

Integration of Sufistic Epistemology in the Development of Islamic Religious Education Curriculum to Foster Students' Spiritual and Social Piety

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ABSTRACT: *This study examines the integration of Sufistic epistemology into the development of Islamic Religious Education (IRE) curricula as a conceptual framework for fostering students' spiritual and social piety. Contemporary Islamic education continues to exhibit a persistent gap between cognitive religious attainment and its behavioral manifestation, indicating the need for an epistemological reorientation that unites reason ('aql) and heart (qalb) as complementary faculties of knowing. Employing a qualitative approach through a library research design, this study systematically traces, examines, and synthesizes classical Sufi thought and contemporary scholarly literature to construct a coherent conceptual model bridging Sufi epistemology and curriculum theory. Data were analyzed using content analysis, strengthened through source triangulation to ensure argumentative consistency. The findings reveal that Sufistic epistemology conceives knowledge not merely as discursive reasoning but as spiritual illumination attained through self-purification, offering a structural foundation for curriculum objectives, content, pedagogical methods, and evaluation. Sufi values such as zuhud, ikhlas, and muhāsabah demonstrate operational relevance in cultivating both vertical piety toward God and horizontal social responsibility among learners. This study concludes that Sufistic epistemology provides a holistic pathway for restoring Islamic education's original purpose, integrating intellect, spirituality, and social ethics within a unified curricular framework.*

Keywords: *Sufistic epistemology; Islamic Religious Education curriculum; spiritual and social piety*

I. INTRODUCTION

The rapid transformation of Islamic Religious Education (IRE) in the twenty-first century has been marked by an increasing tension between the demands of cognitive-oriented curricula and the urgency of cultivating spiritual and social maturity among learners. Contemporary scholarship indicates that formal religious instruction, despite its structural completeness, frequently fails to translate religious knowledge into lived piety, leaving a persistent gap between *what is taught* and *what is embodied* (Farhan, 2025). This phenomenon has prompted renewed scholarly attention toward Sufism (tasawuf) not merely as a devotional practice but as an epistemological framework capable of reorienting the foundations of Islamic pedagogy (Kizi, 2025; Renaldi, 2025).

Sufistic epistemology offers a distinctive way of knowing that differs fundamentally from purely rationalistic or positivistic paradigms dominant in modern educational systems. Within the Sufi tradition, knowledge (*'ilm*) is not confined to discursive reasoning alone but is understood as a light (*nūr*) that illuminates a purified heart, attainable only through processes of spiritual discipline and self-purification (*tazkiyat al-nafs*) (Ahmad, 2023, as cited in the epistemological synthesis of Sufi education literature). Al-Ghazālī's classical formulation in *Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn* situates true knowledge as that which draws the seeker closer to God, thereby uniting *'aql* (reason) and *qalb* (heart) as complementary rather than competing faculties of cognition (Fadhil & Sebgag, 2021). This integrative vision positions Sufistic epistemology as a potential corrective to the fragmentation between intellectual attainment and moral-spiritual formation that characterizes much of contemporary Islamic education.

The urgency of this discourse is further reinforced by the persistent character crisis observed among learners in the modern era, wherein intellectual competence in religious subjects does not necessarily correspond to consistent ethical conduct or social responsibility (Suryadi et al., 2024, as cited in curriculum-character literature). Several scholars have argued that Islamic education, when detached from its spiritual roots, risks producing individuals who possess religious literacy without religious internalization (Ariyanto et al., 2025). In response, contemporary literature increasingly calls for the revitalization of Sufi-based pedagogical values—such as *zuhud* (asceticism), *tawakkal* (reliance on God),

ikhlas (sincerity), and *muhāsabah* (self-reflection)—as instruments for cultivating both vertical piety (*hablum minallah*) and horizontal social solidarity (*hablum minannas*) (Mustofa, 2018, as cited in tasawuf education literature).

Empirical and conceptual studies have begun to substantiate the pedagogical relevance of Sufistic values within formal education. Farhan (2025) demonstrates that the implementation of Sufi-based spiritual values in junior high school education contributes to the moral and spiritual maturity of students, suggesting that curriculum developers should more deliberately incorporate Sufi principles into formal instructional design. Similarly, research on Sufi orders (*ṭarīqa*) as educational institutions reveals a structured epistemological model integrating revelation, spiritual experience, and the mentorship authority of the *murshid* (spiritual guide), offering a coherent pedagogical framework relevant to contemporary character formation (Wahid et al., 2026, as cited in *ṭarīqa* epistemology literature). These findings collectively suggest that Sufistic epistemology is not a marginal or purely historical discourse but a living pedagogical resource with direct applicability to curriculum development.

Nevertheless, the integration of Sufistic epistemology into the structural development of Islamic Religious Education curricula remains conceptually underdeveloped. Existing studies tend to examine Sufi values either in isolated devotional contexts, such as pesantren-based *ṭarīqa* practice, or in the biographical thought of individual scholars such as Hamka, without systematically translating these values into curricular design principles applicable across broader educational settings (Maulida et al., 2026). Furthermore, while numerous studies affirm the positive correlation between Islamic religious instruction and students' spiritual quotient (Kinanthi et al., 2026) or social character (Rangkuti et al., 2024, as cited in secondary-school character literature), few have explicitly framed this relationship through the lens of Sufistic epistemology as a governing paradigm for curriculum construction. This indicates a conceptual gap between the philosophical richness of Sufi epistemology and its operationalization within formal curricular structures aimed at holistic student formation.

Given this gap, the present study seeks to examine how Sufistic epistemology can be systematically integrated into the development of Islamic Religious Education curricula as a means of fostering both spiritual and social

piety among learners. Employing a qualitative approach through a library research design, this study synthesizes classical Sufi thought and contemporary educational scholarship to construct a conceptual framework bridging Sufi epistemology with curriculum theory. This approach is deemed appropriate given the predominantly conceptual and philosophical nature of the inquiry, which requires critical engagement with textual and scholarly sources rather than field-based data collection (Setiawati et al., 2026, as cited in literature-review methodology discussions).

This study is expected to contribute both theoretically and practically. Theoretically, it enriches the discourse on Islamic educational epistemology by offering a systematic account of how Sufi ways of knowing can inform curricular philosophy. Practically, it provides curriculum developers, educators, and policymakers with a conceptual foundation for designing Islamic Religious Education programs that transcend cognitive transmission and cultivate learners' spiritual depth alongside their social responsibility—an integration increasingly regarded as essential amid the moral and spiritual challenges of contemporary society (Azmi et al., 2025).

II. METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach using a library research design, a method that emphasizes the systematic tracing, examination, and in-depth analysis of relevant written sources related to the research topic, including books, scholarly journal articles, and classical works discussing Sufistic epistemology and the development of Islamic Religious Education curricula. The data in this study are secondary in nature, obtained through a literature search from credible academic databases, and subsequently selected based on relevance, recency, and depth of discussion pertaining to the focus of the study.

The data analysis technique employed is content analysis, carried out through stages of identifying key concepts, interpreting ideas related to Sufistic epistemology across various sources, and synthesizing them to construct a coherent conceptual framework regarding their integration into the development of Islamic Religious Education curricula. The validity of the data is strengthened through source triangulation, namely by comparing and cross-verifying findings

from multiple pieces of literature to ensure argumentative consistency and to avoid bias arising from singular interpretation during the analytical process.

III. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The Epistemological Foundation of Sufism in Islamic Religious Education

The literature reviewed reveals that Sufistic epistemology offers a distinctive paradigm of knowledge that transcends the purely rationalistic orientation dominant in modern educational systems. Within this tradition, knowledge (*'ilm*) is not merely the product of discursive reasoning but is regarded as a light (*nūr*) bestowed upon a purified heart, attainable through processes of spiritual discipline and self-purification (Fadhil & Sebgag, 2021). This finding is reinforced by Renaldi (2025), who emphasizes that Al-Ghazālī's intuitive epistemology positions direct spiritual insight (*ma'rifah*) as a legitimate and even superior mode of knowing compared to purely empirical or logical inquiry. Such a framework fundamentally challenges the dichotomy between "religious" and "secular" knowledge that often characterizes conventional curriculum structures, suggesting instead an integrative model in which reason (*'aql*) and heart (*qalb*) function as complementary faculties rather than competing epistemic authorities.

This integrative character is further substantiated by Kizi (2025), whose analysis of Ibn Arabi's epistemological thought demonstrates that Sufi philosophy conceives knowledge as a continuum moving from sensory perception toward spiritual unveiling (*kashf*). The implication for Islamic Religious Education is significant: curricula grounded in Sufistic epistemology are not designed merely to transmit religious information but to cultivate a progressive inner transformation in the learner. This finding aligns with the pesantren-based educational model, wherein the transmission of knowledge is inseparable from the ethical relationship between teacher and student, and where "to know is to become, not merely to understand" (Kholis, 2017).

The Pedagogical Relevance of Sufi Values in Curriculum Development

The second major finding pertains to the practical translatability of Sufi values into curricular design. Farhan (2025) provides empirical support for this claim,

demonstrating that the implementation of Sufi-based spiritual values, such as *zuhud* (asceticism), *ikhlas* (sincerity), and *muhāsabah* (self-reflection), in junior high school education contributes measurably to students' spiritual and moral maturity. This finding suggests that Sufi values are not confined to esoteric or purely devotional contexts but possess operational relevance for formal curriculum design across educational levels.

Complementing this, Rifai et al. (2023) illustrate that an integrated curriculum combining scientific and spiritual dimensions can elevate spiritual intelligence within madrasah settings, indicating that Sufistic principles need not be positioned in opposition to modern pedagogical frameworks but can instead function synergistically within them. Similarly, findings from Karmani and Gozali (2025) regarding the implementation of Islamic education within Indonesia's Independent Curriculum (*Kurikulum Merdeka*) suggest that the current policy environment, which emphasizes character formation and student-centered learning, provides a structurally favorable context for embedding Sufi-based epistemological values, particularly given the curriculum's flexibility in accommodating locally and philosophically grounded content.

Bridging Spiritual and Social Piety through Curricular Integration

A third significant finding concerns the dual orientation of Sufistic values toward both vertical piety (*hablum minallah*) and horizontal social responsibility (*hablum minannas*). Kinanthi et al. (2026) demonstrate that Islamic Religious Education grounded in spiritual habituation contributes not only to students' self-awareness and religious intelligence but also to their capacity for social concern and ethical conduct in daily interactions. This dual impact is critical in addressing the assertion made by Karmani and Gozali (2025) that a persistent gap remains between religious cognitive attainment and its behavioral manifestation among learners.

Furthermore, the study by Lalahwa et al. (2024) on classical Islamic educational theory reinforces the notion that authentic religious knowledge, as conceived by early Muslim philosophers, was never intended to be socially neutral; rather, it was inherently oriented toward the cultivation of virtuous character with direct social consequences. This historical continuity strengthens the argument that integrating

Sufistic epistemology into contemporary PAI curricula is not an anachronistic retrieval of mysticism but a coherent restoration of Islamic education's original holistic purpose—one that unites intellectual formation, spiritual depth, and social ethics within a single pedagogical framework.

Synthesis: Toward a Conceptual Model of Sufistic Curriculum Integration

Taken together, these findings converge to support the central proposition of this study: that Sufistic epistemology, when systematically integrated into curriculum development, offers a coherent theoretical and practical pathway for cultivating both spiritual and social piety among learners. Rather than positioning Sufism as a supplementary or extracurricular dimension of Islamic education, the reviewed literature suggests that it should function as an epistemological foundation informing curriculum objectives, content selection, pedagogical methods, and evaluation criteria alike. This conceptual repositioning addresses the gap identified in previous scholarship, wherein Sufi values have often been examined in isolated devotional or biographical contexts (Maulida et al., 2026) rather than as a structural principle guiding curricular design.

The synthesis of these findings further indicates that the success of such integration depends on three interrelated dimensions: first, a reconceptualization of knowledge itself as encompassing both discursive and intuitive-spiritual modes of understanding; second, the deliberate incorporation of Sufi ethical practices, such as *muhāsabah*, sincerity, and detachment from material excess, into instructional methods rather than treating them as supplementary moral lessons; and third, an evaluative framework capable of assessing not only cognitive mastery of religious material but also observable growth in learners' spiritual sensitivity and social responsibility. This tripartite framework, though conceptual in nature, offers a foundation upon which future curriculum developers and educators may design more holistic models of Islamic Religious Education responsive to the moral and spiritual challenges of contemporary society.

IV. CONCLUSION

This study concludes that Sufistic epistemology offers a coherent and theologically grounded framework for reconstructing the epistemological

foundation of Islamic Religious Education curricula. Rather than confining knowledge to discursive reasoning alone, the Sufi tradition situates 'ilm as a light bestowed upon a purified heart, thereby uniting 'aql and qalb as complementary rather than competing faculties of understanding. This integrative epistemology addresses the persistent gap between religious cognitive attainment and its behavioral manifestation, positioning Sufi values such as *zuhud*, *ikhlas*, and *muhāsabah* not as peripheral moral supplements but as structural principles capable of informing curriculum objectives, content, pedagogical methods, and evaluation.

Furthermore, the integration of Sufistic epistemology demonstrates clear relevance for cultivating both spiritual piety (*hablum minallah*) and social responsibility (*hablum minannas*) among learners, reflecting the original holistic purpose of Islamic education as conceived by classical Muslim scholars. Given the conceptual nature of this study, future research is recommended to empirically examine the implementation of Sufistic-based curriculum models across diverse educational settings, in order to substantiate their practical efficacy in fostering learners who are intellectually competent, spiritually mature, and socially responsible.

V. REFERENCES

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