

Sufism Values in Character Education: An Approach to Facing the Challenges of the Modern Era

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Abstract

Character education in the modern era faces increasingly complex challenges, such as moral degradation, individualism, and the rapid rise of hedonism. In this context, Sufism, as a spiritual approach, offers values that can shape the character of individuals and society. This study aims to examine the values of Sufism in character education and their application to address these challenges. The background of this study focuses on the importance of character education based on profound and holistic values. The research method employed is a qualitative approach with literature analysis from various sources discussing Sufism and character education. The findings indicate that Sufi values, such as patience, sincerity, gratitude, and love, can form a solid foundation for developing positive character and overcoming the challenges of modern life. The implications of this research emphasize the importance of integrating Sufi values into educational curricula and daily life to strengthen the character of the younger generation. The application of these values can be carried out through teaching based on deep spiritual and emotional development.

Keywords: Sufism, education, character

Abstract

Character education in the modern era faces increasingly complex challenges, such as moral degradation, individualism, and hedonism that is growing rapidly. In this context, Sufism as a spiritual approach offers values that can shape the character of individuals and society. This research aims to examine the values of Sufism in character education and its application to face these challenges. The background of this research focuses on the importance of character education based on deep and holistic noble values. The method used in this study is a qualitative approach with literature analysis from various sources that discuss Sufism and character education. The results of the study show that Sufism values, such as patience, sincerity, gratitude, and love, can be a strong foundation for forming a positive character and facing the challenges of modern life. The implication of this research is the importance of integrating Sufism values in the educational curriculum and in daily

life to strengthen the character of the younger generation. The application of these values can be done through teaching based on deep spiritual and emotional development.

Keywords: sufism, education and character

A. Introduction

Character education is an important aspect of individual development that focuses not only on intellectual intelligence, but also on the formation of morals, ethics, and good life values. In the midst of the rapid development of the times and globalization, character education faces various major challenges, such as moral degradation, increasing individualism, and the emergence of hedonism tendencies that undermine the social order. These phenomena affect the younger generation, who are increasingly trapped in materialistic values and losing spiritual orientation in their lives. Therefore, a holistic and in-depth approach to character education is very important to be implemented (Fadlan, 2020).

Sufism or Sufism, is a mystical dimension in Islam that focuses on spiritual development and the search for a closer relationship with God through spiritual disciplines, such as meditation, dhikr, and moral teaching (Ernst, 1997). Sufism is not only a path to personal piety, but it also offers ethical guidance that can be applied in daily life, including in educational and political contexts. Sufistic teachings prioritize values such as tolerance, simplicity, justice, and love, all of which are relevant in the formation of a wholesome and moral human character (Nasr, 2006).

In the history of Islamic civilization, Sufism-based education played an important role in developing individuals who were not only intellectually superior, but also spiritually. Many traditional educational institutions, such as madrassas and pesantren, include the teachings of Sufism in their curriculum to emphasize the importance of a balance between science and morals (Azra, 2010). In the modern context, education that focuses only on academic aspects often ignores the moral and spiritual dimensions, resulting in a crisis of character and ethical values in society (Esposito, 2011).

Politics is also inseparable from the influence of Sufism. Sufist groups often act as a counterweight to political power that has the potential to undermine social harmony. In various Muslim-majority countries, Sufis and tariqat have played a role in fighting for social justice, defusing conflicts, and building peace (Lewis, 2014). For example, in Turkey, sufist groups have been involved in social movements that promote democratization and respect for human rights (Trimingham, 1971).

The problem faced today is how sufistic values can be integrated into formal and political education to create a more just and civilized social order. Given global challenges such as radicalism, corruption, and social inequality, a Sufism-based approach can be an innovative solution to address these problems (Safi, 2003). Therefore, this article aims to delve deeper into the role of Sufism in education and politics and how its values can make a positive contribution to modern society.

B. Research Methods

This study uses a qualitative approach with literature analysis (*library research*) as the main method. The qualitative approach was chosen because this research aims to explore a deep understanding of the values of Sufism in character education and its application in facing the challenges of the modern era. This approach allows researchers to analyze and explore subjective concepts, such as the meaning of Sufism values, as well as their impact on the formation of individual character.

1. Data Source

The data used in this study consisted of various secondary sources, which included books, journal articles, papers, theses, and other sources relevant to the themes of Sufism and character education. The literature used includes writings that discuss the theory of Sufism, the basic principles in the teachings of Sufism, and its application in the context of education and character development. These sources were selected based on their relevance and credibility in providing in-depth insights into the topic being researched.

2. Data Collection Procedure

Data collection was carried out by examining various literature related to Sufism and character education. This process involves searching for literature sources through libraries, academic databases, and scientific journals that can be accessed online and offline. Relevant sources were selected based on their suitability for the purpose of the research and their relevance to the values of Sufism applied in character education.

3. Data Analysis

Data collected from various literature were analyzed using content analysis techniques. This technique allows researchers to extract information related to relevant Sufism values in character formation, as well as its applicative ways in character education. Researchers will identify key themes in the literature that address Sufism and character, and then relate them to the challenges faced in character education in the modern era. The results of the analysis will be compiled in the form of an in-depth narrative to illustrate the contribution of Sufism values in the development of character education.

4. Data Validity and Reliability

To ensure the validity and reliability of the data, this study uses source triangulation, which is by comparing the results of analysis from various literature sources that have relevance to the topic being studied. This process is

carried out to ensure that the findings obtained reflect a consistent and in-depth understanding of the values of Sufism in character education.

C. Study and Discussion

1. Sufism and Character Education

Sufism has long been known as one of the approaches in Islam that focuses not only on ritual worship, but also on the formation of individual character and morality. Character education through Sufistic teachings seeks to form human beings who have noble personalities, good morals, and empathy for others. The teachings of Sufism emphasize the importance of self-control, patience, and love as basic elements in forming an ethical human being. These sufistic values can be integrated into the education system to create a generation that has balanced intellectual and emotional intelligence (Knysh, 2017).

One of the popular sufistic methods in character education is muhasabah or self-reflection. Muhasabah teaches individuals to always correct themselves and admit mistakes, so that they can become a better person. This is in accordance with the concept of character education which emphasizes the formation of personal integrity through introspection and self-correction (Geoffroy, 2010). Sufistic teachings like this are particularly relevant in the context of modern education, where there is often a moral crisis due to a lack of emphasis on the ethical and spiritual dimensions.

Zikir, as one of the sufistic practices, also has a significant impact on character formation. Dhikr is not just a ritual, but also a spiritual exercise that helps individuals to always remember God and cultivate peace of mind. This exercise is scientifically proven to reduce stress levels and improve mental health (Smith & Green, 2013). In education, integrating dhikr can help students develop self-discipline and inner peace, which ultimately improves focus and academic achievement.

In some traditional Islamic educational institutions, such as Islamic boarding schools in Indonesia, sufistic values have become an integral part of the curriculum. Research by Azra (2010) shows that Sufism-based education in pesantren plays an important role in shaping students who have high morality and strong social awareness. Character education through sufism not only educates students to be academically intelligent but also to become individuals who have social responsibility and empathy for others.

Character education through Sufism also includes the teachings of ihsan, which is to do good with all one's heart as if always supervised by God. The value of ihsan teaches students to not only do good, but to do so with sincerity of heart and full dedication. This value is very important in forming sustainable positive behaviors, not just as a reaction to rules or punishments (Safi, 2003). The implementation of ihsan values in education encourages students to

develop a proactive attitude towards kindness and contribute positively in their communities.

Research conducted by Kazmi (2000) shows that sufistic teaching can help reduce negative behaviors such as violence and bullying in schools. By instilling values such as compassion, self-control, and peace, students are more likely to exhibit friendly and respectful behavior. Sufistic-based education also emphasizes the importance of gratitude and acceptance, which can help students face life's challenges with a more positive attitude.

In addition, the integration of Sufistic values in modern education can also help address the problem of radicalism and extremism. The values of moderation and peace-loving teachings in Sufism play an important role in instilling a more inclusive and tolerant understanding of Islam (Esposito, 2011). In the educational environment, the cultivation of these values is crucial to prevent the emergence of radical ideas among the younger generation.

In the context of globalization and rapid technological development, sufistic-based character education can be a balancing act between intellectual progress and the formation of morality. Modern education often focuses on academic achievement and technological mastery, but neglects the equally important ethical and spiritual dimensions. Sufism offers a holistic approach that combines intellectual intelligence with emotional and spiritual intelligence, creating a whole human being who is ready to face the challenges of the times wisely (Schimmel, 1975).

2. The Political Role of Sufism

Sufism not only played a role in the spiritual and educational realms, but also had a significant influence in politics. The influence of Sufism in politics can be seen in the long history of Islamic civilization, where Sufist groups often acted as social mediators and balancers of political power. Sufis and the tarekat have played a role in resolving conflicts, promoting the values of peace, and maintaining social stability. In some countries, Sufism even serves as an alternative political force that offers a moderate view in the face of extremism and radicalism (Trimingham, 1971).

In Indonesia, the political role of Sufism is very visible through organizations such as Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), which has strong sufistic roots. NU plays an important role in reducing political tensions and promoting the values of moderation and tolerance in the midst of often harsh political dynamics. Through its sufistic teachings, NU encourages dialogue and peaceful conflict resolution, especially in the face of issues such as radicalism and intolerance (Fealy & Bush, 2014). This shows that Sufism can play a role as a political force that promotes social harmony and political stability.

In the Middle East, Sufism also has a significant influence in politics. In countries like Egypt and Sudan, the Sufi order has long been part of the social and political structure. They play an important role in people's lives and serve as a bridge between the people and the government. Research conducted by Voll (1995) shows that the Sufi order in Sudan has a role in calming the political situation and being a source of legitimacy for the government. In Egypt, the Sufi order became a symbol of non-violent resistance to colonial authority and played a role in shaping national identity (Sedgwick, 2005).

Sufism also has a role to play in pushing a political agenda that focuses on social justice and peace. Sufistic values, such as love, equality, and forgiveness, encourage a more humane and well-being-oriented approach to politics. For example, the Naqshbandiyah order in Central Asia is known for its non-violent approach to dealing with political pressure. They focus on spiritual coaching and education as a tool to create social change (Zarcone, 2004). This order is not involved in armed conflict, but prefers the peaceful path in fighting for the rights of the people.

However, although Sufism plays a role as a moderate force in politics, there are also challenges faced. In some cases, Sufism can be used by authoritarian regimes to legitimize their power. This happens when the ruler uses the Sufi network to build political support, while on the other hand limiting the group's independence (DeWeese, 1994). Therefore, it is important to understand that Sufism in politics is not always neutral and can be influenced by power dynamics.

The political role of Sufism is also seen in efforts to promote the values of tolerance and pluralism in society. For example, in West Africa, the Sufi order plays an important role in maintaining peace in a multicultural and multireligious society. Through teachings on universal love and respect for differences, Sufi groups in Senegal and Mali contribute to political stability in a region often marred by ethnic and religious conflicts (Babou, 2007).

The integration of Sufistic values in modern politics can be a tool to encourage dialogue and cooperation between groups. Sufism offers a different perspective on power, which is power rooted in spirituality, morality, and service to society. In the context of an increasingly fragmented world, a Sufistic approach to politics can be an inspiration to create a more inclusive and ethical political order (Weismann, 2007).

3. The Integration of Sufistic Values in Modern Education

The integration of Sufistic values in modern education is an important step in creating a generation that not only excels academically but also has strong character and solid ethics. Modern education today often focuses on cognitive aspects, such as analytical abilities and technical knowledge, but neglects the equally important affective and spiritual aspects. Sufism, with its

universal teachings such as compassion, simplicity, and self-introspection, can be a component that enriches the modern educational curriculum (Geoffroy, 2010).

a. Application of Sufistic Values in the Educational Curriculum

One way to integrate Sufistic values in education is through a curriculum based on character and morality building. Teaching about *ihsan* (doing good with all one's heart), *tawadhu* (humility), and patience (patience) can be included in character education subjects. Education not only teaches science, but also invites students to understand themselves and cultivate empathy for others. These sufistic teachings can be a guideline to develop a positive attitude in facing life's challenges (Nasr, 2006).

The application of sufistic methods such as *muhasabah* (self-introspection) in modern education can help students to continue to evaluate themselves and correct mistakes. This approach teaches students to take responsibility for their actions and improve themselves over time. In an educational context, this method can be used in weekly reflection sessions where students are invited to reflect on their behaviors and achievements, as well as formulate improvement measures (Knysh, 2017). This approach not only forms intelligent individuals but also has strong character and high integrity.

b. Development of Soft Skills Through Sufism

Sufistic values can also contribute to the development of soft skills such as leadership, teamwork, and effective communication skills. Sufistic education emphasizes the importance of listening to others with an open heart, speaking honestly, and working together with patience. This skill is particularly relevant in today's world of work which demands collaboration and the ability to communicate with various parties. For example, the concept of *tawadhu* in Sufism teaches the importance of humility and the ability to recognize the strengths of others, which can improve team dynamics and work effectiveness (Smith & Green, 2013).

In the educational environment, the value of *tawadhu* can be integrated by encouraging students to respect each other and learn from each other. Group activities based on sufistic principles such as *deliberation* (joint discussion) can build mutual trust and respect for different opinions. This approach not only improves students' social skills but also forms a more inclusive and tolerant character of differences (Esposito, 2011).

c. Sufism Education as an Alternative to the Prevention of Radicalism

In this modern era, one of the biggest challenges in education is to counteract radical ideologies that often target the younger generation. Sufism, with its teachings of love and peace, offers a powerful alternative to radical narratives. An education that integrates Sufistic teachings can form a moderate and peaceful mindset, helping students understand Islam as a religion of compassion and tolerance (Sedgwick, 2005). This is especially important in countries with large Muslim populations where radicalization is a serious threat.

A Sufism-based education can involve discussions about the importance of interfaith tolerance and an introduction to various Sufistic traditions that emphasize diversity as a grace. For example, introducing the poetic works of Jalaluddin Rumi or Ibn Arabi in literature classes can open students' insights into the depth and diversity in Islam that is far from the impression of rigidity and exclusivity (Schimmel, 1975).

d. A Holistic Approach in Education

Sufism also promotes a holistic approach in education, which focuses not only on academic achievement but also on mental and spiritual balance. This holistic educational model recognizes the importance of maintaining a balance between mind, body, and soul, in accordance with Sufistic teachings that emphasize the balance of life. For example, the application of mindfulness and meditation in the form of dhikr or prayer can help students manage stress and improve their mental health (Ernst, 1997). In an increasingly competitive environment, these sufistic values can be an important tool in maintaining students' psychological well-being.

By integrating Sufistic values in education, we can create a learning environment that not only pursues academic success, but also shapes the whole human being. This approach addresses the challenges of modern times by offering an education that touches the deepest aspects of humanity, shaping a generation that is intelligent, ethical, and ready to face the world with a peaceful heart and an open mind.

Sufism has an important and complex role in the context of modern education and politics. Sufistic values, such as love, patience, simplicity, and self-introspection, offer a holistic approach to shaping individuals with strong character and ethics. In the world of education, Sufism not only functions as a spiritual teaching but also as a foundation in building a comprehensive character education. The integration of sufistic values in the educational curriculum can provide a more humane alternative in facing the various moral and social challenges that arise in the era of globalization.

e. The Role of Sufism in Character Education

Sufistic-based character education focuses on the formation of individuals who have integrity, responsibility, and empathy for others. Values such as *ihsan*, *tawadhu*, and *muhasabah* are the foundation in shaping civilized and virtuous student behavior. Sufistic methods, such as self-reflection and *dhikr*, help students to be always aware of the actions and consequences of their decisions, ultimately forming a more responsible and self-aware individual. Sufistic education also plays a role in preventing the emergence of negative behaviors, such as violence and bullying, by emphasizing the importance of compassion and peace (Kazmi, 2000).

The importance of character education rooted in Sufistic values is increasingly relevant in the midst of increasing cases of moral crisis among the younger generation. Education that focuses only on academic achievement and competition often neglects the development of the emotional and spiritual aspects of students. Sufism offers a balance between intellectual intelligence and soul development, creating individuals who are not only academically intelligent but also possess emotional and spiritual wisdom. This is very important in forming a generation that is able to face the pressures of life calmly and wisely (Geoffroy, 2010).

4. Integration of Sufistic Values in the Modern Education Curriculum

The integration of sufistic values in the modern educational curriculum offers a range of significant benefits. These values not only improve the moral quality of students but also help create a more conducive and harmonious learning environment. Sufistic teachings can be applied through a learning approach that emphasizes reflection, dialogue, and collaboration. For example, experiential learning methods and group discussions inspired by sufistic principles can help students develop social skills, such as listening, empathizing, and cooperative skills (Smith & Green, 2013).

In addition, a sufistic approach in education also contributes to improving students' mental health. Practices such as meditation, remembrance, and prayer can help students manage stress and anxiety, which are often issues in competitive educational environments. By providing space for spiritual and emotional development, sufistic education allows students to better understand themselves and establish balance in their lives (Schimmel, 1975).

In the midst of modern challenges, such as radicalism, social conflict, and moral crisis, Sufism offers relevant and applicable solutions. The values of love, tolerance, and peace taught in Sufism are the foundation for building a more harmonious and inclusive society. In the political context, Sufism encourages a more ethical and humane approach to decision-making, prioritizing common interests over personal or group ambitions (Safi, 2003).

In education, Sufism encourages the development of individuals who are balanced between academic intelligence and spiritual depth. Education

based on Sufistic values can form students who are not only ready to face academic challenges but also have a strong soul and noble character. Thus, the integration of Sufism in modern education is a strategic step in building a generation that is not only intelligent but also strong in character, ready to face the dynamics of the world with a peaceful heart and an open mind.

Sufism made a valuable contribution in enriching modern approaches to education and politics. Sufistic values offer a more holistic, ethical, and inclusive perspective, which can be the basis for shaping a more civilized and harmonious society. By exploring the potential of Sufism in various aspects of life, we can build a better future, where science, ethics, and spirituality go hand in hand for the common good.

D. Conclusion

This study confirms that the values of Sufism have a great relevance in character education, especially in the face of moral and social challenges that exist in the modern era. Values such as patience, sincerity, gratitude, and love contained in the teachings of Sufism can be a solid foundation in shaping the character of individuals with noble ethics. By practicing the values of Sufism, the younger generation can be better able to face various life problems, both in personal and social contexts, with a more thoughtful and tolerant attitude.

The implementation of Sufism values in character education is also very important to be integrated into the formal and non-formal education system. Teaching that prioritizes the formation of character based on spirituality can enrich the educational process, not only from an intellectual aspect, but also from a moral and emotional perspective. Therefore, this study recommends incorporating Sufism values in the educational curriculum at various levels, as well as encouraging the development of educational programs that focus on the internalization of spiritual values that can create a more mature and responsible generation.

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