Contextualizing Nasr's Sufism in Education in the Modern Era

Yudril Basith
Universitas Nahdlatul Ulama,
Indonesia
ORCID: 0000-0003-0079-339X

Saiful Bahri
Universitas Nahdlatul Ulama,
Indonesia
ORCID: 0000-0001-7730-5003

Dede Setiawan
Universitas Nahdlatul Ulama, Indonesia
ORCID : 0000-0002-1205-8387

Abstract: This article examined Seyyed Hossein Nasr's thoughts on contextualizing Sufism in education in the modern era. He viewed Sufism as the key to reviving traditional Islamic values that have been long forgotten. He called for the importance of education, which developed intellectually and cultivated the human soul and personality. This article used a qualitative approach with a type of literature study and examined his works and related literature to explore his thoughts on Sufism and education. The collected data technique used documentation study; primary sources were obtained from Nasr's works, such as books, journal articles, and his writings that discuss Sufism, education, and his thoughts on these topics. The secondary data sources came from other literature relevant to this research. The data analysis was conducted using content analysis and hermeneutic analysis methods. The results showed that contextualizing Sufism in education emphasizes the importance of spiritual and ethical values in the educational process. Nasr emphasized the need to instill transcendent values through the Sufi soul to overcome the secularization of knowledge and materialistic views in modern education.
Keywords: *sufism; education; modern era*

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Introduction

In this modern era, education has lost its spirit. The development of science has reduced educational values, especially in its values and ethics. Gillespie highlighted the increasingly widespread misuse of technology (Gillespie, 2013). ultimately resulting in a loss of control over morality (Ren, 2009). Science, which is a tool to facilitate human beings toward true happiness, has changed its function because it is more focused on its development without paying attention to the true purpose of the existence of science itself (Teller, 1998).

The positivistic view of the modern era has also contributed to problems in education. The authority of science becomes the only measure of truth, while religious values are rejected or ignored because they

are considered to hinder progress. The authority of science is a modern epic, while religious authority is considered obsolete (Russell, 2002). It has led to reduced religious values and even the loss of humanity. This situation is increasingly felt in the field of spirituality, where modern humans prioritize material things over the spiritual values of life (Khoiruddin, 2016; Pane & Darwis Dasopang, 2017).

In addition, the increasingly widespread individual and group conflicts that are often in the name of religion are also a big problem in education (Brantmeier et al., 2010). It is allegedly because in education someone teaches about the religious spirit, which is often ignored. Hence, education only focuses on knowledge, filling answers, and fulfilling external factors that obscure students' true potential and identity (Brantmeier et al., 2010). This is triggered because they need to understand the attitude and awareness of diversity and justice in various social activities. Amin Abdullah (Yaqin, 2007) said that this was allegedly the result of education that fails to give meaning to diversity in a pluralistic society.

Given these issues, developing education based on universal human values is important. Education must change the paradigm from merely emphasizing intellectual aspects to integrating the development of mind, body, and soul in line (Brantmeier et al., 2010). One of the thinkers who seek to integrate this is Sayyed Hossein Nasr with the concept of Sufism.

Many articles on Nasr's thoughts related to education have been studied, such as research conducted by (Muhammad & Kerwanto, 2023) discussing the relevance of Seyyed Hossein Nasr's thoughts on the integration of Islam and science to Islamic innovation in Islamic education in Indonesia, then (Abas et al., 2023) on the comparison of the styles of Sufism education thought of al-Ghazali and Sayyed Hossein Nasr. An article

was written (Widiyanto, 2017) on recontextualizing Seyyed Hossein Nasr's thoughts on building science and Islamic education. Titin Nurhidayati (Nurhidayati, 2019) discusses the thoughts of Seyyed Hossein Nasr: the concept of beauty and Islamic art in the world of Islamic education. Next (Munir, 2016), with the title Human as a learning subject (Study of the Thought of Seyyed Hossein Nasr and Ki Hadjar Dewantara), there is also research researched by (Ardiansyah, 2015) on the concept of human responsibility and the process of its formation in Islamic religious education (Study of the Thought of Seyyed Hossein Nasr).

Although many studies discuss Seyyed Hossein Nasr's thoughts related to education, most of the existing literature focuses more on theoretical concepts and comparative thinking. So, the study of Nasr's concept of Sufism contextualized in education in the modern era is still very limited and needs to be done because it offers an interesting alternative.

Nasr sees that Sufism is the key to reviving traditional Islamic values that have long been forgotten. For him, Sufism is like the heart that gives the pulse of life to all Islamic teachings, both in the social and intellectual dimensions. By practicing the practices of Sufism, such as *maqamat*, humans can train the sharpness of the intellect or the eyes of the heart, which have been closed due to over-reliance on the power of the ratio alone. This spiritual ascent will achieve a balance between the ratio and the intellect, allowing humans to fulfill their spiritual thirst that is not quenched by mere material luxuries. Nasr believes that it is only by returning to the teachings of Sufism that modern humans can restore the integrity of their humanity that has been eroded and reunite the reality of the world and the transcendental dimension that has been uprooted (Mumtaz, 2020).

Research Method

This article uses a qualitative approach with a literature study or literature review type. The main data is obtained from Nasr's works, such as books and journal articles, and his writings that discuss Sufism, education, and his thoughts on these topics. Secondary data sources come from other literature relevant to this research.

The data collection technique used library research, in which the author collects, reads, and analyzes the related written sources in depth. Data analysis was conducted using the content analysis method (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008) and hermeneutic analysis (Haq, 2019), which involved in-depth reading, interpretation, and interpretation of Nasr's works to reveal the meaning, concepts, and main ideas contained in them.

Discussion

Nasr's Sufism Thought

According to Hamka, Sufism cleanses the soul, educates, raises the degree of virtue, emphasizes all temptations and gluttony, and fights desires more than necessary for self-sufficiency (Hamka, 2001). Hamka argues that the misunderstanding so far about Sufism is directed at the concept of *Zuhud*, which is too excessive, where the concept explains that *Zuhud* is diligent in worship and breaking ties with everything other than God, namely only facing God alone, rejecting the ornaments of the world and hating things that always deceive it, the delicacy of property, splendor, and being alone towards the path of God in seclusion and worship (Hamka, 2001).

A. J. Arberry also supports Hamka's opinion that Sufism is a tarekat (path), one of the institutionalized Sufi ways. Sufism is considered only for ignorant people who want to follow Sufism activities in this modern era because they only prioritize aspects of their individuality and believe in mysticism and superstition that do not contribute to the development of the times in the modern era (Arberry, 2008).

Therefore, Sufism is not interpreted in the form of passive, solitary meditation denying the things of the world in the face of the modern era, but as Said Aqil Siraj said in his book Sufism as social criticism that Sufism here must be understood in a substantial value that is not passive and apathetic from social reality (Siraj, 2012). Likewise, Carl W. Ernst and Victor Danner said that Sufism in this modern century has gained a significant place among people in America who learn it through the Sufi poems of Rumi because, according to Danner, the teachings laid by Sufis are ethical and spiritual (Akman, 2010).

According to Nasr, Sufism is considered to one of preserving the Islamic tradition that goes from law to theology, philosophy to art, and language to Sufism, which is continued with the disclosure of traditional manners that are not obtained by Western education or even the Islamic world itself (Nasr, 2002). Nasr considers Sufism as the most important thing that preserves the perennial dimension, the bone marrow or dimension in the Islamic revelation that emphasizes universal values (Haryati, 2012). Sufism is the widest reality that provides meaning for someone who follows its teachings to reach the ultimate truth (Nasr, 2007).

Namely, *Falsafi Sufism*, which departs from the search for divinity through philosophy, and the second is *Suni Sufism*, which is *amali* and *akhlaki*, which reaches the peak of realization from religious practices such as *tariqah* (Siregar, 2002). According to his pattern, Nasr is characterized by *Falsafi Sufism*, where the tendency of Sufism does not deny the social context. Nasr considers

this world to manifest man's desire to find God. Sufism, as Nasr refers to it, is not a form of Sufism that separates itself from social activities. However, humanist Sufism considers humans as beings with divine value in themselves (Nasr, 2006). The dimension of divinity is implemented to become a servant and Khalifah in this world so that in daily activities, one can seek the pleasure of Allah.

Nasr's Sufism is characterized by spiritual humanism, which emphasizes the social aspect of getting closer to God. Nasr considers the inner dimension of religion as a unifier in achieving the highest existence because humans are the manifestation of God (Nasr, 1981b). As Hazrat Inayat Khan said, humans are the manifestation of God's representatives on earth. Quraish Shihab also emphasized that in carrying out the duties of Khalifah fil Ardi, humans become God's representatives as judges by promoting wisdom by human nature as fairly as possible (Shihab, 2000).

Sufism, which departs from philosophical studies that think about the essence of God through rational thinking, causes a person to forget the world, such as Rabiah Al Adawiyah with her concept of *mahabbah*, which puts her love for God to deny the essence of the world. Rabiah isolated from social life to become a *salik* (Nata, 2013).

The Foundation of Education of Nasr

In the modern era, education is still anthropocentric. It is made clear through the goals of education initiated by the school of humanism, namely, to humanize humans (Rahman, 2016). Nimrod Aloni calls it humanistic education, which means that humans see themselves as subjects and objects of knowledge (Aloni, 1997). Education

based on anthropocentric philosophy is what makes mistakes when viewing humans. Humans are seen as separated from the spiritual dimension of religion)(Ross, 2020).

The anthropocentric foundation of education also led Emile Durkheim to conclude that education aims to form moral humans independent of religious doctrine. Moral education is only formed by humans through education; the community environment and religion do not interfere in the formation of these morals (Durkheim, 1990). Paulo Freire says education is a critical consciousness that aims for liberation (Friere, 1975). Meanwhile, John Dewey said that education in the context of democratization is adapted to the existing reality in the form of experience in life in the sense of experiential development and the desirable experience (Dewey, 1916).

According to Nasr, the philosophical foundation of education initiated by Western thinkers is still anthropocentric, while the foundation of education must be theocentric. Namely, God is the main goal of education. (Nasr, 1981b, 2002, 2006b; Widiyanto, 2017). The foundation of education does not exclude the transcendent dimension obtained by revelation and the experience of spirituality. Because the higher a person's religiousness, the higher the social quality (Komaruddin Hidayat, 1998).

Therefore, education is one way to create good human beings who will use technology to be good. Education aims to humanize people for peace (Cook, 2008) and to develop the quality of life (Narayana, 2009).

Humanizing humans departs from the concept of morality embraced by John Dowey, Emile Durkheim, and John Wilson, which all depart from moral philosophy (G. HUITT, 2015). Meanwhile, in Islam, it departs from the *Moral Madzhab* (Subhi, 1992). The two concepts have different points of view;

namely, the West is anthropocentric, while Islam is theocentric.

Nasr, who follows the theocentric *Madzhab*, considers that education in the modern era has been dominated by the secularization of knowledge, which causes the dichotomy of science and religion, which departs from the anthropocentric paradigm so that the goal is the secularization of knowledge, materialism, and individualist culture. Nasr believes this can happen because of the absence of transcendent things in life. That which is transcendent is the sacred dimension and sacred revelation (Nasr, 1981b). Eliminating transcendent things also causes a person to lose the dimension of religious spirituality (Arsheed Ahmad Mali, 2013).

Nasr stated that the spread of secularization of knowledge and criticism of the religious world were carried out through educational institutions in this modern era in the form of ideas taught. It can be seen from the upheaval of very religious students and those who oppose religion. (Nasr, 2003). It makes one ambiguous about the purpose of education.

Nasr views the ideal desired by education as making the whole man (kaffa). Humans have an outer and inner dimensions (Nasr, 1981a). The inner dimension of religion is a unifier in achieving the highest existence. Adopting the language of Quraisy Syihab, humans in carrying out the duties of Khalifah fil Ardi humans become representatives and need the knowledge to carry out their duties as representatives (Shihab, 2000), which requires a philosophical basis for education that is not far from the divine dimension.

For Seyyed Hossein Nasr, education is not just a transfer of knowledge. Rather, it is a process of developing the whole person, both intellectually and spiritually (Nasr & Jahanbegloo, 2010). Nasr believed that education must have a close relationship with God's revelation and religious values because knowledge not accompanied by moral and spiritual qualities is considered dangerous. In his view, education is a combination of the development of reason and the development of the soul. Through education, the potentials of students' minds are honed to understand their nature as beings who have a responsibility to God. The ultimate goal of the educational process is the formation of a universal human being *(insan kamil)* who can optimize all the potential that is given, whether intellectual, spiritual, physical, or linguistic, to carry out his responsibilities as a servant and representative of God on earth (Mahardika & Ali, 2018; Nasr, 2006a).

Contextualization of Nasr's Sufism in Education

Sufism and education have the same goal: to make good and moral people. Because Sufism is learning ethics (Subhi, 1992), which is knowledge in distinguishing good and bad (Nata, 2001). Nahid Jiani says that Sufis have tried to teach two types of ethics in education, namely, the ethics of speech and action. Only those who learn the ethics of speech will understand the ethics of action (Jiani, 2013).

Education for Sufis did not seek knowledge but also to teach someone a good personality, practice knowledge, and know the truth of existence, personality, value, and purpose (Ayazi, 2010).

Knowledge is only a tool to find the ultimate truth, namely Allah. Education for Sufis is one way to make this world more serene and peaceful. Nasr views that man's duty as a servant requires knowledge; the knowledge is a way to serve well and is also a means to become a Khalifah. This can be disseminated through education (Nasr, 1987).

Education, according to Sufism, is not just a search for knowledge but rather to teach someone who has a gentle personality

and practices knowledge, meaning that the search for knowledge for peace is not obtained through reading or repeating lessons but by seeking knowledge within himself to know the truth of his existence, personality, values, and goals (Ayazi, 2010).

Universal education can be applied by using Sufism as the basis for finding wisdom, love, peace, humanity, respect for differences, and morals. In the concept of Sufism, according to Abdul Munil Mulkan, educational ideals can be obtained through the laying of the Sufi soul with the hierarchy of human maqam in its development to become an ideal person. Based on Hossein Nasr, there are three levels in Sufism: the first is Sharia, which talks about God's law; Tariqah, which is about the spiritual path; Haqiqah, which is the truth of God obtained through Sharia; and Tariqah (Mulyati, 2005). The hierarchy of the stages of the Sufi concept of maqam requires a social role that must be passed to reach the maqam stage (Mulkan, 2000).

Sufism, which emphasizes the purification of the soul and self-knowledge of God, can be a provision for students to understand their nature and responsibilities as servants of God (Nasr, 1968). The role of the teacher is not only as a teacher (*muʿallim*) who transfers knowledge but also as a soul builder (*murabbi*), like a murshid in Sufism. Teachers guide students to optimize their intellectual and spiritual potential to fulfill their responsibilities to God (Mahardika & Ali, 2018).

Nasr called for the importance of education, which develops intellectually, cultivates and nurtures the human soul and personality. According to him, education should make students a universal human being (*insan kamil*) who is physically and spiritually intact (Nasr, 1968). By integrating the values of Sufism in education, the spiritual crisis experienced by modern humans can be overcome. Learners will have been forgotten to become universal human beings who are intellectually intelligent and have a deep spiritual awareness as a provision for real life.

The contextualization of Sufism in education emphasizes the importance of spiritual and ethical values in the educational process. Sufism in education lays out how Sufism can shape the principles of teacher submission to God and student submission to their teachers. Sufism education also involves a deep spiritual journey, undertaken through the path of Tariqat, to purify oneself and cleanse the soul of bad traits.

In Sufism, there are three ways to cleanse the soul: *takhallî, tahallî, and tajallî*. The *takhallî* method aims to cleanse the heart from the love of the world, not that he does not need it, but does not love it too much. The second *tahallî* attempt to purify the heart and fill it with the remembrance of Allah. *Tajallî* is the final stage, where a disciple is expected to attain true happiness. This bliss is spiritual, and a disciple's meeting with his God occurs on a more spiritual level. Since the teacher in this place better understands the spiritual condition of the disciple, the right of authority of a teacher is necessary to prevent any misunderstanding of God (Irham & Basith, 2018).

In addition, according to the perennial philosophy initiated by Seyyed Hossein Nasr, education enables spiritual practice in the real world, distinguishing between the Sufi and the real world. This philosophy is important because it explains what wisdom is needed to live a true life and real events (Kulsum, 2019; Nasr, 1981b).

Therefore, Nasr stated that education as an educational institution must spread the view of the value system and religious ideas in education, not secularize knowledge and the development of materialism (Nasr, 1968). According to Azyumardi Azra, this materialist view is a failure of modern education that provides an anthropocentric

epistemology of science (Azra, 2001). According to Nasr, transcendent values must be cultivated by putting the Sufi soul (Nasr, 1981b). Is it believed by Nidhal Guessoum that Nasr, as a Sufi and at the same time a scientist in the field of science, can bring together the religious and spiritual dimensions with Western thought, which is famous for positivistic logic with the concept of Sufism (Guessoum, 2014), namely instilling human values based on divinity. However, Nasr emphasized that this does not mean that one must hate the education the West provides, which has a positive materialist character. However, one must learn from the West to see the mistakes of Westerners in laying the philosophical foundation of education (Nasr, 2006b).

According to Nasr, through a traditional Sufistic approach, education can avoid the materialistic, individualistic, and spiritual dryness that is often a negative impact of modernity. Nasr emphasizes the importance of maintaining the knowledge hierarchy and spiritual values in implementing education (Muhammad & Kerwanto, 2023; Nasr, 2003). Nasr places religious or spiritual knowledge as the pinnacle of the scientific hierarchy because this knowledge will guide humans toward spiritual awareness and their responsibility to God (Mahardika & Ali, 2018).

Some stages need to be completed to gain spiritual knowledge in Sufism. In Sufism, the stages of maqam consist of four levels: maqam Shariat, which means improving external practices; maqam *hakikat*, which means practicing all the secrets of the unseen; maqam tarekat, which means improving internal practices; and maqam *makrifat*, which means knowing the essence of God both in substance, nature, and actions. To reach these stages, students must have a teacher to guide or lead them (Mulyati, 2005).

In Sufism, the teaching given in education is to understand the self because understanding this self is the key to understanding human values based on divinity (Nasr, 2003). A student needs help to understand himself to avoid getting lost, where a teacher is likened to a doctor and a student is a patient (Irham & Basith, 2018). Concepts and principles related to character development come from Sufism. The soul or spiritual is the land it touches because only the spiritual can improve and regulate morals (Irham & Basith, 2018).

Conclusion

In this article, according to Nasr, Sufism is very important to be applied in the world of education, seeing the current education that has led to anthropocentric. According to Nasr, applying Sufism preserves Islamic tradition by prioritizing traditional manners not obtained by Western education. The contextualization of Sufism in education emphasizes the importance of spiritual and ethical values in the educational process. Nasr emphasized the need to instill transcendent values through the Sufi soul to overcome the secularization of knowledge and materialistic views in modern education. Sufism is the widest reality that provides meaning for someone who follows its teachings to reach the ultimate truth.

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