
The Role of Sufism in Shaping Islamic Character in the Young Generation

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Abstract

Building strong Islamic character in today's youth presents a significant challenge. Moral decay, spiritual emptiness, and the pervasive influence of hedonistic culture are all major obstacles. This article explores how the core values of Sufism particularly tazkiyatun nafs (self-purification) and ihsan (excellence) can help young people develop robust Islamic character in the face of these modern difficulties. Our literature review suggests that Sufism offers a powerful path to inner peace, emotional regulation, and heightened spiritual awareness. We propose that formal education can effectively integrate Sufi principles through spiritually-focused curricula. Similarly, non-formal settings can foster Islamic values through positive role models and community-based outreach (da'wah). However, widespread adoption of Sufi practices faces hurdles. These include a lack of public understanding, the pervasive influence of materialism, and a resistance among some young people to traditional values. To overcome these challenges, we suggest leveraging digital technologies, employing experiential learning methods, and empowering educators to play a more active role. In conclusion, our research indicates that Sufism offers a relevant and effective approach to addressing the moral and spiritual challenges facing today's youth, providing a fresh perspective on Islamic character education.

Keywords– *Sufism, Tazkiyatun nafs, Islamic character education, Digital era*



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1. Introduction

The modern world a whirlwind of technological advancements, globalization, and social change presents a significant challenge to instilling strong Islamic values in young people. The digital age, with its emphasis on individualism, materialism, and consumerism, often pulls individuals away from essential spiritual grounding. Young people today face moral decay and spiritual crises, demanding a holistic approach to character development. The Quran itself emphasizes this need, stating:

قَدْ أَفْلَحَ مَنْ زَكَّاهَا ۖ وَقَدْ خَابَ مَنْ دَسَّاهَا ﴿١٠﴾

"Indeed, he will be successful who purifies himself [his soul], and indeed, he will fail who corrupts it" (Ash-Shams 91:9-10).

This verse highlights the crucial role of self-purification (*tazkiyatun nafs*) in building a strong moral foundation. Sufism, with its deep spiritual dimension within Islam, offers a powerful framework for this, emphasizing self-purification and a conscious awareness of God's presence (*ihsan*). Research consistently shows that integrating Sufi principles into education strengthens morality and spirituality, equipping young people to navigate the complexities of modern life (Jannah, 2014; Oktariyani, 2017; Anggraeni & Dewi, 2021).

Sufism's influence extends beyond personal growth, significantly impacting social life. Its teachings encourage young people to cultivate inner purity, self-control, and a deeper connection with God. Practices like remembrance of God (*zikr*), self-reflection (*muhasabah*), and voluntary fasting help them find meaning and cultivate tolerance. The Quran warns against forgetting God, stating:

وَلَا تَكُونُوا كَالَّذِينَ نَسُوا اللَّهَ فَأَنْسَاهُمْ أَنْفُسَهُمْ أُولَٰئِكَ هُمُ الْفَاسِقُونَ ﴿١٩﴾

"And be not like those who forgot Allah, so He made them forget themselves. Those are the defiantly wrongdoers" (Al-Hashr 59:19).

This verse underscores the importance of remembering God as a cornerstone of moral integrity. Studies in Indonesian Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*) demonstrate Sufism's vital role in shaping inclusive and compassionate character among students, reflecting the teachings of scholars like Imam Al-Ghazali (Jannah, 2014; Hadi, 2016; Fitriyanti, 2019).

However, integrating Sufi values into education isn't without its difficulties. A major hurdle is the lack of understanding of Sufism among educators and parents alike. Sufism is often wrongly perceived as irrelevant to modern life, a misconception stemming from a lack of information. Furthermore, the pervasive influence of materialism and resistance to traditional values among some young people pose significant challenges. Despite these obstacles, research consistently shows the effectiveness of religious values—like self-reflection and tolerance—taught through a Sufi lens. These values help young people manage the pressures of the digital age while strengthening their character, enabling them to balance spiritual needs with technological realities (Hadi, 2016; Anggraeni & Dewi, 2021; Fitria, 2024).

In this challenging digital landscape, Sufism offers a particularly relevant response to the moral and spiritual crises facing young people. The digital world often triggers stress, anxiety, and destructive behaviors like cyberbullying and exposure to harmful content. Sufi principles of self-reflection and tolerance provide practical solutions. By embracing these values, young people can navigate the pressures of the digital world more wisely (Oktariyani, 2017; Jannah, 2014; Angkouw & Prayitno, 2020). Moreover, cultivating a strong awareness of God's presence (*ihsan*) helps them maintain harmony between their spiritual needs and the ever-evolving technological landscape.

This article seeks to address key questions about Sufism's role in shaping Islamic character in young people. First, how do Sufi values like *tazkiyatun nafs* and *ihsan* contribute to building strong Islamic character in the modern era? Second, what are the main obstacles to integrating Sufi principles into Islamic character education? Third, what effective strategies can be used to teach Sufi values in formal and informal educational settings? Finally, how can Sufism offer

solutions to the moral and spiritual challenges of the digital age? By answering these questions, this article aims to provide both practical and theoretical insights into fostering a generation of young people with strong morals and deep spiritual awareness.

2. Method

This study uses a literature review approach to explore and analyze Sufism's role in shaping Islamic character among young people in the modern world. We chose this method because it allows for a comprehensive understanding, analysis, and synthesis of existing academic research relevant to our topic. As Randolph (2009) explains, a literature review systematically evaluates and integrates previous research findings, providing a strong conceptual foundation for new research. Furthermore, as Torraco (2005) points out, a literature review bridges theory and practice, making it particularly suitable for examining the implementation of Sufi values in Islamic character education. This approach also effectively identifies trends, challenges, and opportunities related to Sufism's implementation, as highlighted by Booth, Sutton, and Papaioannou (2016), who emphasize the importance of systematic steps in literature searching and evaluation.

Data Sources

Our data comes from various journal articles, books, and academic publications discussing Sufism, Islamic character education, and the moral and spiritual challenges facing young people in the modern era. Key sources were drawn from academic databases like Consensus and Google Scholar, as well as reputable journals focusing on Islamic studies and education.

Research Stages

The research involved several stages:

- **Data Collection:** We began by searching for relevant literature using keywords such as Sufism, tazkiyatun nafs, ihsan, Islamic character education, and the challenges of the digital age. The literature included

publications from 2015 to 2024 to ensure relevance to the contemporary context.

- Literature Selection: We carefully selected the collected literature based on relevance, source credibility, and contribution to the research questions. Only articles from reputable journals, academic books, and conference papers were considered for analysis.
- Data Analysis: We analyzed the selected literature using a thematic approach to identify key themes, such as the role of Sufi values in shaping Islamic character, challenges in integrating Sufi values into education, implementation strategies, and their relevance in the digital age. This analysis also aimed to identify research gaps and connect concepts from various sources.
- Synthesis: The analysis results were organized into a structured synthesis based on the research questions. The goal was to present a comprehensive overview of the topic, linking concepts of Sufism, character education, and the challenges faced by young people.

Validity and Reliability

To ensure validity and reliability, we only used literature from trustworthy sources. The analysis process involved verifying data consistency across sources and noting discrepancies to provide a balanced perspective. This literature review approach is expected to significantly contribute to understanding Sufism's role in shaping Islamic character among young people, offering practical strategies for implementation in the modern era. It also lays the groundwork for future research using primary data.

3. Result and Discussion

Findings

How do Sufi values like tazkiyatun nafs and ihsan contribute to shaping Islamic character in young people today?

Sufi Values: Self-Purification (Tazkiyatun Nafs)

Sufi values, particularly tazkiyatun nafs (self-purification), play a vital role in shaping the Islamic character of young people in the modern world. This concept focuses on cleansing the soul of negative traits, fostering self-control and emotional stability. This process cultivates positive character traits, strong ethics, and robust moral resilience (Maulana & Noviani, 2023; Hajiannor, 2019; Hasyim, 2024). Furthermore, tazkiyatun nafs can counter the pervasive influence of consumerism by instilling higher spiritual and moral values, preventing individuals from getting trapped in materialistic pursuits (Ihsan et al., 2024).

The Concept of Ihsan in Character Development

In addition to tazkiyatun nafs, the concept of ihsan—conscious awareness of God's presence in every action has a profoundly positive impact on mental and spiritual well-being. Ihsan fosters a more compassionate, grateful, and harmonious personality (Saihu & Umar, 2022). In character education, ihsan serves as a model for instilling love, compassion, and virtue as cornerstones of social interaction. These values encourage young people to become not only intellectually accomplished but also deeply empathetic individuals (Saihu & Umar, 2022).

Implementing Sufi Values in Education

In education, a Sufism-based approach proves effective in creating a deeper and more meaningful learning environment. This approach emphasizes soul purification and the development of noble character, essential foundations for building Islamic character (Maulana & Noviani, 2023; Amin et al., 2023). In institutions like Islamic boarding schools (pesantren), Sufi values have long been used to develop students' faith, Islamic practice, and ihsan. The primary

focus is on soul purification and moral development, cultivating strong character and high spiritual values (Azis et al., 2021).

The Relevance of Sufi Values in the Modern Era

In conclusion, Sufi values make a significant contribution to addressing the moral challenges facing young people today. Values like tazkiyatun nafs and ihsan not only shape noble character but also help individuals cope with the pressures of modern culture, which often erodes spiritual values. By embracing Sufi principles, young people can grow into ethical individuals who maintain a balance between spiritual needs and the demands of modern life.

Challenges and Solutions in Integrating Sufi Values into Islamic Character Education Key Challenges in Integrating Sufi Values

Integrating Sufi values into Islamic character education for young people in today's world is far from easy. The rapid pace of globalization and social change often clashes with Sufi principles. One major obstacle is the limited understanding of Sufism among educators and parents. Many have a narrow, even inaccurate, view of Sufism, leading to inconsistent application of values like tazkiyatun nafs and ihsan. Religious education often focuses on the textual and cognitive aspects, neglecting the spiritual dimension at the heart of Sufi teachings (Abitolkha & Mas'ud, 2021).

The dominance of materialistic and hedonistic lifestyles presents another significant challenge. Sufi principles emphasizing simplicity and self-control often conflict with materialistic trends that prioritize consumption and individualism. As a result, young people are often more drawn to worldly pursuits than to the spiritual values offered by Sufism (Iman, 2015).

Furthermore, formal religious education curricula often fail to explicitly integrate Sufi values. The focus typically lies on religious law (fiqh) and creed (aqidah), leaving little room for spiritual character development through Sufi practices like takhalli (emptying oneself of negative traits), tahallī (adornment with positive traits), and tajallī (spiritual manifestation) (Abitolkha & Mas'ud, 2021).

A lack of positive role models also poses a significant challenge. Young people need inspiring figures who demonstrate Sufi values in daily life. However, a shortage of such role models among educators and parents makes internalizing spiritual values difficult (Rubaidi, 2020). This is exacerbated by technology and digital distractions, such as social media, which often detract from self-reflection. Consequently, practices like *muraqabah* (awareness of God's watchful presence) become challenging amidst the constant distractions of the digital world (Supriatna et al., 2022).

Resistance from young people themselves cannot be ignored. Many view Sufi values as outdated and irrelevant to modern life. This skepticism hinders learning and the internalization of Sufi principles (Zubaedi & Saputra, 2024). The fragmented nature of Islamic education, often overly focused on legalistic and creedal aspects, further exacerbates the problem, neglecting the spiritual dimension in character development (Ramadhan & Qamariah, 2024).

Addressing the Challenges

Overcoming these challenges requires a modern and relevant approach. Sufi education needs to be contextualized, with practical applications emphasizing its benefits in daily life, such as emotional management and digital ethics (Abitolkha & Mas'ud, 2021). Educators and parents must serve as better role models, demonstrating Sufi values in their own lives (Rubaidi, 2020).

Formal curricula should integrate Sufi principles holistically, encompassing not only cognitive aspects but also instilling spiritual values in character development (Abitolkha & Mas'ud, 2021). Creative use of technology can also be an effective tool for conveying Sufi teachings in an engaging way that resonates with young people (Supriatna et al., 2022).

In short, integrating Sufi values into Islamic character education faces numerous challenges, from a lack of understanding and the influence of modern culture to fragmentation within Islamic education itself. However, with a holistic and relevant approach, Sufi values can significantly contribute to shaping young people with strong character, high ethical standards, and deep

spirituality. In the modern era, Sufism is not only relevant but also a crucial solution to the moral crises facing today's youth.

How can we effectively teach Sufi values within formal and non-formal education to cultivate Islamic character in the younger generation?

Effective Strategies for Teaching Sufi Values

Several strategies can be employed within both formal and non-formal education to foster Islamic character development in young people. In formal education, integrating Sufi values into the curriculum is a key strategic step. Values such as takhalli (purification of the self), tahalli (adorning the heart with virtuous qualities), and tajalli (spiritual enlightenment) can be incorporated into religious studies. This allows students to understand Sufism as a practice relevant to daily life. Research by Abitolkha & Mas'ud (2021) indicates that this approach can significantly enhance the development of Islamic character in students.

An ihsan-based pedagogical approach (awareness of God's presence) has also proven effective. This approach instills love and compassion as fundamental principles, contributing to improved mental and spiritual well-being among students (Saihu & Umar, 2022). Furthermore, the Sufistic Core Character learning model, which combines religiosity and morality, demonstrates superior outcomes compared to conventional methods in enhancing student character and religiosity (Yahya & Rahmat, 2021).

In non-formal education, strategies like habituation and exemplary conduct are crucial for success. Accustoming students to Islamic practices, such as zikr (remembrance of God), congregational prayers, and reciting supplications, can deeply instill Sufi values. The exemplary behavior of teachers and parents plays a vital role in this process. Research by Munandar (2018) suggests that Islamic routines established through habituation are effective in shaping children's character, particularly in environments like orphanages.

Community-based da'wah (Islamic outreach), including halaqah (study circles), Sufi lectures, and religious discussions, are also effective in enhancing

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understanding and internalization of Islamic values (Syakilah & Nashrillah, 2024). Another relevant strategy is urban community-based education, which emphasizes moderation, tolerance, and national commitment. This approach is particularly effective in shaping moderate attitudes among young people in urban areas (Mustofa & Hakim, 2024).

Leveraging technology and digital media is also crucial for disseminating Sufi values. Creating engaging Sufi content on social media or technology-based educational applications allows these values to reach digitally savvy young people. Research by Sopiah (2020) reveals that technology-based strategies significantly improve the effectiveness of character education, especially in distance learning.

Furthermore, teacher training and development are essential to ensure educators understand and can effectively teach Sufi values. Enhancing teacher competency will ensure the effective and consistent internalization of spiritual values within the educational environment.

Teaching Sufi values can be achieved through both formal and non-formal approaches. Strategies such as the ihsan-based approach, the Sufistic learning model, habituation, community da'wah, and the utilization of technology have proven effective in building Islamic character in young people. By integrating these strategies, Sufi values can be internalized in a relevant and contextual manner, enabling young people to face the challenges of the modern era with strong character, religiosity, and spiritual awareness.

The Relevance of Sufi Values in Addressing the Moral and Spiritual Challenges of Youth in the Digital Age

Sufi values hold significant relevance in addressing the moral and spiritual challenges faced by young people in the digital age. Modern life, often dominated by exposure to negative content and a culture of hedonism, has given rise to a significant moral crisis. In this context, Sufism, with its teachings on tazkiyatun nafs (purification of the soul), offers effective solutions for overcoming negative traits such as greed, envy, and hatred. These teachings help young people focus on positive self-development, strengthen spiritual

values, and build a solid moral foundation amidst the temptations of a materialistic lifestyle (Salleh, 2014).

Sufism also plays a vital role in fostering self-awareness and emotional regulation. Through practices like *zikr* and introspection, young people can gain a deeper understanding of themselves, manage their emotions, and cope with the social pressures often arising from social media interactions. These practices mitigate impulsive behaviors, which are often a source of conflict, while helping individuals navigate the complexities of digital life with wisdom (Hanifah & Varyda, 2024). Moreover, Sufism offers a relevant spiritual approach to managing stress and anxiety resulting from the relentless flow of information. Practices like meditation, prayer, and self-reflection not only provide peace of mind but also strengthen an individual's connection with God, creating harmony between digital life and spiritual needs (Afiani & Haririe, 2024).

In the face of social polarization, which frequently occurs in digital media, Sufism offers highly relevant teachings on moderation and tolerance. Sufi values, such as universal love and respect for differences, help young people view others with compassion and empathy. This approach encourages them to become agents of peace in a digital world often rife with conflict due to differing opinions (Mustofa & Hakim, 2024).

Within education, Sufism can be integrated into formal curricula to cultivate strong Islamic character. Processes such as *takhalli* (cleansing oneself of negative traits), *tahalli* (adorning the heart with virtuous qualities), and *tajalli* (drawing closer to God) guide students to practice moral values in their daily lives. This integration not only enhances intellectual intelligence but also builds the high moral standards required of young people in the modern era (Abitolkha & Mas'ud, 2021).

Furthermore, Sufism emphasizes the importance of social relationships characterized by compassion and empathy, providing a solution to the social alienation resulting from the digital lifestyle. Through teachings like *khidmah* (service to others) and *mahabbah* (universal love), young people are encouraged

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to actively participate in social and community activities. These interactions help them build stronger solidarity with others, even though a significant portion of their lives takes place in the virtual world (Bassar, 2018).

Through various approaches such as introspection, tolerance, and character development, Sufism offers relevant solutions to help young people navigate the pressures of the digital age with greater wisdom. By integrating Sufi values into education and daily life, harmony between digital life and spirituality can be achieved, creating a generation that is morally and spiritually resilient in the modern era.

Discussion

How Do Sufi Values Such as Tazkiyatun Nafs and Ihsan Contribute to the Formation of Islamic Character in Modern Youth?

Sufi values, particularly tazkiyatun nafs (purification of the soul) and ihsan (excellence), play a significant role in shaping the Islamic character of young people in the modern era. Tazkiyatun nafs aids in cleansing the soul from negative traits such as greed, envy, and selfishness, which often serve as the root causes of moral issues amidst the influences of globalization. This value provides a foundation for self-control, simplicity, and emotional stability all essential elements in building a robust Islamic character.

Meanwhile, ihsan, which emphasizes the awareness that every human action is observed by Allah, fosters moral integrity and spiritual consciousness. This value not only cultivates individuals of noble character but also encourages the creation of a harmonious social environment through interactions grounded in love, compassion, and spiritual responsibility.

Recent research supports this contribution. Hajiannor (2019) and Ihsan et al. (2024) note that tazkiyatun nafs can mitigate the negative impacts of consumer culture by guiding young people to pursue spiritual values rather than materialism. Additionally, the concept of ihsan, which aligns with modern positive psychology approaches such as mindfulness and gratitude, has proven effective in enhancing mental and emotional well-being. Thus, the Sufi

approach offers a holistic solution encompassing moral, spiritual, and psychological aspects.

The implications of these findings are broad, particularly in education and character development policies for youth. Sufi values can be integrated into both formal and non-formal education as a model for Islamic character formation that is relevant to the challenges of the modern era. Educational institutions can adopt Sufi-based approaches to create profound and meaningful learning environments, while national character development policies can focus on strengthening the moral and spiritual foundations of the younger generation.

What are the Main Challenges in Integrating Sufi Values into the Process of Islamic Character Education?

Integrating Sufi values into Islamic character education faces several challenges, including a lack of understanding of Sufism, the dominance of materialistic culture, and a crisis of exemplary role models. Many educators and parents perceive Sufism as irrelevant to modern life, leading to the neglect of values such as tazkiyatun nafs (purification of the soul) and ihsan (excellence). The culture of hedonism and materialism further exacerbates this challenge, as the principles of simplicity and self-control within Sufism contrast sharply with the modern lifestyle.

Furthermore, the fragmentation of formal religious education presents a significant obstacle. Abitolkha & Mas'ud (2021) indicate that religious education tends to focus solely on the cognitive and legal dimensions of religion, neglecting the spiritual aspects. Digital distractions, such as social media, also hinder the development of introspection and spiritual awareness, which are central to Sufi values (Supriatna et al., 2022).

To address these challenges, modern holistic education theory encourages the integration of Sufi values through practical approaches relevant to daily life, such as application in emotional management and digital ethics.

*Miswar, Awal Kurnia Putra Nasution, Rahayu Fuji Astuti****What are Effective Strategies for Teaching Sufi Values in Formal and Non-formal Education?***

Effectively teaching Sufi values requires a holistic approach that integrates spirituality into both formal and non-formal learning. In formal education, integrating values such as takhalli (purification of the self), tahalli (adorning the heart with virtuous qualities), and tajalli (spiritual enlightenment) into the curriculum can instill a deep Islamic character. An ihsan-based approach, emphasizing awareness of God's presence, is also effective in building character and supporting students' mental well-being (Abitolkha & Mas'ud, 2021).

In non-formal education, strategies like habituation and exemplary conduct are crucial. Accustoming students to Islamic practices, such as zikr, congregational prayers, and daily supplications, helps instill Sufi values deeply. The exemplary behavior of parents and educators is key to motivating young people to internalize Sufi values.

Leveraging technology is also a vital strategy in the modern era. Creating engaging Sufi content on social media or educational apps allows digitally native youth to more easily understand and apply Sufi values.

How are Sufi Values Relevant in Addressing the Moral and Spiritual Challenges of Youth in the Digital Age?

Sufi values are highly relevant in addressing the moral and spiritual challenges faced by young people in the digital age. The teachings of tazkiyatun nafs offer solutions for cleansing oneself from negative influences such as greed, envy, and hatred, which are often amplified by social media culture. Sufi practices also help young people focus on self-introspection, emotional regulation, and spiritual development, enabling them to maintain moral balance amidst the pressures of a materialistic lifestyle.

Sufism also provides a path towards creating harmony in social life. Values such as moderation and tolerance can mitigate the social polarization often seen in the digital sphere, empowering young people to be agents of peace amidst the challenges of globalization.

In education, the integration of Sufism through takhalli, tahalli, and tajalli not only cultivates high moral standards but also enhances students' spiritual awareness (Abitolkha & Mas'ud, 2021). With its high relevance, Sufism offers an effective holistic approach to developing a morally and spiritually resilient younger generation in the modern era.

4. Conclusion

Sufism, as a spiritual dimension of Islam, holds profound relevance for the younger generation facing various moral and spiritual challenges in the modern era. Amidst the overwhelming influences of globalization, digital culture, and rapid social changes, Sufi values such as tazkiyatun nafs (purification of the soul) and ihsan (excellence) provide a solid moral and spiritual foundation. By focusing on the purification of the soul, emotional regulation, and awareness of God's presence, Sufism serves as a highly effective guide for shaping a strong Islamic character amidst the temptations of materialism and individualism.

However, the path to integrating Sufi values into education is not easy. Significant challenges arise from the limited understanding of educators and parents regarding Sufism, the dominance of hedonistic culture that prioritizes worldly pleasures, and the Islamic education curriculum that tends to focus more on legal aspects rather than deep spiritual values. Nevertheless, opportunities to address these challenges remain open. Creative strategies such as incorporating Sufism into formal curricula, habituating spiritual values in non-formal education, and utilizing digital technology as a means of Sufi outreach can serve as relevant and effective solutions.

The relevance of Sufi teachings becomes increasingly apparent amidst the dynamics of the digital age. As stress, anxiety, and social polarization become part of daily life, Sufi values offer pathways for introspection, tolerance, and the building of more harmonious social relationships. These teachings not only help young people cope with the pressures of a digital lifestyle but also create a balance between spiritual needs and technological challenges.

With a holistic approach that is contextually appropriate for the times, Sufi values can serve as a strong foundation for building a younger generation that is not only morally upright but also capable of being positive agents of change within the global community. They learn not only to live spiritually but also to carry these values into social interactions, fostering a more peaceful and empathetic world

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