant. This position indicates that these legal-centric domains are both highly developed internally and highly central to the broader academic discourse, acting as the primary conceptual drivers of contemporary Al-Ghazali scholarship. Conversely, "ethical philosophy" and "ethical decision-making" are positioned within the niche themes quadrant. This reflects a specialised body of literature that possesses high internal cohesion and maturity but remains conceptually isolated from mainstream theological or legal dialogues.

The basic themes quadrant is populated by foundational philosophical comparative terms such as "Ibn Sina," "Ibn Rushd," and "Islamic philosophy." These represent crucial, cross-cutting themes that are highly central to the overall structure of Islamic intellectual history, yet they remain characterised by lower density, indicating a need for more modern conceptual development and integration. Finally, terms associated with basic spiritual psychology, such as "human nature" and "spiritual purification", hover between the basic and emerging quadrants, suggesting a nascent academic transition toward contemporary applied psychology and digital ethics.

6.5 Influential Contributors

Author Impact Analysis

To identify the scholars driving this discourse, Figure 5 visualizes the local impact of the most productive authors, measured by their local citations within this dataset. Following author disambiguation to consolidate variant name formats in the metadata (specifically merging Shamsudheen S.V. with Valangattil Shamsudheen, and Rosly S.A. with Azhar Rosly), the analysis reveals that Shamsudheen, S. V. and Rosly, S. A. hold the highest local impact in this domain, accumulating 10 local citations collectively across their foundational publications.

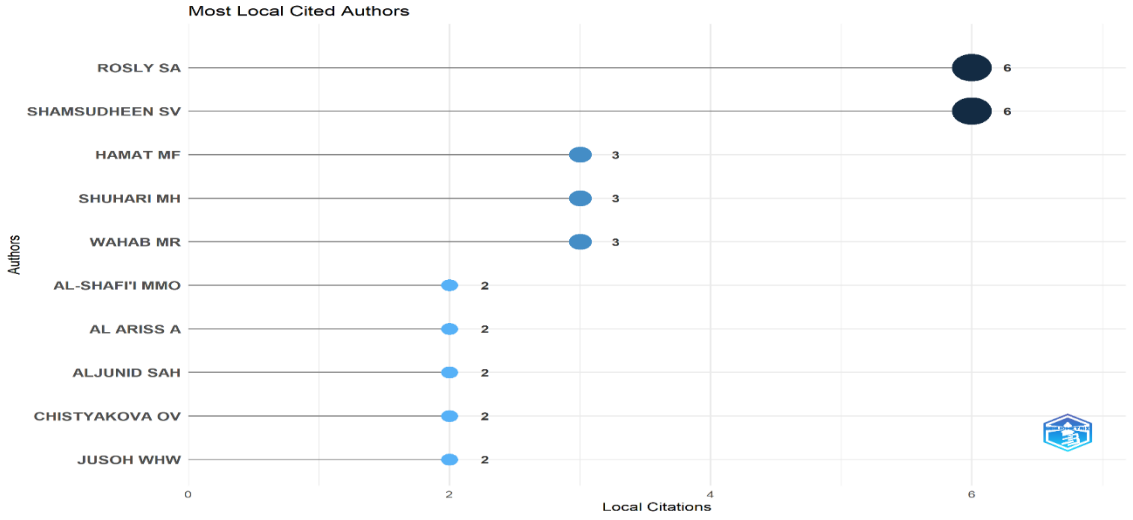


Figure 5 Most local cited authors in the dataset.

Their highly cited contributions primarily focus on integrating Al-Ghazali's ethical reasoning, operational heterogeneity, and psychological models of human nature into the contemporary Islamic

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banking sector (Shamsudheen & Rosly, 2018). Other notable contributors who have significantly shaped this internal discourse include Hamat, M., Shuhari, M. H., and Wahab, N. A., each accumulating 3 local citations for their research surrounding classical concepts such as amanah (trustworthiness), integrity, and ethical decision-making in modern organisational leadership (Ahmed et al., 2019). The high concentration of internal citations within this small cohort underscores that while the broader field is supported by 390 authors, a dedicated group of core researchers plays a central role in driving contemporary applied ethical scholarship.

Corresponding Author's Countries and National Collaboration

To analyse the geographical distribution and national collaboration patterns, Figure 6 maps the publications of corresponding authors' countries using Single Country Publications (SCP) and Multiple Country Publications (MCP) metrics.

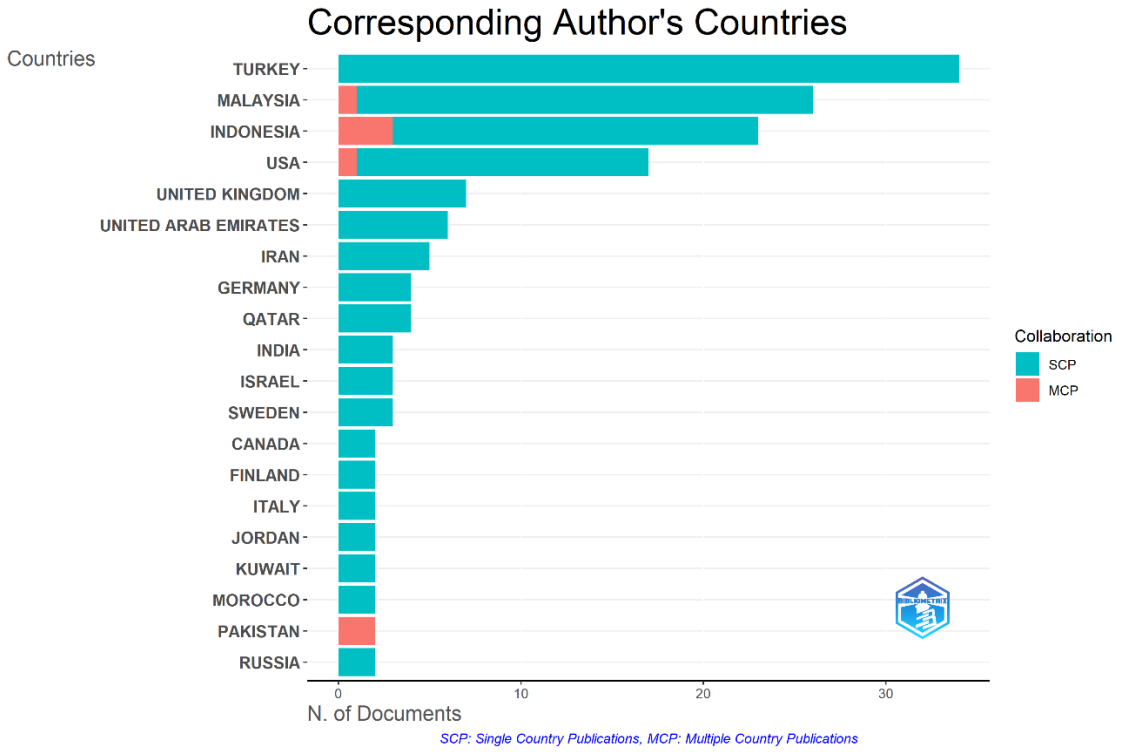


Figure 6 Corresponding author's countries and collaboration types (SCP vs MCP).

The data reveals that Turkey is the most productive nation in this domain, contributing 34 documents, all of which are Single Country Publications (SCP: 34, MCP: 0). Malaysia ranks second with 26 documents (SCP: 25, MCP: 1), followed closely by Indonesia with 23 documents (SCP: 20, MCP: 3). The United States is the leading non-majority Muslim country, ranking fourth with 17 documents (SCP: 16, MCP: 1).

This distribution highlights that research on Al-Ghazali remains concentrated within Turkey and the Southeast Asian region (Malaysia and Indonesia). Crucially, the overwhelming dominance of SCP across

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all leading countries with Turkey, Malaysia, and the USA showing almost zero Multiple Country Publications highlights the localised nature of this scholarship. This localised pattern mathematically explains the overall low international co-authorship rate (5.56%) observed in the dataset, illustrating that scholars continue to study Al-Ghazali's legacy within compartmentalised national or institutional frameworks rather than cross-border networks.

Most Relevant Publication Sources

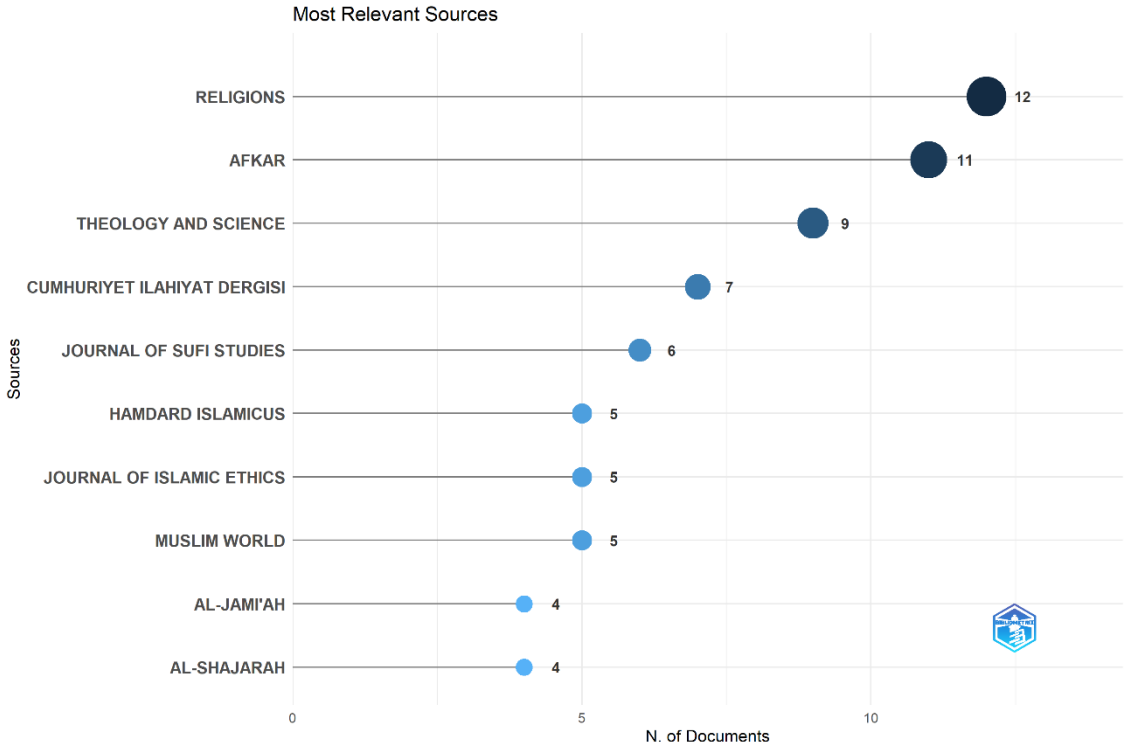


Figure 7 Most relevant publication sources for Al-Ghazali studies.

The journal Religions emerges as the foremost contributor with 12 publications, solidifying its position as a primary interdisciplinary platform for contemporary religious interpretations. The journal Afkar ranks second with 10 publications, reflecting its focus on epistemological theories and theological discourse, particularly within the Malay world. Other influential platforms include Theology and Science (9 publications), The Muslim World (8 publications), and Cumhuriyet Ilahiyat Dergisi (7 publications), which demonstrate cross-disciplinary interest in Al-Ghazali's methodologies within scientific, philosophical, and comparative theology dialogues

6.6 Intellectual Structure of the Field

Definition of Citation Metrics

To explore the underlying intellectual structure of this field, it is critical to draw a distinction between

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two key bibliometric indicators used in science mapping: Global Citations (GC) and Local Citations (LC). The former, GC, is defined as the total number of citations a document has received from all indexed publications across the entire Scopus database, thereby measuring a paper's broad, outward impact across different scientific fields and disciplines. In contrast, LC refers solely to the citations a document receives from other documents within the retrieved dataset of 269 documents in this study. Consequently, while GC captures a wider, multidisciplinary reach, LC provides a precise measure of a paper's specific, internal influence within this specialised Al-Ghazali legal and ethical research domain.

Most Globally Cited Documents

Figure 8 presents the most globally cited publications, highlighting the foundational works that have shaped the broader academic discourse

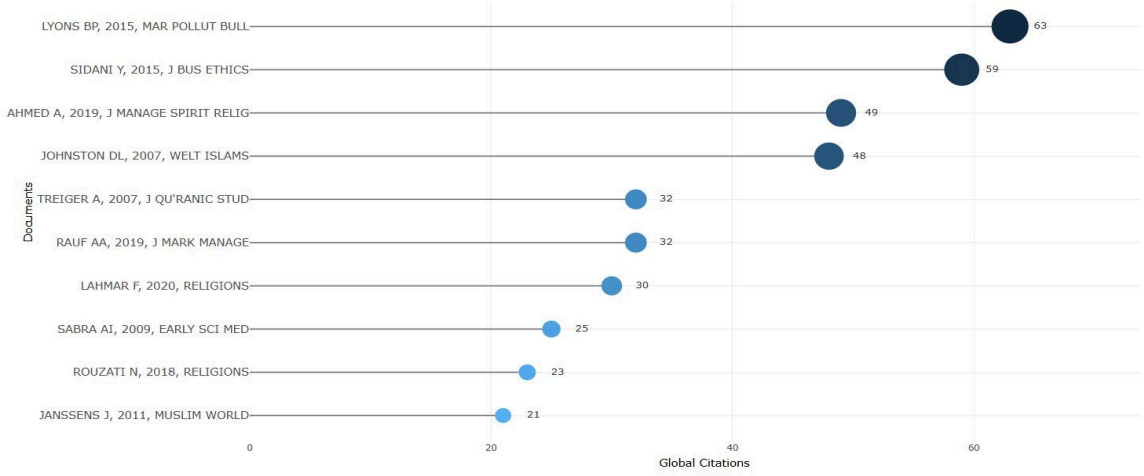


Figure 8 Most globally cited documents in the dataset.

Following the exclusion of irrelevant regional science records, Sidani & Al Ariss (2015), published in the Journal of Business Ethics, is officially identified as the most globally cited document, with 59 global citations. This seminal study establishes new conceptual foundations for Islamic business ethics by directly integrating Al-Ghazali's classical frameworks into contemporary corporate practices. The second most globally cited work is Ahmed et al. (2019) with 49 citations, which examines how the Islamic work ethic moderates employee helping behaviours in modern organisations.

The third is Johnston (2007) with 48 citations, investigating the epistemology of Maqasid al-Shariah in relation to human rights theologies. Rauf et al. (2019) ranks fourth with 32 citations, exploring how theological frameworks discipline consumer desires. The fifth is Sabra (2009) with 25 citations, which explores the simple ontology of Kalām atomism and classical natural philosophy. A summary of these top five globally cited documents is presented in Table 2.

Table 2 Summary of the five most globally cited documents

Paper	Total Citations	Summary

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Sidani, Y., and Al Ariss, A., "New conceptual foundations for Islamic business ethics: The contributions of Abu-Hamid Al-Ghazali," Journal of Business Ethics, 2015	59	This paper explores the integration of Al-Ghazali's thought into Islamic business ethics, establishing conceptual foundations that bridge classical Islamic theology with modern corporate and ethical practices
Ahmed, A., et al., "The influence of spiritual values on employee's helping behaviour: The moderating role of Islamic work ethic," Journal of Management, Spirituality & Religion, 2019	49	The study examines the impact of spiritual values on employee behaviour, emphasising how the Islamic work ethic, rooted in classical teachings, moderates helping behaviours in contemporary organisational settings
Johnston, D.L., "Maqāṣid al-Sharī'a: Epistemology and hermeneutics of Muslim theologies of human rights," Die Welt des Islams, 2007	48	This research investigates the epistemology and hermeneutics of Maqāṣid al-Sharī'a (objectives of Islamic law), providing theoretical frameworks for understanding Muslim theologies concerning human rights
Rauf, A.A., et al., "How does religion discipline the consumer subject? Negotiating the paradoxical tension between consumer desire and the social order," Journal of Marketing Management, 2019	32	The paper addresses the intersection of religion and consumerism, exploring how Islamic theological and ethical frameworks negotiate the tension between consumer desires and societal order
Sabra, A.I. (2009). The simple ontology of Kalām atomism: An outline. Early Science and Medicine.	25	Outlines the foundational ontological and physical concepts in early Islamic theology (Kalām), focusing on atomistic theories of matter

7. DISCUSSION

The results of this bibliometric analysis provide a comprehensive overview of research on Al-Ghazali's intellectual legacy, detailing publication trends, thematic patterns, and the foundational structure of the field. While the findings demonstrate a growing academic interest in integrating classical Islamic frameworks into contemporary studies, they also highlight critical characteristics of the research landscape, such as a high prevalence of single-authored works and limited international collaboration. This discussion critically interprets the results by situating them within the broader educational, theological, and technological landscapes, particularly exploring how classical ethical frameworks can address modern pedagogical challenges.

7.1 Research Trends and Evolution

The evolution of research on Al-Ghazali's thought over the past eight decades reveals distinct phases of slow growth, fluctuation, and rapid expansion. Based on the annual scientific production (Figure 2), the period from 1948 through the early 2000s saw sporadic and minimal output, often with fewer than three articles published annually. This reflects a period where studies on Al-Ghazali were primarily confined to highly specialised historical, linguistic, or theological circles, focusing heavily on textual preservation and translation.

However, a critical turning point is associated with the year 2019, which recorded a sharp increase to 22 publications. This shift marks a renewed global academic interest in contextualising classical Islamic ethics within modern paradigms (Sidani & Al Ariss, 2015). From 2022 onward, a steady and steep upward trend is evident, with publication numbers consistently exceeding 30 articles annually, recording 31

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documents in 2022, 32 in 2023, 34 in 2024, and peaking at 35 in 2025. This sustained growth suggests that Al-Ghazali's epistemological and ethical models continue to hold profound relevance in contemporary academic discourse. The data indicates that research has moved beyond mere historical translation, entering a phase of active, interdisciplinary application where his classical methodologies are being actively repurposed to address modern societal, financial, and organisational challenges (Ahmed et al., 2019; Rauf et al., 2019).

7.2 Thematic Development and the Intersection with AI Ethics

The thematic analysis of Al-Ghazali studies reveals a structured integration of classical theology with applied disciplines. Motor themes, prominently featuring "Islamic law" and "Islamic jurisprudence," represent the core backbone of this discipline (Zuhdi & Abdun Nasir, 2024). Their high centrality and density (Centrality: 5.66, Density: 52.55) emphasise that legal applications of Al-Ghazali's thought remain the most well-developed and heavily researched areas, reflecting a sustained scholarly emphasis on utilising his frameworks (such as Maqasid al-Shariah and maslahah) to resolve contemporary socio-legal issues.

Conversely, "ethical philosophy" and "legal theory" are positioned as specialised niche themes (Density: 122.02 and 97.84 respectively). While these themes exhibit high internal maturity, their lower centrality indicates limited integration with the broader academic discourse. This specialised , isolated status represents a significant research gap, yet it simultaneously offers a vital conceptual framework for addressing modern educational crises.

Specifically, within the context of contemporary higher education and the rapid adoption of generative artificial intelligence (such as ChatGPT), the density of Al-Ghazali's ethical philosophy (akhlaq) and spiritual psychology (Ihya Ulum al-Din) provides critical mechanisms for cultivating learning autonomy, critical thinking, and academic integrity. Al-Ghazali's model of human nature which emphasizes the internal discipline of the soul, the cultivation of intellect ('aql), and the moral responsibility of seeking knowledge stands as a powerful antidote to student overreliance on AI tools.

While modern technology-driven classrooms risk fostering intellectual passivity and dependency, Al-Ghazali's virtue ethics can be repurposed to design digital literacy frameworks that prioritise cognitive agency and moral accountability (Rouzati, 2018; Shamsudheen & Rosly, 2018). Furthermore, aligning Al-Ghazali's legal and ethical philosophy with Maqasid al-Shariah offers a normative foundation to evaluate the ethical implementation of artificial intelligence (AI) in modern educational and institutional systems (Mulki Firdaus Alamsyah et al., 2025).The niche position of this theme underscores an urgent need for future scholarship to transition these specialised ethical insights into transversal educational models, bridging classical virtue ethics with digital humanities to preserve academic rigour in the AI era.

7.3 Authorship Dynamics and Collaboration Challenges

Despite the increasing adoption of Al-Ghazali's frameworks in contemporary academic research, a persistent challenge in this field is the lack of extensive, cross-border collaborative networks. Bibliometric mapping reveals that a substantial portion of the literature is driven by individual efforts, with 194 out of 269 documents (72.1%) being single-authored, produced by 175 distinct scholars within a total pool of 390 active authors.

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As contextualised within the field's benchmarks, this dominance of solitary scholarship is highly characteristic of the humanities and theology, where deep hermeneutic analysis, philosophical contemplation, and qualitative textual synthesis naturally favor the individual inquirer. However, while these independent studies provide invaluable theological depth, the lack of collaborative frameworks limits the generalizability of Al-Ghazali's thought across diverse contemporary domains.

This isolation is further mathematically demonstrated by the low average of 1.65 co-authors per document and a notably low international co-authorship rate of 5.56%. The scholarship remains largely compartmentalised within regional or national institutional boundaries particularly concentrated within Turkey, Malaysia, and Indonesia (Figure 6). The strong representation of Southeast Asian institutions reflects a broader regional surge in leveraging modern bibliometric mapping to contextualize classical Islamic traditions within contemporary societal frameworks (Choirin et al., 2025).The absence of diverse international networks hinders the optimisation of universal ethical models based on his teachings.

To resolve this, future research must pioneer collaborative, cross-border, and interdisciplinary designs. By actively connecting classical jurisprudence and virtue ethics with modern organisational psychology (Ahmed et al., 2019), applied economics (Shamsudheen et al., 2021; Sidani & Al Ariss, 2015), and digital ethics, scholars can elevate Al-Ghazali's legacy from a localised , historical study into a universally applicable framework capable of addressing the complex ethical challenges of the twenty-first century.

8. CONCLUSION

This study provides a systematic and comprehensive bibliometric mapping of the intellectual legacy of Al-Ghazali across a cleaned dataset of 269 Scopus-indexed documents spanning from 1948 to March 12, 2026. By employing science-mapping techniques via the bibliometrix package, the research successfully addresses its three core research objectives.

Regarding the first research objective, the annual scientific production reveals a clear evolutionary trajectory. Following decades of sporadic publications, a significant acceleration in academic interest occurred after 2019, reflecting a contemporary shift from historical textual translation to the active, cross-disciplinary application of Al-Ghazali's thought. Thematic and conceptual structures, mapped through keyword co-occurrence and thematic analysis, identify "Islamic law" and "Islamic jurisprudence" as highly central, mature "motor themes" driving the discipline. Conversely, "ethical philosophy" and "ethical decision-making" remain specialised "niche themes," indicating opportunities for deeper integration into broader contemporary educational and digital ethics frameworks.

For the second research objective , Turkey, Malaysia, and Indonesia emerge as the leading geographical contributors, with the journals Religions and Afkar serving as the primary platforms publishing this literature. In terms of the third research objective, global and local citation analyses highlight foundational studies, led by Sidani & Al Ariss (2015), which bridge classical theological virtue ethics with modern business and organisational practices.

Significantly, the bibliometric metrics reveal a high prevalence of solitary scholarship, with 194 single-authored documents (72.1%) and an international co-authorship rate of 5.56%. Within the framework of scientometric evaluations, these patterns should not be interpreted as structural weaknesses. Instead, they

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reflect the established scholarly culture of Islamic theology and humanities, which naturally favors independent hermeneutic and qualitative textual synthesis. Nevertheless, as Al-Ghazali scholarship increasingly intersects with modern applied domains such as AI ethics, corporate governance, and organizational psychology transitioning toward cross-disciplinary and international research networks will be essential to expand the global impact of his intellectual legacy.

8.1 Limitations of the Study

Despite its rigorous methodology, several limitations must be acknowledged to guide future research. First, this study relies exclusively on the Scopus database, which, despite its prestige and extensive coverage, may not capture all regional or vernacular Arabic and Malay-language journals that contain significant Al-Ghazali scholarship. Second, the search query was tightly scoped around specific legal, ethical, and theological intersections. While this focus ensures conceptual depth, it may have excluded broader literary, historical, or purely biographical dimensions of Al-Ghazali's life. Furthermore, because the dataset includes publications for 2026 only up to March 12, these final-year results must be interpreted with caution, as they represent a partial data point that does not reflect the complete annual scientific production or overall publication trends of that year. Finally, the citation analysis is subject to an inherent citation age bias, as older foundational papers have had nearly two decades to accumulate citations, whereas highly relevant, cutting-edge studies published within the last three to five years may not yet reflect their true academic impact in terms of raw citation counts. Consequently, there is a clear need for future research to integrate multiple databases, such as the Web of Science (WoS) and regional indexes like the Science and Technology Index (SINTA) or the Malaysian Citation Index (MyCITE), alongside broader search strings, to construct an even more comprehensive map of Al-Ghazali's enduring intellectual legacy.

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