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## Tasawuf as a Pedagogical Foundation: Implementing Spiritual Values in Junior High School Education

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### Abstract

*This study aims to examine the implementation of education and learning at the junior high school (SMP) level based on Sufi (tasawuf) values as a pedagogical foundation. The research method employed is library research with a critical analysis of Islamic education and Sufism literature. The findings reveal three key points: first, there is an essential alignment between Sufi values—such as sincerity (ikhlas), patience (sabr), and spiritual awareness (muraqabah)—and the goals of character education at the junior high school level. Second, Sufism offers an alternative pedagogical framework grounded in spirituality, integrating the spiritual dimension into the learning process, thus transforming it into a holistic journey of inner development. Third, modern Islamic education literature has not yet optimally integrated tasawuf as a pedagogical approach, indicating the need for curriculum reconstruction and the development of literature that incorporates Sufi principles. This study suggests that teachers, curriculum developers, and academics should more actively adopt Sufi-based values in formal education to shape students who are not only intellectually capable but also spiritually and morally mature. In doing so, junior high school education can significantly contribute to building a generation grounded in both knowledge and spiritual wisdom.*

**Keywords:** *Tasawuf, pedagogy, character education, spirituality, junior high school*

### Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji implementasi pendidikan dan pembelajaran di tingkat Sekolah Menengah Pertama (SMP) yang berlandaskan pada nilai-nilai tasawuf sebagai fondasi pedagogis. Metode penelitian yang digunakan adalah studi kepustakaan dengan analisis kritis terhadap literatur pendidikan Islam dan tasawuf. Temuan penelitian ini mengungkapkan tiga poin utama: pertama, terdapat kesesuaian esensial antara nilai-nilai tasawuf—seperti ikhlas, sabar, dan muraqabah (kesadaran spiritual)—dengan tujuan pendidikan karakter di tingkat SMP. Kedua, tasawuf menawarkan kerangka pedagogis alternatif yang berlandaskan spiritualitas, dengan mengintegrasikan dimensi spiritual ke dalam proses pembelajaran sehingga menjadi perjalanan holistik dalam pengembangan batin peserta didik. Ketiga, literatur pendidikan Islam modern belum secara optimal mengintegrasikan tasawuf sebagai pendekatan pedagogis, sehingga diperlukan rekonstruksi kurikulum serta pengembangan literatur yang mengadopsi prinsip-prinsip sufistik. Studi ini menyarankan agar para guru, pengembang kurikulum, dan akademisi lebih aktif mengadopsi nilai-nilai berbasis tasawuf

dalam pendidikan formal guna membentuk peserta didik yang tidak hanya cerdas secara intelektual, tetapi juga matang secara spiritual dan moral. Dengan demikian, pendidikan di tingkat SMP dapat memberikan kontribusi signifikan dalam membangun generasi yang berakar pada ilmu pengetahuan sekaligus kebijaksanaan spiritual.

**Kata Kunci:** *Tasawuf*, pedagogik, Pendidikan karakter, spiritualitas, sekolah menengah pertama.

## INTRODUCTION

The moral and spiritual crisis among Indonesian adolescents has become increasingly apparent. The rise in bullying incidents, misuse of technology, and the erosion of social ethics in schools reflect the diminishing role of spirituality in the educational domain. As the initial stage of adolescent identity formation, junior high schools (Sekolah Menengah Pertama or SMP) serve as a critical space for the internalization of moral and religious values. However, the current formal education system remains predominantly focused on cognitive development and academic achievement, while affective and spiritual dimensions are often marginalized (Sholihah & Khoiriyah, 2024).

A growing body of research underscores the importance of character education rooted in religious values to cultivate students with integrity (Lickona, 2004; Zubaedi, 2011). Within the discourse of contemporary Islamic education, spiritual approaches such as *tasawuf* (Islamic mysticism) have gained traction. Previous studies have highlighted the benefits of Sufi values such as sincerity (*ikhlas*), self-purification (*tazkiyatun nafs*), and mindfulness of God (*muraqabah*) in shaping student character (Al-Attas, 1990; Nasr, 2002). Nonetheless, empirical studies examining how *tasawuf* can be systematically implemented as a pedagogical foundation at the junior high school level remain scarce. There is a lack of practical discourse on how these Sufi values can be integrated into teaching strategies, instructional approaches, and classroom dynamics.

*Tasawuf*—a branch of Islamic teachings—emphasizes spiritual purification (*tazkiyatun nafs*), closeness to God (*taqarrub*), and the development of noble character through inner discipline. Al-Ghazali, in *Iḥyā’ ‘Ulūm al-Dīn*, considers *tasawuf* the core of Islamic education due to its holistic orientation toward human development—addressing not only the rational but also the spiritual aspects. In this context, *tasawuf* offers a pedagogical approach aimed at cultivating sincerity, patience, humility, and divine consciousness in learners (Zulki, 2022).

Spirituality-based character education transcends the teaching of morality by anchoring it in internal motivation derived from faith and transcendental awareness. Lickona (2004) asserts that effective character education instills moral values not only through instruction but also through personal consciousness and practice. In Islam, these values are reinforced through inner spirituality as developed in *tasawuf*. An education model grounded in Sufi values revives the affective dimension within students—an aspect often neglected by modern educational systems (Rohman, 2022).

While theoretical discussions on *tasawuf* are abundant, efforts to practically integrate its values into school-based learning—especially at the junior high level—remain limited. Some studies advocate for instructional models that incorporate Sufi values such as *muraqabah* (awareness of being observed by God), *raja'* (hope), and *khauf* (fear of God) to foster a learning environment characterized by ethical conduct and responsibility. However, such approaches are predominantly found in Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*) or *madrasahs*, and have yet to be widely implemented in general public junior high schools (Sodiman, 2014).

Despite existing studies on Sufi values and their role in character development, there is a notable research gap regarding the explicit development of a pedagogical framework grounded in *tasawuf* for junior high schools. The influence of Sufi principles on instructional design, teacher-student interaction, and educational assessment remains underexplored. This highlights the need for research that is not only conceptual but also practical and responsive to the educational needs of today's learners.

This article aims to explore and propose an implementation framework for integrating *tasawuf* values as a pedagogical foundation—beyond merely being an auxiliary component of religious instruction. With a focus on classroom practices at the junior high school level, it presents a spiritual approach embedded in the daily educational system. Here, *tasawuf* is not treated as a theoretical doctrine but becomes present in teacher-student interactions, teaching methodologies, and reflective learning processes.

The article argues that *tasawuf* can serve as an effective pedagogical foundation in shaping learners who are not only intellectually competent but also spiritually and emotionally mature. Through values such as *ikhlas* (sincerity), *sabr* (patience), *muraqabah*, and *tazkiyatun nafs*, learning in junior high schools can facilitate inner transformation, rather than merely the transfer of knowledge. The working hypothesis is that the application of *tasawuf*-

based values in learning will enhance the quality of character education and create a more serene, reflective, and meaningful learning environment.

The material object of this study is the set of *tasawuf* concepts relevant to education, particularly spiritual values with potential to serve as a pedagogical foundation at the junior high school level. The unit of analysis includes both classical and contemporary texts on *tasawuf* and Islamic education. This study adopts a qualitative approach using a library research design. The aim is to explore, analyze, and synthesize Sufi thought from both classical and modern Islamic literature, and to link these ideas with pedagogical theories and practices in secondary education.

Data sources include: Primary Literature: Foundational Sufi works such as *Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn* (Al-Ghazali), *al-Risālah al-Qushayriyyah* (Al-Qushayri), *Tazkiyatun Nafs*, and *al-Ḥikam* (Ibn 'Aṭā'illah), as well as classical Islamic educational texts incorporating elements of spirituality and Sufism. Secondary Literature: Contemporary Islamic education books, peer-reviewed journal articles, dissertations, and prior studies on integrating *tasawuf* values into education, along with character education and spirituality theories from scholars such as Al-Attas, Nasr, Zubaedi, and Lickona.

Data collection involves critical reading and textual analysis of relevant literature. Techniques include: Textual Study: Identification and interpretation of key Sufi concepts such as *ikhlas*, *sabr*, *muraqabah*, and *tazkiyatun nafs* from primary sources. Discourse Analysis: Examination of narrative and argumentative structures in the literature to understand the relevance of *tasawuf* to education. Comparative Analysis: Juxtaposition of *tasawuf* concepts with pedagogical approaches in Islamic education. The data are analyzed through an analytical qualitative approach, comprising: Concept Identification: Extracting pedagogically relevant Sufi concepts. Thematic Categorization: Grouping *tasawuf* values based on their educational functions (e.g., character formation, self-reflection, learning approach, teacher ethics). Contextual Interpretation: Interpreting these concepts in light of contemporary educational needs at the junior high level. Theoretical Synthesis: Formulating an applicable *tasawuf*-based pedagogical framework.

## DISCUSSION

Etymologically, *tasawuf* derives from the Arabic word *ṣūf*, meaning “coarse wool,” symbolizing the ascetic lifestyle of early Sufis. Terminologically, *tasawuf* refers to the purification of the soul (*tazkiyatun nafs*), the control of base desires, and the spiritual journey toward closeness to Allah through the cultivation of noble character. Imam Al-Ghazali defines *tasawuf* as a spiritual path toward Allah, achieved through the purification of the heart, sincerity in action, and the cultivation of constant awareness of God’s presence (*muraqabah*). Within the educational context, *tasawuf* should not be viewed merely as a moral teaching, but as a holistic framework for personality development that integrates cognitive, affective, and spiritual dimensions (Sulaiman, 2020).

As a pedagogical foundation, *tasawuf* offers an educational paradigm that transcends academic outcomes. It aims to form individuals with virtuous character, self-awareness, and an inner connection with the Divine. This is particularly relevant in addressing contemporary educational challenges such as moral degradation and adolescent identity crises. A *tasawuf*-based approach to learning presupposes that education is not merely the transmission of knowledge, but also a process of *tazkiyah* (spiritual purification) and *tahdzīb* (character refinement) (Subhi, 2016).

The values of *tasawuf* that can be integrated into junior high school learning processes may be categorized into three dimensions: Fundamental Values, which include: *Ikhlas* (Sincerity): A commitment to learning and teaching solely for the sake of Allah, not for praise or status (Putri, Gani, & Akmansyah, 2023); *Sabr* (Patience): Endurance in facing learning difficulties and life challenges (Istiningtyas, 2013); *Syukur* (Gratitude): Appreciation for knowledge and the opportunity to learn (Seftiani, Sesrita, & Suherman, 2020); *Tawakkal* (Trust in God): Surrendering outcomes to Allah after exerting optimal effort (Ismawati, 2025).

Reflective (Spiritually Contemplative) Values, which include: *Muraqabah* (God-consciousness): Awareness of being constantly observed by Allah, encouraging students to take responsibility for their actions both inside and outside the classroom (Ayatullah, 2020); *Muhasabah* (Self-evaluation): Reflecting on one’s learning process and daily behavior (Dami & Parikaes, 2018); *Khusyu’* (Mindful Focus): Developing concentration and inner calm in receiving knowledge, thereby creating a sacred learning atmosphere (Kallang, 2020).

Transformational Values, which include: *Tazkiyatun Nafs* (Purification of the Soul): Framing education as a means of cleansing the self from negative traits such as arrogance, envy, and laziness (Khoiruddin, 2016); *Zuhud* (Asceticism): Emphasizing simplicity and sincerity in seeking knowledge, rather than material gain or social prestige (Ihromi, 2024); *Ma'rifatullah* (Divine Recognition): Viewing the ultimate goal of education as attaining closeness and recognition of Allah through knowledge and righteous action (Subhi, 2020; Tiyono & Putra, 2023).

According to Al-Ghazali, the spiritual development of a human being—which serves as a reference point for Sufi-based education—comprises three stages: *Takballi*: Emptying the heart of reprehensible traits; *Taballi*: Adorning the self with virtuous morals; *Tajalli*: The manifestation of divine light within the learner as the culmination of the spiritual educational process (Ilallah, Ali, & Fakhri, 2022). These stages can be implicitly adapted into educational processes, beginning with value awareness, continued through habituation of virtuous conduct, and culminating in the internalization of spirituality in students' daily lives.

### **The Essential Alignment Between Sufi Values and the Aims of Character Education in Junior High Schools**

One of the key findings of this study is the essential alignment between core values in *tasawuf* and the objectives of character education at the junior high school (SMP) level. Fundamental Sufi values such as *ikhlas* (sincerity of intention), *sabr* (steadfastness), *syukur* (gratitude), *muraqabah* (awareness of God's constant presence), and *tawakkal* (submission to the Divine will) represent profound principles of self-discipline. These values directly support the affective dimension of character education at the junior high level, particularly in cultivating responsibility, discipline, perseverance, and moral-spiritual consciousness in students.

Beyond individual moral teaching, Sufi values possess a strong transcendental and spiritual foundation, positioning education not merely as a vehicle for knowledge transmission, but as a transformative process that guides learners to understand their true nature and their relationship with God. In the context of junior high school students—who are undergoing identity formation and searching for meaning—values such as *muhasabah* (self-reflection), *zuhud* (detachment from worldly excess), and *tazkiyat al-nafs* (soul purification) are highly relevant in nurturing a balanced, wise, and morally responsible life

orientation. These values act as inner anchors for character formation, helping students resist external pressures and negative media influences.

When compared to the character values promoted by the Indonesian Ministry of Education and Culture—such as religiosity, honesty, discipline, hard work, responsibility, tolerance, and peace—Sufi principles not only support but deepen and refine these aspects (Pramana & Trihantoyo, 2021). For instance, honesty in *tasawuf* is not simply about telling the truth, but embodies *ṣidq*—an alignment between the heart, speech, and action driven by divine awareness (Mahfudzi, 2019). Therefore, a *tasawuf*-based character education model at the junior high level can serve as an integrative platform to nurture students who are spiritually grounded, emotionally mature, and morally strong, with a life orientation that transcends worldly success (Madhar, 2024).

The discovery of this essential compatibility between Sufi values and the aims of character education at the SMP level carries significant conceptual and practical implications for contemporary education. It indicates that *tasawuf*, often perceived as an abstract and private form of spirituality, holds substantial potential as a normative and pedagogical foundation for shaping student character in a deeper and more holistic manner. By making *tasawuf* a value reference, character education can avoid superficial, symbolic, or administrative approaches, and instead move toward transformative internalization (Acetylena & Sirojuddin, 2025).

Within the framework of classical Islamic educational theory, as explained by Al-Ghazālī, education is not merely the transfer of knowledge, but a process of *tabdhib al-nafs* (soul refinement) and *taḥqīq al-insāniyyah* (human actualization) (Busroli, 2019). *Tasawuf* emerges as an integral part of the Islamic educational mission, focusing on the development of the *qalb* (heart) as the center of moral and spiritual awareness (Subhi, 2016). Values such as *ikhlas*, *sabr*, and *muraqabah* are forms of internalized ethics that penetrate the innermost layers of a student's personality, far beyond external social norms (Subhi, 2018).

Furthermore, contemporary character education theories such as those developed by Thomas Lickona (1991) emphasize three core components: moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action. *Tasawuf* contributes holistically to all three. Moral knowing is shaped through reflection on the nature of good and evil via Sufi insight. Moral feeling arises from spiritual experiences such as *khauf* (fear of God), *raja'* (hope in His mercy), and *mahabbah*

(love for God). Moral action is realized through consistent, ethical, and sincere deeds. Thus, the *tasawuf* approach fills a void in contemporary character education, which has often been dominated by behavioral or social discipline models alone.

For this reason, it is crucial that formal education—especially at the junior high level—incorporates Sufi principles as part of curriculum design and instructional strategies. Teachers should not merely serve as academic instructors but act as *murabbī rūḥānī* (spiritual mentors) who impart values in a personal and reflective way (Wahyudi, 2015). In this context, the *tasawuf* approach enables a more humanistic and profound educational model, aligned with the core mission of Islamic education: to form humans with divine character (*insān kāmil*), not merely high-achieving students.

These findings are consistent with the Tasawuf of the Prophetic Path, introduced by Ust. Hj. Hussien bin Abdul Latiff, which shares a deep spiritual foundation focused on the formation of *insān kāmil* and emphasizes *maʿrifatullāh* (gnosis of God) as the essence of inner transformation (Subhi, 2020; Tiyono & Putra, 2023). In this approach, Ustaz Hussien underscores the importance of direct awareness of God's presence (*ihṣān*) in daily life—an idea closely aligned with the concepts of *muraqabah*, *tawakkal*, and *ikhlas* discussed in this study. Divine awareness, in this view, is not theoretical but existential, guiding every action, word, and intention. Students are not simply taught to behave ethically but are educated to recognize the divine within themselves, just as the prophets guided their communities through inner purity and total submission to God's will.

The findings reaffirm that the educational process in Islam is essentially *taṣḫīyat al-nafs* (purification of the soul), not merely the transmission of knowledge. This aligns with the core framework of *tasawuf*, which is concerned with cleansing the *qalb* from *maẓmūmah* (blameworthy traits) and cultivating *maḥmūdah* (praiseworthy traits). Values such as *ḥubud*, *mubasabah*, and *sabr* serve as concrete methods for detaching the soul from worldly attachments and reorienting life solely toward Allah. In formal education, this means students are not merely taught ethics but are guided through a process of inner transformation by teachers who serve as *murabbī rūḥānī*.

One of the primary missions of *tasawuf* is to guide individuals toward the *maqām* of *insān kāmil*—a human being whose will is harmonized with the will of God and who embodies divine attributes on earth. This is fully in line with the study's concluding insight:

that the goal of education should be to form humans with divine character, not merely academically successful or disciplined individuals. In the Sufi paradigm, character is not merely external behavior (*external conformity*), but an expression of inner purity and spiritual awareness. Therefore, values such as honesty, responsibility, and peace grow not from external enforcement but from inner conviction rooted in the divine (Akhirin, 2013).

In conclusion, *tasawuf* is not only relevant but offers a powerful pedagogical and epistemological framework for character education in schools. It provides the spiritual depth urgently needed in a modern world that often emphasizes competence while neglecting the heart.

### **Tasawuf as a Spiritual-Based Alternative Pedagogical Framework**

Another key finding of this study is that *tasawuf* contributes not only ethical and spiritual values but also offers a distinctive and alternative pedagogical framework. This framework is not grounded in the paradigms of cognitivism or behaviorism that commonly underpin modern education but is rooted in a spiritual-transcendental paradigm in which the educational process is viewed as a means of purifying the soul (*tazkiyatun nafi*), drawing closer to God (*taqarrub ilā Allāh*), and actualizing the human *fitrah*. In this context, education is not merely the transmission of knowledge but a structured and gradual spiritual journey (*suluk*).

The Sufi pedagogical structure can be articulated through three primary stages adapted from the classical path of *tasawuf*: *takballi*, *tahalli*, and *tajalli*.

*Takballi* involves the purification of the soul from destructive traits such as ostentation, arrogance, envy, and laziness. In learning, this translates into identifying and correcting students' negative behaviors and fostering introspective awareness. *Tahalli* refers to adorning the soul with virtuous traits like honesty, compassion, trustworthiness, and proper conduct. This is where value habituation occurs—through teacher exemplars, moral conditioning, and internalization within classroom activities. *Tajalli* is the stage of spiritual manifestation, where students attain reflective and transcendental awareness of noble values. It can be implemented through reflective exercises, spiritual journaling, or worship practices imbued with deep meaning.

This Sufi-based pedagogical framework offers a holistic and transformative learning model. It does not end with behavioral change but penetrates the deepest layers of consciousness and life orientation. At the junior high school level, this stage is critical, as

students are navigating a psychologically vulnerable period marked by identity confusion, value crises, and existential searching. The Sufi framework provides support that is not only intellectual but also emotional and spiritual. Thus, *tasawuf* opens the path to an education that shapes not only cognitively intelligent individuals but also those who are wise in attitude, gentle in spirit, and grounded in values.

The finding that *tasawuf* is capable of generating an alternative, spirituality-based pedagogical framework suggests that Islamic education holds a paradigmatically different potential from the modern educational systems currently dominant (Masykuri, Qodriyah, & Bz, 2020). This finding is important because it reveals that learning does not have to rely solely on cognitive or performative orientations (such as content mastery and performance metrics), but can also be directed toward self-transcendence, ego control, and the cultivation of deep inner awareness (Safaat, 2024). Amidst ethical crises, educational materialism, and spiritual desolation among adolescents, the Sufi approach provides a liberating path for the soul—one that is largely absent in formal education (Mawarti, 2020).

Theoretically, *tasawuf* views the human being as more than a physical and rational entity; it recognizes the spiritual dimension as the center of growth for values and meaning. The theory of *tazkiyat al-nafs*—central to *tasawuf*—holds that true human development is only possible when the soul is purified and guided toward *al-nafs al-muṭmaʿinnah* (a tranquil, spiritually stable self). This aligns with the perspective of Islamic educational thinkers like Ibn Miskawayh, who emphasized that genuine education is the refinement of the soul, not merely the accumulation of information. In this sense, *tasawuf* does not merely supply values but outlines a learning process rooted in transcendental awareness and self-mastery (Khudriah & Lubis, 2018).

From a modern educational perspective, this approach finds common ground with the *transformative learning* model developed by Jack Mezirow, which underscores the importance of critical reflection in reshaping learners' perspectives. While Mezirow emphasizes cognitive and reflective dimensions, *tasawuf* expands this scope to spiritual reflection through *muhasabah* (self-accountability), *tafakkur* (contemplation), and *muraqabah* (divine awareness)—enabling students to recognize their existential position before God. Thus, Sufi pedagogy does not merely transfer knowledge; it facilitates holistic self-transformation, uniting intellect, heart, and spirit in one meaningful educational experience (Mezirow, 1997; Rosmilawati, Fauzi, & Krismantoro, 2021).

This framework is especially vital for junior high school education, as students in this phase are in the midst of searching for meaning and identity (Saputra, 2025). If the educational process is solely directed toward academic achievement, without engaging spiritual and personal dimensions, it risks producing intellectually capable but emotionally and morally hollow individuals. With *tasawuf* as a pedagogical approach, teachers become *murabbī ruhānī*—spiritual mentors who do not merely instruct but guide the soul. In this way, learning becomes more than a technical process; it becomes a transformative experience that leaves a lasting impact on the student's inner life into adulthood (Yapono, 2015).

The above findings critique modern educational approaches that are overly cognitive or behavioristic and instead elevate education as a process of spiritual transformation and soul refinement. Human beings are created not only to *know* (*ta'allum*) but to *become* (*khalīfah*), and this becoming is impossible without *qalb* purification (Aziz, 2013). Hence, spiritual transformation is not a by-product but the fundamental goal of education. This perspective aligns education with the prophetic mission—to guide people from darkness to light (*min al-zulumāt ilā al-nūr*)—not merely through doctrine, but through the lived experience of awareness and inner change (Azizah, 2020). The SMP stage, as a critical phase of self-searching, thus becomes the ideal context for implementing the Sufi method.

These findings also point to the expansive scope of spiritual reflection—beyond cognitive inquiry. Students are not only required to think critically but to feel and witness the presence of God inwardly, through processes such as *muraqabah*, *muhasabah*, and total surrender (*tawakkuḥ*). This process renders learning existentially meaningful. Whereas *transformative learning* aims to shift perspectives, *tasawuf* seeks to transform *existence*—elevating the human being from the ordinary to the divine (*insān kāmil*). This is the true essence of education in Islam and the core of Sufi relevance. Thus, the Sufi pedagogy constructed in this study is not only compatible with modern education but is a direct reflection of the prophetic path of learning. Education is not merely instructional activity; it is a journey of the soul toward God—transforming every classroom into a *mihrab* for spiritual growth.

### **Modern Islamic Education Literature Has Yet to Fully Integrate Tasawuf as a Pedagogical Foundation**

The third finding of this study indicates that modern Islamic education literature, both in terms of formal curricula and academic discourse, has yet to fully integrate *tasawuf* as

a foundational pedagogical framework. Most textbooks, instructional modules, and educational policies within Islamic education still tend to emphasize normative moral values or dogmatic theology, while neglecting the methodological richness and spiritual depth offered by the Sufi tradition. Yet *tasawuf* not only teaches abstract moral values but also provides a structured methodology for spiritual education that can be formulated into formal educational frameworks. This gap reflects a disconnect between the classical Islamic intellectual legacy and contemporary Islamic educational practices (Al Qifari, 2021).

Furthermore, in much of the modern Islamic education literature, Sufi approaches are often treated merely as components of character development or moral instruction, rather than being explored as a standalone pedagogical paradigm. This is evident from the limited engagement with key concepts such as *riyādat al-naḥs* (spiritual discipline), *taẓkiyat al-naḥs* (purification of the soul), and *murāqabah* (spiritual awareness), which are in fact rich sources for educational strategies. Islamic education remains overly attached to formalistic and administrative structures, focusing on cognitive achievement and memorization, while the transformative inner dimension of the learner—which lies at the heart of *tasawuf*—is rarely addressed in a systematic way (Mumtazah, Rohmah, Ulya, & Ibrahim, 2025).

The absence of comprehensive integration of *tasawuf* in modern Islamic pedagogical literature has led to a lack of instructional models capable of engaging the deepest dimensions of student personality development. Yet current educational challenges are not limited to the academic realm; they also concern character formation, spiritual growth, and the cultivation of personal integrity amidst a moral crisis and consumerist culture (Febriyanti, Kholid, & Hartono, 2025). It is therefore essential to reconstruct Islamic educational literature by creating space for the Sufi approach—not as a spiritual ornament, but as a holistic epistemological and pedagogical foundation. This represents a major opportunity for educators, scholars, and curriculum developers to reconnect the profound spiritual legacy of Islam with the demands of 21st-century education, which calls for individuals who are not only intellectually competent but also spiritually aware, ethically clear, and morally wise (Busthomi, A'dlom, & Kusmayadi, 2020).

The finding that *tasawuf* has not been maximally integrated into pedagogical frameworks underscores a significant void in the design of spiritual education within contemporary Islamic schooling. This absence is not merely a technical or methodological issue—it reflects a broader marginalization of inner and transcendental dimensions in Islamic

education. As a result, teaching tends to become normative and verbalistic, conveying religious doctrines textually without reaching the depths of students' consciousness, emotion, or spiritual experience (Badruzaman, Hafidhuddin, & Mujahidin, 2018). This directly contributes to the lack of character transformation rooted in divine awareness, and the gradual erosion of the spiritual energy that once defined classical Islamic learning.

One reason for this underutilization is the continued dominance of jurisprudential and theological approaches in Islamic educational institutions, which emphasize formal compliance over inner awareness and spiritual awakening (Barizi, 2011). *Tasawuf* is often viewed as an “extracurricular” or even suspicious area, particularly within modernist Islamic thought that tends toward rationalistic and legal-formal paradigms (Susanto, 2019). In contrast, classical scholars such as Imam al-Ghazālī emphasized that true education is a process of *tazkiyat al-nafs*—achievable only through the Sufi path. In his monumental work *Iḥyā’ ‘Ulūm ad-Dīn*, al-Ghazālī offers not just moral theory, but also practical methods of spiritual pedagogy, including daily *mubāsabah* (self-reflection), spiritual mentorship (*murshid*), and ethical training.

Moreover, Islamic education systems in many post-colonial Muslim countries have adopted Western models that separate science and spirituality (Ikhwansyah, 2023). Within these frameworks, *tasawuf* has no firm place as a legitimate educational foundation because it is considered unscientific or incompatible with modern rationality. Consequently, Sufi pedagogical models—centered on soul formation and spiritual journeying—are excluded from mainstream curricula and textbooks. Yet this approach has the potential to enrich the learning process with greater depth, flexibility, and wholeness—particularly at the junior high school level, when students are actively searching for values and direction in life.

Understanding this makes it clear that integrating *tasawuf* into Islamic education literature is not just theoretical—it is an urgent necessity. *Tasawuf* can serve as the basis for developing more contextual, spiritually grounded learning theories that respond directly to the psychological and existential realities of students. This effort aligns with modern holistic education, which emphasizes the balance between head (thinking), heart (feeling), and hand (action), as advocated by scholars such as Parker J. Palmer (Ammā, Zainuri, & Oviyanti, 2024). Islam has long embodied this principle through *tasawuf*, though it has yet to be fully expressed in contemporary pedagogical discourse. This is both a challenge and a vital opportunity for renewing Islamic education in a more integrated and meaningful way.

At its core, *tasawuf* is founded upon a central objective: the purification of the soul (*tazkiyatun nafs*) and the guidance of the human being toward knowing the self in relation to God (Komarudin, 2019). This is not an auxiliary spiritual element—it is the essence of education itself. Thus, the absence of *tasawuf* from modern pedagogical literature reflects a neglect of the very heart of the prophetic mission of education. *Tasawuf* is profoundly relevant as an alternative epistemological framework because it not only teaches values but also presents a methodology of *riyāḍat al-nafs* (spiritual discipline), which remains largely absent from textbooks, teaching modules, and formal Islamic curricula.

Additionally, studies indicate that modern Islamic education tends to be overly formalistic, textual, and cognitively oriented—mirroring a purely jurisprudential approach without spiritual depth. An education system focused only on memorization and legal compliance, without engaging the *qalb* (spiritual heart), will inevitably produce individuals who are outwardly obedient but inwardly hollow. Education must cultivate *ḥuḍūr ma‘a Allāh* (conscious presence with God) in the lives of students (Syahril, Al Munawar, & Alwizar, 2022). Sufi education does not stop at moral instruction; it reaches into the realm of inner transformation, which can only be achieved through continuous spiritual formation. True change happens when one becomes aware of being watched and loved by Allah. This transformation cannot be realized through theory alone but requires sustained *muraqabah*, *muhāsabah*, *tafakkur*, and inner training—concepts that are nearly absent from current Islamic education curricula. *Tasawuf* can fill this void directly, making education a process of spiritual internalization (*ghars riḥāni*), not merely cognitive evaluation.

Ultimately, this finding calls for the unification of the head, heart, and hand, as emphasized in holistic education frameworks. This integration has long been the essence of *tasawuf*, which harmonizes reason (*‘aql*), heart (*qalb*), and soul (*riḥ*) in a unified movement toward God. Only by aligning intellectual understanding, emotional resonance, and spiritual connection can one attain maturity and divine character. The relevance of the Sufi approach is not merely as a complement to modern education, but as a total reorientation of its aims and objectives—toward forming individuals who are not just technically educated, but spiritually conscious, clear-hearted, and whole.

In conclusion, *tasawuf* as a pedagogical foundation offers a comprehensive solution to the gaps in modern Islamic educational literature. It provides not only spiritual values but

also a structured, authentic, and applicable model of soul-centered education—fully aligned with the innate purpose of Islamic pedagogy: to educate not only the intellect but the human soul.

## CONCLUSION

This study concludes that *tasawuf* holds a strategic role as a pedagogical foundation for education and learning at the junior high school (SMP) level. First, there is an essential alignment between Sufi values and the goals of character education in SMP, where spiritual principles such as *ikhlas* (sincerity), *sabr* (patience), and *muraqabah* (God-consciousness) contribute to the holistic and transformative development of student character. Second, *tasawuf* provides an alternative spirituality-based pedagogical framework, offering a model of learning that emphasizes not only cognitive and affective domains but also the spiritual dimension—thus positioning education as a process of soul purification and spiritual maturation. Third, current Islamic education literature has yet to fully integrate *tasawuf* as a pedagogical approach, highlighting the need for a reconstruction of both curriculum and scholarly resources so that Sufi spirituality can become an integral component of contemporary Islamic education.

Based on these findings and conclusions, several recommendations can be proposed: For educators and practitioners, it is recommended to adopt Sufi values and pedagogical methods in SMP learning practices as part of an effort to foster students' spiritual and moral wholeness. Teachers should also take on the role of *murabbi ruhānī* (spiritual mentors) who accompany students in their journey of inner purification. For curriculum developers and policymakers, it is advisable to incorporate Sufi principles into character education curricula—especially at the junior high school level—so that education does not focus solely on academic achievement but also promotes sustained spiritual development. For scholars and researchers, further studies are needed to explore applicable and context-sensitive models of Sufi pedagogy for formal education, along with the development of academic literature that systematically integrates Sufi values into modern Islamic educational theory and practice. For Islamic educational institutions, it is recommended to create space for teacher training and professional development in *tasawuf*-based spiritual education to ensure that the implementation of these values can be both effective and sustainable. Through these measures, junior high school education can become an effective platform for shaping

students into spiritually grounded, ethically strong, and holistically developed individuals who are better prepared to face life's complex challenges.

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