

## THE SELF-CONCEPT FORMATION BASED ON SUFISM IN OVERCOMING MORAL DEVIANCE AMONG SANTRI: A CASE STUDY AT AL-INAROH ISLAMIC BOARDING SCHOOL

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### Abstract

*This study aims to explore how the formation of self-concept based on Sufism can address moral deviations among students (santri) at Islamic boarding schools. Conducted at Pondok Pesantren Al-Inaroh, the research investigates the integration of Sufi teachings into the institution's character development framework. A qualitative case study approach was employed, utilizing participant observation, in-depth interviews, and document analysis to collect both primary and secondary data. The findings indicate that the internalization of core Sufi values—such as muraqabah (spiritual vigilance), muhasabah (self-reflection), and zuhud (detachment from worldly desires)—plays a critical role in cultivating spiritual awareness among students. This awareness positively shapes their self-concept, which, in turn, acts as a preventive mechanism against moral deviations. The research highlights the significant impact of Sufism-based education in fostering a strong moral foundation within the pesantren environment. By offering insights into how spiritually grounded educational models contribute to moral development, the study presents a valuable approach for addressing moral deviance and strengthening character education in Islamic boarding schools.*

**Keywords:** *Self-Concept; Sufism; Moral Deviation; Santri; Character Education*

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### A. Introduction

Social Social changes and the rapid development of digital technology have significantly influenced the mindset and behavior of the younger generation, including students in Islamic boarding schools. With the flow of globalization and the widespread dissemination of information, the moral and spiritual values that have long served as the foundation of pesantren education are increasingly being challenged. Phenomena such as a lack of discipline, declining respect towards teachers, and a growing tendency toward individualistic behavior have become apparent in various Islamic educational institutions, including Islamic boarding schools. These issues signal a shift in student behavior that demands a deeper understanding and response, particularly in the context of traditional pesantren teachings.

Islamic boarding schools, or pesantren, have long been revered as institutions that balance the development of intellectual knowledge with the nurturing of moral and spiritual character. However, the increasing influence of digital culture and modern societal trends has led to new challenges in maintaining these traditional values. Research

has shown that the rise of moral deviance among students in Islamic boarding schools reflects broader issues within the educational and cultural fabric (Al-Khawaja, 2021; Nurkholis, 2022). These issues are not isolated but are part of a larger global trend in which educational institutions worldwide struggle to address the changing needs of students in the digital age.

In this context, Sufism offers a valuable approach to addressing these moral challenges. Sufism is not only a mystical dimension of Islam but also a comprehensive system of spiritual education that emphasizes soul purification (*tazkiyah an-nafs*), self-control, and the cultivation of a transcendental awareness of the existence of God. The relevance of Sufi teachings in modern education has been explored in several studies, suggesting that they can contribute significantly to fostering moral integrity and spiritual maturity among students (Bajorek, 2020; Idris, 2021). As such, integrating Sufi practices into the educational framework of *pesantren* can serve as an effective tool in addressing moral deviance.

The importance of this study lies in its potential to offer practical solutions to the moral challenges faced by students in Islamic boarding schools. By examining how Sufism-based education can contribute to character development, this research seeks to bridge the gap between traditional moral teachings and the realities of modern educational challenges. Moreover, this study contributes to the growing body of research on the role of Islamic spirituality in contemporary education, highlighting how Sufi teachings can help students not only excel academically but also mature spiritually. This research is crucial for understanding the factors that influence moral development in *pesantren* settings and for exploring effective strategies to strengthen the moral fiber of students. By providing insights into the role of spiritual education in preventing moral deviance, the findings of this study could inform the development of more effective educational programs that foster both intellectual and moral growth.

However, the extent to which the Sufism approach is effective in forming a positive self-concept and preventing deviant behavior still requires in-depth study. Therefore, this study is directed to identify the process of forming the self-concept of Sufism-based students at the Al-Inroh Islamic Boarding School, as well as evaluate its impact on efforts to prevent moral deviance. Through a qualitative approach with case studies, this research is expected to make a conceptual and practical contribution to the development of spiritual-based character education that is adaptive to the challenges of the times.

## **B. Methods**

This research adopts a qualitative, case study approach to explore the process of self-concept formation among students at the Al-Inaroh Islamic Boarding School, based on Sufism values. This method is well-suited for uncovering the spiritual and moral dynamics in context, as demonstrated in studies by Anwar, Lutfauziah, & Hartono (2021) and Ciputri, Safitri, & Panotogama (2025). The research location in Central Java was selected based on the consistency of the *pesantren*'s integration of spiritual practices such as daily *dhikr*, night *muhasabah*, *wirid*, and *tarekat* recitation into its character development curriculum. These practices serve as core components of students' spiritual

development, making the pesantren an ideal setting for studying the influence of Sufism on self-concept formation.

The research subjects were purposively selected, consisting of ten students actively engaged in spiritual practices, three supervising ustadz responsible for guiding students' spiritual development, and one pesantren leader who oversees the formulation and supervision of Sufism education policies. Data were gathered using participatory observation, semi-structured interviews, and documentary analysis. Observations were conducted during ritual activities such as dhikr and muhasabah to capture the real-time internalization of Sufi values, as recommended by Baihaqy (2024) in his study of the integration of Sufism in pesantren education. Interviews provided insights into the personal experiences of the students, as well as the perspectives of the ustadz and pesantren leaders on the transformation of self-concept through spiritual practices. Document analysis – which included reviewing daily activity modules, student journals, and character evaluation reports – complemented the triangulation of data sources.

The analysis process followed the three stages outlined by Miles and Huberman (1994): data reduction, presentation of findings in narratives and citations, and drawing reflective conclusions. This methodology was also applied in the research by Mujiburrohman, Saepudin, and Alfelahi (2024) on the content of Sufism in pesantren education. Data validity was ensured through triangulation of sources (observations, interviews, and documents) and member checking (re-examination of interpretations with the informants), ensuring the alignment of the researcher's interpretations with the participants' experiences.

### **Justification of Case Study Boundaries**

The scope of this research is confined to Al-Inaroh Islamic Boarding School in Central Java, limiting the generalizability of findings to other pesantren institutions. The case study focuses specifically on the internalization of Sufi values and their influence on self-concept formation, while not examining other potential factors of student development such as academic or social influences. The duration of the study is six months, spanning from January to June 2025, with observations and interviews conducted at key spiritual milestones throughout the year to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the spiritual practice process. This timeframe is sufficient to capture longitudinal changes in self-concept, but the findings may not represent the experiences of students in pesantren with different approaches or geographical locations.

### **Data Validation and Researcher Role:**

The researcher's role in participatory observation was to immerse in the daily spiritual activities of the pesantren to observe firsthand the process of internalizing Sufi practices. This involvement ensured transparency in the data collection process, though the researcher remained mindful of maintaining objectivity and avoiding bias in interpreting the participants' experiences. The researcher was present during dhikr sessions, muhasabah activities, and other ritual practices, observing students' engagement, self-reflection, and changes in behavior.

**Table 1. Methodological Flow Summary**

Data Type	Source	Duration	Method
Observations	10 students, 3 ustadz, 1 leader	6 months (January–June 2025)	During dhikr, muhasabah, wirid sessions
Interviews	10 students, 3 ustadz, 1 leader	1 hour per interview session (3 sessions per informant)	Semi-structured interviews
Documentation	Student activity journals, modules, character reports	Collected throughout study	Analysis of daily reports and journals

*Data Reduction and Interpretation Examples:*

The analysis process includes reducing data by focusing on key themes, such as changes in students' self-reflection and spiritual awareness. For instance, during the interviews, students reported that the practice of muhasabah helped them reflect on their behavior, with one student noting: "After doing muhasabah every night, I realize I used to disrespect my teachers, but now I make an effort to show more respect and discipline." Such quotes illustrate the transformative impact of Sufi teachings on their self-concept. Narratives like these will be used to draw reflective conclusions about the role of muraqabah, muhasabah, and zuhud in fostering a positive spiritual self-concept and reducing moral deviance in the pesantren.

In conclusion, this study uses a systematic and transparent approach to capture the internalization of Sufi values and their effect on students' moral and spiritual development. The inclusion of triangulated data sources, participant narratives, and methodological clarity helps ensure the credibility and reliability of the findings, which contribute valuable insights into the integration of Sufism in contemporary pesantren education.

**C. Results and Discussion**

**The Process of Forming Students' Self-Concept through the Internalization of Sufism Values**

The formation of the self-concept of students at the Al-Inaroh Islamic Boarding School is a gradual and structured process, carried out through continuous spiritual guidance(El Mazir et al., 2024). Observations and interviews indicate that one of the primary approaches utilized by the pesantren is the integration of Sufism values into daily practices. These key values include:

1. Muhasabah (*self-introspection*): Conducted through self-evaluation activities every Friday night, where students reflect on their actions, repent for mistakes, and renew their intention for worship.
2. Muraqabah (*awareness of Allah's supervision*): Fostered through the study of Sufi texts and regular participation in intensive worship practices.

3. Tawadhu (humility): Emphasized in daily interactions between students, as well as in their relationships with ustadz and caregivers.

The students who actively engage in this structured coaching process consistently demonstrate improvements in self-awareness, motivation to behave morally, and a heightened sense of moral responsibility. The self-concept that emerges from this process reflects a strong spiritual awareness, grounded in Sufism.

Key Findings:

1. Student Quote: *"I used to feel that it was normal to violate the rules. But after frequently participating in muhasabah and listening to the advice of ustadz, I started to feel guilty. Now, I understand the meaning of repentance and self-improvement better,"* (Class XI student, Interview, May 20, 2025).
2. Ustadz Quote: *"Students who are active in the study of Sufism tend to be calmer, have fewer behavioral problems, and show higher obedience. They are easier to engage in discussions about self-improvement,"* (Ustadz F, moral coach, Interview, May 18, 2025).

These findings underscore the role of Sufism in developing a moral self-concept among students, grounded in personal reflection and spiritual discipline.

### Sufism as a Mechanism for the Prevention of Moral Deviance

Sufism provides an effective preventive mechanism against moral deviance, particularly among new students transitioning from a secular lifestyle to the disciplined environment of an Islamic boarding school. According to documentation from the pesantren, the most common types of moral violations among students include:

1. Non-compliance with the congregational worship schedule.
2. Verbal bullying or abusive behavior between students.
3. Minor dishonest behaviors, such as hiding personal items or accessing prohibited content.

Following the introduction of the Self-Concept Development program in mid-2023, there has been a notable decline in these violations, as indicated by the data presented in

**Table 2. Recapitulation of Moral Offenses 2022–2024**

Types of Violations	2022	2023	2024
Not following congregational prayers	47	33	20
Accessing prohibited content	16	9	3
Lying or slandering	22	13	5
Verbal abuse	12	8	2

The data clearly shows a reduction in moral violations, demonstrating that internalizing Sufi values—such as muraqabah—functions as a form of spiritual self-regulation rather than mere compliance with external rules.

Key Findings:

- 1) Student Quote: *"If I remember that Allah is always watching, I don't dare to lie. Even if no one else knows, it still feels shameful,"* (Final class student, Interview, May 22, 2025).

This reflection reveals that the internal awareness of Allah's presence (muraqabah) becomes a central moral control mechanism, leading to self-regulation and reducing the reliance on external sanctions or punishments.

### **Collective Self-Concept: Social Dynamics and Santri Solidarity**

The self-concept formed through the Sufi approach evolves into a collective self-concept, where students view themselves as part of a spiritual community (Fadlillah & Mubarakah, 2024). This sense of community is nurtured through activities that foster solidarity and mutual responsibility. Key activities supporting the formation of this collective self-concept include:

1. Weekly dhikr gatherings.
2. Group discussions on Sufi texts.
3. The Obedient Friends program, a peer-based coaching system that encourages students to guide and correct one another.

Students with a collective self-concept demonstrate increased responsibility towards maintaining the integrity and moral values of the pesantren. They hold each other accountable and support one another in adhering to moral principles.

#### **Key Findings:**

- 1) Student Quote: *"I feel ashamed if I violate the rules because my friends would be disappointed. We take care of each other and remind each other when we go wrong,"* (Class XI student, May 21, 2025).

This shared sense of accountability supports Durkheim's theory of moral formation, which emphasizes that morality is cultivated within a cohesive community where social control and collective norms play a vital role.

### **The Relevance of Sufism in Character Education of Students**

The theoretical foundation for the use of Sufism in character education is grounded in Carl Rogers' humanistic psychology, which stresses the importance of self-awareness, personal experience, and self-acceptance in the formation of self-concept. Within the context of pesantren education, this approach is enriched by Islamic spirituality. Sufi values provide essential pillars for character education, including:

1. Spirituality: Connecting moral behavior with the pursuit of the afterlife.
2. Self-Awareness: Encouraging reflection and self-improvement (muhasabah).
3. Self-Control: Cultivating restraint over negative impulses through spiritual practices (riyadhah).
4. Compassion and Humility: Promoting ethical behavior and harmonious social interactions.

These values collectively contribute to the development of a well-rounded moral character that integrates both spiritual and social dimensions.

### **Critical Reflection: Challenges and Opportunities**

Despite the success of the Self-Concept Development program in reducing moral deviance, there are several challenges that need to be addressed:

1. Diversity of Student Backgrounds: Students come from varying cultural and religious

- backgrounds, affecting their level of acceptance and engagement with Sufi values.
2. Limited Expertise among Coaches: Some ustadz may not possess in-depth knowledge of Sufism, which can impact the quality of the spiritual guidance provided.
  3. Systematic Alignment: There is a need to align spiritual practices with psychological approaches more systematically to address emotional and behavioral challenges in a more integrated manner.

However, the potential for strengthening character development through Sufism is considerable if supported by a comprehensive system involving teacher training and parental involvement.

#### **D. Conclusion**

This study demonstrates that the formation of self-concept among students at Al-Inaroh Islamic Boarding School is deeply influenced by the internalization of Sufi values, which play a pivotal role in shaping both their spiritual and moral development. The integration of key Sufi practices such as muhasabah (self-introspection), muraqabah (awareness of Allah's supervision), and tawadhu (humility) into daily routines has proven effective in fostering strong moral consciousness and self-awareness in students. These practices not only guide students towards personal reflection and self-improvement but also establish a deep connection to spiritual values, which help reduce moral deviance and enhance their sense of responsibility. The research also highlights the preventive role of Sufism in addressing moral deviance, particularly among students transitioning from a secular lifestyle to a more disciplined life in an Islamic boarding school. Through consistent participation in spiritual practices, students internalize a profound sense of moral responsibility, which is not solely governed by external regulations but by internal spiritual consciousness. This aligns with Durkheim's theory of moral formation, where morality is nurtured through social control within a cohesive community, strengthening the moral fabric of the pesantren. Furthermore, the study reveals the importance of collective self-concept, where students develop a shared spiritual identity and hold each other accountable for maintaining the moral standards of the pesantren. This sense of social solidarity is cultivated through peer-based programs such as the Obedient Friends program and group activities like dhikr assemblies and Sufi text discussions, which reinforce ethical behavior and solidarity. In conclusion, this research demonstrates that the Sufi approach to character education is highly relevant and effective for preventing moral deviations and enhancing the moral development of students in Islamic boarding schools. By emphasizing spirituality, self-awareness, and self-control, Sufism provides a holistic framework for character formation that not only shapes individual identities but also nurtures a cohesive, morally-conscious community. This approach is a valuable model for integrating spiritual discipline into contemporary educational systems, especially within Islamic educational institutions.

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