

Spirituality, Sufism and Students' Character Building

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Abstract

In today's fast-paced world of tremendous material expansion, man's temporal and spiritual life, as well as his needs, cannot be ignored. Although man's life began in matter, his abilities serve as a campaign to unravel the mysteries of this physical cosmos and enlighten the meaning of existence. While man is currently at the apex of his material advancement, his spiritual development is lagging behind. In the holistic development of personality, the relevance and satisfaction of his material life, as well as his emotional, intellectual, and spiritual requirements, cannot be disregarded. The study has made an effort to introduce the spiritual schools of thought to the younger generation (teachers and students) in innovative ways and to offer students' spiritual selves a place in contemporary educational institutions. As a result of this work, the Sufi school of thought is given renewed relevance to meet contemporary needs in students character building. Sufi beliefs and practices, which center around the ascent of love, the position of humanity, true monotheism, and the mysteries of spiritual advancement, are rooted in genuine love and endowed with methods for transforming one's personality. In this article, taking into account the principles of qualitative research, the teaching strategies of Sufism are explored in the relevance of holistic personality development dimensions and character building.

Keywords: Spirituality, Sufism, Students, Character Building

Introduction

The goal of education is to transform individuals into ideal or complete human beings. The creation of "personal morality" or moral character demonstrates attaining perfection. As a result, if education is carried out consistently, each school should be dedicated to the formation of moral persons (Chu, 2022). Moral people capable of managing their lives in accordance with humanity's noble values. Academic brilliance, personal achievement, and real citizenship are all dependent on character education (Vadeboncoeur, 2005).

Then, all efforts aimed at instilling awareness must be oriented at creating sensitivity to and respect for noble ideals

among students. Character development is an endeavor to assist students in developing characteristics so that they can interact and collaborate with all stakeholders in mutually beneficial ways. Only by possessing a good moral character can people work together and assist each other in carrying out their responsibilities (Daud, Yussuf, & Kadir, 2023; Djailani, 2013).

Throughout Islam's early centuries, when it began its rapid and unprecedented imperial expansion and intellectual florescence, pious Muslim intellectuals worked tirelessly to integrate and codify the new faith. As a result, these early intellectuals focused on themes that affected people's daily lives. Some Muslims sought to explain and codify

a supplementary science centred on the inner life, one based on the Quran, Prophetic principles, and the practices of Muhammad's closest friends. Some researchers and practitioners referred to this as the "Science of the Way of the Afterlife". It includes both practical, action-oriented understanding about heart cleansing and a theoretical dimension that delves into the secrets of faith. Over time, several masters emerged as excellent instructors and practitioners of this discipline. Sufi lay organisations or orders emerged in the 12th century, each led by a renowned teacher, or shaykh, and a personally chosen successor in each generation. Sufism evolved as both a religious science and a social movement, with a continuous line of spiritual development and transmission dating back to the founder shaykh. It bequeathed a legacy of Islam that taught with cultural sensitivity, advocated tolerance and inter-religious collaboration, and never abandoned the inner life and spiritual essence for the sake of just political engagement (Baran, 2004; Rahman, 2025).

This study was aimed at getting better understanding of Sufism in relevance to a person's character building, so its practices may be adopted in schools for student's character building. Researcher assumed that best practices are adopted by Sufis in Islam which may help us to understand how a sound character be developed by continuous guidance and assistance provided to students by their teachers as mentors.

Education plays a vital role in character building of our generations, and aimed at developing personalities in such a way that may be helpful in individuals own life and to develop better societies as well. As Muslims we believe on the values given by our religion and we feel ourselves accountable for our deeds. Aiming at developing characters may lead us to best practices adopted by our ancestors. The role model of

Prophet Muhammad and his companions provide us with practicing approaches towards character building of individuals. After the era of prophet hood great Muslim scholars and Sufis play a great role in molding and uplifting the personalities which have worth in this word and hereafter. Now a days as our education system is lacking in character building of individuals, we may get guidance from the Sufism as it had a great impact in developing personalities in history. Practices adopted by the Sufis or sheikhs may help us in driving techniques and practices for our teachers of main stream education to play an effective mentoring role in character building of students. Modern educational systems are embracing approaches that can encourage character formation in our institutions, with the goal of developing individuals. Many studies and activities are being conducted for this aim all around the world. Only academic achievement does not lead to a personality development that can assist a person develop their personality and character in such a manner that they may serve society as a whole. We, as Muslims, are responsible for our actions in this world and in the afterlife, therefore our future generations must be guided in such a way that they can shape their personalities(Khan, 2023).

This spirit may be found in our oldest traditions, such as Sufism. Sufism has an important influence in transforming people's personality and making them helpful to mankind as a whole. This research will concentrate on the strategies and methods used by sheikhs, with the goal of determining how we may use such approaches in our mainstream education systems by educating our instructors to act as mentors to our students. This research will help to improve the methods and approaches used by our instructors in the holistic development of our generations' character. In this sense, Sufism had a significant influence. Sufi practices are

very close to human nature, and their methods for molding one's life are quite practical and result-oriented. This research aids in the design and improvement of teacher training as well as the environments of our educational institutions (Farooqui, 2021).

Research Objectives

- To have better understanding of Sufism's finest practices in the development of personalities.
- To highlight the practices of Sufis which are beneficial for the teachers in character development of their students.

Research Questions

- How Sufis and sheikhs try to mold the personalities of their followers?
- How they achieve desirable changes in individual's characters?
- How can we use those practices as teachers in building characters of our students?
- Can teachers bring change in personalities by using those techniques?

Review of Related Literature

Mysticism is a global phenomenon that runs across many of the world's major religious traditions, including Hinduism, Buddhism, Manichaeism, Zoroastrianism, Hellenism, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. In Islam, this tradition is known as Sufism or *tasawwuf*. Sufism emerged as a unique movement at a later period, drawing on some Quranic injunctions as well as the Prophet's (peace be upon him) sayings and acts. The popularity of the Sufi movement, which coincided with the formation of a set of Sufi ideas and practices, was not an instantaneous development. On the contrary, the evolution of Sufism into a movement with institutionalized rituals was the product of a lengthy process lasting over centuries during which it flourished throughout the length and width of the Muslim territories (Anjum, 2006).

The beginning of the XIII-XIV century is a fruitful time in the history of *tasawwuf*. During this time, Sufism (*tasawwuf*) reached its pinnacle, both theoretically and practically. Sufism (*tasawwuf*) literature blooms and develops throughout this time. Great Sufi poets like Muhiyiddin Ibn al-Arabi, Yahya Suhrawardi, and Najmuddin, as well as sheikhs like Fariduddin Attar, Ahmad Yassavi, and Jaloliddin Rumi, filled *tasawwuf* science with philosophy and knowledge (Rahmonova, 2018).

Tasawwuf is more than just academic knowledge; it also has practical needs, which are actively handled by a teacher. So, how do murid teachers and other Taliban murids differ from other instructors? What distinguishes *murshidi komil* (the perfect teacher) from other instructors, and murid from other talibs (students)? (Rahmonova, 2018).

Core Sufi teachings aside from the preceding interpretation and practice of Sufism, the essence of Sufism teachings is to develop human morals with the goal of solely seeking God's blessing. Exercises to enhance morals include striving to purify oneself of loathsome qualities and decorate oneself with praiseworthy characteristics. Sufis think that their own aspirations are what separates them from their Lord. This honest trait includes qualities such as patience, appreciation to God, and readiness. These four concepts are central to Sufi beliefs (Zaelani¹ & Zuriyati, 2020).

The role and function of Sufism is considered relevant and empowered for character education, because the educational model like this is oriented to the formation of character or the inner nature of man that affect all his thoughts and deeds, and also means as character. Therefore, character education is not merely to provide knowledge about good and bad things, but an effort to instill noble values so as to form the structure of humanity by familiarizing,

practicing, cultivating, and exemplifying noble values, such as honest, discipline, responsible, patient, sincere, nationalism, and humane. Such initiatives are conducted in a variety of schooling settings, including institutions (schools), homes, and communities. Education like this is done in the process of producing the creation of human character and is noteworthy.

(Abdurahman, 2018).

Education is consistent with human endeavours from birth to death. Humans educate themselves intentionally by controlling the condition of their soul, particularly in order to cultivate excellent character and habits from the start of their growth. As a result, their personalities develop in accordance with their educational ambitions. Education, too, is changing (via innovation). That shift occurs as a result of the educational process, which is not in line with the demands of the times and will only keep people stagnant. As a result, people's perceptions of education alter. Sayyidina Ali bin Abi Talib once informed us, "Do not raise your children the way [your] parents raised you, they were born for a different time". The moral value of the above remark is that an educator must be able to improve and update their teaching and learning techniques. Thus, the learning process will flow smoothly and in line with the demands of the learners. Furthermore, the content supplied will always be able to be correctly absorbed by learners using the appropriate approaches under current circumstances. Education will continue to innovate, change, and progress for as long as humans exist (Abidin et al., 2020).

Tasawuf academic education is the suggested way. In Bid'ayah Al-Hidayah, al-Ghazali employs both the drill and example methods. In order to carry out the process of Sufism moral education, educators and learners must both possess certain manners. Exemplary has a significant significance in

education the child's morals, exemplification into a vital point in learning and constructing a child's morals, if the educator is excellent at the likelihood that his pupils are wellbehaved, since the pupil imitates his instructor; otherwise, the teacher is terrible. The Mujadah technique is able to educate learners to do good and behave in order to get happiness (Khoerul, 2020).

The Arabic words that are used to refer to the teacher are mu'allim, murshid, shaikh, ustādh, and mudarris. Some of these terms go beyond the common meaning of "teacher" and refer to as a guide or even an adviser. The teacher is also viewed as a physician who can cure the illness of the mind and lead the student to the straight path. Abu Zayd indicates the importance of having a teacher by stating that "whoever becomes involved in seeking knowledge without a Shaikh will emerge without knowledge, because knowledge is a profession, and every profession has its experts. Therefore, it is necessary to have a proficient teacher in order to learn. In The Revival of Religious Sciences, Imām Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī illustrates two types of teachers. The first one possesses knowledge but does not act according to it, while the other acquires knowledge, acts upon it, and teaches it to others. According to al-Ghazālī's view, the first teacher is like a needle that remains naked but sews clothing for others, while the second teacher has been conceptualized as a sun which illuminates itself and gives light to others. From an Islamic perspective, the teacher should have certain qualities such as piety, kindness, and sympathy towards the students. They are required to follow the methods of the prophets in their teaching, and deal with each disciple according to their intellectual capacity. Moreover, it is unexpected from masters to belittle the value of any knowledge in front of students. Masters should treat their disciples like their own children, and try to maintain a healthy,

honest, and personal relationship with them. In the early period, scholars had a good relationship with their disciples that led them to take care of students' personal issues, in order to support their studies. Students from all backgrounds enjoyed good quality education without any restriction, in addition to being free and open to all (Ashraf, 2020).

Research Methodology

Using a qualitative research design, this study investigates the untapped area of sufi notions and how well they can be adapted for use by academic institutions and instructors (Flick, 2004). A special technique for examining the human psychology and how individuals react to speeches, communication materials, entertainment programming, and news events is content analysis. To have a decent grasp of the material, a descriptive content inquiry is done on the example. The collected data is analysed by the application of inductive approach. It was extremely difficult to locate the genuine spirit of Sufi's in today's material world, we can hardly find authentic mentors, and thus researcher must rely on the content that is accessible regarding our renowned Sufi academics views and actions.

Due to the very comprehensive details about Sufiism, its practices and the transformation of personalities, the very renowned book of Ali bin Usman Hajvery's "*Kashf al mahjoob*" was considered as sample of the study through detailed analysis of the content of the book researcher may highlight the best practices for today's teachers. The inductive method is employed to generate novel concepts with practical applications (Prince & Felder, 2006). To find words, topics, themes, or concepts, content analysis is employed to collect data from a subset of content samples. The purpose of the substance investigation strategy is to identify and analyze elements in order to provide them with legitimacy. A variety of examination systems and methodically

analyzed contemporaneous data are examples of subjective exploration strategies. The manual substance investigation approach revealed themes related to sufi practices, and NVIVO 12 software was used for computational analysis to evaluate the reliability of the manual coding. This is a practical and trustworthy method for content analysis (Wicks, 2017).

Data Analysis and Findings

Thorough study of the content helps us in finding the practices adopted by the Sufis in transformation of personalities of their followers. All topics related to the teaching practices are included in content analysis and rest of the topics based on different school of thoughts and religious practices are excluded from analysis.

Researchers discover that Sufiism has a significant influence on their followers. After a thorough examination of the book *kashf al mehjob*, some of the basic practices used by Sufis to educate their disciples might be useful for our instructors in shaping the character of their pupils in general, as we see Sufism having a significant influence on the development of their disciples' character.

Following themes showing the important aspects of Sufi practices in generally uplifting their pupil's characters:

Student teacher relationship in respect to sheikh and follower

In Sufiism a murshad or sheikh plays a role of a guide. Sufi let their followers experience the life and guide him in drawing lessons from their observations and experiences. They take care of their followers and give them lesson from their daily life. Sufis practices are very close to nature and so do they provoke thinking in their followers to draw lines. The lesson through practical life provides sound base for character. Same as a teacher can let his or her students to experience life and make them able of drawing conclusions from their experiences and relate them with the divine teachings. It

demands a mutual confidence of teacher and student on each other.

A total submission to teachers (sheikh's authority)

In Sufiism a sheikh has authority and the pupil have to follow in all situations. As sheikh knows the realities and have deep understanding of the life so sheikh's vision about things and life is of worth valued. This authority builds commitment and submission in students to follow the commands and be obedient to their masters in any case and situation. So, our teachers must have authority to that level which is beneficial in building character of their students. Teacher must have deep understandings of the situations and their outcomes so they can use authority in the right direction for building character.

Moderation

Sufi practices go naturally with the life and Sufis don't exaggerate in any sense, they consider their pupils a normal human being which is always in between evil and good they never let their *mureed* alone in facing the spiritual challenges and never judge them on the basis of their wrong doings. They always try to keep them on right direction by providing them guidance and keeping them in close observation. It provides hope to students and also stimulate hardworking in life.

Purification of body (Taharah)

Cleanliness is vital when a follower observes his sheikh, this habit in the long aspect help the students to remain clean and build their aesthetics and to see good in everything as *Tahart* soothes and nourish our spirits. Our body has a right on us to keep it clean, it effects a company we keep so it must be demonstrated in our schools by our teachers as students made habitual of it.

Sheikh as mentor

As sheikhs play a role of not just of a teacher to teach the religious practices according to religion but actually, they are

mentoring the followers in building their character at large. They set achievable goals of life for their followers and instill passion and hardworking for the noble cause. Through mentoring they provoke thinking among followers and set examples by their own character to follow. As follower is attached with the sheikh so he tries level best to demonstrate in sheikh's style. The followers unconsciously imitate the sheikh's behavior and try to achieve the goals in best of ways with continuous support of the sheikh. A teacher must remember the fact that once a teacher is always a teacher for their students so they must try to have positive impact on their students for their lifetime and for their success in hereafter also. Obedience to the Beloved is a key milestone.

Awareness of spiritual psychology

In Sufiism the element of spirit is addressed as a key factor. Sufis not only are the master of general psychology of a human being but they are experts in the field of spirituality. Like cognition, emotions and physical needs Sufis also knows the spiritual needs of the person and they believe that a spiritual life is the base of all other features of personality. They are experts in ways of how soul find peace and stimulate a person to reach beyond boundaries. Through spirituality they instill courage to lead a purposeful life and face the challenges of life with determination and will. so teacher must pay attention to this feature of a personality to make courageous, motivated and determined human beings.

Support between knowledge and action

Sufiism practice knowledge, in this school of thought they teach life skills. Thought provoking activities are generated through which a lifelong lesson is learnt by the follower. They don't just rely upon knowledge sharing but they provoke action. They practice doing the skills until these are mastered by the follower. There is no haste in this regard, a person is given full time to

grasp over it and make it a habit. Sufi condemn teaching which is not in self-practice. They believe in practices not just in mere knowledge.

Etiquette of all times

Etiquette is the base of Sufiism. The etiquette of general life, self-care, humanity, company, practices, religious practices, are followed by the sheikh and encourage among the followers. Sheikh not only practice the etiquettes but it is appreciated in the followers also and they slowly adopt all manners. Followers not only adopt manners of general life as well as they are mastered in creating basic personality traits, raising good question or remain silent. Through these practices a moderate personality is developed which is nice and appealing for others. The servants of the Most Gracious walk-in humility.

Priority to good deeds over lineage

From the very early stages a follower is trained to value good deeds on lineage and enjoy the best state of inner peace. When a person is in harmony with his inner peace he excels in his intellect and he started living for a big purpose in life. Slowly, they learn to value the purpose on worldly pursuits and material things. Concept of God is all-knowing and all-seeing instilled in them for creating a self-accountability, self-purification and heart purification in them.

Isolating oneself from bad company

Person cannot escape from the effects of company he keeps, so it is strictly observed in Sufiism to keep the students with the people of high morals in early stages of their life, and gradually they are trained to not get influenced from others without a sound base.

Knowledge without action is like a body without a soul

Sufiism is action oriented. They transform personalities through practices they keep. Knowledge just provides the base but actually learning is what we adopt and it changes our entire previous practices.

Students are motivated to perform the values and practices learnt by them.

The claim of perfection in knowledge is misguidance

Knowledge has no limits so Sufi never claim perfection at any stage. The followers are trained to learn throughout their lives and be open minded to new diversities of knowledge and always consider himself a learner. Shelter from knowledge which is of no use is also a key point in Sufiism.

Practicing good character

A very comprehensive practical model is observed by the Sufi mentors to practice the teachings in daily life by their students. One year of service to the people, one year of service to the truth, one year of monitoring one's heart

Serving people after acquiring perfect skills

Service to humanity is very essential part of Sufi practices and teachings.

Discussion and Conclusion

According to the research findings, in order to grow people, contemporary educational systems are adopting strategies that can support character development in our institutions. Sufi practices are recognized to change people's lives; therefore, educators can use them as a guide when creating strategies for student's character development.

According to findings, A *murshad*, or *sheikh*, is an important figure in Sufism who serves as a teacher and guide, letting their followers go through life and learn from their experiences and observations.

Findings highlights the concept of authority to be adopted by contemporary teachers. Building character requires both the teacher and the student to have this mutual confidence. Because they have a profound awareness of life and reality, sheikhs are respected for their authority. Students are more devoted to and submissive to their teachers as a result of this authority, which

motivates them to obey their leaders in all circumstances. For the purpose of fostering character development, teachers need to have a thorough awareness of the circumstances and results they are dealing with.

Findings prove that, Sufi traditions are in harmony with life, viewing its followers as fellow human beings who exist between the realms of good and evil. They constantly work to maintain their followers on the straight road by offering counsel and vigilant observation, never passing judgment on them for their transgressions. *Tahart* calms and nourishes our spirits, therefore this aids pupil in maintaining their cleanliness and developing their aesthetics. In order to instill a habit of cleanliness in pupils, teachers must model it in the classroom.

Sheikhs also act as mentors, establishing realistic life objectives and inspiring their adherents to work hard and passionately for the just cause. By serving as mentors, they encourage critical thinking in their subordinates and provide a model of moral behavior. Teachers need to keep in mind that they are their pupils' lifelong teachers, and that they should strive to have a beneficial influence on them both now and in the afterlife. One important turning point is obeying the Beloved.

The spirit element is considered a crucial component in Sufism. Experts in the subject of spirituality, Sufis hold that all other aspects of personality stem from a spiritual life. They inspire bravery to live a life with meaning and to meet life's obstacles head-on with a strong sense of resolve. Sufism is a way of life that teaches life skills through stimulating activities and constant practice till mastery. It is imperative for educators to consider this aspect of a candidate's personality in order to produce brave, driven, and focused people.

Sufism is based on etiquette, which is practiced by sheikhs in their daily lives as well as in their religious and social

interactions. In addition to picking up common etiquette, followers also cultivate fundamental personality qualities, ask insightful questions, or stay mute. From the very beginning, followers are taught to prioritize good deeds above ancestry, which helps them to appreciate good deeds over lineage and find inner peace. The idea that God is all-knowing and all-seeing is ingrained in children in order to foster self-accountability, self-purification, and heart purification. They also learn to place a higher emphasis on purpose above worldly pursuits and material possessions. Sufis strictly believe that one should keep oneself apart from bad company since one cannot escape the impacts of one's companionship.

Sufis strictly believe that one should keep oneself apart from bad company since one cannot escape the impacts of one's companionship. Followers are taught to learn throughout their lives and to be receptive to new and diverse forms of information, believing that knowledge without action is akin to a body without a soul. One year of serving the people, one year of serving the truth, and one year of keeping an eye on one's emotions are all necessary components of cultivating excellent character.

Findings of this study adds practical applications of personality development for transformational learning theory. The study illustrates a number of aspects that will help academic institutions and teachers equally. This study explores the spiritual leadership of Sufism and its concepts, such as transcendence, role modeling, self-realization as a means of gaining determination from others, and many other practical skills. It also explores transformational learning theory and the theoretical model that great teachers have constructed to help academic institutions achieve the goals they set (Zanchetta et al., 2017).

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