

The Basic Concept of Sufism Morals as the Initial Step in Purifying the Souls of Students

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Keywords: Morals, Sufism, Tazkiyah al-Nafs, Santri, Character Education	Abstract
Submitted: 15/06/2025	Sufism is a branch of Islamic knowledge that focuses on the spiritual dimension and purification of the soul (tazkiyah al-nafs). In Islamic boarding school education, Sufism plays a crucial role in shaping the character of students with noble morals. This article examines the basic concepts of Sufism morals and their relevance to the process of purifying the soul, encompassing values such as sincerity, patience, asceticism, and contentment. This research used a descriptive qualitative literature study method. The results indicate that the stages of takhalli (emptying oneself of blameworthy traits), tahalli (filling oneself with praiseworthy traits), and tajalli (revealing Divine truth) are the main foundations in the process of purifying the soul. The implementation of these values is not only relevant for the formation of insan kamil (perfect human beings) in Islamic boarding schools but also holds high relevance in the modern era for character education, self-control, mental health, and social ethics. Overall, Sufism morals are a transformative approach to building spiritual depth amidst the challenges of a fast-paced and materialistic life.
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INTRODUCTION

The acceleration of modernity, marked by global competition, the flow of information, and materialism, often creates spiritual aridity and a moral crisis in education and social life. In this context, the Sufi approach offers a path to recovery through purification of the soul (tazkiyah al-nafs) and the instilling of inner virtues as a foundation for character (Mukhlisin & Purnomo, 2023; Saprin, 2019). Several contemporary studies also show that Sufi spiritual practices such as dhikr, muraqabah, and muhasabah are positively related to inner peace and mental health, making them

relevant as a basis for strengthening character amidst the pressures of modern life (Fitriya et al., 2024).

Conceptually, Sufism is a discipline focused on cleansing the heart of despicable traits in order to draw closer to God, the fruit of which is manifested in noble character (Al Qusyairi, 2007). Classical tradition describes the stages of purification as a hierarchical process: takhalli (emptying of blameworthy traits), tahalli (filling with praiseworthy traits), and tajalli (unveiling of divine light in the heart), all of which form the integration of the inner and outer dimensions in behavior (Nasution, 1973; Nurazizah, 2022). Therefore, "Sufi morals" do not stop at the normative level, but rather become practical ethics that unite personal and social piety (Saprin, 2019).

Within the Islamic boarding school educational ecosystem, Sufi values play a strategic role in shaping the student's habitus: spiritual discipline, strengthening of manners, and social sensitivity. Various field studies have shown that the integration of Sufism through the habituation of dhikr (remembrance of God), riyadhah (religious devotion), and the internalization of the values of sincerity, patience, asceticism, and tawakkul (religious obedience) effectively fosters the moral resilience and spiritual identity of Islamic boarding school students amidst the challenges of globalization (Aziz et al., 2023; Arifin et al., 2025). Thus, Sufism is not a nostalgia for classical teachings, but rather a character education framework that adapts to the needs of the times (Mukhlisin & Purnomo, 2023).

This article examines the basic concepts of Sufism's morals and their relevance to purifying the souls of Islamic boarding school students, highlighting: (1) the theoretical foundations of Sufism's morals, (2) the stages of tazkiyah al-nafs (self-control) and their pedagogical implications, and (3) the implementation of Sufism's values in the formation of Islamic boarding school students' character and their contribution to mental health and social ethics. Using a literature study approach, this paper links classical literature and contemporary findings to offer an integrative model of moral development in Islamic boarding schools (Al Qusyairi, 2007; Fitriya et al., 2024; Nurazizah, 2022).

RESEARCH METHODS

This research is in the form of a literature study with an integrative design (integrative/narrative literature review) and a descriptive qualitative approach. Data were collected from two types of sources: (1) classic Sufism books including *Ihya' 'Ulum al-Din* and *Risalah Qusyairiyah* as a conceptual basis; and (2) journal articles and contemporary proceedings on the theme of morals/Sufism, character education/Islamic boarding schools, and mental health from an Islamic perspective published between 2000 and 2025. Searches were conducted through Google Scholar, Garuda, DOAJ, NELITI, and university journal repositories using controlled keywords such as "morals/Sufism", "tazkiyah al-nafs", "character education", "Islamic boarding schools", "mental health", and "social ethics". Literature selection was carried out in layers from the title, abstract, to the full text. Inclusion criteria included high thematic relevance to Sufism morality and Islamic boarding school (santri) education, the availability of complete manuscripts, and their academic nature. Exclusion criteria included popular opinions without scholarly references, duplication, and studies outside the context of Islam or Sufism. Each manuscript that passed the selection process was extracted into a data sheet containing the source's identity, context (classical/contemporary), key concepts (e.g., takhalli-tahalli-tajalli, muraqabah, muhasabah), and relevant findings. The search and filtering process was documented to maintain transparency.

Data analysis was conducted through a six-step reflective thematic analysis familiarization, initial coding, theme discovery, theme review, defining/naming themes, and reporting to identify patterns of meaning across sources. This analysis was complemented by a conceptual content analysis to organize thematic categories (e.g., ikhlas, sabar, zuhud, tawakal, ridha; tazkiyah al-nafs; character education; mental health) and to test the consistency of definitions across texts. Trustworthiness was maintained through source triangulation (classical texts compared with contemporary research), an audit trail of search, selection, and coding decisions, and internal peer debriefing. Results were presented transparently to ensure the traceability of arguments. Because this research was based on public documents without involving human subjects, ethical approval was not required. Academic integrity was ensured through the inclusion of full references in the bibliography in accordance with scientific writing standards. A limitation of this study lies in the absence of a formal systematic review-level methodological quality assessment, so the resulting generalizations are conceptual, not statistical.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Conceptual Foundation Of Morals And Sufism

Morals are understood as a stable inner state that guides behavior toward spontaneous goodness. Sufism is a path to purifying the heart and controlling the desires to draw closer to God, thus producing noble morals that are evident in both outward and inward behavior. Within this framework, "Sufistic morals" are not simply a set of norms, but rather a synthesis of personal piety, continuity of worship, and social sensitivity that shape the complete personality of students.

Stages of Tazkiyah al-Nafs and Pedagogical Implications

The process of purifying the soul is structured in three hierarchical stages: takhalli (emptying of blameworthy traits), tahalli (filling with praiseworthy traits), and tajalli (clarity of heart as a result of mujahadah). In Islamic boarding school education, these stages can serve as a roadmap for a spiritual curriculum: the initial stage focuses on deconstructing bad habits and practicing self-control, the intermediate stage on cultivating consistent virtues and the etiquette of a student, and the advanced stage on maintaining a clear heart through measured and continuous riyadhah (religious devotion).

Core Values of Sufism and Operational Indicators

The core values that are prominent and relevant to the character of students include sincerity, patience, asceticism, trust (relief), consent (relief), muraqabah (self-reflection), self-reflection (muhasabah), and mahabbah (compassion). Their operational indicators are manifested in concrete behaviors, such as sincerity in learning without seeking praise, resilience in accepting correction, simplicity in lifestyle, willingness to strive with calm acceptance of the results, awareness of Divine supervision in situations without external oversight, honest daily self-evaluation, and genuine social concern. These indicators facilitate the mapping of affective outcomes at both the individual and institutional levels.

Implementation of Values in the Islamic Boarding School Ecosystem

Effective implementation occurs when Sufism values permeate the curriculum, worship practices, institutional culture, and parental partnerships. At the curriculum level, Sufism material is integrated into morals/fiqh/Islamic religious education (PAI) lessons with a practical orientation. In the habituation phase, routine dhikr (remembrance of God), qiyam al-lail (religious reflection), voluntary fasting, and quiet time for contemplation and self-reflection serve as instruments for shaping inner

habits. In the institutional culture, the exemplary conduct of the kiai (Islamic scholars) and asatidz (Islamic teachers) acts as a "living curriculum" that instills good manners; while in the partnership phase, parents are provided with guidance on good manners at home to maintain continuity of development.

Impact on the Character and Mental Health of Students

Sufism-based development strengthens emotional regulation, psychological resilience, and a sense of meaning. The practice of dhikr and contemplation fosters a sense of responsiveness that prevents impulsivity; the values of patience, trust in God, and consent (*ridha*) foster resilience in the face of academic and social pressures. The orientation of worship strengthens life's purpose, thereby suppressing hedonistic tendencies and fostering prosocial behavior. Thus, *tazkiyah al-nafs* functions simultaneously as mental hygiene, fostering a healthy learning ecosystem.

The Position of Sufi Morals in Islamic Knowledge

Sufi morals occupy a strategic position within the trichotomy of faith, sharia, and morals. Faith strengthens belief, sharia regulates outward conduct, while Sufism maintains purity of intention and presence of heart so that worship does not become mere formality. The relationship with fiqh is mutually reinforcing; faith ensures theological orthodoxy, while the link with social sciences, psychology, and pedagogy provides tools for understanding behavior, conducting character assessments, and designing virtue-based learning strategies.

Contextual Relevance in the Modern Era

Amidst the tide of materialism and digital distractions, Sufi morals offer a balance that touches the inner roots. Its values encourage disciplined learning, social media ethics, and social responsibility; while the practice of *muraqabah* and *muhasabah* helps students manage anxiety, maintain consistent performance, and maintain integrity. Thus, Sufism is not nostalgic, but rather adaptive and provides solutions to the needs of character development in today's era.

Integrative Scheme for Developing Sufism's Morals

The integrative scheme can be summarized as an interconnected flow: the conceptual foundation that morals are the fruit of Sufism; the *takhalli-tahalli-tajalli* process supported by *muraqabah-muhasabah*; core values such as sincerity, patience, asceticism, *tawakal* (relief), consent (permission), and *mahabbah* (respect); simultaneous implementation in the curriculum, habits, culture, and parental partnerships; and outcomes in the form of noble character, mental resilience, and social ethics. This scheme guides educational units in designing multi-layered yet measurable programs.

Practical Implications for Islamic Boarding Schools

Practical implications include the development of character competency maps per level with observable behavioral indicators, the use of self-reflection journals and affective rubrics as tools for reflection and feedback, the integration of service projects as a vehicle for empathetic and leadership learning, and brief training.

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

Conclusion

This study emphasizes that the morality of Sufism is an essential foundation in the development of students. Through the framework of *tazkiyah alnafs* which goes from *takhalli* (emptying of despicable qualities), *tahalli* (filling of praiseworthy qualities), to *tajalli* (clarity of heart) character formation takes place gradually and measurably. Core values such as sincerity, patience, *zuhud*, *tawakal*, *ridha*, *muraqabah*, *muhasabah*, and *mahabbah* can be operationalized into real behavioral indicators,

making it easier to map affective achievements at the individual and institutional levels. In the pesantren ecosystem, Sufism morality is effective when it is thoroughly integrated into the curriculum and learning, habituation of worship and *riyadhah*, institutional culture and example, and parent-community partnerships.

The results of the synthesis show that the practice of Sufism has a direct impact on strengthening emotional regulation, psychological resilience, and a sense of meaning in learning and society. Worship orientation purifies intentions, suppresses impulsive behavior, and expands prosocial actions, so that *tazkiyah alnafs* works at the same time as *mental hygiene* that nourishes the learning climate in Islamic boarding schools. Scientifically, the morality of Sufism animates the implementation of sharia and reflects the right faith, and can synergize with the findings of social sciences, psychology, and pedagogy to enrich virtue-based learning strategies. Considering that this study is a literature study with conceptual synthesis, the generalization of the findings is conceptual, so field trials are needed to assess the effectiveness of the implementation in a measurable manner.

Suggestion

In order for the development of Sufism morals to run systematically, Islamic boarding schools are advised to establish a character roadmap that contains vision, annual goals, and affective performance indicators, as well as form a small cross-element team as a bodyguard for design, implementation, and evaluation. In the realm of curriculum and learning, Sufism material should be integrated with an emphasis on practice for example, performative tasks in the form of muhasabah journals, thematic halaqah, structured tadavbur, and khidmah projects and accompanied by a simple affective assessment rubric so that behavioral achievements can be observed consistently at each level.

In the realm of habituation of worship and riyadhah, it is necessary to schedule a dhikr routine, a daily quiet time for tafakkur-muhasabah, periodic qiyam allail, and gradual sunnah fasting, accompanied by a digital hygiene policy to suppress distractions and maintain clarity of heart. Institutional culture should be strengthened through the example of kiai and asatidz as a "life curriculum", as well as rules that instill manners of speaking, dressing, guesting, and social media, with an educative and improvement-oriented ta'zir approach. Partnerships with parents can be realized through a brief character booklet for the practice of manners at home, a short parent coaching program, and solemn activities across the neighborhood to foster empathy and social ethics for students.

To ensure sustainability and quality improvement, a simple but consistent monitoring and evaluation mechanism is needed for example, through weekly muhasabah journals, affective rubrics, and feedback from dorm guardians and maple teachers accompanied by periodic evaluation meetings and a culture of appreciation for consistent small progress. In the future, pesantren are encouraged to conduct structured trials of intervention packages (such as muhasabah journals, silent time, and solemn projects) in several classes or dormitories, with measurements of changes in affective indicators and learning climate; These field findings can be the basis for refining the model and standardizing character assessment instruments for wider replication.

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