Development And Evaluation of A Sufi-Oriented Experiential Learning Model In Islamic Religious Education

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Abstract
This study addressed the low emotional-spiritual intelligence among students at SMAN 1 Kinali, a problem stemming from a conventional Islamic Religious Education (PAI) approach overly focused on cognitive and dogmatic instruction. The research aimed to develop, implement, and evaluate the validity, practicality, and effectiveness of a Sufi-oriented experiential learning model that integrates Al-Ghazali's spiritual stages (*maqamat*) with Kolb's experiential learning cycle. Employing a Research and Development (R&D) design using the 4D model (Define, Design, Develop, Disseminate), data were collected through mixed methods, including pre-test/post-test *ESQ* scales, participant observation, reflective journals, and in-depth interviews. The experimental group (n=32) underwent the intervention, while a control group

(n=30) received conventional instruction. Quantitative data analysis using paired and independent sample t-tests revealed a significantly higher ESQ improvement in the experimental group (mean gain = +27.52, p < 0.01, d = 3.78) compared to the control group (mean gain = +10.09). Qualitative thematic analysis showed students' progression to the initial *taubah* (repentance) stage, marked by heightened self-awareness, behavioral changes, and value internalization. The findings conclude that the developed model is valid, practical, and effective in enhancing students' ESQ. This study offers a replicable pedagogical framework for holistic PAI, emphasizing the integration of spiritual psychology and experiential pedagogy.

Keywords: *Emotional Spiritual Intelligence, Experiential Learning, Islamic Religious Education, Sufi-Oriented Learning*

1. Introduction

National education aims to develop a complete Indonesian person, one who balances intellectual intelligence (IQ), emotional maturity (EQ), and spiritual depth (SQ). In practice, however, a significant gap persists. Many students excel academically yet display symptoms of low empathy, intolerance, and moral crisis. National character surveys confirm this phenomenon. This crisis is not merely about disciplinary breaches but is more fundamental: a crisis of meaning within the educational process. This crisis is particularly evident in Islamic Religious Education (PAI). Often, PAI instruction remains trapped in a theoretical-dogmatic paradigm, overemphasizing the memorization of Islamic law (*fiqh*) and cognitive knowledge. Consequently, the essential aspects of inner awakening (*tazkiyatun nafs*) and character building (*akhlak*)—the very core of religious education—are frequently neglected.

Criticism of this partial model of PAI has long been voiced. Scholars such as Harun Nasution and Mukti Ali, since the late 20th century, have highlighted the overly scholastic and legal-formalistic approach of PAI (Nasution, 1992; Ali, 1991). Later, Azyumardi Azra and M. Amin Abdullah reinforced this critique by asserting that PAI must not be reduced to mere semantic knowledge transfer but must revitalize the ethical-spiritual dimension as its soul (Azra, 1999; Abdullah, 2006). Meanwhile, global education has recognized concepts like multiple intelligences (Gardner, 1983) and spiritual intelligence (Zohar, 2000), emphasizing the importance of a holistic approach.

Within the Islamic tradition, the concept of comprehensive education has long existed. Imam Al-Ghazali, in his magnum *opus Ihya' Ulum al-Din*, clearly distinguished between external knowledge (for social interaction) and internal knowledge (for heart purification). For him, knowledge without soul purification is incomplete knowledge (Al-Ghazali, n.d.). In the contemporary era, figures like Said Aqil Siraj (2006) and Haidar Bagir (2019) strive to revive these Sufi values as an antidote to modern education, which often lacks spirituality.

Despite the development of critical and solution-oriented discourse, a significant gap remains between theory and practice. Many studies on Sufi-oriented approaches in Islamic education remain philosophical-normative, such as Isbiq's (2011) research on Habib Luthfi's thought or Dahlan's (2015) work on Syekh Arsyad al-Banjari's ideas. Such studies are valuable conceptually, but have not reached the operational level: how to design and implement a concrete learning model in the classroom? Meanwhile, research attempting to design Sufi-based learning models, such as that by Subkhi (2016) and Basyar (2016), is generally descriptive-qualitative and often conducted in pesantren (Islamic boarding school) settings. There is scarcely any research that systematically develops, tests the validity, and measures the effectiveness of a Sufi-oriented PAI learning model for public schools using a structured and measurable methodology.

This is where the uniqueness and urgency of this study lie. This research does not stop at discourse but goes further by employing the Research and Development (R&D) 4D model method. Its goal is to create an operational, measurable, and effective PAI learning model for public schools, integrating Sufi spiritual stages (*maqamat*) with David Kolb's experience-based learning cycle (experiential learning). Thus, this research seeks to answer a fundamental question: How can we design and implement a Sufi values-based PAI learning model that can significantly enhance the emotional-spiritual intelligence (ESQ) of public school students?

The philosophical foundation of this effort refers to the word of Allah SWT in Surah Al-Jumu'ah, verse 2:

هُوَ ٱلَّذِي بَعَثَ فِي ٱلۡأُمِّيِّـۧنَ رَسُولٗا مِّنۡهُمۡ يَتۡلُواْ عَلَيۡهِمۡ ءَايَٰتِهِۦ وَيُزَكِّيهِمۡ وَيُعَلِّمُهُمُ ٱلۡكِتَٰبَ وَٱلۡحِكۡمَةَ وَإِن كَانُواْ مِن قَبۡلُ لَفِي ضَلَٰلٖ مُّبِينٖ

"It is He who has sent among the unlettered [Arabs] a Messenger from themselves, reciting to them His verses, purifying them, and

teaching them the Book [i.e., the Qur'ān] and wisdom." (Q.S. (Al-Jumu'ah: 2)

This verse, as explained by Quraish Shihab in Tafsir Al-Misbah (2002), affirms the three primary missions of the Prophet Muhammad, which should also be the spirit of Islamic education: (1) Reciting the verses (imparting cognitive knowledge), (2) Purifying them (*tazkiyatun nafs* developing the spiritual-affective aspect), and (3) Teaching them the Book and Wisdom (deep understanding and wise application). Ideal Islamic education must integrate these three aspects in balance, not merely focus on the first.

Therefore, this research holds dual significance. Theoretically, it contributes an integrated framework that bridges Sufi epistemology, spiritual psychology, and critical pedagogy into a structured learning model. Practically, it provides a prototype of PAI instruction that has been tested for effectiveness, is replicable across various schools, and directly addresses the crisis of character and spirituality among the younger generation. By being piloted at SMAN 1 Kinali, a public senior high school, this research proves that the Sufi approach, often perceived as "abstract" and "exclusive," can in fact be adapted into a concrete, engaging, and transformative learning method for students within the national education system.

2. Method

This research adopted an educational design research framework, specifically employing the Research and Development (R&D) methodology as conceptualized by Gall, Borg, & Gall (2003). The development process was operationalized through the systematic 4D model, Define, Design, Develop, and Disseminate, proposed by Thiagarajan, Semmel, & Semmel (1974). This model was selected for its structured, iterative, and user-oriented approach, which is particularly suited for creating, validating, and implementing innovative educational interventions in real-world classroom contexts, such as the proposed Sufism-based PAI learning model.

The study was conducted at SMAN 1 Kinali, West Pasaman Regency, a setting chosen for its representativeness of a public senior high school grappling with the universal challenge of integrating character depth into academic curricula. Participants were selected through a purposive sampling technique. One intact class of Grade XI students (n=32) was designated as the experimental group, while another comparable class (n=30), matched based on academic performance and

demographic background, served as the control group. Additionally, PAI teachers (n=3), the school principal, and curriculum stakeholders were engaged as key informants. Prior to commencement, ethical protocols were strictly observed, including obtaining informed consent from all participants and guardians, ensuring confidentiality, and clarifying the voluntary nature of participation.

The development and implementation of the Sufism-based PAI model unfolded across four detailed and interconnected phases:

1. The Define Phase: This foundational phase was dedicated to a comprehensive diagnostic and analytical procedure to precisely ground the model in empirical necessity. It involved a multi-pronged needs analysis: (a) systematic classroom observations to document the existing PAI pedagogical dynamics and student engagement; (b) a review of curricular documents, syllabi, and student portfolios to assess the alignment between stated objectives and actual practice; and (c) the administration of a preliminary Spiritual-Emotional Quotient (ESQ) scale to a broader student cohort to establish a statistical baseline. This triangulation of data converged to irrefutably confirm the core problem: a significant gap in students' spiritual awareness and emotional regulation, thereby providing the definitive rationale and specific target for the subsequent intervention design.

2. The Design Phase: Informed by the diagnostic results, this phase translated theoretical constructs into a preliminary instructional blueprint. The primary activity was the systematic mapping of core Sufistic concepts, specifically the spiritual stations (*maqamat*) of *Taubah* (repentance), *Sabr* (patience), *Syukur* (gratitude), *Ikhlas* (sincerity), and *Tawakkal* (trust in God) onto David Kolb's (1984) experiential learning cycle (Concrete Experience, Reflective Observation, Abstract Conceptualization, Active Experimentation). This integration aimed to ensure that spiritual values were not merely taught but experienced and reflected upon. The tangible outputs of this phase included: (i) a detailed conceptual framework of the model; (ii) a series of prototype lesson plans (RPP) featuring contemplative, role-playing, and community-based activities; and (iii) a draft of holistic assessment tools designed to measure attitudinal and behavioral shifts alongside cognitive understanding.

3. The Development Phase: This phase subjected the designed prototype to rigorous scrutiny and refinement through expert validation and preliminary testing. The draft model and its instruments were evaluated by a panel of three independent experts specializing in

Islamic Education, Sufism Philosophy, and Instructional Design. Their feedback, gathered via structured appraisal forms and in-depth discussion, focused on theological accuracy, pedagogical feasibility, and developmental appropriateness. The model was revised iteratively based on their consensus recommendations. Following expert validation, a limited trial (small-scale tryout) was conducted with a group of students not involved in the main study. This trial served to pilot-test the research instruments, estimate time allocation, and refine logistical procedures, ensuring the model's practicality and readiness for full implementation.

4. The Disseminate (Implementation & Evaluation) Phase: Contrary to a mere distribution of findings, this phase constituted the controlled implementation and intensive evaluation of the finalized model. Over 12 structured meetings, the experimental group engaged with the complete Sufism-based PAI curriculum, while the control group continued with conventional, lecture-based PAI instruction. Data collection during this phase followed a convergent parallel mixed-methods design. Quantitatively, a validated 40-item ESQ scale (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.87$) was administered as a pre-test and post-test to both groups. Qualitatively, data were gathered through: (a) participatory observation with a structured rubric focusing on student engagement and affective responses; (b) in-depth interviews with a stratified sample of students and all participating teachers; (c) analysis of students' reflective journals; and (d) Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) with stakeholders to gauge broader perception and impact.

Quantitative data were analyzed using statistical software (e.g., SPSS) to perform descriptive analyses, paired-sample t-tests (within-group), and independent-sample t-tests (between-group) on the gain scores, with effect size calculated using Cohen's d to determine practical significance. Qualitative data underwent a rigorous thematic analysis procedure as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006), involving transcription, iterative coding, theme generation, and interpretive analysis to uncover the nuanced processes of spiritual-emotional transformation and contextualize the quantitative findings.

This phased, iterative, and evidence-based methodology ensures that the developed Sufism-based PAI model is not only theoretically sound and theologically coherent but also pedagogically robust, empirically validated, and replicable in analogous educational contexts.
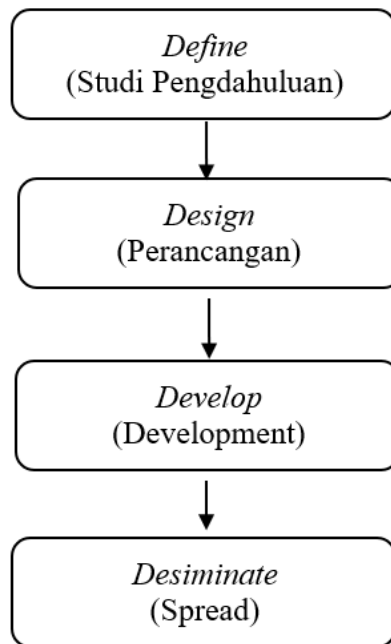
Figure 1. Thiagarajan's development model

3. Results and Discussion
3.1 Achievement of the Initial Spiritual Level (*Taubah*)

The findings of this study reinforce and align with a body of existing research that underscores the importance of the spiritual dimension in education, such as the work of Subkhi (2016) on Sufistic approaches in Islamic education and Basyar (2016) on the relevance of Sufistic education for character formation. The significant increase in Emotional-Spiritual Quotient (ESQ) scores, with a mean gain of +27.52—, alongside the attainment of the initial spiritual stage of *taubah*, characterized by enhanced self-reflection (*muhasabah*) and improved emotional regulation, corresponds closely with earlier assertions regarding the capacity of Sufistic values to cultivate character and inner depth in learners.

However, this study distinguishes itself methodologically from prior normative inquiries, such as those by Isbiq (2011) and Dahlan (2015), which largely centered on philosophical analysis of Sufistic thought without advancing a practical classroom model or empirical assessment framework. The present research moves decisively from conceptual discussion to operational implementation through the Research and

Development 4D methodology (Define, Design, Develop, Disseminate). This approach enabled the systematic integration of Sufi spiritual stages (*maqamat*), including Taubah, Sabar, and Syukur, into Kolb's experiential learning cycle, thereby creating a structured pedagogical process for internalizing values, as depicted in Figures 2 and 3. Moreover, the study employed a holistic evaluation system that combined quantitative ESQ instruments with qualitative tools such as reflective journals, participant observation, and focus group discussions, allowing for a multifaceted assessment of behavioral and spiritual development beyond mere cognitive understanding. Notably, while many previous studies on Sufistic education were situated in traditional Islamic settings such as *pesantren*, the successful application of this model in a public senior high school (SMAN 1 Kinali) demonstrates its adaptability within the broader national educational context and enhances its potential for generalization across diverse institutional environments.

3.2 Effectiveness of the Experiential Learning Approach

The experiential learning approach (concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation) proved effective in bridging theory and practice. Examples of implemented activities include:

a. Concrete experience: Group *dzikir* (remembrance of God) practices, social activities helping others, and conflict simulations to train patience.
b. Reflection: Students documented their spiritual and emotional experiences in daily journals.
c. Conceptualization: Group discussions linking experiences to Islamic moral values.
d. Active experimentation: Application of attitudes like patience and empathy in daily school interactions.

Through this cycle, students not only cognitively understood Sufistic values but also emotionally and spiritually experienced and internalized them.

3.3 Improvement in Emotional and Spiritual Intelligence

Quantitative and qualitative data showed significant improvement in students' ESQ aspects. The following table compares the average ESQ scores before (pretest) and after (posttest) the learning intervention:

Table 1. Posters and Pretest Group

Group	N	Pretest	Posttest	Mean Gain	t (paired)	Cohen's d
Experimental Class	30	63.71	91.23	+27.52	15.674	3.78
Control Class	32	63.21	73.30	+10.09	5.892	1.36

An independent sample t-test on the gain scores showed a statistically significant difference between the experimental and control groups (t(60) = 9.215, p = .000). The very large effect size (d = 3.78) for the experimental group indicates the model's strong practical significance in boosting ESQ, far exceeding the improvement seen in conventional instruction. Thematic Insights into Spiritual-Emotional Progression Thematic analysis of journals, interviews, and observations revealed a transformative journey, primarily centered on the first *maqam*, *taubah* (repentance), and the cultivation of patience (*sabar*).

Data Interpretation:
a. The increase in the experimental class (27.52 points) was substantially higher than in the control class (10.09 points).
b. This indicates that the Sufistic-based learning model through experiential learning was significantly more effective in improving students' ESQ compared to conventional methods.
c. Qualitative data from in-depth interviews and behavioral observations support this finding, with teachers reporting increased empathy, emotional regulation, and spiritual awareness among students.

Awakening to Conscious Repentance (*Taubah*). Students exhibited a shift from unconscious habit to conscious self-audit. A journal entry read: "The guided reflection on our daily actions. I suddenly realized my sarcastic remarks hurt my friend. It wasn't just a joke; it was a mask for my insecurity. I feel genuine regret now." (Student Journal, Week 4). Observations noted a measurable decrease in disruptive, impulsive behaviors in class, replaced by more thoughtful interactions. Reconceptualizing Patience (*Sabar*) as Active Engagement. The experiential conflict simulation activity transformed sabar from a passive ideal into an active, strenuous choice. One student reflected in an interview: "During the role-play, when provoked, my first instinct was to

shout. Holding back felt physically heavy. I learned sabar is not silence; it's the hard work of managing the storm inside before it erupts." (Student Interview). This aligns with Al-Ghazali's view of sabar as a form of spiritual struggle (*mujahadah*).

Internalization through Experiential Cycles. The Kolb cycle facilitated deep internalization. For example, the Concrete Experience of a community service project (first dimension) was followed by Reflective Observation (journaling on feelings of humility), Abstract Conceptualization (linking the experience to Quranic verses on social justice), and Active Experimentation (initiating a peer-support group). This cycle ensured values moved beyond cognitive understanding to lived experience.

3.4 Positive Response from Stakeholders
Teachers, school staff, and student representatives responded positively to this learning model. They stated that this approach:
a. Made Islamic Education learning more lively and meaningful.
b. Helped shape student character more holistically.
c. Created a more harmonious and conscious school environment.

Discussion on the integration of sophisticated and experiential learning. The integration of sophisticated values (such as repentance, patience, and trust in God) with an experience-based learning cycle creates a transformative learning process. The achievement of the repentance level serves as a crucial foundation, as emphasized in Sufi literature that *taubah* is the first step in purifying the soul (*tazkiyatun nafs*). Holistic evaluation through reflective journals and behavioral observation proved capable of measuring students' internal development more authentically than written tests alone.

However, challenges remain, particularly in maintaining the consistency of value internalization at higher spiritual levels (such as *zuhud* asceticism and *ridha* contentment). A tiered program development and continuous teacher training are needed for deeper and more sustainable implementation of this model.

Overall, these findings support the conclusion that sufistic-based Islamic Education learning through experiential learning not only enhances cognitive understanding but also strengthens students' emotional and spiritual dimensions, while fostering better moral character.

The findings of this study are situated within a growing body of literature that advocates for the integration of spiritual and experiential

dimensions in education, particularly within Islamic Religious Education (PAI). When compared to prior research, such as the works of Subkhi (2016) and Basyar (2016), which emphasize the role of Sufi-based approaches in character and spiritual development, this study reinforces the validity of such frameworks while offering a distinctive methodological integration. Specifically, it operationalizes the classical Sufi stages (*maqamat*) through the structured cycle of experiential learning, thereby providing a pedagogical bridge between timeless spiritual concepts and contemporary educational practice. The observed initial success at the stage of repentance (*taubah*) resonates strongly with foundational Islamic scholarship, notably Al-Ghazali's emphasis on repentance as the essential gateway to spiritual growth, while simultaneously diverging from conventional PAI assessment paradigms by prioritizing behavioral transformation and internalization over mere cognitive recall.

The causal mechanisms underlying these outcomes can be attributed to the synergistic design of the intervention. The experiential learning cycle, concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation facilitated a profound, multi-layered engagement with Sufi values. Direct activities such as guided *dzikir*, spiritual exercises (*riyadhah*), and socially oriented projects created tangible emotional and sensory experiences for students. The critical reflective component that followed allowed these experiences to be processed, connected to Islamic teachings, and personally integrated. Furthermore, the shift from traditional testing to holistic evaluation using reflective journals, behavioral observation, and introspective interviews created a supportive environment that valued and measured inner development, thereby motivating sustained personal effort and self-awareness.

In terms of scholarly contribution, this research offers both theoretical and practical advancements. Theoretically, it presents a coherent, integrated model that enriches the discourse on Islamic education by demonstrating how classical spiritual psychology (*tasawwuf*) can be systematically translated into a modern pedagogical framework. Practically, it provides an evidence-based, replicable prototype for educators and curriculum developers seeking to design PAI programs that genuinely foster emotional and spiritual intelligence, thereby addressing persistent concerns about moral decline and the lack of meaning-oriented learning among youth.

Nevertheless, this study is not without its limitations. The research primarily documented progress at the foundational stage of repentance; the internalization of higher, more complex *maqamat*, such as complete trust in God (tawakkal) or contentment (ridha), requires a longer-term study to observe and measure. The implementation was also context-specific, conducted within a single school setting (SMAN 1 Kinali), which necessitates caution in generalizing the findings to vastly different educational environments. Finally, the model's long-term sustainability and scalability are contingent upon sustained institutional support and significant investment in continuous teacher professional development, as the approach demands educators to master and comfortably facilitate both Sufi principles and experiential learning methodologies.
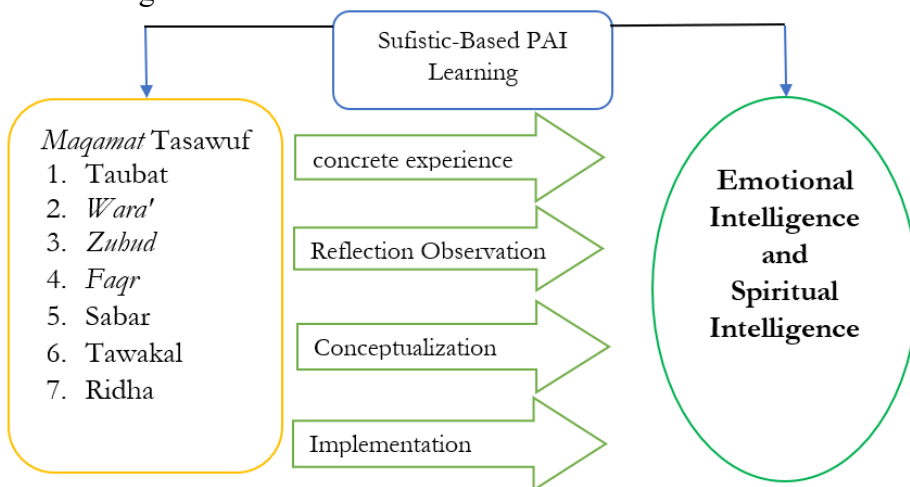

Figure 2. Design of a Sufistic-Based PAI Learning Model

The *experiential learning* approach means taking students to experience spiritual activities firsthand, such as *meditation* (dhikr), prayer, or social activities that foster empathy and caring. The experience is then reflected, analyzed, and finally internalized by students as part of their moral formation. Build emotional and spiritual intelligence through real experience**.** Combining *sophisticated principles with an* experiential learning *approach* provides an opportunity for students to develop emotional and spiritual intelligence through hands-on experience. For example, when students are invited to dhikr and meditate, they not only learn what dhikr is, but also experience firsthand the feeling of calm and focus it causes. Similarly, when they are involved in social activities that

support the values of empathy and compassion, they can feel the impact on their social and emotional relationships for themselves. This experiential approach is very effective in helping students understand more deeply the teachings of Islam and morality. Students are not only expected to memorize concepts, but also to internalize and apply these values in daily life. Aligning cognitive, emotional, and spiritual aspects. One of the strengths of Sufistic and experiential-based learning is its ability to align all three important aspects of the human being: cognitive, emotional, and spiritual. A cognitive understanding of Islamic teachings, such as theological understanding and sharia laws, becomes more meaningful when balanced with deep emotional experiences and spiritual reflection. Thus, students will grow into a whole person, able to think critically and have good emotional and spiritual awareness

The pattern of developing *suffistic-based* learning through *experiential learning* is expected to improve students' emotional and spiritual intelligence. *Sufistic maqamat* in real learning is the level of success in a student's spiritual journey. The basic material in the moral family is the priority scale to provide students with an understanding of the importance of good behavior in daily activities. Sufistic levels such as repentance, patience (emotional control), and serenity will help students develop emotional and spiritual intelligence.

The spiritual experience (*tajribah*) in this development emphasizes *experiential learning*, in which students experience *Sufistic values* for themselves in daily life. The methods used can be in the form of *contemplation*, spiritual journeys (*rihlah ruhaniyah*), and deep worship practices.
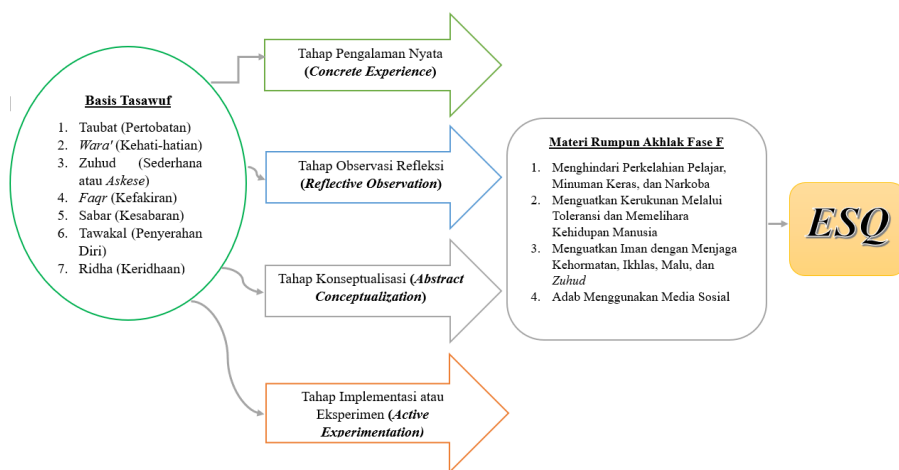

Figure 3. Sufistic-Based PAI Learning Model

The implementation of the Sufistic-based learning framework at SMAN 1 Kinali is carried out systematically through holistic integration into all dimensions of instructional activities and the school's Islamic culture. Based on thematic analysis of participant observation data and in-depth interviews with stakeholders, this learning model is constructed upon a coherent and hierarchical conceptual framework, which is philosophically grounded in three correlated foundational pillars. The first pillar, namely the application of maqamat al-taṣawwuf (*Sufi stations*), is formulated as a psycho-spiritual framework focused on mapping the stages and purification of the students' souls (*tazkiyat al-nafs*) toward a state of proximity to the Divine. The second pillar, manifested in strengthening moral conduct materials, is designed as a systematic effort to instill moral-transcendental values and shape ethical behavior crystallized in daily social interactions. As for the third pillar, which is the enhancement of Emotional-Spiritual Intelligence, it is interpreted as a multidimensional construct aimed at strengthening the vertical relationship with Allah Swt while developing introspective awareness and self-regulation. Integratively, these three foundations form a philosophical-educative paradigm that serves as the basis for operationalizing all pedagogical practices within the school environment, which are subsequently actualized through a series of structured, measurable, and sustainable work programs within a systematic and evaluable implementation framework.
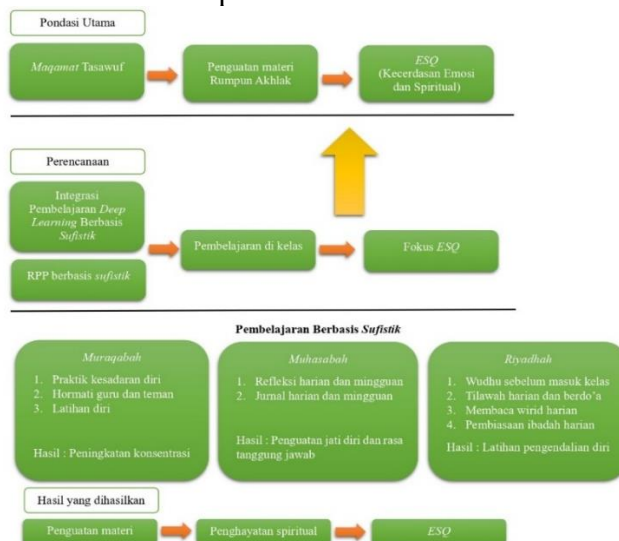
Figure 4. Sufistic-Based Learning Flow
Source: Suharjo Development Model

Evaluation in the learning of sufistic-based Islamic religious education *is* important because it holistically assesses the cognitive, emotional, and spiritual development of students (Satria Kharimul Qolbi, 2025). Different from traditional evaluations that focus on theoretical knowledge, this approach measures how students understand and internalize religious values in their daily lives. This evaluation encourages students to feel, reflect, and apply values such as *ihsan* (awareness of God's supervision), *tazkiyatun nafs* (purification of the soul), and noble morals such as patience and sincerity.

4. Conclusion

Based on the conducted research, it can be concluded that the development of Islamic Religious Education and Character learning based on a Sufistic approach through experiential learning has successfully addressed the problem of low emotional and spiritual intelligence among students, who have typically been exposed to theoretical-dogmatic instruction. The implementation of this model at SMAN 1 Kinali demonstrates success in reaching the initial spiritual stage of repentance (taubah), marked by positive behavioral changes, increased worship consciousness, and improved ability to manage emotions and empathy. These findings not only enrich the scholarly landscape of Islamic education by integrating the wisdom of Sufi tradition with modern learning methodologies but also yield practical impacts through the creation of a holistic, transformative learning process focused on value internalization. For sustainability, it is recommended that this model be developed progressively through continuous teacher training, the formulation of more specific evaluation indicators for each spiritual *maqam*, and the expansion of its application across diverse educational contexts. Further studies could be directed toward measuring long-term impacts, adapting the model for other educational levels, or integrating technology into sophisticated experiential learning activities to enhance its relevance to the dynamics of the younger generation.

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