

Bridging Divine Transcendence and Human Dignity: Transforming the Values of Tarekat Education for Character Formation

Ali Ihwan

Sekolah Dasar Negeri Pendrikan Kidul, Kota Semarang, Indonesia

*Corresponding Author : aliihwan41@gmail.com

Abstract

Modern educational activities are not merely focused on developing students' intellectual competencies, but also their religiosity, character, and social and humanitarian values. This qualitative study aims to describe the importance of tarekat education in shaping religious and humanistic character. This qualitative study, conducted as a literature review, utilizes academic literature related to tarekat orders, Sufism, Islamic education, character education, and humanism, which is then analyzed descriptively and interpretively through reduction, categorization, interpretation, and conceptual synthesis. The findings indicate that tarekat order education has pedagogical relevance through *tazkiyat al-nafs*, *riyāḍat al-nafs*, *mujāhadah*, *tahdhīb al-akhlāq*, *dhikr*, spiritual habituation, and the exemplary conduct of the *mursyid*. The integration of these values can foster students' religious character through God-consciousness and their humanistic character through compassion, humility, social concern, and respect for human dignity.

Keywords: Tarekat Education, Religiosity, Humanism

Abstrak

Aktifitas pendidikan modern bukan sekedar dituntut pada pengembangan aspek kompetensi intelektual peserta didik, namun juga religiusitas, karakter dan sosial kemanusiaan. Penelitian kualitatif ini bertujuan untuk mendeskripsikan urgensi pendidikan tarekat dalam pembentukan karakter religious dan humanis. Penelitian kualitatif dalam bentuk studi pustaka menggunakan data literatur akademik terkait tarekat, tasawuf, pendidikan Islam, pendidikan karakter, dan humanisme, kemudian dianalisis secara deskriptif-interpretatif melalui reduksi, kategorisasi, interpretasi, dan sintesis konseptual. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa pendidikan tarekat memiliki relevansi pedagogis melalui *tazkiyat al-nafs*, *riyāḍat al-nafs*, *mujāhadah*, *tahdhīb al-akhlāq*, *zikir*, pembiasaan spiritual, dan keteladanan *mursyid*. Integrasi berbagai nilai tersebut dapat membentuk karakter peserta didik yang religius melalui kesadaran ketuhanan dan karakter humanis melalui kasih sayang, kerendahan hati, kepedulian sosial, serta penghormatan nilai kemanusiaan. Penelitian ini berkontribusi pada penegasan bahwa nilai-nilai pendidikan tarekat dapat menjadi basis paradigma transformatif dalam mengintegrasikan spiritualitas dan humanisasi

Kata Kunci: Pendidikan Tarekat, Religiusitas, Humanisme

INTRODUCTION

Moral decay is becoming increasingly rampant in this country, even among students. Certain negative behaviors have become commonplace, such as bullying, harassment, student brawls, murder, and many others. This indicates that the education system has not yet been able to shape ideal individuals who can be relied upon in society. Such phenomena are becoming increasingly widespread, and one of the root causes is a school system that deviates from and violates the fundamental human values of students. Many believe this is the cause of destructive behavior, school brawls, and other negative behaviors. (Mulkhan, 2016).

The phenomenon described above can be said to indicate that something is amiss in educational practices within educational institutions namely, a lack of attention to the psychological and social aspects of children in these settings for which a solution must be found (Magfurin, 2010). In this regard, efforts to foster humanistic behavior in students are always tested for their coherence with religious morality. "This religious morality constitutes its axiological dimension, which is linked to reward and punishment as consequences of humanity's function and responsibility as God's vicegerents" (Muhaimin, 2014). In this context, the educational values of Sufi orders can serve as an alternative in efforts to counteract incoming cultural influences and can also act as a check and balance against the proliferation of Western culture. It is hoped that Sufi orders can foster peace and tranquility in society, as these orders themselves are based on systems of meditation and devotional practices such as *wirid* and *dhikr* in performing acts of worship in accordance with the teachings established and exemplified by the Prophet, and carried out by the Companions and the Tabi'in, passed down through generations to the teachers or scholars whose lineage extends to the present day (Bruinessen, 2014).

This qualitative study aims to describe the urgency of tarekat order education as a framework for fostering religious and humanistic character. This study employs a qualitative approach using literature review and conceptual analysis of the literature on Islamic education, Sufi orders, Sufism, character education, and humanism.

Various previous studies have shown that the discourses on humanistic Islamic education and Sufi-based education have developed in relatively separate directions. A study by Abdullah and Nurhaeni frames humanistic education from an Islamic perspective as a process of humanizing individuals through the development of their fitrah, akhlak, and potential (Abdullah & Nurhaeni, 2020). Furthermore, in his study, Nasith emphasizes a social-humanist paradigm in Islamic Religious Education through the integration of Islamic, humanistic, and social values (Nasith, 2021). A similar perspective is developed in the study by Nurmaida et al. through the theory of humanistic learning in Islamic education (Nurmaida et al., 2022), as well as in the study by Mansyur (2023) through the implementation of humanistic learning theory in Islamic Religious Education (Mansyur, 2023).

Furthermore, the study by Abitolkha and Mas'ud examines the integration of Sufi values into the Islamic Education (PAI) curriculum through the concepts of *takhalli*, *tahalli*, and *tajalli* (Abitolkha & Mas'ud, 2021), while Abidi's study highlights the internalization of

Sufi order values such as patience, sincerity, trust in God, asceticism, and spiritual discipline as means of spiritual development (Abidi, 2021).

The various studies mentioned above have not yet conceptually framed Sufi order education as a paradigm for character development in students that integrates religious and humanistic dimensions. The novelty of this study lies in its effort to reconstruct Sufi education not merely as a spiritual practice but as a pedagogical approach that links spiritual transformation (*tazkiyat al-nafs*) with the development of moral character, empathy, social concern, and respect for human dignity.

In the context of contemporary education, which faces the challenges of moral decay, individualism, and a weakening of social concern, Sufi education is important to reexamine as a pedagogical resource that places inner transformation through *tazkiyat al-nafs* as the foundation for the formation of moral character and social behavior. Therefore, this study is necessary to conceptually construct the relevance of tarekat values in Tarekat order education as a transformative paradigm that connects divine consciousness with empathy, social concern, and respect for human dignity, thereby broadening the orientation of Islamic education from the mere transfer of knowledge toward the formation of individuals who are both religious and humanistic.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employs a qualitative approach using a literature review design focused on a conceptual analysis of the importance of Sufi order education in shaping the religious and humanistic character of students. The research data sources consist of primary and secondary sources. Primary sources include authoritative works on tarekat, tarekat orders, Islamic education, and moral character development, particularly literature containing the concepts of *tazkiyat al-nafs*, *tahdhīb al-akhlāq*, *riyāḍat al-nafs*, the exemplary role of the mursyid, and spiritual discipline. Secondary sources include scientific journal articles, academic books, and previous research relevant to character education, humanistic education, Islamic educational psychology, and the integration of spiritual values into the educational process. The literature was selected purposefully based on substantive relevance, academic authority, relevance to the research focus, and its contribution to constructing the relationship between Sufi order education, religious character, and humanistic character. Data were collected through documentation techniques by tracing, identifying, classifying, and recording relevant conceptual ideas from various literature sources.

Data analysis was conducted using descriptive-interpretive and conceptual methods through several stages: data reduction, theme categorization, interpretation, synthesis, and conceptual construction. During the reduction stage, information not directly related to the research focus was eliminated, while relevant data was classified into main themes, including the spiritual dimension, moral guidance, the formation of religious character, and the development of humanistic character. Subsequently, each concept was analyzed interpretatively to identify the relationship between Sufi order educational practices and the goals of character education. The analysis was then synthesized by bringing together

perspectives from Sufism, Sufi orders, Islamic education, and humanistic educational theory to arrive at a coherent conceptual framework. The validity of the argument was ensured through source triangulation that is, by comparing and confirming the concepts identified across various academic literature and authoritative sources.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Ontological Discourse on Tarekat Education

Etymologically, the definition of education provided by the scholar John Dewey, as cited by M. Arifin, states that education is a process of developing fundamental basic abilities both intellectual and emotional that shape human nature and the ordinary person. Meanwhile, terminologically, education is a cultural process aimed at enhancing human dignity and worth, which continues throughout one's lifetime and takes place within the family, school, and community. Therefore, education is a shared responsibility among families, the community, and the government. To achieve its goals, education must be managed within an integrated and harmonious system across the education sector and other development sectors; across regions; and across various levels and types of education (Arifin, 2015).

Etymologically, the word "*Tarekat*" derives from the Arabic word "*Toriqoh*," which means path, state, school, or line of thought (Amiruddin, 2017). Linguistically, tarekat also means method, approach, or system (Jaiz, n.d.: 14). Terminologically, tarekat refers to spiritual practices or exercises carried out in specific ways to draw closer to Allah—namely, by observing the Sharia, internalizing the essence of worship, not taking shortcuts in worship, avoiding all that is forbidden both outwardly and inwardly and upholding Allah's commands to the best of one's ability; of course, all of this is carried out under the guidance of a wise person or Sheikh (Muhammad Jamil, 2013). Nasution (n.d.: 89) states that "*tarekat*" derives from the word "*tariqah*" (path), which refers to the path a prospective Sufi must follow in order to come as close as possible to God. "*Tarekat*" subsequently came to denote an organization. Each tarekat has its own Sheikh, ritual ceremonies, and form of *dhikr*.

Furthermore, the Sufi order serves as a guide for performing acts of worship in accordance with the teachings exemplified by the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) and practiced by the Companions, the Tabi'in, and the Tabi'in of the Tabi'in, and subsequently passed down by the scholars to the present day through an unbroken chain of transmission. The education of the practical Sufi order and its methods (curriculum) must follow the guidelines taught by the teacher, not an individual's personal creativity (Khalifah & Rahman, 2013). A tarekat order is a path, a method, a school of thought, a tradition, and a place of refuge. It is built upon a close relationship between a teacher (*mursyid*) and his or her student. This relationship between the *mursyid* and the disciple can be considered a crucial pillar of the tarekat organization. It begins with a pledge of allegiance (*bai'at*) from an individual seeking to become a disciple of a specific sheikh as their *mursyid*. The technical details and procedures of the *bai'at* often vary from one tarekat to another. Once the *bai'at* is declared, the disciple is required to obey the

mursyid's various teachings and demands, believing that the mursyid is a representative of the Prophet. Furthermore, it is believed that the bai'at is also a covenant between the disciple, as a servant, and Al-Haqq, as his Lord. The *mursyid* has his own way of assessing or determining the competence or progress of his disciples. The same mursyid may employ different forms of evaluation for each of his disciples (Riyadi, 2014).

A tarekat order is a religion in its entirety, not merely a form or religious institution as it is currently perceived (Gaus, et al. 2016). Thus, by steadfastly and consistently following the right path, God promises that humans will receive the immeasurable gift of a happy life. That happy life is the true life, which in the sacred verse is likened to abundant water. In Sufi literature, this divine gift is called "the water of life" (*mâ'u al-hayâtî*). This is what the practitioners of the Sufi path symbolically seek, the true essence of which is none other than a "union" with God through His pleasure. This hope for Allah's pleasure is also reflected in a Sufi invocation that reads, "Ilahî Ant maqshûdî wa ridlâ-Ka mathlûb" (Madjid, 2015).

From the various opinions mentioned above, it can be understood that the term "tarekat" refers to a spiritual path for a Sufi, which includes acts of worship, dhikr, and other practices centered on invoking the name of Allah and His attributes, accompanied by deep contemplation. The practices within this tarekat are intended to achieve the closest possible (spiritual) connection with God. Tarekat education is the process of purifying the soul from reprehensible character traits and adorning oneself with noble virtues; or, it can be understood that the tarekat involves practicing the teachings of Islam in their entirety—both outwardly and inwardly in order to attain the pleasure of Allah SWT or wushul to Allah SWT (Khatimah, 2023). The teacher in an established Sufi order is referred to as a mursyid or sheikh, and his deputy is called a khalifah. The followers are called murids, while the place of practice is known as a *ribath*, *zawiyah*, or *taqiyah*; in Persian, it is called a *khanqah* (Aceh, 2016). From this, it can be understood that Sufi education is a conscious and planned effort to enable students to follow a spiritual path that includes acts of worship, dhikr, and other practices centered on invoking the name of Allah and His attributes, accompanied by deep spiritual contemplation.

The Integration of Religiosity and Humanization in the Construction of Educational Values in Tarekat Orders

Human beings, as creatures of God, are endowed with various potentials from birth, one of which is *fitrah* (innate disposition) (Shihab, 2017). According to M. Arifin, human *fitrah* encompasses the ability to choose between the right and wrong paths, and this ability is shaped through educational processes that influence human development. To gain a comprehensive understanding of character education, this section therefore examines the concepts of education and character separately before discussing their interrelationship (Arifin, 2015).

According to scholars of Sufism, tarekat aims to attain the pleasure of Allah through spiritual exercises (*riyâdah*) and the struggle against one's desires and lower self (*mujâhadah*), as well as through purification from blameworthy traits (Nurdi et al., 2015).

Fundamentally, the primary objective of tarekat is to enable individuals to know Allah (*ma'rifat Allāh*) and maintain constant spiritual proximity to Him. Nurcholish Madjid explains that undertaking tarekat means following the right path with steadfastness and consistency. Those who pursue such a path are promised divine grace and a profound form of happiness. This happiness represents true life, which is metaphorically described in the Qur'an as abundant flowing water. In Sufi literature, this divine grace is symbolically referred to as the "water of life." This is what those who pursue the tarekat seek; ultimately, it signifies the spiritual "encounter" with God and the attainment of His pleasure (Madjid, 2015).

The ultimate goal of Muslims is to attain divine grace and salvation, both in this world and in the Hereafter. This aspiration is shared by adherents of tarekat as well as Muslims in general. There is no fundamental distinction that makes tarekat practitioners more privileged than other Muslims. The difference lies primarily in their greater commitment to worship through specific practices prescribed by their respective tarekat traditions. These practices constitute a system of religious beliefs that shapes a set of knowledge, devotional practices, and behaviors at individual, social, and transcendental levels (Birzawie, 2017).

Education within tarekat is conducted by strengthening the faith and spiritual convictions of *sālik* or disciples. Although each tarekat may employ different Sufi practices, all of them ultimately share a common foundation rooted in Islamic teachings. According to Mu'thi (2014), tarekat as an organization of spiritual seekers (*sālik*) and Sufis, fundamentally shares the same objective: drawing closer to Allah. The term *ṭarīqah* itself derives from the Arabic word *ṭarīqah*, meaning "method" or "path," namely a method or path for attaining proximity to Allah. However, because tarekat organizations are predominantly followed by ordinary Muslims and *mubtadi'ūn* (beginners on the spiritual path), the original and primary objective is elaborated into several interconnected aims. Broadly speaking, *ṭarīqah* encompasses three principal objectives, each of which gives rise to particular forms and practices of Sufi devotion: *tazkiyat al-nafs* (purification of the self), *taqarrub ilā Allāh* (drawing closer to Allah), and *tabarruk* (seeking spiritual blessings). Through *ṭarīqah*, disciples acquire knowledge concerning the process of *al-wuṣūl ilā Allāh* (attaining proximity to Allah). This educational and spiritual process is oriented toward cultivating disciples who are obedient, pious, constantly mindful of Allah, and, importantly, respectful and attentive to their spiritual guide. Within Sufi traditions, the guide serves as a principal source of inspiration who assists the disciple in drawing closer to Allah. This relationship is known as *rābiṭah*, referring to the spiritual bond or connection between the disciple and the guide. Conceptually, this Sufi educational system is characterized by a distinctive pattern of teacher student interaction, particularly within the context of *ṭarīqah* (Suriadi, 2017).

Furthermore, participation in a tarekat requires guidance from a qualified spiritual teacher known as a *mursyid* and cannot be undertaken arbitrarily. The *mursyid* bears primary responsibility for the spiritual condition of the disciples under his guidance. He supervises them not only in their outward conduct but, more importantly, in their inner

and spiritual development. The *mursyid* is also regarded within this tradition as a *wasilah* (spiritual intermediary) through which the disciple is guided in worship and in approaching God. Therefore, a *mursyid* is expected to have attained a high level of spiritual and ethical maturity in both *sharī'ah* and *ḥaqīqah*, grounded in the Qur'an, Hadith, and *ijmā'* (scholarly consensus) (Sholikhin et al., 2018). Learning from a *mursyid* who is capable of guiding disciples in purifying the heart from spiritual diseases that may obstruct *ma'rifah* (gnosis) of Allah is regarded as essential within this tradition. Such guidance is intended to protect disciples from deviations in belief and from practices or conditions that may endanger their spiritual development. According to this Sufi understanding, the *mursyid* has himself traversed the spiritual path under the guidance of a preceding *mursyid*, with an established chain of spiritual transmission (*silsilah*) extending through the *tābi'ūn*, the Companions of the Prophet, and ultimately the Prophet Muhammad, who received revelation through the Angel Gabriel from Allah (Asrori, 2012).

The habituation and implementation of Sufi-oriented education are directed toward the formation of national character based on Pancasila and religious maturity. Sufi education refers to an educational context structured around moral standards and *tazkiyat al-nafs* (purification of the heart) (Solikhin, 2019), with these values subsequently manifested in social life. In this way, the objectives of national education in developing a society with strong spiritual and moral foundations can be pursued. According to Mulkhan (Abdul, 2013), the term "Sufi-oriented" (*sufistik*) refers to a mode of thought characterized by Sufi perspectives, whereas *Sufi* denotes a person or an orientation associated with Sufi practices and views. Sufi-oriented thought emphasizes that attaining closeness to God is achieved not merely through outward or physical acts of worship, but also through inward spiritual practices involving the heart and soul. In other words, the essence of Islamic education oriented toward Sufi education lies in cultivating noble character and moral virtues, rather than merely developing cognitive competence; greater emphasis is placed on affective development and spiritual awareness.

Within the educational process of tarekat, an individual's spiritual awareness is gradually opened to truth and becomes more receptive to divine wisdom. Therefore, spiritual education can be cultivated through *amaliyah* (spiritual practices) associated with *ṭarīqah*, according to the objectives being pursued. Various *ṭarīqah* practices can thus function as instruments for disciplining and educating the soul toward the attainment of genuine tranquility and well-being in both this world and the Hereafter (Sholikhin et al., 2018). At this stage, the disciple is described as entering a state of *mā siwā Allāh*, in which awareness of all that is other than God recedes before the consciousness of divine reality. When such spiritual practice is undertaken with sincere devotion and obedience to God, the disciple may attain a level of *ma'rifah* within the realm of *mushāhadah*, understood as a direct spiritual witnessing of divine reality. For a *sālik* (a seeker who journeys toward God), such a state represents the essence of true happiness. This orientation also demonstrates how spiritual education generates values that shape social interaction, particularly through the development of social attitudes among disciples, *mursyids*, and their assistants. Such

social behaviors include strong dedication and service, mutual assistance, familial solidarity, and loyalty (Sholikhin, Mukhtar, & Munir, 2018).

The various practices of *ṭarīqah* involve spiritual discipline (*riyāḍah*) aimed at struggling against the lower self and its desires, purifying oneself from blameworthy traits, and cultivating praiseworthy qualities through the refinement of moral conduct in various aspects of life. *Ṭarīqah* also seeks to cultivate continuous remembrance of Allah through the regular practice of *wird* and *dhikr*, accompanied by *tafakkur* (contemplative reflection), which is performed consistently (*istiḳāmah*).

Furthermore, tarekat seeks to cultivate *khawf* (awe and fear of Allah), thereby encouraging individuals to distance themselves from worldly influences that may cause them to become heedless of God. Ultimately, the educational objective of tarekat is the attainment of *‘ubūdiyyah ṣāḥiran wa bāṭinan*, namely, complete devotion to Allah both outwardly and inwardly. Outward devotion entails fulfilling God's commands and avoiding His prohibitions as prescribed by the *sharī‘ah*. Inward devotion, meanwhile, requires that obedience to God's commands and avoidance of His prohibitions be accompanied by sincerity, constant remembrance, and profound awareness of God's presence. The individual develops the consciousness that all actions are fully known and witnessed by Allah. Ultimately, this process is intended to cultivate a person who is devoted to worship (*‘ābid*), characterized by steadfast and sincere dedication to the service of Allah (Sholikhin et al., 2018).

CONCLUSION

The central argument of this study concludes that tarekat education has conceptual relevance as a transformative paradigm for developing learners' character as both religious and humanistic. Tarekat education is not merely oriented toward the transmission of religious knowledge or the reproduction of ritual practices; rather, it operates through an internal process of transformation that connects the cultivation of the inner dimension with its behavioral manifestation. Practices such as *tazkiyat al-nafs*, *riyāḍat al-nafs*, *mujāhadah*, *tahdhīb al-akhlāq*, *dhikr*, *wird*, spiritual habituation, and the exemplary conduct of the *mursyid* constitute pedagogical mechanisms that foster God-consciousness, sincerity, discipline, self-control, and moral consistency among learners. The orientations of *taqarrub ilā Allāh*, *ma‘rifat Allāh*, and *‘ubūdiyyah ṣāḥiran wa bāṭinan* demonstrate that spirituality within *ṭarīqa* education extends beyond ritual practice, functioning instead as a foundation for value internalization and personality formation. At the same time, such spiritual transformation carries ethical implications for social relations. The purification of blameworthy traits and internalization of virtuous qualities have the potential to cultivate empathy, compassion, humility, solidarity, mutual assistance, kinship, loyalty, and respect for others.

The primary contribution of this study lies in its conceptual reconstruction of *ṭarīqa* education as a character-education model that brings together spiritual transcendence and social humanization. This perspective broadens the understanding of tarekat education from an exclusively spiritual formation institution into a source of pedagogical values that

can be contextualized within contemporary character education. Nevertheless, this study has several limitations that should be considered when interpreting its findings. As a qualitative literature-based study, its arguments rely primarily on conceptual analysis of the literature and educational values of tarekat traditions; therefore, it does not yet provide empirical evidence regarding their effectiveness in shaping learners' character within formal educational settings. The study also does not examine in sufficient depth the variations in doctrines, educational methods, and pedagogical traditions across different tarekat orders, although such diversity may generate distinct patterns of character formation. Future research should therefore empirically examine this conceptual framework through field studies in educational institutions that integrate Sufi-oriented values, particularly through case studies.

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