

Ethical Sufism in Education: Reconstruction of the Concept of *Zuhd* According to Al-Ghazali and Its Model of Actualization in Pesantren Communities

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Abstract

This article aims to reconstruct and actualize the concept of *zuhd* within the framework of ethical Sufism (*tasawwuf akhlaki*) as an ethical solution to the modern moral crisis and to formulate its implementative model in Islamic education. This study is motivated by the fact that the modern and digital era is characterized by the strengthening of materialism, hedonism, and consumerism, which contribute to a structural moral crisis in the educational sphere. Educational paradigms that overly emphasize cognitive-instrumental achievements tend to neglect the cultivation of the soul and character. Using a qualitative method with a library research approach, this study examines various references related to ethical Sufism, *zuhd*, and Islamic character education. The analysis is conducted through content analysis and thematic analysis to identify conceptual patterns and implementation models. The findings indicate that ethical Sufism, grounded in *tazkiyat al-nafs* and the formation of character through the stages of *takballi*, *taballi*, and *tajalli*, has strong relevance in responding to the contemporary moral crisis. The concept of *zuhd* is reconstructed not as passive asceticism, but as a proportional ethical ethos that views the world as a means rather than an ultimate goal. Its implementation in Islamic education can be realized through the integration of values such as simplicity, self-control, spiritual habituation, and exemplary conduct within the culture of educational institutions. Thus, ethical Sufism based on the concept of *zuhd* offers a transformative paradigm that is integrative and contextual in cultivating a generation with integrity, moral resilience, and a transcendental orientation in the modern era.

Keywords: *Islamic education, Character education, Spiritual ethics, Tasawwuf akhlaki, Zuhud*

Abstrak

Artikel ini bertujuan merekonstruksi dan mengaktualisasikan konsep *zuhud* dalam kerangka tasawuf akhlaki sebagai solusi etis terhadap krisis moral modern serta merumuskan model implementatifnya dalam pendidikan Islam. Hal ini dilatari oleh fakta bahwa era modern dan digital ditandai oleh menguatnya materialisme, hedonisme, dan konsumerisme yang berimplikasi pada terjadinya krisis moral struktural dalam dunia pendidikan. Paradigma pendidikan yang terlalu menekankan capaian kognitif-instrumental cenderung mengabaikan pembinaan jiwa dan karakter. Dengan menggunakan metode kualitatif dengan pendekatan studi pustaka (*library research*), kajian dilakukan dengan menelaah berbagai sumber referensi yang relevan dengan tema tasawuf akhlaki, *zuhud*, dan pendidikan karakter Islam. Analisis dilakukan melalui teknik analisis isi dan analisis tematik untuk menemukan pola konseptual dan model implementasi. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa tasawuf akhlaki, yang berlandaskan pada *tazkiyatun nafs* dan pembentukan akhlak melalui tahapan *takballi*, *taballi*, dan *tajalli*, memiliki relevansi kuat dalam merespons krisis moral kontemporer. Konsep *zuhud* direkonstruksi bukan sebagai asketisme pasif, melainkan sebagai etos etis-proporsional yang menempatkan dunia sebagai sarana, bukan tujuan. Implementasi konsep ini dalam pendidikan Islam dapat dilakukan melalui integrasi nilai kesederhanaan, pengendalian diri, pembiasaan spiritual, dan keteladanan dalam budaya lembaga pendidikan. Dengan demikian, tasawuf akhlaki berbasis *zuhud* menawarkan

paradigma transformatif yang integratif dan kontekstual dalam membangun generasi berintegritas, berdaya tahan moral, dan berorientasi transendental di era modern.

Kata Kunci: *Pendidikan Islam, Pendidikan karakter, Etika spiritual, Tasawwuf akhlaki, Zuhd*

Introduction

The modern and digital era is characterized by rapid technological advancement, a consumerist culture, hedonism, and the globalization of values that often weaken the spiritual and moral orientation of the younger generation. Various studies have recorded symptoms of moral degradation, such as the increasing tendency toward individualism, deviant behavior among adolescents, the widespread accessibility of negative content, and the crisis of honesty and integrity in educational and professional environments.¹ This phenomenon is often described as a structural moral crisis, as it is closely related to an educational paradigm that emphasizes cognitive achievement and instrumental competence more than the cultivation of the soul and character.²

Within the context of Islamic education, many studies emphasize that character education will not be effective if it is not grounded in spiritual ethics and inner purification (*tazkiyat al-nafs*).³ In this regard, ethical Sufism (*tasawwuf akhlaki*) a dimension of Sufism that focuses on the purification of the soul, the formation of noble character, and the control of human desires—has again been considered relevant as a conceptual and practical foundation for education that responds to the contemporary moral crisis.⁴

According to Bambang Irawan, one of the key concepts in ethical Sufism is *zuhd* (ascetic detachment). Recent literature emphasizes that *zuhd* does not signify a total rejection of worldly life; rather, it refers to an inner attitude of not being excessively attached to material pleasures, status, and power, while at the same time using worldly life as a means to draw closer to God and to serve others.⁵ Understood in this way, *zuhd* has strong potential

¹ Nasiruddin Cholid et al., “Sufism Values in Character Education: An Approach to Facing the Challenges of the Modern Era,” *Edukasiana: Journal of Islamic Education* 32, no. 3 (2025): 167–86, <https://doi.org/10.61159/edukasiana.v4i1.376>; Naylatul Fadhilah, Aini Yusra Usriadi, and Gusmaneli Gusmaneli, “Peran Pendidikan Islam Sebagai Solusi Krisis Moral Generasi Z Di Era Globalisasi Digital,” *Jurnal Manajemen Dan Pendidikan Agama Islam* 3, no. 3 (2025): 230–37, <https://doi.org/10.61132/jmpai.v3i3.1119>.

² Ashri Hidayati, Purwoko, and Helmawati, “Pendidikan Akhlak Sebagai Inti Konsep Pendidikan Islam Dalam Pemikiran Al-Ghazali,” *Jurnal Pengabdian Masyarakat Dan Riset Pendidikan*, 2025, <https://doi.org/10.31004/jerkin.v4i1.1764>; Edo Feri Irawan and Fathur Rohman, “Rekonstruksi Konsep Pendidikan Agama Islam Berbasis Etika Spiritual: Studi Kritis Atas Pemikiran Pendidikan Al-Ghazali,” *IQRO: Journal of Islamic Education* 8, no. 1 (2025): 164–84, <https://doi.org/10.24256/iqro.v8i1.6618>.

³ Muhammad Hafidz Khusnadin and Muhammad Fahmi Shihab, “Al-Ghazali’s Concept of Tazkiyatun Nafs as a Method in Moral Education,” *Oasis: Jurnal Ilmiah Kajian Islam* 9, no. 2 (2025): 151, <https://doi.org/10.24235/oasis.v9i2.19732>; Ahmad Wildan Sahuri Ramdani, “Pembentukan Karakter Melalui Pendidikan Agama Islam,” *Annual International Conference on Islamic Education for Students*, 2022, <https://doi.org/10.18326/aicoies.v1i1.357>.

⁴ M Al-Chudri and Ainun Najib, “Pedagogi Tasawuf Dalam Pendidikan Islam Moderat,” *YASIN*, 2025, <https://doi.org/10.58578/yasin.v5i2.5194>; Nasiruddin and Nurhasanah, “Sufism Values in Character Education: An Approach to Facing the Challenges of the Modern Era,” *Edukasiana: Journal of Islamic Education*, 2025, <https://doi.org/10.61159/edukasiana.v4i1.376>.

⁵ “Islamic Boarding Schools (Pesantren), Sufism and Environmental Conservation Practices in Indonesia,” *HTS Theologese Studies / Theological Studies*, 2022, <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v78i4.7073>.

to become an ethical ethos that resists the excesses of modern materialism and consumerism.⁶

A number of previous studies show that ethical Sufism (*tasawwuf akhlaki*) has long been a subject of discussion in the discourse of Islamic education, although the focus and approaches vary.⁷ Classical conceptual foundations of ethical Sufism are often traced to the thought of Abu Hamid al-Ghazali, particularly in his monumental work *Ihya Ulum al-Din*, which emphasizes *tazkiyat al-nafs* (purification of the soul) as the core of moral formation and the integration between the outward and inward dimensions in education.⁸ Contemporary studies that examine al-Ghazali's thought generally focus on the relevance of the concepts of spiritual purification, control of the lower self (*nafs*), and moral habituation within modern Islamic educational curricula.⁹ However, most of these studies remain normative–philosophical in nature and have not specifically connected these ideas with the structural problems of moral crisis in the era of digitalization and global consumerism.¹⁰

Beyond al-Ghazali, the idea of ethics grounded in Sufism can also be traced in the thought of Ibn Miskawayh through his work *Tabdhib al-Akblaq*, which emphasizes character formation through the training of the soul and the balance of rational, irascible, and appetitive human faculties.¹¹ Several modern studies position Ibn Miskawayh as a pioneer of rational Islamic ethics; however, these studies largely examine aspects of moral philosophy rather than the practical dimension of ethical Sufism within the context of contemporary education.¹² Consequently, the relationship between Sufi ethics and the challenges of modern hedonistic culture has not yet been systematically elaborated.¹³

In the Indonesian context, studies on ethical Sufism are often associated with character education rooted in pesantren traditions and the ideas of reformist Muslim

⁶ I Adibah and Uswatun Chasanah, “Aktualisasi Sufisme Dan Masa Depan Pendidikan Islam Modern Era Society 5.0,” *Al-Fikri: Jurnal Studi Dan Penelitian Pendidikan Islam*, 2023, <https://doi.org/10.30659/jspi.v6i2.35054>; Rosi Islamiyati and Siti Amallia, “Gagasan Zuhud Modern Dan Relevansinya Dalam Upaya Peningkatan Etos Kerja Kaum Sufi,” *Jurnal Multidisiplin Ibrahimy*, 2024, <https://doi.org/10.35316/jummy.v1i2.4608>.

⁷ Faisal Nur, “Pendidikan Akhlak Berbasis Tasawuf: Relevansi Dan Implementasi Dalam Konteks Pendidikan Modern,” *Jurnal Ilmiah Guru Madrasah*, 2025, <https://doi.org/10.69548/jigm.v4i1.58>.

⁸ Ashri Hidayati et al., “Pendidikan Akhlak Sebagai Inti Konsep Pendidikan Islam Dalam Pemikiran Al-Ghazali,” *Jurnal Pengabdian Masyarakat Dan Riset Pendidikan* 4, no. 1 (2025): 2606–16, <https://doi.org/10.31004/jerkin.v4i1.1764>.

⁹ Irawan and Rohman, “Rekonstruksi Konsep Pendidikan Agama Islam Berbasis Etika Spiritual: Studi Kritis Atas Pemikiran Pendidikan Al-Ghazali.”

¹⁰ Muhamad Arif and Mohd. Norafizal Abd. Aziz, “The Relevance of Islamic Educational Characteristics In The 21st-Century,” *Syaikhuna: Jurnal Pendidikan Dan Pranata Islam*, 2022, <https://doi.org/10.36835/syaikhuna.v13i02.5903>.

¹¹ Wanto Hermawan and Mahmudin Sudin, “Moral Education Approaches: Ibn Miskawayh And Imam Al-Ghazali,” *Jurnal Hadratul Madaniyah*, 2025, <https://doi.org/10.33084/jhm.v12i1.9835>.

¹² Saeful Anwar, Ahmad Dianul Fikri, and Yogi Prana Izza, “Implementation of The Concept of Tazkiyat Al-Nafs Imam Al-Ghazali in The Cultivation Of Student Moral Education at The Al-Aly Bojonegoro Modern Islamic Boarding School,” *Al Uhya: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam*, 2025, <https://doi.org/10.32665/alulya.v10i1.4210>.

¹³ Mujiburrohman, Nur Hidayah, and Abdunrorma Samaalee, “Transforming Moral Values in Muslim Youth: Islamic Philosophy and Educational Practice at MTs Sholihyyah in Global Perspective,” *Solo Universal Journal of Islamic Education and Multiculturalism*, 2025, <https://doi.org/10.61455/sujiem.v3i2.408>.

thinkers.¹⁴ Several studies on the educational thought of Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, for example, emphasize the importance of *adab* as the core of education, which epistemologically aligns with ethical Sufism.¹⁵ Nevertheless, such studies tend to focus more on critiques of the secularization of knowledge and the Islamization of knowledge rather than on reconstructing the concept of *zuhd* as an ethical ethos for confronting modern materialism.¹⁶ Similarly, studies on Sufism in education often highlight the implementation of spiritual values in Islamic educational institutions but have not explicitly formulated *zuhd* as an ethical paradigm responsive to the structural moral crisis caused by globalization and consumerist culture.¹⁷

Other studies on *zuhd* generally remain focused on historical and theological aspects, for instance by examining early ascetic practices within the classical Sufi tradition as developed in the thought of Hasan al-Basri or Rabi'a al-Adawiyya.¹⁸ These studies emphasize the spiritual and eschatological dimensions of *zuhd* as an attitude of distancing oneself from worldly attachments.¹⁹ However, reinterpretations of *zuhd* as a proportional ethical attitude namely, active engagement in the world without becoming trapped in materialism remain relatively limited within contemporary studies of Islamic education.²⁰

Based on this review, a research gap becomes apparent. *First*, studies on ethical Sufism (*tasawwuf akhlaki*) tend to be normative and have not been systematically integrated with analyses of the structural moral crisis in the modern era.²¹ *Second*, the concept of *zuhd* has mostly been understood within the framework of individual asceticism and has not yet been reconstructed as an ethical paradigm that is applicable within the system and practices of contemporary Islamic education.²² Therefore, this study offers a novel contribution by actualizing the concept of *zuhd* within the framework of ethical Sufism as an ethical solution to the modern moral crisis, while also formulating a model for its implementation in Islamic education. Through this approach, ethical Sufism is not merely positioned as a classical

¹⁴ Samdani Samdani et al., "Internalization of Sufism Values in Learning Moral Beliefs in Madrasah Aliyah," *Tafkir: Interdisciplinary Journal of Islamic Education*, 2025, <https://doi.org/10.31538/tijie.v6i4.2350>.

¹⁵ Ita Yunita, Anis Saidah, and Muhammad Fahmi, "The Imperative of Integrating Knowledge and Adab in Reconstructing Islamic Education in the Digital Era: A Study of Al-Attas's Thought," *J-PAI: Jurnal Pendidikan Agama Islam*, 2025, <https://doi.org/10.18860/jpai.v11i2.32660>.

¹⁶ Islamiyati and Amallia, "Gagasan Zuhud Modern Dan Relevansinya Dalam Upaya Peningkatan Etos Kerja Kaum Sufi."

¹⁷ Yetty Faridatul Ulfah, Alfian Eko Rochmawan, and Faruq Alhasbi, "Islamic Ethics Education Concept For Gen Z: Ibn Miskawayh's View On Philosophy," *Profetika: Jurnal Studi Islam*, 2024, <https://doi.org/10.23917/profetika.v25i01.4391>.

¹⁸ Islamiyati and Amallia, "Gagasan Zuhud Modern Dan Relevansinya Dalam Upaya Peningkatan Etos Kerja Kaum Sufi."

¹⁹ Islamiyati and Amallia.

²⁰ Ulfah, Rochmawan, and Alhasbi, "Islamic Ethics Education Concept For Gen Z: Ibn Miskawayh's View On Philosophy."

²¹ Irawan and Rohman, "Rekonstruksi Konsep Pendidikan Agama Islam Berbasis Etika Spiritual: Studi Kritis Atas Pemikiran Pendidikan Al-Ghazali."

²² Samdani et al., "Internalization of Sufism Values in Learning Moral Beliefs in Madrasah Aliyah."

spiritual heritage, but as a transformative paradigm that is relevant and contextual in addressing the moral challenges of the digital and global era.²³

Departing from this background, the article is grounded in the main problem of a structural moral crisis in the modern and digital era, characterized by the dominance of materialism, hedonism, and educational paradigms that overly emphasize cognitive–instrumental aspects while neglecting the cultivation of the soul.²⁴ Although various studies have emphasized the importance of character education and spiritual ethics, an approach that systematically integrates ethical Sufism, particularly the concept of *zuhd*, into the framework of contemporary Islamic education has not yet been comprehensively and practically formulated.²⁵ Accordingly, the central question addressed in this article is how the concept of *zuhd* within the framework of ethical Sufism can be reconstructed and actualized so that it functions as an ethical solution to the modern moral crisis, and how it can be implemented in the practices of Islamic education.²⁶

More operationally, this study formulates several key questions: What are the theoretical foundations of ethical Sufism and the concept of *zuhd* within the tradition of Islamic thought? How are the values of *zuhd* relevant in responding to the phenomena of materialism, consumerism, and moral degradation in the modern era? How can an implementative model of the concept of *zuhd* be integrated into Islamic education and contemporary character education? Through a library research approach and thematic analysis, this article aims to formulate a conceptual construction that positions *zuhd* not as passive asceticism, but rather as a proportional ethical ethos that cultivates integrity, self-control, and transcendental orientation within the educational process.²⁷ Thus, the solution proposed by this study is a conceptual-implementative model of ethical Sufism based on *zuhd* that is relevant, contextual, and transformative for Islamic education in the modern era.²⁸

This study employs a qualitative method using a library research approach. The primary sources consist of references discussing *tasawwuf akhlaki* (ethical Sufism), *zuhd*, *tazkiyat al-nafs* (purification of the soul), Islamic character education, Sufism in education, and critiques of moral modernity. Data were collected through searches in academic databases using the keywords *tasawwuf akhlaki*, *zuhd*, Sufism moral education, *tazkiyat al-nafs*, and Islamic character education. The data were analyzed using content analysis and thematic

²³ Mujiburrohman, Hidayah, and Samaalee, “Transforming Moral Values in Muslim Youth: Islamic Philosophy and Educational Practice at MTs Sholihyyah in Global Perspective.”

²⁴ Ashri Hidayati et al., “Pendidikan Akhlak Sebagai Inti Konsep Pendidikan Islam Dalam Pemikiran Al-Ghazali.”

²⁵ Abu Hamid Al-Ghazali, *Ihya' Ulum Al-Din* (Beirut: Dar al-Ma'rifah, n.d.).

²⁶ Roma Wijaya, “Rekonstruksi Ajaran Sufistik Era Medsos (Kajian Konsep Zuhud),” *Al-Dzikra: Jurnal Studi Ilmu Al-Qur'an Dan Al-Hadits*, 2023, <https://doi.org/10.24042/al-dzikra.v17i1.13768>.

²⁷ M Ramdani, Aceng Kosasih, and M Abdullah, “Nilai-Nilai Pendidikan Akhlak Dalam QS. Al-Mujadalah Ayat 11 Dan Implikasinya Terhadap Pembelajaran Pendidikan Agama Islam,” *At-Tajdid: Jurnal Pendidikan Dan Pemikiran Islam*, 2024, <https://doi.org/10.24127/att.v8i2.3711>.

²⁸ Nur, “Pendidikan Akhlak Berbasis Tasawuf: Relevansi Dan Implementasi Dalam Konteks Pendidikan Modern.”

analysis in order to identify conceptual patterns and models for implementing *zuhd* within educational contexts.²⁹

Results and Discussion

Overview of Ethical Sufism

Ethical Sufism (*tasamwuf akhlaki*) is a dimension of Sufism oriented toward moral development through the process of purification of the soul (*tazkiyat al-nafs*), control of human desires, and the internalization of noble character.³⁰ Unlike philosophical Sufism, which emphasizes metaphysical speculation, ethical Sufism places greater emphasis on the transformation of character through systematic spiritual discipline and ethical practice in social life.³¹ Its conceptual roots can be traced to the thought of Abu Hamid al-Ghazali, particularly in his monumental work *Ihya Ulum al-Din*, which integrates the dimensions of sharia, ethics, and spirituality within a framework of moral education.³² In al-Ghazali's formulation, the formation of character cannot rely solely on the transmission of knowledge but requires a gradual process consisting of three stages: *takhalli* (emptying oneself of reprehensible traits), *taballi* (adorning oneself with virtuous qualities), and *tajalli* (the manifestation of divine values in human behavior).³³

Beyond al-Ghazali, the ethical dimension of Sufism is also closely related to the thought of Ibn Miskawayh, particularly through his work *Tabdhib al-Akhlak*, which emphasizes the importance of balancing the rational, irascible, and appetitive faculties in the formation of character.³⁴ Although Ibn Miskawayh is often categorized as a moral philosopher, the integration of spiritual discipline and moral habituation in his ideas demonstrates a strong intersection with the paradigm of ethical Sufism.³⁵

In contemporary scholarship, studies indexed in international and nationally accredited academic databases demonstrate a renewed interest in ethical Sufism as a foundational framework for Islamic character education. Various studies emphasize that a Sufi-oriented approach contributes significantly to the development of reflective awareness,

²⁹ Al-Chudri and Najib, "Pedagogi Tasawuf Dalam Pendidikan Islam Moderat."

³⁰ Happy Syafaat Sidiq, "Akhlak Tasawuf," *Eksekusi: Jurnal Ilmu Hukum Dan Administrasi Negara*, 2023, <https://doi.org/10.55606/eksekusi.v2i1.818>.

³¹ Taosyekh Nawawi et al., "Pengertian Ilmu Akhlak Tasawuf Dan Perannya Dalam Menumbuhkan Karakter Mahasiswa," *TSAQOFAH*, 2025, <https://doi.org/10.58578/tsaqofah.v5i2.5178>.

³² Md Yousuf Ali, "Analyzing The Application and Practice of The Principles of Da 'wah in The Age of Globalization," *Dakwah*, 2023, 563, https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Mohd-Mohamad-4/publication/307569538_Peranan_Perubatan_Islam_Di_Malaysia_Sebagai_Medium_Dakwah_Kepada_Masyarakat/links/57c92cea08ae28c01d544f2f/Peranan-Perubatan-Islam-Di-Malaysia-Sebagai-Medium-Dakwah-Kepada-Masyarakat.

³³ M Mas'ud and F Fauzan, "Sufism Moral Education as an Effort to Strengthen Student's Character in the Era of Digital Disruption," *Research and Development in Education (RaDEn)*, 2025, <https://doi.org/10.22219/raden.v5i1.38364>.

³⁴ Mas'ud and Fauzan.

³⁵ Zaprulkhan Zaprulkhan, Zainul Abas, and Akbar Sarif, "Zuhd and Mahabbah: Liberating Modern Society from Spiritual Desolation and Moral Decadence," *Teosofi: Jurnal Tasawuf Dan Pemikiran Islam*, 2025, <https://doi.org/10.15642/teosofi.2025.15.1.205-228>.

self-discipline, and moral integrity among students.³⁶ These works generally argue that the modern moral crisis cannot be effectively addressed solely through normative or legalistic approaches; instead, it requires the internalization of values through spiritual cultivation and ethical habituation, which are central characteristics of ethical Sufism.³⁷

Conceptually, ethical Sufism may be understood as an educational paradigm centered on inner transformation, integrating cognitive, affective, and spiritual dimensions.³⁸ It does not merely propose a model of individual ethics, but also articulates a broader vision for the formation of the complete human being (*insan kamil*), who is able to maintain a balance between worldly engagement and spiritual orientation.³⁹ Consequently, ethical Sufism possesses a strong epistemological foundation within the classical Islamic intellectual tradition while also demonstrating continued relevance in contemporary discussions of Islamic education.⁴⁰

The Urgency of Ethical Sufism in Islamic Education

The urgency of ethical Sufism in Islamic education has become increasingly evident amid the growing moral challenges faced by the younger generation in the digital era.⁴¹ Numerous academic reports and studies published in reputable scholarly outlets indicate a rising trend of deviant behavior, academic integrity crises, and weak self-control among students and university learners.⁴² Research in the field of character education also suggests that educational models excessively oriented toward cognitive achievement and labor-market competencies often neglect the cultivation of inner character, resulting in an imbalance between intellectual capability and moral maturity.⁴³

In this context, ethical Sufism offers an integrative approach that places *tazkiyat al-nafs* (purification of the soul) as a foundational element of educational curricula and institutional culture.⁴⁴ Empirical studies conducted in pesantren-based educational institutions demonstrate that the internalization of values such as simplicity, spiritual discipline, and reflective self-awareness correlates positively with increased honesty, social

³⁶ John Thibdeau, "Enacting Mysticism in the World: Practical Sufism in the Tariqa Karkariyya and Alawiyya," *Religions*, 2025, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel16020111>.

³⁷ Samsudin Sekolah et al., "Implementation of Moral Sufism in Islamic Religious Education," *Indonesian Journal of Contemporary Multidisciplinary Research*, 2023, <https://doi.org/10.55927/modern.v2i6.6806>.

³⁸ Samdani et al., "Internalization of Sufism Values in Learning Moral Beliefs in Madrasah Aliyah."

³⁹ Aji Muhammad Iqbal et al., "Sufistic Curriculum Development Management at the Islamic Boarding School," *International Journal of Islamic Educational Research*, 2025, <https://doi.org/10.61132/ijier.v2i2.284>.

⁴⁰ A Gani, "Urgency Education Morals of Sufism in Millennial Era," *Journal for the Education of Gifted Young Scientists*, 2019, <https://doi.org/10.17478/jegys.603574>.

⁴¹ Nasr S.H., *Islamic Spirituality: Foundations* (New York: Routledge/KPI, 1987).

⁴² Ahmad Handhalas Shamsuddin Shamsuddin et al., "E-Learning Integration of Tasawuf in Islamic Education: A Bibliometric Study," *Journal of Advanced Research in Applied Sciences and Engineering Technology*, 2024, <https://doi.org/10.37934/araset.56.3.129146>.

⁴³ Ibn Miskawayh, *Tabdhib Al-Akhlāq Wa Taṭhīr Al-A'raq* (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-Ilmiyyah., 1966).

⁴⁴ Fahrudin Fahrudin et al., "Exploring Students' Perspectives on Sufism and Tarekat in Islamic Education," *Jurnal Pendidikan Islam*, 2024, <https://doi.org/10.15575/jpi.v10i1.33521>.

responsibility, and moral resilience among students. These findings suggest that the spiritual dimension is not merely complementary but rather a determinant factor in the sustainable formation of character.⁴⁵

Furthermore, the urgency of ethical Sufism is also reflected in its ability to respond to the culture of global materialism and consumerism. The concept of *zuhd*, when reconstructed in a proportional manner, becomes an ethical ethos that encourages active simplicity, ecological responsibility, and a transcendental orientation in social life.⁴⁶ Several contemporary studies on Islamic moral education also highlight that Sufi-inspired approaches are effective in cultivating self-regulation and moral resilience among young people in the face of pressures from digital culture.

Thus, ethical Sufism possesses a strategic urgency within contemporary Islamic education for several fundamental reasons. *First*, it provides an integrative theoretical framework that bridges the relationship between knowledge (*ilm*) and moral character (*akhlak*). In many modern educational systems, the transmission of knowledge often becomes separated from the cultivation of ethical and spiritual values, resulting in graduates who are intellectually capable yet morally fragile. Ethical Sufism seeks to overcome this dichotomy by positioning knowledge as a means for spiritual refinement and ethical responsibility, thereby integrating intellectual development with the purification of the soul (*taẓkiyat al-nafsi*).

Second, ethical Sufism offers a practical approach grounded in spiritual habituation and ethical discipline. Unlike purely normative or doctrinal approaches to moral education, the Sufi tradition emphasizes continuous training of the self through reflection, self-control, and the cultivation of virtues. Practices such as self-evaluation (*muhasabah*), spiritual discipline (*riyadah*), and the gradual internalization of virtues foster character formation not only at the cognitive level but also at the affective and behavioral levels. Through such processes, moral values become embodied habits rather than merely theoretical principles.

Third, ethical Sufism remains highly relevant in addressing the structural moral crisis generated by the globalization of values, particularly the expansion of materialism, consumerism, and hyper-individualism in the digital age. The reconstruction of concepts such as *zuhd*, understood not as withdrawal from worldly engagement but as a balanced and ethical orientation toward it, provides a moral framework capable of guiding individuals to participate actively in society without becoming trapped in excessive material attachment.⁴⁷

In this regard, the implementation of ethical Sufism in Islamic education does not merely strengthen individual religiosity, but also nurtures broader social and ecological consciousness. By emphasizing humility, responsibility, and ethical awareness, it encourages learners to develop sensitivity toward social justice, communal harmony, and environmental

⁴⁵ Implementasi Pendidikan et al., "Implementasi Pendidikan Tasawuf Dalam Membentuk Toleransi Di Pondok Pesantren Sunan Kalijogo Jabung Malang," *Impressive: Journal of Education*, 2023, <https://doi.org/10.61502/ijoe.v1i4.48>.

⁴⁶ Najwan Saada, "Educating for Global Citizenship in Religious Education: Islamic Perspective," *International Journal of Educational Development*, 2023, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijedudev.2023.102894>.

⁴⁷ Shamsuddin et al., "E-Learning Integration of Tasawuf in Islamic Education: A Bibliometric Study."

stewardship. Therefore, the integration of ethical Sufism into the system of Islamic education represents both an epistemological necessity and a practical imperative for cultivating a generation that possesses integrity, moral resilience, and a transcendental orientation in navigating the complexities of the modern era.

***Zuhd* as an Ethical Solution to the Moral Crisis**

The moral crisis in the modern and digital era is increasingly characterized by the dominance of materialism, consumerism, and hedonism, accompanied by the weakening of personal integrity and social responsibility.⁴⁸ These tendencies are reinforced by rapid technological development and the culture of digital visibility, where social recognition is often measured through material symbols, lifestyle displays, and online validation. As a result, success is frequently defined in terms of economic achievement and external performance rather than moral maturity and spiritual depth. This phenomenon can also be observed within institutional cultures, including educational institutions, where academic success is sometimes reduced to measurable achievements while neglecting the cultivation of ethical awareness and inner discipline.⁴⁹

In this context, the concept of *zuhd* within the framework of ethical Sufism can be reconstructed as a relevant and contextual ethical solution.⁵⁰ Classical scholars such as Abu Hamid al-Ghazali explain in *Ihya Ulum al-Din* that *zuhd* does not imply a total rejection of worldly life.⁵¹ Rather, it represents an inner orientation in which worldly possessions remain under human control instead of controlling the human heart. Wealth, status, and power are therefore regarded merely as instruments for achieving higher spiritual and ethical purposes. This perspective highlights that *zuhd* is not a form of passive asceticism or social withdrawal, but a balanced ethical attitude that enables individuals to engage actively in worldly affairs while maintaining spiritual awareness and moral restraint.⁵²

In facing the modern moral crisis, *zuhd* functions as an important mechanism of self-regulation that helps individuals manage their desires and resist excessive consumerist impulses. Many forms of moral degradation stem from the inability to control desire, ambition, and the pursuit of prestige.⁵³ By cultivating the value of moderation and the virtue of *qana'ah* (contentment), *zuhd* encourages individuals to develop inner stability and ethical consistency. This attitude becomes particularly significant in the digital environment, where individuals are constantly exposed to competitive displays of lifestyle, symbolic

⁴⁸ A Wahid et al., "Utilizing *Zuhd* Hadiths For Upper-Class Crime Prevention," *Jurnal Ilmiah Islam Futura*, 2023, <https://doi.org/10.22373/jiif.v23i2.17353>.

⁴⁹ Abdullah Şahin, "Critical Issues in Islamic Education Studies: Rethinking Islamic and Western Liberal Secular Values of Education," *Religions*, 2018, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel9110335>.

⁵⁰ Zaprulkhan, Abas, and Sarif, "*Zuhd* and Mahabbah: Liberating Modern Society from Spiritual Desolation and Moral Decadence."

⁵¹ Al-Ghazali, *Ihya' Ulum Al-Din*.

⁵² Alifya et al., "Membangun Karakter Spiritual Melalui Hadis Nabi: Studi Hadis Tematik Atas Konsep *Zuhud*," *Mahad Aly Journal Of Islamic Studies*, 2025, <https://doi.org/10.63398/54z7tg89>.

⁵³ Zaprulkhan, Abas, and Sarif, "*Zuhd* and Mahabbah: Liberating Modern Society from Spiritual Desolation and Moral Decadence."

representations of success, and the pressure to maintain social visibility.⁵⁴ Through the ethical discipline of *zuhd*, individuals learn to evaluate success not merely in material terms but in relation to integrity, responsibility, and spiritual purpose.

Furthermore, the reinterpretation of *zuhd* in contemporary discourse also expands beyond individual spirituality to include social and ecological dimensions.⁵⁵ From this perspective, detachment from excessive material attachment encourages responsible consumption and a more balanced relationship with natural resources. A person who internalizes the values of *zuhd* is less likely to pursue exploitative economic behavior and more inclined to adopt sustainable and ethical patterns of living.⁵⁶ Consequently, *zuhd* contributes to the development of social sensitivity, solidarity with marginalized communities, and awareness of environmental stewardship.

In educational contexts, the integration of *zuhd* as an ethical value can help reshape the orientation of learning from purely competitive and achievement-driven models toward a more holistic formation of character. Students are encouraged to cultivate humility, discipline, responsibility, and reflective awareness as integral components of intellectual development. Such an approach aligns with the broader objective of Islamic education, which seeks not only to transmit knowledge but also to form morally grounded and spiritually conscious individuals.⁵⁷

Therefore, the contemporary actualization of *zuhd* within the paradigm of ethical Sufism should be understood not merely as a revival of classical moral teachings, but as the formulation of a transformative ethical framework capable of addressing the root causes of the modern moral crisis, namely excessive attachment to material success and the erosion of transcendental orientation in human life. By restoring the balance between worldly engagement and spiritual awareness, *zuhd* offers a constructive pathway toward cultivating individuals and societies that are more ethical, balanced, and spiritually grounded in the midst of modern challenges.

The Contribution of Ethical Sufism to Educational Advancement

Ethical Sufism (*tasawwuf akhlaki*) provides a significant contribution to the advancement of education, particularly in fostering a balance between the intellectual, moral, and spiritual dimensions of human development.⁵⁸ Modern education often becomes trapped in a cognitive–instrumental orientation, emphasizing academic achievement, technical

⁵⁴ Şahin, “Critical Issues in Islamic Education Studies: Rethinking Islamic and Western Liberal Secular Values of Education.”

⁵⁵ Irawan, “Islamic Boarding Schools (Pesantren), Sufism and Environmental Conservation Practices in Indonesia.”

⁵⁶ Şahin, “Critical Issues in Islamic Education Studies: Rethinking Islamic and Western Liberal Secular Values of Education.”

⁵⁷ Azwar Azwar et al., “Işlāḥ of Al-Ghazālī’s Ideas and Movements and Their Relevance to Contemporary Islamic Preaching,” *Ulumuna*, 2024, <https://doi.org/10.20414/ujis.v28i1.513>.

⁵⁸ Yedi Purwanto et al., “Tasawwuf Moderation in Higher Education: Empirical Study of Al-Ghazālī’s Tasawwuf Contribution to Intellectual Society,” *Cogent Social Sciences* 9 (2023), <https://doi.org/10.1080/23311886.2023.2192556>.

competence, and economic productivity. As a result, the cultivation of character and inner maturity frequently receives insufficient attention. Ethical Sufism offers an integrative paradigm that places moral formation at the core of the educational process.⁵⁹

In the classical Islamic intellectual tradition, the integration of knowledge and morality was strongly emphasized by Abu Hamid al-Ghazali, who argued that knowledge without moral guidance can lead to corruption and harm. In his work *Ihya Ulum al-Din*, he explains that education is not merely the transfer of knowledge but a process of spiritual and moral transformation through the stages of *takballi* (purifying oneself from negative traits), *taballi* (adornment with virtuous qualities), and *tajalli* (the manifestation of divine values in human conduct).⁶⁰ This perspective remains highly relevant for contemporary education, which increasingly demands not only technical competence but also the formation of individuals with strong ethical character.⁶¹

The contribution of ethical Sufism to educational progress can be observed in several important aspects. *First*, it strengthens academic integrity and honesty. Values such as *muraqabah* (the awareness of being constantly observed by God) and *muhasabah* (self-reflection and evaluation) encourage students to act truthfully and responsibly even when external supervision is absent. These spiritual attitudes cultivate internal moral discipline, which is essential in preventing academic misconduct and ethical violations.⁶² *Second*, ethical Sufism helps develop moral resilience in the face of the pressures of digital culture and global competition. Students today encounter intense exposure to social comparison, consumerist lifestyles, and symbolic measures of success. The ethical training found in Sufi traditions encourages moderation, humility, and inner stability, enabling learners to maintain their values despite external pressures. *Third*, ethical Sufism contributes to the formation of ethical leadership oriented toward the common good. By internalizing spiritual values such as sincerity, humility, and responsibility, students are prepared to become leaders who prioritize justice and social welfare. This vision aligns with the Islamic concepts of *insan kamil* (the complete human being) and humanity's role as God's representative on earth (*khalifah fi al-ard*), emphasizing leadership that combines intellectual capability with moral responsibility.⁶³

In practical terms, educational institutions—particularly pesantren-based schools and Islamic educational environments—that integrate the values of ethical Sufism often demonstrate more holistic approaches to character formation.⁶⁴ Spiritual habituation, the moral example of teachers, and a culture of simplicity become integral elements of an

⁵⁹ M.A. Al-Abrasyi, *Dasar-Dasar Pendidikan Islam* (Jakarta: Bulan Bintang, 1974).

⁶⁰ Abu Hamid Al-Ghazali, *Miẓān Al-'Amal* (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 2010).

⁶¹ Uzma Gillani and Muhammad Jahanzeb Khan, "Achieving Our Highest Potential through Character Development (Husn-i-Akhlaq): An Islamic Perspective on Holistic Personality Development, Spiritual Growth and Human Flourishing," *Frontiers in Psychology* 16 (2025), <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2025.1569393>.

⁶² Syarnubi Syarnubi et al., "Implementing Character Education in Madrasah," *Jurnal Pendidikan Islam*, 2021, <https://doi.org/10.15575/jpi.v7i1.8449>.

⁶³ S.H., *Islamic Spirituality: Foundations*.

⁶⁴ Syarnubi et al., "Implementing Character Education in Madrasah."

educational ecosystem that continuously shapes the character of students. Such practices show that the progress of education should not be measured solely by academic indicators but also by the moral quality and social responsibility of its graduates.⁶⁵

Therefore, ethical Sufism contributes to educational advancement by providing a moral and spiritual foundation that strengthens the direction and purpose of education itself. It restores education to its essential function: forming individuals who are knowledgeable, morally upright, and oriented toward transcendental values.⁶⁶ In the context of the global moral crisis, the integration of ethical Sufism into educational systems is not merely an alternative approach but a strategic necessity to ensure that intellectual progress develops alongside moral and spiritual maturity.⁶⁷

Conclusion

Based on the discussion presented above, it can be concluded that the structural moral crisis in the modern and digital era is caused not only by weak individual self-control, but also by an educational paradigm that overly emphasizes cognitive–instrumental aspects while neglecting the cultivation of the soul. The dominance of materialism, hedonism, and global consumerism reinforces this tendency, resulting in an imbalance between intellectual intelligence and moral maturity. In this context, ethical Sufism (*tasawwuf akhlaki*) offers an integrative conceptual and practical framework through *tazkiyat al-nafs*, self-control, and the internalization of noble character. Grounded in the classical Islamic intellectual tradition, particularly the ideas of Abu Hamid al-Ghazali and Ibn Miskawayh, ethical Sufism places character formation at the core of education rather than as a mere complement. Its relevance becomes even stronger when confronted with the challenges of digital culture, which is marked by image competition and material orientation.

The concept of *zuhd*, reconstructed in a proportional manner, becomes the main contribution of this article. *Zuhd* is not understood as passive asceticism or rejection of the world, but rather as a proportional ethical ethos that views the world as a means rather than an ultimate goal. Within the framework of Islamic education, *zuhd* functions as a mechanism for building integrity, strengthening self-regulation, and fostering a transcendental orientation that guides learners to live simply, responsibly, and with moral resilience amid the globalization of values. Therefore, the actualization of ethical Sufism based on the concept of *zuhd* represents a strategic necessity in contemporary Islamic education. Its integration into curricula, institutional culture, and spiritual habituation can shape an educational model that is not only intellectually excellent but also morally and spiritually grounded. This article emphasizes that ethical Sufism is not merely a classical spiritual heritage, but a transformative paradigm that remains relevant and contextual in responding to the modern moral crisis.

⁶⁵ S.M.N. Al-Attas, *The Concept of Education in Islam* (Kuala Lumpur: ISTAC, 1991).

⁶⁶ Fariza Md. Sham and Hajar Nurma Wachidah, “Moral Reasoning Theory: Between Kohlberg ‘s and Al-Ghazali’s Perspective,” *International Journal of Islamic Thought*, 2021, <https://doi.org/10.24035/ijit.20.2021.207>.

⁶⁷ S.H., *Islamic Spirituality: Foundations*.

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