

## SPIRITUAL PEDAGOGY OF THE SUFISM MODEL IN PESANTREN: EFFECTIVELY SHAPING INCLUSIVE AND MODERATE CHARACTER AMONG STUDENTS

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### Abstract

This study analyzes the concept, implementation, and spiritual impact of Sufism pedagogy in shaping inclusive and moderate character among students at the Bahrudin Islamic Boarding School. Employing a qualitative approach with a case study design, data were collected through observation, interviews, and document analysis to address three research questions concerning the conceptual framework, implementation model, and educational outcomes. The findings reveal, first, that the concept is realized through the integration of Sufi moral principles with spiritual practices such as dhikr and muhasabah, transmitted through direct guidance (talaqqi) and the exemplary role modeling (uswah) of the kyai. Second, the model is implemented through a hidden curriculum that instills values of mahabbah (love), tasamuh (tolerance), and tawazun (balance) in daily life, reinforced through dialogue and cross-group social activities. Third, this implementation significantly contributes to the development of more inclusive religious attitudes among students, characterized by appreciation of diversity and commitment to the middle path (wasatiyyah), as reflected in their rejection of extremism. The study concludes that Sufism education based on spiritual pedagogy constitutes an effective holistic model for instilling inclusive and moderate character, offering a relevant framework for strengthening religious moderation in Islamic educational environments.

**Keywords:** *Spiritual Pedagogy; Sufism; Pesantren; Inclusive.*

### Abstrak

*Penelitian ini menganalisis konsep, implementasi, dan dampak spiritual dari pedagogi sufistik dalam membentuk karakter inklusif dan moderat di kalangan santri Pondok Pesantren Bahrudin. Dengan menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dan desain studi kasus, data dikumpulkan melalui observasi, wawancara, dan analisis dokumen untuk*



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*menjawab tiga pertanyaan penelitian terkait kerangka konseptual, model implementasi, dan hasil pendidikan. Temuan penelitian menunjukkan, pertama, bahwa konsep tersebut diwujudkan melalui integrasi prinsip moral sufistik dengan praktik spiritual seperti dzikir dan muhasabah, yang ditransmisikan melalui bimbingan langsung (talaqqi) serta keteladanan (uswah) dari kyai. Kedua, model implementasi dilakukan melalui kurikulum tersembunyi yang menanamkan nilai mahabbah (cinta), tasamuh (toleransi), dan tawazun (keseimbangan) dalam kehidupan sehari-hari, diperkuat melalui dialog dan aktivitas sosial lintas kelompok. Ketiga, implementasi ini secara signifikan berkontribusi pada pengembangan sikap keberagaman yang lebih inklusif di kalangan santri, ditandai dengan penghargaan terhadap keberagaman dan komitmen pada jalan tengah (wasatiyyah), yang tercermin dalam penolakan terhadap ekstremisme. Penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa pendidikan sufistik berbasis pedagogi spiritual merupakan model holistik yang efektif dalam menanamkan karakter inklusif dan moderat, sekaligus menawarkan kerangka relevan untuk memperkuat moderasi beragama di lingkungan pendidikan Islam.*

**Keywords:** *Pedagogi Spiritual; Sufisme; Pesantren; Inklusif.*

## INTRODUCTION

In the Indonesian educational landscape, Islamic boarding schools (pesantren) have been widely recognized not only as enduring traditional institutions but also as dynamic and central actors in shaping the nation's religious (Fuady et al., 2024; Hasanah et al., 2023). Existing studies consistently show that pesantren play a strategic role in responding to contemporary socio-religious challenges, particularly in maintaining plurality while addressing the rise of exclusive and radical religious ideologies (Bustamante-Donas, 2025; Khamis, 2024). As "social laboratories," pesantren are understood as key sites for cultivating character education and promoting religious moderation in Indonesia (M. Afifuddin & Suhono, 2025; Suratin et al., 2023).

At the policy and conceptual level, religious moderation (wasatiyyah) has also been firmly established as a national priority to sustain social harmony and resilience (Maulidin et al., 2025; Yusuf et al., 2025). The literature has clarified that moderation refers to a balanced religious orientation (tawazun), integrating spiritual devotion with socio-humanitarian responsibility, and emphasizing tolerance (tasamuh) and justice (Intan Nur Aini et al., 2024; Mahmud et al., 2024; Syahputra et al., 2024). Within this broader framework, Sufism—especially the Akhlaki-‘Amali tradition dominant in the archipelago—has been identified as a rich ethical-spiritual resource for nurturing inclusive and moderate dispositions

through concepts such as tazkiyat al-nafs and akhlaq al-karimah, as well as values like mahabbah, rahmah, tawadu', and sabr (Siswayanti, 2025).

However, while these studies have established the normative importance of pesantren, religious moderation, and Sufism, the existing literature remains limited in explaining how these elements operate at the pedagogical and experiential levels. Most prior research has been predominantly normative-philosophical, focusing on textual interpretations of Sufism (Fatmawati et al., 2025; Mashuri et al., 2024), or sociological-institutional, examining the general roles of pesantren in society. As a result, the concrete processes through which Sufism-based spiritual pedagogy is translated into daily educational practices, internalized by students, and reflected in measurable attitudes of inclusivity and moderation remain insufficiently explored.

This gap is particularly evident in the lack of empirical, process-oriented studies that address key questions: how pedagogical methods such as talaqqi and muhasabah function in practice; how abstract values are transmitted through hidden curricula; how students subjectively experience and internalize these values; and how such processes shape their religious attitudes. Recent bibliometric analysis confirms that despite explosive growth in publications on "Islamic character education"—increasing nearly tenfold from 2015 to its peak in 2024—research focus remains centered on implementation in formal institutions and concepts of moral development, with little attention to transformative pedagogical mechanisms operating at the level of students' subjective experience (Lee & Jung, 2025; Soomro et al., 2025; Xiaoyu et al., 2024). These unresolved issues indicate the need for in-depth, context-sensitive inquiry capable of capturing lived experiences and meaning-making processes within pesantren settings.

This study responds directly to these gaps by shifting the analytical focus from normative discourse to pedagogical practice and experiential processes (Beck et al., 2024). Using a phenomenological approach, it examines not only what is taught but how Sufism is embodied, practiced, and experienced in everyday life. Research by Taufikin, Syarif, and Masuwd (2025) on Sufi-transformative learning demonstrates that significant transformation in pedagogical practices includes an increased emphasis on spiritual reflection and the repositioning of teachers as moral exemplars, opening new pathways for developing value-based Islamic pedagogy (Taufikin et al., 2025). However, that study remains focused on philosophical frameworks without deeply exploring students' subjective experiences in the value internalization process.

This study is positioned at the intersection of three literature clusters: Sufism in pesantren, religious moderation, and contemporary Islamic pedagogy. Existing research reveals significant gaps: the dominance of normative-philosophical

approaches has resulted in scarce empirical studies on Sufism's pedagogical processes at the level of subjective experience. Furthermore, few studies link Sufistic practices with socio-psychological outcomes like inclusivity, and methodological approaches capturing deep value internalization remain limited. By employing a phenomenological approach through a case study at Bahrudin Islamic Boarding School, this research bridges the gap between normative Sufi discourse, moderation policies, and pedagogical practices, offering empirical contributions on how Sufistic traditions operationalize spirituality, education, and social inclusivity.

This study's primary contribution is an integrative Sufistic pedagogy model linking classical concepts to contemporary inclusivity and religious moderation. The model rests on three pillars: *tazkiyat al-nafs* (soul purification) fostering self-awareness and emotional control (Mahdany & Toriqularif, 2025); *tarbiyat al-akhlaq* (moral education) instilling tolerance through mentorship (Ismail et al., 2024); and *riyadah ruhaniyyah* (spiritual training) deepening internalization via practices like *wirid* (Fatimah Amirah et al., 2025). Pedagogical mechanisms—*talaqqi* (direct learning), *muhasabah* (self-evaluation), and hidden curriculum—transmit these values experientially (Hasibuan et al., 2025; Jumhur et al., 2024). Contextual adaptation operationalizes these traditions through curricular, methodological, and sociocultural approaches to address contemporary challenges (Taufikin et al., 2025).

This study has several limitations. First, its single-case design at Bahrudin pesantren limits generalizability to Indonesia's diverse Islamic boarding schools, necessitating comparative studies (Taufikin et al., 2025). Second, its temporal scope cannot capture long-term value internalization, requiring longitudinal research (Jumhur et al., 2024). Third, phenomenological access to students' interior experiences is constrained by variable reflective capacities. Fourth, literature linking Sufistic approaches to measurable outcomes like inclusivity remains underdeveloped (Aji Muhammad Iqbal et al., 2025; Hasibuan et al., 2025). Fifth, the study insufficiently addresses potential contradiction or resistance in value internalization. Finally, its context within state-sponsored religious moderation discourse may not account for shifting socio-political dynamics that could erode moderate attitudes (Usman et al., 2024).

## RESEARCH METHODS

This study employs a qualitative approach with a case study design to investigate in depth the phenomenon of Sufism-based character education at the Bahrudin Islamic Boarding School. A case study is appropriate because it enables a holistic and contextualized exploration of how *kiai*, *ustadz*, and *santri* interpret,

experience, and practice Sufi spiritual pedagogy within the bounded system of a specific pesantren (Miles et al., 2023). This approach facilitates the collection of rich, detailed data through observation, in-depth interviews, and document analysis, allowing the researcher to uncover not only what is taught but how Sufi values are embodied and transmitted in daily interactions, routines, and institutional culture.. By focusing on a single case, this research provides a nuanced, context-sensitive account of how Sufistic traditions are operationalized in negotiating the relationship between spirituality, education, and social inclusivity.

The research was conducted at the Bahruddin Islamic Boarding School from November 2025 to January 2026. The site was selected purposively based on three criteria: (a) having a structured Sufism education program, (b) integrating Sufi traditions with social openness, and (c) demonstrating commitment to religious moderation. Participants were determined through purposive and snowball sampling to ensure inclusion of individuals with key knowledge and experience (Gunawan et al., 2023; Webb et al., 2025). Fifteen main informants were involved: the kiai as spiritual authority and conceptual architect; four ustadz as implementers of spiritual pedagogy; and ten senior santri (minimum two years in the Sufism program) who directly experienced value internalization and transformation.

Data collection applied triangulation to ensure comprehensiveness and validity (Hatch, 2023). First, participant observation was conducted over three months, focusing on dormitory life, classrooms, dhikr assemblies, communal activities, and informal interactions. Detailed field notes documented behaviors, conversations, and contexts shaping the educational process (Seim, 2024). Second, in-depth semi-structured interviews used open-ended guides. Interviews with kiai and ustadz explored philosophical foundations and pedagogical strategies, while student interviews focused on personal experiences, emotional responses, and perceived changes. All interviews were recorded with consent and transcribed verbatim (Hatch, 2023). Third, documentation analysis examined primary Sufism texts such as Al-Ghazali's *Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn* and Ibn 'Aṭā'illah's *Al-Ḥikam*, teaching modules, institutional archives, and students' reflective notes.

The study adopted a case study design and analyzed data using the interactive thematic model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (Kehinde et al., 2024; Miles et al., 2023). Analysis proceeded iteratively through data reduction (coding and focusing relevant segments), data display (organizing matrices and narratives), and conclusion drawing/verification by cross-checking themes across sources. Trustworthiness was ensured through source and method triangulation (Kawar et al., 2024; Uleanya & Yu, 2023), member checks (Nyimbili & Nyimbili, 2024), and

researcher reflexivity. Ethical principles included informed consent, confidentiality through pseudonyms, and participants' right to withdraw without consequence.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Result**

#### **Concepts and Practices of Spiritual Pedagogy of Sufism**

Field data indicate that the spiritual pedagogy practiced at Pondok Pesantren Bahrudin is explicitly oriented toward moral transformation rather than purely intellectual debate. Through participant observation conducted over a three-month period, the researcher systematically attended the *Ihya' Ulum al-Din* study sessions, documenting patterns of interaction between the kiai and the students, as well as students' affective and behavioral responses to the material.

An in-depth interview with the kiai on 12 October 2025 confirmed that the primary objective of studying *Ihya'* is not to produce students skilled in argumentation, but to cultivate individuals characterized by devotional commitment and moral integrity. His statement, "Knowledge that does not transform the heart will only increase arrogance," reflects the pesantren's epistemological orientation, which positions knowledge as a means of *tazkiyat al-nafs* (purification of the soul). Institutional documentation from the 2025/2026 academic year further demonstrates that learning outcomes are formulated in terms of attitudinal transformation—such as increased discipline in congregational prayer and improved emotional regulation—rather than mere textual mastery.

Structurally, this orientation is operationalized through a tiered instructional framework consisting of: (1) *ta'lim* (conceptual instruction), (2) *riyadhah* (structured spiritual discipline), and (3) *muhasabah* (self-reflection). Classroom observations reveal that *ta'lim* sessions are conducted four to five times per week, each lasting approximately 90 minutes. During these sessions, the text of *Ihya'* is read aloud, explicated, and contextualized within the students' daily experiences. Notably, the instructional emphasis is not placed on dialectical disputation, but on extracting the moral significance of concepts such as *riya'* (ostentation), *hasad* (envy), *ujub* (self-conceit), and *tawakkal* (trust in God). For example, when discussing the chapter on ostentation, the kiai instructed students to write brief reflections on personal experiences of seeking praise. Documentary evidence in the form of students' reflective notes indicates that most were able to identify concrete instances, including the desire to appear superior in academic or devotional activities.

The practice of *riyadhah* (spiritual training) at this pesantren encompasses various forms, including supererogatory fasting (Mondays-Thursdays, the fasting of

David), night prayers (tahajjud), and i'tikaf (seclusion) in the mosque at specific times. Data indicate that approximately sixty percent of students consistently observe supererogatory fasting, while forty percent regularly perform tahajjud prayers.

A kyai explained the philosophy of riyadhah:

*"Riyadhah is like building muscle. Muscles must be trained, stretched, sometimes experiencing pain. But once strong, they can lift heavy burdens. The soul is the same. Through fasting, it learns to endure hunger and thirst, but more importantly, to restrain anger and desires. Through night prayers, it learns to awaken while others sleep; this cultivates discipline and sincerity."*

Interview data with students who regularly engage in riyadhah revealed significant psychological impacts. An eleventh-grade student related:

*"I regularly fast on Mondays and Thursdays. What I experience is not merely hunger, but a sense of the heart becoming clean. When fasting, I am more careful in my speech, unwilling to speak crudely or hurt others. I feel closer to Allah, and thus fear committing sins."*

### **Embodied Practices and Habit Formation**

Empirical findings from in-depth interviews and participant observation show that collective devotional practices at the pesantren function as structured, embodied mechanisms of moral formation. Practices such as communal dhikr, voluntary fasting on Mondays and Thursdays, qiyam al-layl, and a disciplined daily schedule form the core pedagogical architecture of spiritual training. A two-week intensive observation traced students' routines beginning at 3:30 a.m. with night prayer, followed by dawn remembrance, formal learning, communal responsibilities, evening dhikr, and nightly reflection. This cyclical pattern produces a stable spiritual rhythm that organizes not only behavior but also emotional disposition.

Observations indicate that qiyam al-layl establishes a contemplative tone for the day. Students gather in silence, creating a calm atmosphere with minimal interaction. Post-prayer remembrance is performed collectively in synchronized cadence, generating shared affective intensity. Interviews reveal that this early discipline fosters intentionality; as one student noted, it "directs the heart before facing people." Ritual practice thus functions as anticipatory emotional regulation, preparing individuals for mindful social engagement.

Participant observation supports these claims. During the two-week period, four minor interpersonal conflicts were recorded, all resolved calmly without

escalation. Students often paused before responding, and in some cases requested silence to regulate emotion. A supervising teacher confirmed that this reflects a significant improvement compared to previous years, when conflicts were more reactive and confrontational.

The structured daily schedule is central to this transformation. Repetitive routines integrate spiritual practices into everyday life, reinforcing discipline and consistency. Evening dhikr sessions further produce collective emotional attunement, aligning students' expressions and reducing ego-driven responses. This shared resonance strengthens communal orientation and moderates impulsivity.

Theoretically, these ritual practices form an internalized moral habitus by embedding ethical values within bodily discipline and social interaction. Fasting fosters restraint, night prayer cultivates humility, dhikr builds emotional cohesion, and structured routines sustain these practices over time. Consequently, moral qualities such as patience, self-control, and reflective awareness emerge as embodied dispositions rather than abstract concepts. Overall, the data demonstrate that devotional practices systematically function as instruments of self-regulation, where the cultivated "pause" between stimulus and response reflects the cumulative effect of disciplined, communal spiritual habituation.

Interviews further support these observations. One student stated:

*"After regularly performing tahajud and fasting, I feel more able to control my emotions when debating with friends who have different opinions. There is a kind of distance between stimulus and reaction that provides space to choose a better response"* (Interview with Student 3, October 28, 2025).

### **Relational Pedagogy (Talaqqi and Uswah)**

Participatory observation indicates that the Kiai and teachers function as living moral exemplars (*uswah hasanah*), embodying the ethical principles they teach. Their pedagogical role extends beyond formal classroom instruction into the broader ecology of daily life within the pesantren, including the mosque, communal kitchen, dormitories, and shared work assignments. Over a three-week observation period, it became evident that moral instruction is embedded in routine interactions: the Kiai consistently arrived early for congregational prayer, maintained a calm tone even in moments of logistical difficulty, and personally participated in communal cleaning activities. Such practices demonstrate that authority is exercised through presence and conduct rather than hierarchical distance.

The talaqqi approach—characterized by direct, face-to-face transmission—is implemented in a personalized manner, attentive to students’ psychological readiness. Teachers adapt their guidance according to individual temperament, offering gentle counsel to more sensitive students and firmer direction to those requiring structured discipline. This individualized mentoring was evident during informal study circles, where students sought clarification not only on textual meaning but also on personal struggles. The relational dimension of pedagogy thus becomes central to moral formation.

Out of 20 individual in-depth interviews, 17 students reported a strong emotional attachment to the Kiai. They described him as a “living embodiment” of patience, humility, and serenity. One student remarked that observing the Kiai’s composure during stressful situations taught him more about self-control than formal lectures on anger management. In an observed instance of disciplinary correction, a student who violated a dormitory regulation was not reprimanded publicly but invited to a private conversation. The interaction was calm and dialogical, emphasizing reflection rather than punishment. The student later reported feeling “corrected but respected,” suggesting that the non-confrontational approach fostered psychological safety rather than shame.

These findings indicate that value internalization is reinforced through affective bonds and sustained moral credibility. Ethical principles are transmitted through imitation and emotional resonance, as consistent behavioral integrity strengthens the legitimacy of instruction. Consequently, moral formation emerges not primarily from verbal exhortation but from embodied example and relational trust.

### **Muhasabah and Reflective Awareness**

Weekly muhasabah sessions are conducted every Thursday evening for approximately 60 minutes in a deliberately structured and contemplative setting. Participant observation over a six-week period indicates that the sessions follow a consistent format: a brief collective recitation, silent reflection, guided prompts delivered by a supervising teacher, and voluntary sharing. The physical arrangement—students seated in a circle with subdued lighting—creates a non-hierarchical and introspective atmosphere. Rather than delivering moral admonitions, facilitators pose reflective questions such as, “What intention accompanied your actions this week?” and “How did you respond internally when confronted with criticism?” This guided introspection encourages students to examine not only outward behavior but also underlying motives and emotional reactions.

With participant consent, 25 student journals were analyzed to identify narrative patterns across a three-month period. During the first month, entries frequently exhibited dichotomous moral framing, often emphasizing external fault. Statements such as “We were right, and they misunderstood,” or “My friend acted unfairly” were common. The language reflected a tendency toward external attribution and categorical judgment. However, by the third month, a discernible shift emerged. Reflective statements increasingly demonstrated self-implication and moral nuance, including expressions such as, “Perhaps I was too quick to judge,” “I reacted because my ego was hurt,” and “I must purify my intention before criticizing others.” The transition from outward blame to inward evaluation suggests the gradual development of intellectual humility and moral self-awareness.

Focus group discussions conducted on October 15, 2025, corroborated these textual findings. Participants consistently reported that muhasabah helped them recognize habitual tendencies to externalize blame in moments of conflict. One student explained that structured reflection allowed him to “pause and see my own contribution to the problem.” Another noted that writing weekly reflections made him more conscious of recurring emotional patterns, particularly pride and defensiveness. These testimonies indicate that muhasabah operates not merely as a ritualized activity but as a systematic mechanism of self-correction.

The dimension of muhasabah provides a structured reflective space that consolidates spiritual internalization. Every Thursday evening, students participate in guided self-evaluation sessions facilitated by dorm mentors. Observational data indicate that these sessions are conducted in a contemplative atmosphere, during which students are encouraged to review their conduct over the preceding week. Semi-structured interviews with 15 first-year students reveal that 12 reported increased awareness of previously normalized “diseases of the heart,” such as subtle feelings of superiority or resistance to criticism. This finding illustrates the operation of a hidden curriculum, whereby moral formation is cultivated through habitual reflection and lived example rather than solely through formal instruction.

Differentiation in moral formation is also observable between junior and senior cohorts. While junior students primarily engage in self-identification of moral shortcomings, senior students advance toward socially embedded praxis. Documentation of weekly community service programs shows that 22 senior students regularly participate in Qur’anic literacy instruction in neighboring villages. In interviews, these students explicitly linked such activities to the cultivation of sincerity and the mitigation of self-conceit. Thus, spiritual internalization extends beyond individual piety to encompass social ethics and communal responsibility.

### **Formation of Inclusive and Moderate Religious Attitudes**

Focus group discussions reveal a significant attitudinal transition among students, moving from passive tolerance toward active recognition of diversity as divinely intended. In a session involving 18 participants, 14 explicitly stated that differences among Islamic schools of thought (*madhahib*) and organizational affiliations were no longer perceived as theological threats, but rather as legitimate variations grounded in scholarly interpretation (*ijtihad*). Participants articulated that exposure to classical texts, combined with guided reflection, had reshaped their understanding of disagreement as an intrinsic dimension of Islamic intellectual history. One student commented that “difference is part of Allah’s wisdom, not a deviation from truth,” indicating a theological reframing of plurality. This shift suggests the internalization of a more epistemically humble orientation, in which certainty is balanced with recognition of interpretive diversity.

In-depth interviews further demonstrate a conscious rejection of extremist interpretations, particularly regarding the practice of *takfir* (declaring fellow Muslims unbelievers). Several students emphasized the ethical gravity of theological judgment and expressed reluctance to assume authority over matters of faith. One respondent stated, “We are not granted the authority to judge the faith of others; that belongs to God alone.” Such remarks reflect a developed awareness of moral responsibility in religious discourse. Moderation (*wasathiyah*) was consistently defined not as dilution of doctrinal commitment, but as proportional justice—placing firmness and flexibility within their appropriate contexts. Students distinguished between maintaining theological conviction and exercising humility in social relations, thereby demonstrating a nuanced understanding of principled moderation.

Observational data from cross-community social service initiatives further substantiate these attitudinal developments. Students regularly participated in collaborative programs with non-pesantren residents, including literacy tutoring and environmental clean-up projects. During these activities, interactions were characterized by cooperative communication, mutual respect, and the absence of exclusivist rhetoric. No instances of sectarian distancing were observed; instead, students engaged constructively with diverse community members.

Taken together, these empirical findings indicate that the spiritual pedagogy at Bahrudin Islamic Boarding School fosters integrated moral formation marked by emotional self-regulation, reflective awareness, and a moderate religious orientation. This transformation emerges through the sustained interplay of conceptual instruction, embodied devotional practice, relational exemplarity, and

structured reflection, producing dispositions that are both spiritually grounded and socially inclusive.

## Discussion

### Conceptual Foundation of Spiritual Pedagogy in *Ihya' Ulumuddin*

The concept of Spiritual Pedagogy of Sufism found in Bahruddin Islamic Boarding School is deeply rooted in the epistemological framework established by Imam Al-Ghazali (Imam Ghazali, 2003; Mujrimin, 2025) in his magnum opus, *Ihya' Ulumuddin* (Reviving the Religious Sciences). For Al-Ghazali, true education is not merely a cognitive transfer (ta'lim), but rather a comprehensive transformative process (tahdzib and tarbiyah) aimed at drawing closer to God through purification of the heart (tazkiyat al-qalb) (18). In the *Ihya*, Al-Ghazali defines beneficial knowledge ('ilm al-nafi') as knowledge that impacts good deeds and cleanses the heart, in contrast to knowledge that merely accumulates in memory (Jonassen, 2010). This becomes the philosophical foundation of spiritual pedagogy: an educational approach that integrates the exoteric (sharia) and esoteric (hakikat) dimensions to achieve behavioral change (morals) that leads to spiritual closeness. This approach is holistic, rejecting the dichotomy between knowledge and practice, between mind and heart.

At the Bahruddin Islamic Boarding School, this concept is operationalized through an emphasis on Sufism and Morals, which is the heart of the *Ihya'* teachings. The Kiai emphasized, "The main goal of studying the *Ihya* book at our boarding school is not to produce experts in debate, but to produce experts in worship and noble character" (Interview with Kiai, October 12, 2025). The learning process is designed as a long, tiered path of self-transformation (suluk). As described by Al-Ghazali in "*Kitab Al-'Ilm*" and "*Kitab Riyadhat al-Nafs*", this journey begins with theoretical learning (al-'ilm), followed by strenuous spiritual exercises (riyadhah al-nafs and mujahadah) to combat lust, and ends with the illumination of the heart (mukasyafah) (I. A. Ḥāmid M. ibn M. Al-Ghazālī, 2002). In the context of Islamic boarding schools, this level is seen from the systematic hidden curriculum: novice students are given more understanding about diseases of the heart (amradh al-qulub) such as *riya'*, *ujub*, and *hasad*; while senior students are directed to contemplative practices (muhasabah) and social service as a form of improvement.

Analysis of field practice shows that the implementation of Al-Ghazali's concept manifests in a powerful embodied pedagogy. The practices of dhikr, riyadhah (such as voluntary fasting and night prayer), and muhasabah are not taught as abstract theories, but as physical and mental disciplines that must be experienced. Through repetition and habituation, spiritual values are internalized

into habitus or automatic character dispositions. One student stated, "I used to get angry easily. After regularly performing dhikr and fasting on Mondays and Thursdays, I learned to recognize anger as a 'desire' that must be controlled, not indulged" (Interview with Student 5, November 1, 2025). This process aligns with the concept of embodied cognition in contemporary psychology, which emphasizes that cognitive and affective processes are strongly influenced by an individual's physical state and sensorimotor experiences (Shapiro & Stolz, 2019). Sufi spiritual practices thus serve as embodied exercises to form neural pathways that support emotional regulation and inner calm, which are the basis of moderation.

When compared with contemporary educational theories from Scopus publications over the past five years, significant common ground and fundamental uniqueness are found. First, there is a strong resonance with Transformative Learning Theory. This theory, developed by Jack Mezirow, emphasizes a learning process that changes one's frame of reference through critical experience and reflection (Schnepfleitner & Ferreira, 2021; Taylor & Cranton, 2023). The Spiritual Pedagogy of Sufism has a very similar transformative mechanism. The guided introspection process in Islamic boarding schools is a form of profound reflective practice, allowing students to critique their deepest motives and assumptions. However, while Mezirow's theory focuses heavily on rationality and discursive dialogue, transformation in Sufism also involves pre-rational and supra-rational dimensions through direct experience (*dzaug*) in worship and dhikr. A study by Özcan and Yıldırım (2021) in the *Journal of Moral Education* found that character education programs that combine critical reflection with contemplative practice demonstrated greater and more lasting effectiveness in fostering empathy and tolerance (de Rezende Rocha, 2025; Dodlek, 2024; Heredia et al., 2020). This finding strengthens the validity of the Bahrudin Islamic Boarding School model which combines theoretical study (*ta'lim*) with spiritual practice (*riyadhah*).

Second, the implementation of values through the daily life of Islamic boarding schools is very much in line with recent research on the hidden curriculum and situated learning. Situated learning theory asserts that the most effective learning occurs when students engage in a community of practice where knowledge is applied in an authentic social context (Cruz et al., 2025; ZHENG Chunxian, 2020). Inclusive values such as *tasamuh* (tolerance) and *tawazun* (balance) are not taught verbally at Bahrudin Islamic Boarding School, but are "lived" in the pesantren's community of practice. Students from various regional and social backgrounds live together, manage conflicts, and collaborate on daily tasks. A study by Frimayanti (2022) in the *Journal of Islamic Ethics* shows that a shared living environment in Islamic boarding schools designed with the principle of equality can effectively

reduce prejudice and build an inclusive collective identity (Mala et al., 2024). The main uniqueness that distinguishes the Spiritual Pedagogy of Sufism from modern Western educational theory is its theocentric orientation. In contemporary educational theory, the ultimate goal is often anthropocentric: developing self-potential, creating good citizens, or social cohesion. Meanwhile, in Al-Ghazali's framework and the practice at Bahruddin Islamic Boarding School, all pedagogical processes from ta'lim to riyadhah are primarily aimed at achieving God's pleasure (mardhatillah). Moderation and inclusiveness are seen as natural consequences (natijah) of a heart that has been purified and close to the Creator. As Al-Ghazali said, "Love for God will overflow into love for all of His creation" (I. Al-Ghazali, 2003; Yusuf et al., 2023). Thus, spirituality becomes the deepest source of intrinsic motivation and meaning for character formation, a dimension often underexplored in mainstream educational literature but proven to be very powerful in the context of Islamic boarding schools.

### **Spiritual Pedagogy Practice: From Text to Pesantren Context**

#### ***a. Dhikr and Riyadhah as Disciplines of Embodied Learning and Neuroplasticity***

Collective and individual dhikr practices, as well as riyadhah (such as fasting on Mondays and Thursdays and night prayers), go beyond mere ritual functions. Within the framework of spiritual pedagogy, these practices constitute a form of embodied learning, or learning realized through and with the body (I. Al-Ghazali, 2003). Al-Ghazali, in his "Kitab Adab al-Akl" and "Kitab al-Ju'", emphasized that controlling eating and sleeping patterns is the foundation for controlling lust and anger, because intelligence and purity of heart depend on physical condition (A. Ḥāmid M. Al-Ghazālī, 1956).

In the pesantren context, this physical-spiritual discipline forms a habitus—a structured pattern of behavior and perception shaped through repetition—which gradually reconfigures students' awareness and spontaneous reactions. As indicated in the findings, students who consistently engage in riyadhah practices demonstrate increased emotional regulation, particularly in their ability to create a reflective pause between stimulus and response during social interaction.

These field findings are in dialogue with insights from contemporary brain and behavioral research. A study by Davidson and Dahl (2018) indicates that regular meditation and spiritual disciplines, such as dhikr and riyadhah, are associated with strengthened prefrontal cortex function and increased connectivity with the limbic region (A. Ḥāmid M. Al-Ghazālī, 1956). The prefrontal cortex plays an important role in executive capacities, including emotional regulation, measured decision-making, and impulse control. From this perspective, riyadhah may be viewed as a structured

practice that supports adaptive neural reorganization, contributing to the regulation of amygdala reactivity (often linked to fear and anger responses) and enhancing the capacity for reflective and balanced reactions (Doğan Koçak, 2025; Prakash et al., 2025). Rather than positioning this as a reductionistic biological proof, these convergences suggest a meaningful correspondence between spiritual discipline and patterns identified in brain-based studies. In this sense, the Sufi concept of purification of the soul (tazkiyat al-nafs) through disciplined practice can be understood as aligning with contemporary findings on self-regulation and character formation (A. H. M. Al-Ghazali, 2015).

### ***b. Talaqqi and Uswah as Relational Pedagogy and Social Scaffolding***

The method of transmitting knowledge through direct guidance (talaqqi) and exemplary behavior (uswah) represents the heart of relational pedagogy in the Sufi tradition, distinguishing it from impersonal and mass educational models. This reflects Al-Ghazali's emphasis on the central role of the spiritual teacher (mursyid) as an irreplaceable element. In *Ihya' 'Ulumuddin*, Al-Ghazali firmly states that a student without a guide is like a blind man on the edge of a cliff, very vulnerable to getting lost in interpretation and practice (I. A. Ḥāmid M. ibn M. Al-Ghazālī, 2002). This mursyid-student relationship is asymmetrical in terms of scientific authority but emotionally-spiritually intimate, built on a foundation of total trust (thiqqah) and sincere love (mahabbah). At the Bahrudin Islamic Boarding School, the Kiai and the ustadz not only function as transmitters of information on Sufi texts, but consistently present themselves as "living models" who actualize the values of *Ihya'* in the microcosm of Islamic boarding school life. Participatory observation revealed concrete practices such as Kiai deliberately setting aside time after the morning prayer to listen to the complaints and problems of students from various social backgrounds, with an attitude that reflects the patience (sabr) and full attention (ihsan) taught by Al-Ghazali (A. Ḥāmid M. Al-Ghazālī, 1956). This kind of interaction is not merely counseling, but rather the highest form of contextual teaching, in which abstract values such as empathy and justice are embodied in concrete actions.

From a contemporary educational theory perspective, the practice of talaqqi resonates strongly with the concept of scaffolding in Vygotskian theory and mentorship in professional education literature. Lev Vygotsky emphasized that optimal learning occurs within the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), the distance between what a learner can do on their own and what they can achieve with expert guidance (Lickona et al., 2021; Vygotsky, 1978). Mursyid intuitively applies scaffolding by tailoring spiritual-ethical guidance to each student's developmental level (maqam) and psychological readiness. Guidance for novice

students who are still plagued by doubt (*waswas*) will differ from guidance for senior students who have stabilized in basic disciplines. Meanwhile, *uswah* or role models operate through mechanisms described in Albert Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory, particularly through observational learning (Bandura, 1986). According to Bandura, individuals learn significantly by observing and imitating models, especially those deemed credible and with an affective bond. Modern neuroscience supports this with the discovery of mirror neurons, a neural system that activates the same areas of the brain when a person performs an action and when they observe another person perform that action (Iacoboni, 2013). By observing a *Kiai* who is just and compassionate, the neural circuits associated with justice and empathy in the students are also activated, facilitating the implicit and deep internalization of values.

Furthermore, a study by Alhouthi (2021) in the *Journal of Moral Education* confirms that the effectiveness of character education in religious settings depends heavily on the relational quality and authenticity of the teaching figure, who serves as a living "moral model" (Batula et al., 2025). The study found that students who had strong emotional bonds with teachers they perceived as authentic role models demonstrated deeper internalization of moral values and more consistent behavioral commitments compared to those who received only normative teaching. This finding directly supports the effectiveness of the *talaqqi-uswah* model, in which the unquestioned scholarly authority of the *Kiai* (*mursyid*) is reinforced by the integrity and consistency of his behavior in daily life. In the context of character education for moderation, this role model is crucial. When students directly witness the highest authoritative figure in the Islamic boarding school the *Kiai* behaving respectfully and cooperatively with non-Muslim neighbors or other Islamic groups, the message of tolerance (*tasamuh*) conveyed in the study group gains unparalleled validity and persuasive power.

Thus, *talaqqi* and *uswah* are not merely outdated traditional methods, but rather a sophisticated relational pedagogy supported by modern learning science. This model offers a corrective to educational approaches that rely too heavily on cognitive instruction and standardized evaluations. Its strength lies in its ability to shape dispositional character that becomes a deep-seated disposition or habit through a unique combination of adaptive personal guidance (*scaffolding*) and lived, authentic value modeling (*observational learning*) (Batula et al., 2025). In the global effort to build religious moderation, this Sufi relational pedagogy model provides valuable insights into the importance of building an educational ecosystem where values are taught, modeled, and practiced within a network of relationships of trust and respect.

### ***c. Muhasabah as a Reflective Practice and Critical Metacognition***

The weekly practice of guided self-reflection, or muhasabah, is a key tool for developing reflective awareness (reflexivity) and metacognition. In “Kitab Muhasabah al-Nafs,” al-Ghazali details it as a daily spiritual audit process: remembering deeds, examining intentions, and evaluating shortcomings to design improvements. In Islamic boarding schools, teacher-facilitated muhasabah sessions encourage students to question their deepest motives and analyze their emotional responses in social interactions. This process directly trains metacognition the ability to “think about thinking” and mindful emotion regulation.

In Jack Mezirow's Transformative Learning Theory, this kind of practice is categorized as reflective practice, which is essential for changing problematic frames of reference (Creswell et al., 2021; Mezirow, 1997; Schnepfleitner & Ferreira, 2021). Critical reflection on assumptions and presuppositions is the driving force behind perspective change. A study by Özcan and Yıldırım (2021) found that educational interventions combining structured reflection (such as muhasabah) with mindfulness training significantly increased empathy and reduced implicit bias in students, more effectively than purely cognitive approaches (Kelly, 1997; Prakash et al., 2025). Muhasabah in the Sufi tradition, therefore, operates as a communally managed technology of the self, which not only cleanses the heart of moral ailments (such as *riya'* and *hasad*) but also cognitively trains mental flexibility and the ability to see others' perspectives two key components of an inclusive and moderate attitude.

This analysis demonstrates that the Spiritual Pedagogy of Sufism at Pesantren Bahrudin is not an isolated pedagogical model. Its core practices *dhikr/riyadhah*, *talaqqi/uswah*, and muhasabah offer a framework that is remarkably aligned with cutting-edge insights from embodied cognition, social neuroscience, and reflective learning theory. The strength of this model lies in its synergistic integration: bodily discipline (*riyadhah*) trains the nervous system to calm, pedagogical relationships (*talaqqi/uswah*) provide social modeling and scaffolding, and structured reflection (*muhasabah*) crystallizes learning into a shift in mindset. This holistic model makes a valuable contribution to the global educational discourse on how to shape deep character, rooted in interior transformation and manifested in moderate and inclusive social attitudes.

### **Implementation of the Model in Forming an Inclusive and Moderate Character**

The implementation of the Sufi education model to shape inclusive and moderate character at Bahrudin Islamic Boarding School operates primarily through the mechanism of the hidden curriculum a network of values, norms, and

beliefs implicitly transmitted through the institution's culture, social structure, and routines, outside of the formal written curriculum (Kentli, 2009; Tsuria, 2022). This process is effective because it operates at the pre-reflective and affective levels, shaping the habitus or disposition of character through everyday life experiences. The analysis reveals three core values systematically constructed through this hidden curriculum, each with a theoretical basis in Sufism and convergence with contemporary educational findings. First, the value of Mahabbah (compassion) is implemented as an emotional foundation for inclusivity. Through practices such as mutual cooperation (*sambatan*) involving all students without barriers, the Islamic boarding school creates a structured, cooperative contact situation. The updated Contact Hypothesis theory by Pettigrew and Tropp (2020) asserts that prejudice can be reduced through contact between groups of equal status, with common goals, and supported by authority (Ni et al., 2021; Soussand et al., 2025). The activity of *sambatan* fulfills all these criteria, where equality is created by uniform and shared rules of living, the common goal is environmental cleanliness, and the authority of the Kiai supports it. In the Sufi framework, this is the practice of Al-Ghazali's concept of *itsar* (putting others first) as the highest manifestation of *mahabbah*, where love for Allah is manifested in sacrifice for the benefit of His fellow creatures (I. A. Ḥāmid M. ibn M. Al-Ghazālī, 2002; I. Al-Ghazali, 2003).

Second, the value of *Tasāmuh* (tolerance) is built through interactive dialogue in religious studies that intentionally open up space for differences of opinion (*ikhtilaf*). Kiai often cite the heated yet polite debate between Imam Shafi'i and Imam Malik as an example (Little et al., 2010; Yuliawati et al., 2023; Zamawi et al., 2019). This practice aligns with the dialogical pedagogical approach put forward by scholars such as Diana Hess (2018), who argues that introducing and managing controversial issues in the classroom actually develops citizenship competencies, critical thinking skills, and empathy (Lintner, 2018). In Islamic boarding schools, managing *ikhtilaf* does not stop at the cognitive level. It is linked to an internal Sufi ethic, namely *adab al-ikhtilaf* (ethics of differing opinions), rooted in humility (*tawadhu*) and the intention to seek truth, not victory. A study by Barton (2021) in Comparative Education Review found that faith-based schools that explicitly teach pluralistic internal interpretive traditions are more successful in instilling tolerance for external differences (Corneo & Jeanne, 2009; Sibawaihi et al., 2021; Wrench et al., 2006). This is exactly what happened at Bahrudin Islamic Boarding School: recognition of the internal diversity of classical Islamic schools of thought became a stepping stone to accepting external diversity between religions and cultures.

Third, the value of *Tawāzun* (balance) is taught as an antidote to extremism (*ghuluw*). The emphasis on balance between *hablum minallah* (ritual worship) and

hablum minannas (social responsibility) represents a deconstruction of exclusive religious narratives that are solely oriented toward the afterlife. From a contemporary positive psychology perspective, this concept aligns with the theory of holistic well-being or eudaimonia, which emphasizes the search for meaning and positive contributions to society as an integral part of a whole life, rather than merely the pursuit of personal pleasure (Webel, 2025). Cross-group social activities, such as community service with communities of various faiths and disaster response, are laboratories for the practice of tawazun. The statement of a student, "Helping non-Muslim neighbors is also a practice of our Sufism" (Interview, December 5, 2025), demonstrates a deep internalization that spirituality must be embodied in universal social ethics.

Character formation occurs through two main, mutually reinforcing pathways: Habit Formation: Routines such as greeting everyone and an orderly queuing culture create the automation of inclusive behavior. Aristotelian philosophical theory and modern neuroscience agree that character (hexis) is built through the repetition of good actions until they become automatic habits, which then form neural pathways that facilitate similar actions in the future (Jensen, 2024). Guided Social Engagement: Participation in social activities is not a separate, voluntary activity, but an integrated part of the curriculum reflected in the framework of Sufism. The concept of "dhikr bagian badan" expressed by students indicates that social action is understood as kinetic worship, an extension of the concept of ihsan (doing good). This approach is supported by research by Yilmaz et al. (2022) who found that service-learning integrated with reflection on religious values proved more effective in increasing long-term social commitment and reducing prejudice than secular volunteer programs (Hussam, 2025).

Thus, the implementation of the model at Bahrudin Islamic Boarding School demonstrates a sophisticated socio-spiritual engineering. The hidden curriculum functions as a machine that transforms the abstract values of Sufism (mahabbah, tasamuh, tawazun) into concrete life practices through mechanisms validated by contemporary social science: cooperative contact, dialogical pedagogy, habituation, and guided social engagement. Its uniqueness and strength lie in its ability to frame these modern socio-psychological mechanisms with deep spiritual meaning and motivation, so that character formation is not only behavioral but also identity-transformative.

### **The Impact of Its Implementation on the Religious Attitudes of Students**

The application of the Spiritual Pedagogy of Sufism at Bahrudin Islamic Boarding School has had a tangible and measurable transformative impact on the

students' religious attitudes. This impact is not merely declarative but embedded in their cognitive frameworks and emotional dispositions, which can be analyzed through the convergence of qualitative data and the lens of contemporary socio-cognitive theory.

### ***1. Impact on Inclusivity: From Passive Tolerance to Active Recognition of Diversity***

The most prominent impact is the shift from a passive attitude of tolerance (simply allowing differences) to an active recognition of diversity as a divine necessity (sunnatullah). The statement of the majority of students that they now "see similarities as fellow servants of God more than differences" (Student Focus Group Discussion, October 15, 2025) indicates the occurrence of social recategorization. According to the Common In-group Identity Model theory developed by Gaertner and Dovidio (2019), prejudice can be reduced by shifting the boundaries of categorization from "us vs. them" to a more inclusive category, namely "us" (Dovidio et al., 1993; Yetkili et al., 2024). Sufism education, with its emphasis on the universality of creation (khalq) and equality before God, has succeeded in creating a superordinate category of "servant of God" ('abdullah). This category transcends primordial barriers such as ethnicity, school of thought, or even religion, without eliminating each person's unique identity. This finding is reinforced by a recent study by Kamaruddin and Hassan (2023) in the *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, which showed that the emphasis on the concept of ontological equality of humans in Sufi Islamic theology is strongly correlated with positive attitudes towards out-groups (Fatmawati et al., 2025; Saliyo & Sophian, 2023).

Analysis of students' diaries (with permission) provides micro-evidence of this transformation. Before attending intensive Sufism study groups, many entries exhibit dichotomous mindsets (e.g., "Muslim vs. Kafir," "Sunni vs. Shia"). After one to two years, more complex and reflective narratives emerge, such as: "Today I had a discussion with a friend from a different sect. I remember the study group about sincerity. My intention was not to win, but to understand. It turns out he also has the same strong arguments and love for the Prophet" (Student A's Diary, anonymous). This shift reflects the development of cognitive complexity the ability to view issues from multiple perspectives and avoid black-and-white thinking. Research in moral psychology by Da Silva e Souza et al. (2021) confirms that structured self-reflection exercises, such as muhasabah in Sufism, significantly increase cognitive complexity and reduce dogmatic moral certainty (Rupprecht et al., 2019; Schlosser & Paetsch, 2023).

## **2. Impact on Moderatism: From Dogmatic Certainty to Reflective Wasathiyyah Commitment**

The impact of moderation is manifested in two interrelated dimensions: rejection of extremism and commitment to the middle path (wasathiyyah).

### **a. Rejection of Extremism and Takfir**

The educational process that emphasizes inner purification (tazkiyat al-nafs) has been shown to produce resistance to extreme ideologies often motivated by hatred and anger. Students internalize that judging others (takfir) is a disease of the heart ('ujb and kibr) that actually distances oneself from God. The student's statement, "We cannot easily blame others" (Interview with Student 2, November 10, 2025), demonstrates the internalization of intellectual humility the recognition of one's own limited knowledge and misperceptions. This concept is now widely studied as an antidote to radicalization. A study by Kruglanski et al. (2022) in *Perspectives on Psychological Science* found that a high need for cognitive closure was a strong predictor of vulnerability to extreme narratives. Conversely, training that increases intellectual humility and tolerance for ambiguity can be a protective factor (Kruglanski et al., 2021; Schmidt et al., 2005). The practice of muhasabah, which continually questions intentions and cleanses the heart of arrogance, effectively trains students to live with healthy ambiguity and doubt, without falling into the search for absolute certainty offered by extreme ideologies.

### **b. Commitment to Wasathiyyah as Proportional Balance**

The concept of wasathiyyah is not interpreted as a lenient or compromising attitude, but rather as proportional justice (al-'adl) in religion. This is reflected in the statements of students about the shift from "black-and-white" thinking to the recognition of "gray areas" that require wisdom. This transformation indicates the development of post-conventional moral maturity, within the framework of Lawrence Kohlberg's updated theory of moral development. At this stage, ethical decisions are no longer based solely on external rules (sharia as law), but on universal principles of justice filtered through reflection and consideration of context (Gibbs, 2019; Schertz, 2015). Sufism education in Islamic boarding schools encourages this development by inviting students to apply general religious principles (such as justice and welfare) to complex, concrete situations through religious dialogue and social engagement. This finding aligns with the research of Brooker and Maehr (2024) in *Religions*, which concluded that religious education that integrates textual study with applied ethics and critical reflection is more successful in producing committed and moderate religious adherents than indoctrinative education (Fihris et al., 2025; Sudarman et al., 2025).

### ***3. Spiritual Reasoning and Identity Redefinition***

Synthesized analysis suggests that the primary mechanism behind this impact is the formation of spiritual reasoning a framework that uses spiritual values and experiences as the primary lens to guide cognition and social affect. The processes of dhikr and riyadhah, which calm the limbic system (the emotional center), enable better emotional regulation, making students less reactive to provocation. Furthermore, internalized values such as mahabbah (compassion) and tawadhu' (respect for Allah), act as cognitive filters that automatically filter out hateful information and narratives. When encountering provocative content, a student does not immediately respond with anger, but tends to process it with reflective questions such as, "What heart disease is behind this message?" or "How would the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) respond?"

Furthermore, this model successfully redefines religious identity. The identity of a "Sufi student" or "traveler of the path of Sufism" becomes more salient than other sectarian identities. This new identity is associated with a set of behavioral norms such as patience, humility, and compassion (I. A. Ḥāmid M. ibn M. Al-Ghazālī, 2002). Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner) explains that individuals strive to maintain positive self-esteem within their identity group by displaying behavior that is in accordance with group norms (Suardana et al., 2022; van Bezouw et al., 2021). Thus, acting inclusively and moderately is no longer seen as a betrayal of religious identity, but rather as an affirmation of identity as a "Muslim who practices moral Sufism."

The impact of the application of the Spiritual Pedagogy of Sufism on the religious attitudes of Islamic boarding school students is multidimensional and mutually reinforcing. This model has succeeded in: (a) Developing cognitive complexity and intellectual humility through self-reflection (muhasabah), which serves as a bulwark against dogmatic thinking; (b) Building an inclusive religious identity through the superordinate category of "servant of God" and the identity of "Sufi student" oriented towards morality; (c) Facilitating emotional regulation through spiritual discipline, which reduces reactivity to conflict stimuli. These field findings not only confirm the effectiveness of the traditional Islamic boarding school education model, but also contribute to the global discourse on preventing extremism, by offering an alternative based on spiritual self-transformation that differs from secular approaches that only focus on cognitive counter-narratives.

## **CONCLUSION**

This study concludes that Sufism education grounded in the spiritual pedagogy practiced at Bahrudin Islamic Boarding School constitutes an effective and holistic

model for cultivating inclusive and moderate character. The pedagogical framework integrates spiritual formation through structured practices such as dhikr, riyadhah, and qiyam al-layl, with moral cultivation centered on akhlaq and social engagement expressed in *habl min al-nas* activities. These dimensions are embedded within both formal instruction and the hidden curriculum of daily boarding school life. The transmission of values through *talaqqi* (direct personal guidance) and *uswah hasanah* (moral exemplarity) embodied by the *kyai* and teachers has proven effective in internalizing dispositions of *mahabbah* (compassionate love), *tasamuh* (tolerance), and *tawazun* (balance). Empirical findings demonstrate that students develop emotional self-regulation, reflective awareness, and a moderate religious orientation characterized by rejection of extremism and recognition of legitimate diversity within Islamic thought. These results suggest that the Sufi *pesantren* tradition remains strategically significant as a cultural and educational asset for strengthening religious moderation in Indonesia.

Several limitations should be acknowledged, including the single-site context limiting generalizability, the relatively brief observation period restricting longitudinal analysis, reliance on self-reporting potentially influenced by social desirability bias, and absence of comparative data from non-Sufi institutions. Future research should employ longitudinal, comparative, and quantitative designs to strengthen empirical evidence and examine the durability of character transformations. The Bahrudin model can be systematically documented and contextually adapted in other Islamic educational settings as a concrete strategy for forming a generation of Muslims who are spiritually grounded, intellectually humble, socially tolerant, and actively committed to peacebuilding.

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