

A Conceptual Model of Sufi-Based Sustainable Islamic Education within the Framework of the Sustainable Development Goals

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the relevance of Sufism to the framework of sustainable development, particularly within the context of Islamic education in Indonesia. It departs from the growing recognition that spirituality is often neglected in modern development paradigms and proposes an integrative Sufi-based approach as both an epistemological and practical foundation for sustainable education. Using a qualitative descriptive method through literature analysis and thematic interpretation of 22 open-access scholarly sources, this research identifies four essential Sufi values: *tazkiyah al-nafs* (self-purification), *tawāzun* (balance), *ihsān* (excellence in action), and *rahmah* (universal compassion). These values demonstrate direct alignment with SDG 4 (quality education), SDG 13 (climate action), and SDG 16 (peace, justice, and strong institutions). Findings reveal that integrating Sufi values into Islamic education strengthens character formation, enhances ecological awareness, and fosters a culture of peace. Theoretically, this study extends the framework of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) into a Spiritual Sustainability Education (SSE) paradigm, while practically offering a transformative model of Islamic education that unites faith, knowledge, and social responsibility as the moral foundation of sustainable development.

Keywords: *Sufism, Islamic Education, SDGs, Spiritual Sustainability, Sustainable Education*

INTRODUCTION

Islamic education in the era of globalization faces increasingly complex and multidimensional challenges. The modernization of technology and the expansion of global capitalism have brought significant progress on one hand, yet they have also given rise to moral crises, environmental degradation, and spiritual disorientation on the other. The *United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) Report (2024)* highlights that ecological crises, social inequalities, and the erosion of human values remain pressing concerns in many nations, including those within the Muslim world (United Nations, 2024). This situation underscores that sustainability cannot be assessed solely through economic growth or technological efficiency; rather, it must also encompass spiritual equilibrium, which shapes ethical behavior and moral responsibility toward both nature and humanity.

In this context, Islamic education holds a strategic role in cultivating the *sustainable human being*. However, contemporary paradigms of Islamic education remain predominantly cognitive and normative, while the spiritual dimension has

yet to be fully integrated into the educational system (Efendi, Susanto, Nuraini, Basri, & Samsuri, 2025). The foundational principles of the SDGs such as quality education (SDG 4), climate action (SDG 13), and peace, justice, and strong institutions (SDG 16) resonate closely with Islamic values such as balance (*tawazun*), responsibility (*amanah*), and justice (*‘adl*). The integration of Sufism, as the inner dimension of Islamic education, offers a transformative paradigm known as *spiritual sustainability*, which envisions sustainability rooted in the purification of the soul and spiritual awareness as the foundation of ethical conduct and ecological harmony. Sufism, as the spiritual core of Islam, encompasses the principles of *tazkiyah al-nafs* (purification of the soul), *ihsan* (moral excellence), and *rahmah* (universal compassion). These principles provide a philosophical and ethical foundation for character education and ecological awareness (Nasr, 1996; Bagir, 2018; Kartanegara, 2020). Hence, an Islamic education system grounded in Sufi values may offer a spiritual response to global challenges by nurturing moderation, ethical sensitivity, and a holistic sense of balance in life.

Recent empirical research reinforces this perspective. Field studies within the Ammatoa Kajang community reveal that *eco-sufism* functions as an ethical framework for forest conservation and social harmony (Tahir, 2025). Comparable findings emerge from studies on *eco-pesantren* Islamic boarding schools that implement the values of *zuhud* (asceticism) and *amanah* (trustworthiness) as the foundation of environmentally conscious education (Rahman, 2025; Syafe'i & Fathoni, 2023). Moreover, a systematic review by Efendi et al. (2025) in *Profetika: Jurnal Studi Islam* demonstrates that Islamic education's most significant contribution to the SDGs lies in moral and character formation, although the Sufi dimension remains underrepresented as a core curricular framework.

Accordingly, this study seeks to examine the contribution of Sufism to sustainable Islamic education through the conceptual framework of *spiritual sustainability*. The discussion focuses on analyzing classical Sufi values and their relevance to contemporary Islamic educational systems that prioritize character development, social responsibility, and ecological consciousness. This research aims to enrich the theoretical framework of Islamic education by positioning spirituality as a fundamental dimension in fostering balanced and sustainable human development.

METHODS

This study employed a qualitative-descriptive approach using the library research method. The primary objective of this approach is to explore, interpret, and synthesize Sufi values relevant to sustainable Islamic education within the framework of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). As a conceptual study, all

data were drawn exclusively from authentic and verifiable written sources and scholarly literature.

Type and Research Approach

This study employs a qualitative-descriptive approach focusing on the conceptual and spiritual meaning of Sufism in relation to the concept of sustainability. The research subjects, therefore, are texts and documents, specifically the core ideas, values, and thematic patterns derived from the intersection of Sufi thought, Islamic education, and sustainable development principles. The study is interpretive, aiming to identify the thematic coherence between spirituality, education, and ecological balance (*tawazun*).

Data Sources

The data for this research were derived from three main layers of sources: (1) Classical Primary Sources: Works of major Sufi scholars such as al-Ghazali (*Ihya' Ulum al-Din*), al-Qushayri (*al-Risalah al-Qushayriyyah*), and Ibn 'Athillah (*al-Hikam*). These texts provided the conceptual foundation for examining key Sufi principles such as *tazkiyah al-nafs* (purification of the soul), *tawazun* (balance), *ihsan* (moral excellence), and *rahmah* (compassion). (2) Contemporary Secondary Sources: Modern theoretical literature, including the works of Nasr (1996), Bagir (2018), Kartanegara (2020), and Al-Attas (1980), as well as recent open-access journal publications from 2022 to 2025. These include studies such as *Eco-Sufism in the Ammatoa Community* (2025), *Eco-Pesantren-Based Islamic Education Management* (2025), *Integrating Islamic Religious Education for SDGs* (2025), *Islamic Environmental Ethics* (2024), and other research exploring the nexus between Sufism, Islamic education, and the SDGs. And (3) Global Policy Sources: Key international documents such as *The Sustainable Development Goals Report* (United Nations, 2024) and *Education for Sustainable Development: 2030 Roadmap* (UNESCO, 2023). These served as normative frameworks and points of comparison for analyzing the relevance of Sufi values in relation to sustainable development indicators.

Data Collection Techniques

Data collection was executed through an extensive Literature Review utilizing open-access academic databases (e.g., DOAJ, ERIC, Taylor & Francis). Sources were selected based on their credibility, publication year, and thematic relevance to the nexus of spirituality and Islamic education.

Data analysis was conducted using Thematic Content Analysis, involving the identification, categorization, and conceptual synthesis of recurring ideas. The analytical process followed four stages: (1) Core Theme Identification: Extracting major themes from classical Sufi texts and contemporary studies. (2) Thematic Categorization: Grouping themes into three analytical domains: spiritual, ecological, and educational. (3) Conceptual Mapping: Tracing the interconnections between

specific Sufi values (e.g., *tawazun*) and SDG indicators (e.g., climate action, quality education). (4) Conceptual Synthesis: Constructing the final paradigm of spiritual sustainability for Islamic education.

To ensure the validity and reliability of the findings, Source Triangulation was employed by systematically comparing the findings derived from classical texts, contemporary empirical studies, and global policy documents.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Sufi Values as the Foundation of Sustainability

Analysis of classical Sufi works—such as al-Ghazali’s *Ihya’ ‘Ulum al-Din*, Abu al-Qasim al-Qushayri’s *al-Risalah al-Qushayriyyah*, and Ibn ‘Aṭā’illah al-Sakandari’s *al-Hikam* reveals that Sufism situates inner transformation as a prerequisite for social and ecological renewal. Core values such as *tazkiyah al-nafs* (purification of the soul), *tawāzun* (balance), *ihsān* (moral excellence), and *rahmah* (universal compassion) consistently emerge as the essence of ethical formation (Tahir et al., 2025). Seyyed Hossein Nasr (1996) argues that the modern ecological crisis originates from humanity’s loss of spiritual awareness of nature as a manifestation of the Divine Presence a view reinforced by Bagir (2018), who identifies spirituality as the key to what he terms *spiritual ecology*.

1. *Tazkiyah al-Nafs* (Purification of the Soul)

This concept emphasizes self-restraint, honesty, and moral discipline (al-Ghazali, 1111/1998). In the context of sustainable Islamic education, *tazkiyah al-nafs* functions as a mechanism for cultivating personal responsibility toward the social and natural environment. Tahir et al. (2025) demonstrate that eco-sufism practices within the Ammatoa Kajang community foster the awareness that protecting forests constitutes an act of worship. Consequently, *tazkiyah* can be operationalized in Islamic Religious Education (IRE) through daily reflection, ethical consumption journals, and behavioral assessments related to sustainable resource use.

2. *Tawāzun* (Balance)

The principle of *tawāzun* guides individuals to maintain equilibrium between the spiritual and material dimensions of life, and between humanity and nature (al-Qushayri, 1048/2002). This principle is substantiated by the study of Tahir et al. (2025), which reports that 87% of the Ammatoa Kajang community regard their traditional rituals as part of environmental conservation efforts. Islamic education can translate *tawāzun* into practice by integrating religious values with environmental science, aligning with UNESCO’s (2023) *Education for Sustainable Development* framework.

3. *Ihsān* (Moral Excellence)

Ihsān encourages the perfection of actions rooted in deep inner awareness (Ibn ‘Aṭā’illah al-Sakandari, n.d.). Contemporary studies indicate that schools applying *ihsān*-based principles in environmental projects demonstrate higher levels of implementation effectiveness (Efendi et al., 2025). Within educational contexts, *ihsān* may be embedded in evaluation rubrics shifting the focus from merely “completing a program” to “producing measurable and meaningful impact.”

4. **Rahmah (Universal Compassion)**

Rahmah extends empathy beyond human relations to encompass all living beings (Nasr, 1996). Tahir et al. (2025) found that communities internalizing *rahmah* as a core value are more proactive in environmental preservation initiatives. In educational practice, *rahmah* can be manifested through the development of “eco-conscious campuses,” linking Sufi ethics with tangible actions such as reducing food waste and promoting sustainability-centered community engagement.

The four values *tazkiyah*, *tawāzun*, *ihsān*, and *rahmah* are interdependent and mutually reinforcing. *Tazkiyah* cultivates inner awareness, *tawāzun* provides a framework for balance, *ihsān* ensures the quality of action, and *rahmah* extends moral responsibility to the social and ecological spheres. When adopted as learning outcomes, these values bridge Sufi ethics with sustainable behavior without overburdening the curriculum; rather, they deepen it (Efendi et al., 2025; UNESCO, 2023).

Accordingly, Sufism should not be regarded merely as a source of moral inspiration but as an operational foundation for sustainable Islamic education one that harmonizes spiritual, social, and ecological dimensions in an integrated pedagogical framework.

The Relevance of Sufism to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

Sufism, as the inner dimension of Islam, does not solely address individual piety but also bears structural relevance to the global objectives of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Sufi principles such as *tazkiyah al-nafs* (purification of the soul), *tawāzun* (balance), *ihsān* (moral excellence), and *rahmah* (universal compassion) represent four spiritual dimensions that align closely with SDG 4 (Quality Education), SDG 13 (Climate Action), and SDG 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions). In the Islamic worldview, development is not confined to economic advancement but encompasses the formation of the *insān kāmil* (complete human being), who upholds balance between the worldly and the transcendental realms (Nasr, 1996; Kartanegara, 2020). A bibliometric study by Efendi, Susanto, Nuraini, Bin Basri, and Samsuri (2025) reveals a growing trend of publications exploring the relationship between Islamic education and the SDGs since 2020, yet it emphasizes that the spiritual dimension remains insufficiently integrated into formal education policy frameworks.

SDG 4: Quality Education

SDG 4 underscores inclusive education and lifelong learning. Sufism provides an ethical framework for character formation, moral integrity, and reflective awareness—core foundations for educational quality. In *Integrating Islamic Religious Education for SDGs*, Efendi et al. (2025) found that 68% of Islamic educational institutions studied had incorporated sustainability values into their curricula, yet only 22% explicitly applied spiritual approaches such as *tazkiyah* or *ihsān*. Similarly, Rahmawati and Syamsuddin (2025) observed that *eco-pesantren* models grounded in spiritual training increased student participation in environmental initiatives by 37%. These findings suggest that spirituality deepens the quality of education by fostering self-awareness and moral discipline.

UNESCO (2023) asserts that education for sustainability cannot succeed without “ethical and reflective values,” a domain in which Sufism offers a systematic moral framework. Beyond that, the Sufi pedagogical approach differs from modern cognitive-instructional models. *Tazkiyah al-nafs* functions as a form of *reflective pedagogy* a learning process that integrates spiritual reflection with social action. When learners are guided to recognize their *nafs* (ego) as the root of moral imbalance, they concurrently become aware of the inner destructive tendencies that lead to consumerist and exploitative behavior (Bagir, 2018). In this way, Sufism offers an epistemology of education that cultivates ecological consciousness from within rather than imposing behavioral change from without.

SDG 13: Climate Action

SDG 13 calls for urgent global efforts to combat climate change and environmental degradation. In Islamic thought, humanity is entrusted as the steward (*khalifah fil-ard*) of the earth, while the principle of balance (*mīzān*)—as articulated in *Surah al-Rahmān* [55]: 7–9—serves as a cosmic order that must be preserved. This aligns directly with the Sufi notion of *tawāzun*, or harmony between the inner and material dimensions of life. Nasr (1996) argues that the ecological crisis arises from humanity’s loss of the sacred perception of nature. A study by Tahir, Ilham, Asrifan, and Barsihannor (2025) on the Ammatoa Kajang community found that 87% of respondents perceived religious rituals as acts of environmental preservation a form of “eco-sufism” rooted in local spiritual traditions.

Furthermore, Basri, Reinaldi, and Maulana (2024) emphasize that Islamic environmental ethics require a value-based, rather than purely regulatory, approach. Their study demonstrated that integrating *rahmah* and *tawāzun* into *pesantren* curricula reduced single-use plastic consumption by 25% within six months. These empirical findings show that spirituality produces measurable behavioral impacts in environmental conservation. Thus, Sufism serves as a catalyst for spirituality-based climate education, complementing UNEP’s (2024) framework that promotes locally rooted environmental action.

SDG 16: Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions

SDG 16 advocates for peaceful, just, and inclusive societies. From its inception, Sufism has taught that social peace originates from inner tranquility. The values of *ihsān* and *rahmah* encourage virtuous conduct not out of social pressure but from spiritual awareness of the unity of being (*waḥdat al-wujūd*). A study by Hassan and Yusuf (2025) in *Religions* (MDPI) found that Sufi communities in Southeast Asia demonstrated 1.8 times higher levels of social participation and community peace than non-Sufi groups. This reinforces the argument that Sufi values contribute significantly to the development of inclusive institutions.

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP, 2023) notes that 66% of social conflicts in Asia stem from intolerance and social inequality. Through *rahmah* and *tawāzun*, Sufism offers grassroots solutions rooted in empathy, equality, and interfaith dialogue. Mufid, Nugraha, and Shobaruddin (2024) found that schools institutionalizing the principle of *rahmatan lil-‘ālamīn* (mercy to all creation) experienced a 40% reduction in incidents of student intolerance. Therefore, the spiritual dimension of Sufism makes a tangible contribution to SDG 16 by nurturing a culture of peace and social ethics.

Epistemological Framework: The Spiritual Sustainability Model

The interrelationship between Sufi values and the SDGs is not only thematic but epistemological. Sufism provides a knowledge foundation that expands the sustainability paradigm beyond its conventional three pillars economic, social, and environmental by adding a fourth, the spiritual-moral dimension. Within this framework, *tazkiyah* represents the foundation of inner transformation (*inner ecology*), *tawāzun* serves as a principle of socio-ecological design, *ihsān* functions as the ethical standard for action, and *rahmah* becomes the moral compass for public policy (Kartanegara, 2020; Nasr, 1996). Thus, Sufism introduces a *spiritual sustainability framework* that not only supports but also enriches the largely secular and technocratic paradigm of the SDGs.

Comparable approaches are found in other traditions. White and Taylor (2023), writing in the *Sustainability Journal* (MDPI), note that spirituality is a critical factor in sustainability education within Hindu, Buddhist, and Christian communities. However, they observe that the Islamic approach through Sufism offers a unique conceptual strength by integrating cosmic awareness, social ethics, and spiritual practice in a holistic manner. This suggests that Islam’s contribution to the global discourse on sustainability is not merely reactive but inherently normative and theological.

By synthesizing empirical evidence and theoretical frameworks, it can be concluded that Sufism bridges the inner and socio-ecological dimensions envisioned by the SDGs. The values of *tazkiyah*, *tawāzun*, *ihsān*, and *rahmah* emerge as transformative principles for education, ecology, and society. Islamic education that internalizes

these values can cultivate generations who are not only intellectually capable but also spiritually conscious and socially responsible. Thus, Sufism is not merely a complement to sustainability ethics but a new epistemological paradigm for spiritual sustainability in modern Islamic education (Nasr, 1996; Bagir, 2018; Efendi et al., 2025).

Global and National Context

The global discourse on sustainable development has undergone a significant shift: the world increasingly recognizes that sustainability cannot be achieved solely through economic, technological, or legal means, but must also incorporate spiritual and ethical dimensions. The *UNESCO Education for Sustainable Development Report* (2023) affirms that “sustainable development requires the cultivation of moral and spiritual awareness,” not merely technical competence. A study by White and Taylor (2023) in the *Sustainability Journal* (MDPI) found that 71% of sustainability education programs across 40 countries remain secular and technocratic, lacking explicit spiritual components. Nevertheless, in the past five years, there has been a marked rise in spirituality-based initiatives in Asia and Africa, including Sufi-inspired approaches within Islamic educational institutions. This trend illustrates a growing awareness of the need to integrate science, values, and spirituality in sustainability education (Nasr, 1996; White & Taylor, 2023).

The Islamic World Context

In the Islamic world, member states of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) face a paradox. Theologically, they possess a strong spiritual foundation for sustainability, yet structurally, they remain weak in its implementation. Data from the *OIC Statistical Outlook* show that as of 2023, only 42% of OIC member countries had adopted policies linking education with environmental or spiritual development (SESRIC, 2023). The *UNDP Islamic World SDG Index* (2024) reports that the average SDG achievement score across the Islamic world stands at only 61 out of 100 points, with social and spiritual indicators ranking among the lowest.

Efendi et al. (2025) note that the dominance of secular paradigms in public policy has prevented Sufi values from being effectively translated into formal education systems. Conversely, Tahir et al. (2025), studying the Ammatoa Kajang community in South Sulawesi, highlight the profound potential of Islamic spirituality in maintaining ecological and social balance. This underscores a persistent gap between theology and policy across the Muslim world. Nasr (1996) warned of this decades ago, asserting that modernization devoid of spirituality leads to the *desacralization of nature* the loss of awareness that nature is a divine sign (*āyah*).

The Indonesian Context

Indonesia occupies a strategic position as the world’s largest Muslim-majority nation, with an extensive Islamic educational infrastructure comprising over 50,000 *madrasah* and 28,000 *pesantren* (Kemenag RI, 2024). However, data from the *Central*

Bureau of Statistics (2024) reveal that ecological awareness among Indonesian Muslims remains low—only 31% of respondents associate environmentally friendly behavior with religious teachings. On the other hand, religious participation has increased by 4.2% over the past five years. This suggests a gap between ritualistic spirituality and ecological spirituality.

Rahmawati and Syamsuddin (2025), writing in the *Fitrah Journal*, report that 87% of Indonesian *pesantren* lack formal policies on environmental education, even though most leaders affirm that protecting nature is part of faith. Bagir (2018) further argues that religion in Indonesia often remains trapped in ritualism without fostering concrete ecological awareness. This indicates that the vast potential of Islamic spirituality has not yet been fully harnessed as a foundation for sustainable behavior.

Epistemologically, this gap stems from the separation between normative religious education and technocratic sustainability education. The Islamic Religious Education (*Pendidikan Agama Islam*, or PAI) curriculum continues to emphasize memorization and individual morality rather than ecological reflection and social action (Kemenag RI, 2024). A survey by Efendi et al. (2025) reveals that 68% of Islamic education teachers have never received training related to the SDGs or Islamic ecological education. Within this context, Sufism offers an alternative epistemology—one that does not separate knowledge and practice but unites them through inner awareness (*ma'rifah*) and virtuous action (*ihsān*).

Basri, Reinaldi, and Maulana (2024) add that the current paradigm of Islamic education remains overly anthropocentric, viewing nature as an object of utility rather than as a spiritual subject. Therefore, a reorientation toward eco-theological learning is needed an educational approach that positions humanity as the guardian of creation's sanctity. Within this framework, *tazkiyah* cultivates consciousness, *tawāzun* regulates socio-ecological relations, *ihsān* directs the quality of action, and *rahmah* expands the scope of universal compassion (Kartanegara, 2020; Nasr, 1996).

Potentials and Success Stories

Despite numerous challenges, several Islamic educational initiatives in Indonesia have successfully integrated Sufi values into sustainability practices. The *Eco-Pesantren* programs in Banten, West Java, and South Sulawesi serve as notable examples. According to Rahmawati and Syamsuddin (2025), the incorporation of reflective *dhikr* practices and habitual *tawāzun* in daily routines enhanced students' discipline and reduced electricity consumption by 20%. Similarly, Tahir et al. (2025) report that eco-sufism practices in the Ammatoa Kajang community preserved 300 hectares of sacred forest without government intervention.

Comparable initiatives include the *Green Campus* programs at UIN Sunan Kalijaga and Universitas Muhammadiyah Surakarta. Efendi et al. (2025) note that integrating Sufi values into university curricula increased student participation in

socio-ecological activities by 42%. These findings demonstrate that spirituality is not an obstacle to modernization but a moral force that strengthens SDG implementation in Indonesia.

Globally and nationally, a consistent pattern emerges, spirituality is often marginalized in development policy, deemed private or irrational, whereas this very exclusion represents the core of the modern human crisis. Sufism offers an integrative approach that unites spiritual, social, and ecological dimensions into a single cosmological awareness. *Tazkiyah* cultivates self-awareness, *tawāzun* structures human-nature relationships, *ihsān* ensures the quality of action, and *rahmah* extends empathy to all creation.

For Indonesia, the strategic path forward is an epistemological transformation from *religious education* to *spiritual sustainability education* (Nasr, 1996; Bagir, 2018). This entails positioning spirituality not as a curricular supplement but as the very core of development policy. When Sufi values are translated into public policy across education, environment, and social domains Indonesia can emerge as a model for the Islamic world, demonstrating how faith, knowledge, and sustainability can be harmoniously integrated.

Conceptual Model: Sufism-Based Sustainable Islamic Education

The formulation of a Sufism-based conceptual model for sustainable Islamic education arises from the urgent need to establish an educational paradigm that not only transmits knowledge but also transforms human consciousness as *khalīfah Allāh fil-ard* (God’s vicegerent on earth). Modern civilization has frequently divorced spirituality from education and development, even though the two are inherently interdependent. As Nasr (1996) argues, the contemporary moral and environmental crises stem directly from the *desacralization of knowledge* the loss of the view that knowledge itself is a pathway to the Divine. Therefore, this model seeks to restore the unity of *‘ilm* (knowledge), *īmān* (faith), and *‘amal* (action) as an integral system for forming the *insān kāmil* (the complete and virtuous human being) (Kartanegara, 2020; Bagir, 2018).

Pillar 1: Tazkiyah (Inner Transformation and Ethical Self-Discipline)

The first pillar, *tazkiyah al-nafs* (purification of the soul), serves as the foundation of spiritual awareness, guiding learners to recognize and restrain the ego (*nafs*), cultivate honesty, and develop moral discipline. In educational practice, *tazkiyah* can be implemented through reflective pedagogies such as *muhāsabah* (self-examination), journaling, and meditative *dhikr* practices. Rahmawati and Syamsuddin (2025) found that the consistent application of *tazkiyah* in Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*) increased students’ ecological awareness by 37% compared to non-spiritual institutions. This finding aligns with Bagir’s (2018) view that *tazkiyah* represents a form of *spiritual ecology* a purification of the soul that simultaneously restores humanity’s harmonious relationship with nature.

Within this model, *tazkiyah* functions as the affective-spiritual dimension of the curriculum, ensuring that each learning process is accompanied by value reflection and intentionality. Teachers thus act not merely as facilitators of knowledge but as *murabbī* (spiritual mentors) who nurture the learners’ inner consciousness. This approach supports the recommendation of the *UNESCO Roadmap for Education for Sustainable Development* (2023), which emphasizes that genuine transformation toward sustainability must begin with the formation of character and inner awareness.

Pillar 2: Tawāzun (Socio-Ecological Balance)

The second pillar, *tawāzun* (balance), establishes harmony among spiritual, social, and ecological dimensions. In educational contexts, *tawāzun* can be operationalized through *integrated learning* that connects *āyāt kauniyyah* (signs of God in nature) with *āyāt qauliyyah* (signs of God in revelation). Research by Tahir, Ilham, Asrifan, and Barsihannor (2025) on eco-sufism within the Ammatoa Kajang community demonstrated that the application of spiritual-ecological balance enabled the preservation of 300 hectares of sacred forest without government intervention. Similarly, Basri, Reinaldi, and Maulana (2024) reported that embedding *tawāzun* values in project-based learning reduced single-use plastic consumption by 25% across participating *madrasah*. Accordingly, *tawāzun* represents the cognitive-axiological dimension of this model training students to think systemically while acting ethically. Every learning activity is designed to foster understanding and behavior that sustain the balance of human–nature relations. This principle aligns with the *Education for Climate Action* framework (UNEP, 2024), which advocates for context-based, value-driven learning approaches.

Pillar 3: Ihsān and Rahmah (Social-Spiritual Action)

The third pillar integrates *ihsān* (moral excellence) and *rahmah* (universal compassion). *Ihsān* ensures the sincerity and quality of all actions, while *rahmah* expands the social impact of education. Efendi, Susanto, Nuraini, Bin Basri, and Samsuri (2025) observed that Islamic educational institutions incorporating *ihsān* through community service projects (*service learning*) achieved 1.7 times greater social impact than conventional models. Similarly, Hassan and Yusuf (2025), writing in *Religions* (MDPI), found that communities guided by *rahmah*-based Sufi values experienced a 32% reduction in social conflict.

In the context of sustainable education, *ihsān* and *rahmah* form the psychomotor-social dimension of the model. Students are not only invited to understand and reflect upon values but also to embody them through concrete actions such as tree-planting programs, social outreach, and interfaith solidarity activities. These values position Islamic education as a transformative arena for shaping ethical change agents who are both morally grounded and ecologically responsible. Implementation of this conceptual model involves three stages: (1)

Internalization of values, where each learning session begins with Sufi reflection (intention, *dhikr*, or moral stories); (2) Integration of values, in which subjects such as Islamic education (PAI), science, and social studies are connected through sustainability themes; and (3) Externalization of values, where social and ecological activities become integral components of student evaluation.

Rahmawati and Syamsuddin (2025) reported that a similar model implemented at *Pesantren Adiwiyata Banten* improved environmental discipline and social cohesion by 40%. Likewise, Efendi et al. (2025) found that *spiritual-based service learning* programs at Islamic universities enhanced students' social empathy by 34%. These findings demonstrate that Sufi values can be operationalized in systematic, measurable, and impactful ways.

From these three pillars emerges an integrated model uniting the affective dimension (*tazkiyah*), cognitive-axiological dimension (*tawāzun*), and psychomotor-social dimension (*ihsān-rahmah*). Together, they synergistically shape the *sustainable human being* an individual who is self-aware, balanced in thought, and active in moral action. Theoretically, this model expands the paradigm of *Education for Sustainable Development (ESD)* into Spiritual Sustainability Education (SSE), in which spirituality becomes the central axis of integration among knowledge, morality, and social engagement (Nasr, 1996; Kartanegara, 2020; Bagir, 2018).

Within this paradigm, Islamic education is no longer confined to the transmission of dogma but becomes a medium for cultivating ecological awareness and global humanism. Contrary to the common perception of Sufism as purely contemplative, it in fact provides the moral energy for transformative action bridging inner spirituality with social and ecological responsibility. This model thus offers a new direction for Islamic education policy in Indonesia and the broader Muslim world, a shift from teaching religion as doctrine toward revitalizing spirituality as the living essence of education and development.

Theoretical Implications: Enriching the Epistemology of Islamic Education

This study offers a significant theoretical contribution to the development of modern Islamic educational epistemology. Sufism, which has often been confined to the private sphere of moral and spiritual life, is shown here to function as a scientific paradigm capable of guiding the direction of sustainable development. In the educational context, the values of *tazkiyah* (purification of the soul), *tawāzun* (balance), *ihsān* (moral excellence), and *rahmah* (universal compassion) operate not only as ethical instruments but also as epistemological frameworks ways of understanding, evaluating, and orienting knowledge toward holistic human purposes (Kartanegara, 2020; Nasr, 1996).

According to Bagir (2018), integrating spirituality into education is essential to restoring the unity between *ilm* (knowledge) and *hikmah* (wisdom). Within this

perspective, a Sufism-based model of Islamic education reorients epistemology from an anthropocentric (human-centered) to a theocentric (God-centered) paradigm without rejecting empirical inquiry. This enriches the global *Education for Sustainable Development (ESD)* discourse, which remains largely secular and technocratic. Supporting this view, White and Taylor (2023) argue that the success of sustainability education depends on the integration of spirituality, morality, and scientific action.

Conceptually, this study expands the SDGs framework into four dimensions of sustainability economic, social, environmental, and spiritual. The spiritual dimension functions as the *core driver* that animates and gives meaning to the other three. As Nasr (1996) emphasizes, without Divine consciousness, development efforts lose their ethical compass. Thus, the Sufi approach adds theological and moral depth, making sustainability not only technically feasible but also existentially meaningful.

Practical Implications: Directions for Educational and Policy Development *Curriculum and Pedagogical Strengthening*

The findings of this study can serve as a foundation for strengthening the Islamic education curriculum. Integrating Sufi values does not require the addition of new subjects but rather the infusion of spiritual awareness throughout the learning process. In practice, both religious and scientific disciplines can be structured around the values of *tazkiyah*, *tawāzun*, *ihsān*, and *rahmah*. Efendi et al. (2025) report that such integration increased student engagement by 28% and fostered stronger reflective discipline. Accordingly, Sufism functions as a dual method for character formation and eco-ethical education.

Furthermore, Islamic education institutions should adopt *spirituality-based service learning* a model that integrates social service activities into formal learning. Rahmawati and Syamsuddin (2025) demonstrate that Sufi-oriented service learning in *pesantren* significantly enhances students' empathy and environmental discipline. This approach can be adapted for *madrasah* and Islamic universities to suit diverse educational contexts.

Teacher Training and the Transformation of Educators' Roles

Sufism-based sustainable education necessitates a transformation in the teacher's role. Educators must evolve from mere transmitters of knowledge to *murabbī* spiritual mentors who embody moral and spiritual guidance. Basri, Reinaldi, and Maulana (2024) found that 72% of Islamic education teachers view spiritual training as vital for enhancing the effectiveness of sustainability education. Consequently, teacher development programs should include reflective and spiritual components, not only methodological training.

The *Ministry of Religious Affairs (Kemenag RI, 2024)* could incorporate Sufi-based training into its Religious Moderation Strengthening Program and the Green

Madrasah Initiative. Teachers who internalize Sufi values are better equipped to guide students toward balanced ecological and social awareness.

Institutional Policy and National Collaboration

At the institutional level, this study recommends the integration of Sufi principles into national education and religious policy. The *Ministry of Religious Affairs, Ministry of Education*, and Islamic higher education institutions could jointly develop a Spiritual Sustainability Framework as a strategic guide for 21st-century Islamic education. This aligns with UNESCO’s (2023) recommendation that sustainability education must include reflective and spiritual dimensions to effectively address global challenges.

Collaboration among government bodies, *pesantren*, and civil society organizations must also be strengthened. Tahir et al. (2025) demonstrate that partnerships among educational institutions, religious leaders, and local communities have successfully preserved sacred forests in South Sulawesi. This suggests that community-based spiritual education can serve as an effective tool for socio-ecological empowerment.

Social Implications: Contribution to a Culture of Peace

Socially, a Sufism-based Islamic education model holds immense potential for fostering peace and interfaith tolerance. Hassan and Yusuf (2025) found that Sufi communities exhibit higher levels of empathy and social cooperation compared to non-Sufi religious groups. This indicates that spirituality centered on *rahmah* (universal compassion) plays a vital role in reducing social polarization.

In Indonesia, applying Sufi ethics within educational institutions can strengthen the *Religious Moderation Program* launched by *Kemenag RI* (2024). Projections suggest that if 30% of Islamic institutions integrate Sufi ethics into their curricula, the national tolerance index could rise by 8%, while incidents of religion-based violence could decline by 12% over five years (based on *Kemenag* and *BPS* data, 2024). This demonstrates that spirituality is not merely a private matter but a foundation for peaceful civilization.

Global Implications: The Muslim World’s Contribution to the SDGs

At the global level, this study underscores the distinctive conceptual contribution of the Islamic world to the SDGs through the paradigm of spiritual sustainability. The *UNDP Islamic World SDG Index* (2024) notes that Islam’s theological potential for sustainability remains underutilized in public policy. This research shows that Sufism can bridge spirituality and development, positioning religious values as the ethical foundation of innovation and science.

This approach aligns with the emerging international trend that recognizes spirituality as the fourth pillar of sustainable development (White & Taylor, 2023; UNESCO, 2023). When applied systemically, Sufism-based Islamic education could

serve as a global model for sustainability education one that harmoniously integrates faith, knowledge, and action.

Synthesis: Toward a Paradigm of Spiritual Sustainability Education

Taken together, the theoretical and practical implications of this study point toward a paradigm shift in Islamic education from traditional religious instruction to Spiritual Sustainability Education (SSE). This paradigm affirms that genuine sustainability cannot be achieved without a living spiritual consciousness within humanity.

Sufism, through its four foundational values *tazkiyah*, *tawāzun*, *ihsān*, and *rahmah* provides both the epistemological foundation and methodological framework for integrating ethics, knowledge, and social action. Within this framework, Islamic education becomes more than a cognitive process: it is a moral and spiritual movement that prepares human beings to serve as stewards of the earth and as bearers of mercy (*rahmatan lil-‘ālamīn*) for all creation.

CONCLUSION

This study affirms that Sufism possesses profound and functional relevance to the global agenda of sustainable development. The Sufi values of *tazkiyah al-naḥf* (purification of the soul), *tawāzun* (balance), *ihsān* (moral excellence), and *rahmah* (universal compassion) serve not merely as religious-moral instruments but as epistemological and practical frameworks for modern Islamic education. Through this approach, spirituality is redefined not as a private or contemplative pursuit but as a social energy that cultivates ecological awareness, social justice, and universal peace. At the theoretical level, this research expands the Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) paradigm by introducing a fourth dimension spirituality as the ethical and moral driving force that animates the three principal pillars of the SDGs: economy, society, and environment. Sufism contributes a transcendental depth that unites education, knowledge, and humanity within a single sacred cosmic order (Nasr, 1996; Kartanegara, 2020). This integrated framework, termed Spiritual Sustainability Education (SSE), places Divine consciousness at the heart of all processes of human and civilizational development. Practically, the application of Sufi values has been shown to strengthen learners’ character, enhance social empathy, and foster environmentally conscious behavior within Islamic educational institutions (Rahmawati & Syamsuddin, 2025; Efendi et al., 2025). Initiatives such as *eco-pesantren* programs, spirituality-based *service learning*, and the integration of Sufi ethics into curricula have increased ecological and social participation by more than 30%. These findings demonstrate that Sufism can be operationalized as a transformative and measurable model of education, bridging inner awareness and tangible social impact. Furthermore, this study underscores the need for an epistemological and policy transformation in Islamic education from *religious*

education to spiritual sustainability education. This shift entails moving beyond the transmission of religious doctrine toward nurturing living spirituality embodied in consciousness, action, and public policy. Governments, educational institutions, and civil society each hold critical roles in establishing spirituality as a foundational principle of national sustainability policies. In essence, this study concludes that Sufism is not a mystical doctrine detached from social reality but a humanistic science one that integrates spiritual consciousness, scientific inquiry, and ecological responsibility. Through this synthesis, Islamic education has the potential to cultivate the *sustainable human being (al-insān al-khālīd)*: an individual who is knowledgeable, virtuous, and compassionate toward all creation. Thus, Islam through the wisdom of Sufism can make a substantive contribution to the realization of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), not merely at the symbolic level, but through conceptual, pedagogical, and practical transformation that unites faith, intellect, and ethical action.

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