



## **A Sufi-Neuroplasticity Model for Muslim Students' Emotional Regulation**

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### **Abstract**

*Emotional regulation has become a pressing concern in Islamic higher education. Muslim students now face academic pressure, digital exposure, social anxiety, and unstable psychological responses in everyday learning. Previous studies have discussed Islamic education, Sufism, spirituality, mindfulness, religious coping, and emotion regulation. However, only a limited body of work has built a conceptual model that links Sufi practices with neuroplasticity for Islamic educational purposes. This article presents the Sufi-Neuroplasticity Model as a theoretical framework to enhance the emotional regulation of Muslim students. The study was qualitative library research that reviewed classical Sufi literature and Scopus-indexed studies (2020–2025) in the fields of Islamic education, Sufi pedagogy, neuroeducation, Islamic psychology, emotion regulation and Islamic mindfulness. The collected data were analyzed through content analysis and conceptual synthesis. The findings show that dhikr, muraqabah, tawakkul, khauf transformation, and rida can be conceptualized as spiritual-pedagogical practices related to repetition, reflective awareness, cognitive meaning reconstruction, fear reorientation, and emotional acceptance. The model contributes to Islamic education by positioning Sufism as a transformative pedagogy for emotional self-regulation, while avoiding direct neurological or clinical claims.*

**Keywords:** *emotional regulation; Islamic education; Islamic mindfulness; neuroplasticity; Sufism*

### **Abstrak**

*Regulasi emosi telah menjadi perhatian yang semakin mendesak dalam pendidikan tinggi Islam karena mahasiswa Muslim saat ini menghadapi tekanan akademik, paparan digital, kecemasan sosial, serta respons psikologis yang tidak stabil dalam proses pembelajaran sehari-hari. Penelitian sebelumnya telah membahas pendidikan Islam, tasawuf, spiritualitas, mindfulness, religious coping, dan regulasi emosi, tetapi masih sedikit yang membangun model konseptual yang menghubungkan praktik-praktik sufistik dengan neuroplastisitas dalam konteks pendidikan Islam. Artikel ini menawarkan Model Sufi-Neuroplastisitas sebagai kerangka teoretis untuk meningkatkan regulasi emosi mahasiswa Muslim. Penelitian ini merupakan penelitian kepustakaan dengan pendekatan kualitatif yang mengkaji literatur tasawuf klasik serta artikel-artikel terindeks Scopus periode 2020–2025 dalam bidang pendidikan Islam, pedagogi sufistik, neuroedukasi, psikologi Islam, regulasi emosi, dan mindfulness Islam. Data dianalisis menggunakan analisis isi (content analysis) dan sintesis konseptual. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa dzikir, muraqabah, tawakkal, transformasi khauf, dan rida dapat dikonseptualisasikan sebagai praktik spiritual-pedagogis yang berkaitan dengan pengulangan, kesadaran reflektif, rekonstruksi makna kognitif, reorientasi rasa takut, dan penerimaan emosi.*

*Model ini memberikan kontribusi terhadap pengembangan pendidikan Islam dengan menempatkan tasawuf sebagai pedagogi transformatif untuk regulasi diri emosional, tanpa mengajukan klaim neurologis maupun klinis secara langsung.*

**Kata kunci:** *regulasi emosi; pendidikan Islam; mindfulness Islam; neuroplastisitas; tasawuf.*

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## Introduction

This Emotional regulation has become an important issue in the contemporary higher education. Students do not only face academic demands. They also deal with social pressure, digital exposure, anxiety about other people's judgments, and uncertainty about the future. These conditions can affect concentration, academic engagement, interpersonal relationships, and psychological well-being. Recent studies on the regulation of emotions show that the ability to manage emotions is related to resilience, academic achievement, social skills, and student's mental health (Jarrell et al., 2022; Romo et al., 2025; Hwang, 2025). For this reason, emotional regulation should be understood as a part of the holistic human education, not as an individual psychological issue.

In the context of Muslim students, emotional regulation cannot be separated from the spiritual and religious dimensions. Religiosity, spirituality, and religious coping can shape the way students interpret pressure, accept failure, manage anxiety, and build psychological resilience. Studies on religiosity and emotion regulation show that spirituality can support adaptive emotion regulation strategies such as cognitive reappraisal, acceptance, and resilience (Zulfiqar et al., 2024; Graça & Brandão, 2024; Brandão, 2025). In Islamic education, this point is important because the aim of education does not stop at cognitive achievement. It also includes formation of character, self-awareness, spiritual maturity, and the ability to orient life toward divine values.

Islamic education has a strong conceptual base for this matter especially through the Sufi tradition. Sufism is not limited to moral advice. It also contains a discipline of self-formation through *tazkiyat al-nafs*, control of the *nafs*, purification of the *qalb*, and the formation of *akhlaq*. Practices such as *dhikr*, *muraqabah*, *tawakkul*, *khauf*, and *rida* provide an inner educational frame that is relevant to students needs when facing academic and social pressure. Studies on the integration of Sufi values in Islamic education show that Sufism can strengthen spiritual intelligence, character formation, self-awareness, and emotional resilience among learners (Muhammad et al., 2024; Mannopov et al., 2025;

Wahyudi et al., 2025). Thus, Sufism can be read as a pedagogy of self-transformation, not only as a normative moral teaching.

Nevertheless, studies on Sufism in Islamic education often stop at discussions of ethics, intellectual history, or character formation in general. Many studies have not explained systematically how Sufi practices work as exercises in emotion regulation. At the same time, modern psychology has long discussed emotion regulation, mindfulness, cognitive reappraisal, self-compassion, and emotional acceptance. Yet these approaches often come from secular frameworks that do not fully explain the spiritual experiences of Muslim students. Research on Islamic mindfulness also shows that practices such as *dhikr* and *muraqabah* cannot be reduced to secular mindfulness because they are based on faith, adab, divine orientation, and the aim of moral formation (Abdulkerim & Li, 2022; AlBedah et al., 2025; Ahmed & Yousaf, 2025; Rejeki & Hakim, 2025).

This gap becomes clearer when Sufism is linked with neuroplasticity. Neuroplasticity is the explanation that the patterns of human response can change through repeated practice, directed attention, meaningful experience, and the creation of new habits. This principle provides a conceptual language for reading spiritual practice as an exercise that shapes attention, meaning, and emotional response. However, the literature from 2020 to 2025 shows that the studies explicitly linking Sufi practice, neuroplasticity, and Islamic education are still very limited. Some studies also talk about Sufism as spiritual education. Others examine neuroeducation in learning. Others focus on mindfulness and students' emotional regulation. Yet these three strands are rarely formulated into a single conceptual model of Islamic education focused on Muslim students' emotion regulation (Mujiburahman et al., 2025; Granado De la Cruz et al., 2025; Yeatman & Yablonski, 2025).

The integration of Sufism and neuroplasticity must be approached carefully. Sufism cannot be reduced to a relaxation technique, brain training, or psychological intervention. It is based on faith, *tazkiyat al-nafs*, adab and closeness to Allah. Neuroplasticity, on the other hand, cannot be used to claim neurological change without empirical evidence. Critiques of the integration of Islamic psychology and modern psychology point to epistemological, conceptual, and methodological challenges, especially when Islamic concepts are linked to secular psychology, mindfulness, or cognitive behavioral therapy (Rothman & Coyle, 2020; Cucchi, 2022; Hussein Rassool,

2023; Toprak, 2024). Therefore, this article uses neuroplasticity as a conceptual reading framework, not as a clinical claim or direct neurological evidence.

Based on this gap, this article proposes the Sufi-Neuroplasticity Model as a conceptual framework of Islamic education for strengthening Muslim students' emotional regulation. The model maps five major Sufi components. First, *dhikr* is understood as a repetitive spiritual practice that centers students' attention on Allah and quiets emotional reactions. Second, *muraqabah* is understood as a reflective awareness that enables students to observe thoughts and emotions before responding. Third, *tawakkul* is understood as the reconstruction of spiritual meaning in the face of uncertainty, failure, and limits of human control. Fourth, *khauf* is understood as the transformation of fear from dependence on social validation to moral awareness before Allah. Fifth, *rida* is understood as emotional acceptance after sincere effort, enabling students to face criticism, failure, and academic pressure with greater maturity.

The novelty of this article lies in the formulation of a conceptual model that links Sufi psychology, emotion regulation, Islamic mindfulness, and neuroplasticity in the context of Islamic education. Unlike studies that only discuss Sufism as moral teaching, this article positions Sufism as a pedagogy of self-transformation. Unlike general mindfulness studies, this article emphasizes the distinctiveness of *dhikr* and *muraqabah* as Islamic awareness practices oriented toward Allah. Unlike secular neuroeducation studies, this article uses neuroplasticity in a limited way as a conceptual language for explaining the role of practice, repetition, attention, and meaningful experience in shaping emotional responses. In this position, the article seeks to balance the theological roots of Sufism with scientific dialogue in contemporary psychology.

This study aims to formulate the Sufi-Neuroplasticity Model as a conceptual framework of Islamic education for strengthening Muslim students' emotion regulation. Specifically, the article addresses three questions. First, how can *dhikr*, *muraqabah*, *tawakkul*, *khauf*, and *rida* be understood as inner educational practices for emotion regulation? Second, how can the principle of neuroplasticity be used conceptually to read the processes of practice, repetition, attention, and emotional response formation in Sufi practice? Third, how can the integration of Sufism and neuroplasticity be formulated as a model of Islamic education that is relevant for Muslim students in the digital age? Through these questions, this article is expected to contribute to the

development of *akhlaq*-tasawuf studies, Islamic psychology, and contemporary Islamic education.

### Research Method

This study uses a qualitative approach with library research as its method. This method was selected because the study does not aim to test the effectiveness of an intervention empirically. Instead, it seeks to formulate a conceptual model through a critical review of the literature on Sufism, Islamic education, Islamic psychology, emotion regulation, Islamic mindfulness, and neuroplasticity. The study is conceptual, interpretive, and analytical. Its main focus is to develop the Sufi-Neuroplasticity Model as a framework of Islamic education for strengthening Muslim students' emotion regulation.

The data sources consist of primary and secondary sources. The primary sources include key literature on Sufi psychology, the concepts of *nafs*, *qalb*, *tazkiyat al-nafs*, *dhikr*, *muraqabah*, *tawakkul*, *khauf*, *rida*, and theories of neuroplasticity that explain response change through practice, repetition, directed attention, and meaningful experience. Secondary sources consist of reputable journal articles, academic books, and scholarly studies on Islamic education, Sufi pedagogy, Islamic psychology, emotion regulation, religious coping, Islamic mindfulness, neuroeducation, mental health, and psychological well-being.

The recent data were obtained by Scopus literature search (2020–2025). The search was based on five groups of keywords related to the focus of the article. The first query was on studies on Islamic education, Sufism, Islamic psychology, and emotion regulation. The second query was on studies on the relationship between Sufism, neuroplasticity, neuroscience, and education. The third query was on studies on emotion regulation, Muslim students, spirituality, religiosity, and religious coping. The fourth query was on critiques of integration of Islamic psychology, psychotherapy, neuroscience, mindfulness, and cognitive behavioral therapy. The fifth query targeted studies on *dhikr*, *muraqabah*, *tawakkul*, *rida*, *khauf*, Islamic mindfulness, emotion regulation, anxiety, stress, well-being, and students.

Table 1. Literature Search Strategy

Query	Search Focus	Function in the Article
Query 1	Islamic education, Sufism, Islamic psychology, and emotion regulation	Strengthens the link between Islamic education, Sufism, and emotion regulation

<b>Query 2</b>	Sufism, neuroplasticity, neuroscience, education, and pedagogy	Identifies the gap between Sufism, neuroplasticity, and Islamic education
<b>Query 3</b>	Emotion regulation, Muslim students, spirituality, religiosity, and religious coping	Strengthens the psychological and spiritual mechanisms of students' emotion regulation
<b>Query 4</b>	Islamic psychology, psychotherapy, critique, mindfulness, CBT, and neuroscience	Strengthens epistemological critique, integration limits, and conceptual caution
<b>Query 5</b>	<i>Dhikr, muraqabah, tawakkul, rida, khauf</i> , Islamic mindfulness, stress, anxiety, and well-being	Strengthens the core practices of the Sufi-Neuroplasticity Model

Literature was selected based on inclusion and exclusion criteria. The inclusion criteria included studies related to Islamic education, Sufism, Islamic psychology, emotion regulation, Islamic mindfulness, neuroeducation, neuroplasticity, or students' psychological well-being. Modern scholarly sources were prioritized from publications in the range of 2020 to 2025, especially journal articles and review articles with clear bibliographic information and direct relevance to the model. Classical Sufi literature was still used even though it is outside the year range, because it is the main conceptual basis. Exclusion criteria were articles that are very far from the focus of Islamic education and students, articles that are too technical in neuroimaging or clinical instruments, clinical therapy articles that have no educational relevance, and articles that did not directly contribute to the conceptual model.

Literature selection process involved four stages. The first stage was identification, which was the collection of articles from Scopus exports and Scopus AI outputs based on five queries. The second stage was initial screening through titles, abstracts, publication years, and keywords. The third stage was eligibility assessment through abstract reading and bibliographic checking to evaluate relevance to the model. The fourth stage was reference-function mapping based on the article sections: introduction, research gap, theoretical framework, model mapping, critique of integration, implications for Islamic education, and future research.

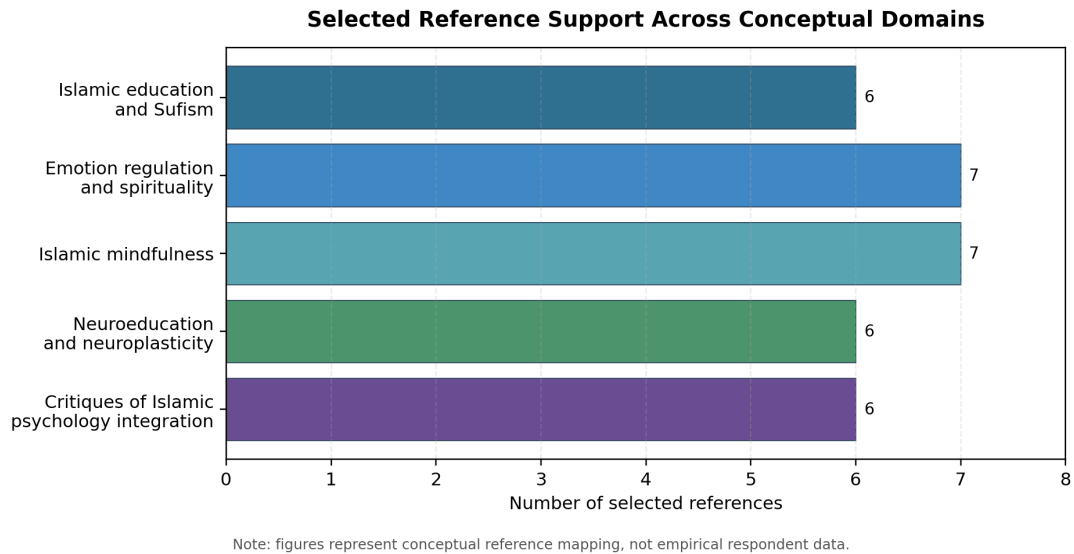
Data were analyzed using content analysis and conceptual synthesis. Content analysis was used to identify key concepts in the literature such as *dhikr, muraqabah, tawakkul, khauf, rida*, Islamic mindfulness, cognitive reappraisal, religious coping, emotional acceptance and neuroplasticity principles. This analysis helped in identifying patterns, categories and conceptual relations across the reviewed sources. Then conceptual synthesis was used to relate Sufi concepts to emotion regulation and neuroplasticity in an Islamic educational framework.

The synthesis was carried out in three stages. First, the study identified the main concepts of both fields: Sufism, Islamic psychology, emotion regulation, Islamic mindfulness and neuroeducation. Second, it mapped the conceptual relationship between Sufi practices and the principles of emotional response formation, such as repeated practice, directed attention, self-reflection, meaning reconstruction, fear reorientation and emotional acceptance. Third, it formulated the Sufi-Neuroplasticity Model by positioning *dhikr* as repetitive spiritual practice, *muraqabah* as reflective awareness, *tawakkul* as spiritual meaning reconstruction, *khauf* as fear transformation, and *rida* as emotional acceptance after effort.

The data reliability was ensured through source triangulation, analytical persistence, and epistemological caution. Source triangulation was done by comparing classical Sufi literature, studies on Islamic education, Islamic psychology, research on emotion regulation, Islamic mindfulness, and neuroeducation. Analytical persistence was ensured by reading the selected sources repeatedly, highlighting key concepts and ensuring that each reference had a clear role in the structure of the article. Epistemological caution was applied by avoiding direct parallels between Sufi concepts and concepts in neuroscience. In this study, neuroplasticity is used as a conceptual framework to understand the role of practice, repetition, attention, and meaningful experience and not as direct neurological evidence for Sufi practice.

This study did not directly involve human participants. It therefore did not require ethical approval in the same way as field or experimental research. Academic ethics were maintained through the use of credible sources, citation according to APA style, and avoidance of exaggerated claims. The model formulated in this study is positioned as a pedagogical-conceptual synthesis, not as a clinical intervention, psychological diagnosis, or neurological proof.

## Results and Discussion



*Figure 1. Mapping of selected Scopus references from 2020 to 2025*  
*Source: Author's mapping of selected references from Scopus, 2020-2025.*

Figure 1 shows that the Sufi-Neuroplasticity Model is constructed from five main domains of literature. The first domain is Islamic education and Sufism. This domain strengthens the position of Sufism as part of character education, spiritual formation, and students' self-transformation. Sufism, Islamic education, emotional intelligence, and self-regulation can be understood as an integrated pedagogical framework that remains relevant to contemporary Islamic education (Akmansyah et al., 2025; Ismail et al., 2022; Kurniawan et al., 2025; Mannopov et al., 2025; Ma'ruf et al., 2025; Muhammad et al., 2024).

The second domain is emotion regulation and spirituality. This domain strengthens the argument that students' emotion regulation cannot be explained only through secular psychological mechanisms. It also needs to consider religiosity, spirituality, religious coping, and Muslim cultural contexts. Spirituality and religious values can support cognitive reappraisal, acceptance, resilience, and students' psychological well-being (Awasthi et al., 2022; Brandão, 2025; Graça & Brandão, 2024; Rammouz et al., 2023; Sabki et al., 2025; Wijaya et al., 2025; Zulfiqar et al., 2024).

The third domain is Islamic mindfulness. This domain bridges Sufi practice and emotion regulation. There is a spiritual distinctiveness to Islamic awareness practices such as *dhikr*, *muraqabah*, and mindfulness in worship that makes them distinct from secular mindfulness. These practices are not only for the sake of psychological calm but also include awareness of Allah, adab, meaning of worship, and moral formation (Afifi

et al., 2025; Ahmed & Yousaf, 2025; AlBedah et al., 2025; Fahm, 2025; Heidari et al., 2025; Rejeki & Hakim, 2025; Wahyudi et al., 2025).

The fourth domain is neuroeducation and neuroplasticity. This domain helps explain that learning and self-response formation are related to practice, repetition, directed attention, and meaningful experience. Recent studies strengthen the need for dialogue among education, neuroscience, spirituality, and self-formation (Arora & Mandal, 2023; Durán-Chinchilla et al., 2025; Granado De la Cruz et al., 2025; Mujiburahman et al., 2025; Shukla et al., 2025; Yeatman & Yablonski, 2025). However, this domain must be used carefully because the present article does not empirically test changes in brain structure.

The fifth domain is the critique of Islamic psychology integration. This domain protects the Sufi-Neuroplasticity Model from biological reductionism and from the secularization of Sufi concepts. The integration of Islamic psychology with CBT, mindfulness, psychotherapy, and neuroscience requires epistemological caution (Abdulkerim & Li, 2022; Cucchi, 2022; Fitriyana & Merida, 2023; Hussein Rassool, 2023; Toprak, 2024; Zahir & Qoronfleh, 2025). *Dhikr* should not be reduced to an ordinary relaxation technique. *Muraqabah* is not identical to secular mindfulness. *Tawakkul* is not fully equivalent to cognitive reappraisal. *Rida* should not be reduced to acceptance in modern psychology.

This mapping shows that the Sufi-Neuroplasticity Model has cross-disciplinary conceptual support. The model does not rely only on classical Sufi literature. It is also strengthened by recent studies on Islamic education, spirituality, emotion regulation, Islamic mindfulness, neuroeducation, and critiques of Islamic psychology. Therefore, the model can be positioned as a pedagogical synthesis that bridges the Sufi tradition and the emotional regulation needs of Muslim students in the digital age.

### ***Conceptual Framework of Sufi-Neuroplasticity***

The literature synthesis shows that the Sufi-Neuroplasticity Model can be formulated as a conceptual framework that links Sufism, emotion regulation, and neuroplasticity principles in Islamic education. The model does not position Sufism as a secular psychological technique. Instead, Sufism is interpreted as a pedagogy of self-transformation based on faith, *tazkiyat al-nafs* and the formation of *akhlaq*. Neuroplasticity is used as a conceptual language to describe the importance of repeated

practice, directed attention, meaningful experience and the formation of more adaptive emotional response habits

Table 2. Conceptual Mapping of the Sufi-Neuroplasticity Model

Sufi Component	Spiritual Function	Emotion Regulation Function	Conceptual Neuroplasticity Principle	Direction for Islamic Education
<i>Dhikr</i>	Remembering Allah repeatedly	Calms attention and anxious responses	Repetition and response-habit formation	Training inner calm
<i>Muraqabah</i>	Being aware of Allah's watchfulness	Observes thoughts and emotions before reaction	Directed attention and reflective awareness	Educating self-awareness
<i>Tawakkul</i>	Trusting Allah after effort	Reduces the need to control outcomes	Meaning reconstruction and cognitive reappraisal	Educating meaning and trust
<i>Khauf</i>	Ethical fear before Allah	Redirects fear away from social validation	Threat reorientation and new response formation	Educating moral orientation
<i>Rida</i>	Accepting Allah's decree after effort	Stabilizes emotion after failure	Emotional acceptance and reduced inner resistance	Educating resilience and acceptance

The mapping of the literature shows that research on Islamic education and Sufism has focused on the integration of Sufi values into the curriculum, character building, and the spiritual development of students (Muhammad et al., 2024; Mannopov et al., 2025; Akmansyah et al., 2025). Other studies suggest that religiosity, spirituality, and religious coping are related to emotion regulation, resilience, psychological well-being, and students' ability to cope with academic pressure (Zulfiqar et al., 2024; Graça & Brandão, 2024; Brandão, 2025; Sabki et al., 2025). Yet studies that directly formulate the relationship among Sufi practice, neuroplasticity, and Islamic education remain limited. For this reason, this article positions the Sufi-Neuroplasticity Model as a conceptual synthesis that fills this gap.

The model rests on five major Sufi concepts: *dhikr*, *muraqabah*, *tawakkul*, *khauf*, and *rida*. These five concepts are not treated as isolated moral concepts. They are read as inner educational practices that train attention, self-awareness, meaning-making, fear reorientation, and emotional acceptance. In this way, Sufism can function as a system of self-formation that helps students manage academic pressure, social anxiety, failure, and uncertainty.

The table shows that each Sufi component has a pedagogical function that can be directed toward emotion regulation. *Dhikr* offers repetitive practice that organizes attention. *Muraqabah* builds the ability to observe inner states. *Tawakkul* shapes how

students interpret outcomes and uncertainty. *Khauf* redirects fear so that it is not centered on social validation. *Rida* forms acceptance after sincere effort. This sequence shows that *akhlaq*-tasawuf education can be developed as a structured process of inner training, not merely as the delivery of normative concepts.

### ***Sufism as a Pedagogy of Self-Regulation***

Sufism in Islamic education is often understood as the study of *akhlaq*, *adab*, and purification of the soul. This understanding is valid, but it needs to be expanded so that it becomes more relevant to contemporary students' experiences. Students face academic pressure, complex social relationships, anxiety about the future, and digital exposure that can intensify social comparison. In this context, Sufi learning needs to function as a pedagogy of self-regulation, namely an educational process that trains students to recognize, manage, and direct their inner states.

Studies on Sufism and education demonstrate that Sufi values may be infused into Islamic education curricula for developing balance among cognitive, spiritual, and emotional dimensions (Muhammad et al., 2024). Studies on tasawwuf as an ethical science also show that Sufism is not solely about moral knowledge; it also entails ethical habituation that forms personality through experience, discipline, and inner practice (Mannopov et al., 2025). These findings fortify the argument that Sufism can be developed as a pedagogy of self-transformation.

In this model, *tazkiyat al-nafs* serves as the anthropological foundation of education. Students are not viewed only as cognitive subjects who need information. They are human beings with *qalb*, *nafs*, reason, emotion, and spiritual orientation. The Islamic education has to take care of all these dimensions. The position of *nafs* in the Islamic psycho-spirituality and the notion of *ilm al-nafs* provide a basis for a more holistic understanding of the self (Rassool & Keskin, 2025; Toprak, 2024). This framework is important because emotion regulation should not be reduced to symptom control. It should be placed within the formation of morally grounded human beings.

Sufism as a pedagogy of self-regulation therefore has three functions. First, it provides spiritual direction for emotion management. Emotions are not only controlled so that individuals feel comfortable. They are directed so that they align with divine values. Second, Sufism teaches the inner practices of *dhikr*, *muraqabah*, *tawakkul*, *khauf*, and *rida*. Third, Sufism gives meaning to life pressures. Students learn that failure,

criticism, and uncertainty are not only sources of stress. They are also spaces for practicing effort, patience, *tawakkul*, and *rida*.

### ***Emotion Regulation Mechanisms in the Sufi-Neuroplasticity Model***

The first mechanism is *dhikr* as repetitive spiritual practice. *Dhikr* is a practice that teaches students to shift their attention from anxious thoughts to awareness of Allah. The importance of attention shifting in emotion regulation is that anxiety tends to increase when one keeps thinking about negative thoughts over and over again. Studies of mindfulness and self-regulation show that the practice of attention is related to students' ability to control their emotion and eliminate psychological pressure (Aldbyani, 2025; Li et al., 2025; MacDonald, 2021). However, *dhikr* differs from secular mindfulness, as it is based on the remembrance of Allah, rather than just the awareness of the present moment. In this model,

*Dhikr* is not considered as an empty verbal recitation, but as a spiritual practice that involves speech, attention, heart, and meaning. *Dhikr* and Sufi meditation are relevant to inner calm and mental health, while Sufism-based mindfulness has also begun to be positioned as a relevant approach in mental health studies (Afifi et al., 2025; Rejeki & Hakim, 2025; Wahyudi et al., 2025). Thus, *dhikr* can be placed as an initial pathway to emotion regulation because it trains students to organize focus and reduce the dominance of anxious thoughts.

The second mechanism is *muraqabah* as reflective awareness. *Muraqabah* teaches students to be aware of Allah's presence while also observing their inner states. In academic life, students often react impulsively to criticism, low grades, social conflict, or assignment pressure. *Muraqabah* helps students to detach themselves from thoughts and emotions before choosing a response. Studies on mindfulness during Islamic worship indicate that awareness in worship has a spiritual dimension that is distinct from general mindfulness because it includes orientation toward God, adab, and religious obedience (Ahmed & Yousaf, 2025; Heidari et al., 2025).

*Muraqabah* can also be linked to reflective awareness. Students who can observe their thoughts are more able to distinguish between facts and emotional interpretations. A lecturer's criticism, for example, is not immediately interpreted as personal rejection, but as material for improvement. Failure is not immediately interpreted as the collapse of identity, but as part of the learning process. In this context, *muraqabah* functions as a self-observation exercise that strengthens emotion regulation.

The third mechanism is *tawakkul* as spiritual meaning reconstruction. Much student anxiety emerges from the desire to control all outcomes. Students want to control grades, social acceptance, the future, and other people's judgments. When outcomes do not match expectations, emotions become unstable. *Tawakkul* helps students distinguish between the domain of effort and the domain of Allah's decree. It does not weaken effort. It organizes the relationship among effort, hope, and acceptance.

In emotion regulation psychology, this mechanism is close to cognitive reappraisal, namely the ability to reinterpret an event so that the emotional response becomes more adaptive. Religion can be related to emotion regulation strategies, including reappraisal and acceptance. Restructuring beliefs and meaning is another way to combine Islamic principles and cognitive behavioral therapy (Brandão, 2025; Cucchi, 2022). Yet *tawakkul* is not identical to secular cognitive reappraisal. *Tawakkul* has a theological basis because the final meaning of an event is connected to Allah's will, wisdom, and justice.

The fourth mechanism is *khauf* as the transformation of fear. In students' lives, fear is often directed toward social evaluation. Students fear being seen as failures, incompetent, unattractive, or unable to meet expectations. This kind of fear can intensify social anxiety and avoidance behavior. In Sufism, *khauf* redirects fear from dependence on human validation toward moral awareness before Allah. Fear is not eliminated. It is educated so that it has the right direction.

*Khauf* transformation helps students to reorder the hierarchy of threats. Human judgment still matters, but it does not become the center of self-worth. Students learn that self-value is not determined only by social comments, academic achievements, or digital image. Awareness of Allah provides a more stable moral foundation. Studies on anxiety and emotion regulation show that threat management and emotional response organization play an important role in reducing psychological pressure (Akbari et al., 2025; Romo et al., 2025). In this model, *khauf* gives a spiritual dimension to the reorganization of perceived threat.

The fifth mechanism is *rida* as emotional acceptance after effort. *Rida* helps students accept realities that do not always match expectations. In higher education students can face low grades, academic critique, organizational conflict, social rejection or failed plans. Without acceptance, such experiences can turn into prolonged regret,

anger, envy, or anxiety. *Rida* teaches that acceptance is not the same as passivity. *Rida* comes after effort.

In psychology, emotional acceptance is related to the ability to reduce inner resistance to reality. Studies on mindfulness, self-compassion, religious/spiritual coping, emotion regulation, psychological well-being, and life satisfaction show the importance of acceptance in students' mental health (Ajilchi et al., 2025; Graça & Brandão, 2024). In the Sufi context, *rida* gives a spiritual foundation to acceptance. Students do not accept reality only to reduce stress. They accept it because they recognize human limitation and dependence on Allah.

### ***Critiques and Limits of Sufi-Neuroplasticity Integration***

The integration of Sufism and neuroplasticity must be read critically. The Sufi-Neuroplasticity Model should not be understood as a claim that *dhikr*, *muraqabah*, *tawakkul*, *khauf*, and *rida* have been proven to change students' brain structures. Such a claim requires empirical research with a strong design. This article only formulates a conceptual model. Neuroplasticity is used as a reading framework for explaining that practice, repetition, attention, and meaningful experience play a role in shaping response patterns.

Critiques concerning the integration of Islamic psychology with modern psychology highlight that epistemological issues cannot be overlooked. Islamic psychology faces challenges relating to epistemological bias, mimicry of Western theory, and the necessity to generate concepts based on Islam. Mindfulness also cannot be readily applied to Muslim clients without considering the cultural and religious fit (Abdulkerim & Li, 2022; Hussein Rassool, 2023). Thus, this article does not equate *muraqabah* with secular mindfulness, *tawakkul* with cognitive reappraisal, or *rida* with acceptance in modern psychology.

These differences matter. *Muraqabah* is founded on the awareness of God's watchfulness, while secular mindfulness is frequently focused on present-moment awareness without a theological orientation. *Tawakkul* is rooted in trust in Allah after effort, while cognitive reappraisal focuses on changing cognitive interpretation. *Rida* is rooted in acceptance of Allah's decree, while acceptance in psychology is usually directed toward reducing psychological resistance. These concepts can enter into dialogue, but they should not be treated as fully identical.

Another boundary lies in the article's context. This model belongs to the field of Islamic education, not clinical psychotherapy. Its implications are therefore directed toward *akhlaq-tasawuf* learning, student mentoring, character development, spiritual reflection, and non-clinical Islamic counseling on campus. If the model is to be used for the treatment of psychological disorders, mental health professionals and clinical validation are necessary. Islamic interventions are promising in mental health, but they need rigorous empirical evidence and proper implementation contexts (Mushtaq et al., 2025; Rauf et al., 2025).

With these boundaries, the Sufi-Neuroplasticity Model remains scientifically valuable. Its value does not lie in direct biological claims. It lies in its ability to construct a pedagogical framework that brings together Sufism, emotion regulation, and self-practice principles in a careful way. The model offers Islamic education a new language for discussing students' emotions without losing its spiritual roots.

#### ***Implications of the Model for Islamic Education***

The Sufi-Neuroplasticity Model has practical implications for Islamic education at higher education. First, *akhlaq-tasawuf* learning should move from normative knowledge to reflective practice. Lecturers should not only explain the definitions of *dhikr*, *muraqabah*, *tawakkul*, *khauf*, and *rida*. They need to connect these concepts with students' real experiences, such as anxiety before presentations, grade pressure, peer conflict, academic failure, and uncertainty about the future.

Second, the model can be developed into a Sufi-based emotion regulation reflection module. The module may include a *muraqabah* journal, reflective *dhikr* practice, mapping of anxiety sources, *tawakkul* reflection on academic outcomes, *khauf* transformation exercises related to social evaluation, and *rida* reflection after failure. These practices need to be simple and structured. They should not turn worship into a dry technical procedure separated from its spiritual meaning.

Third, the model can support student religious mentoring. Mentors or supervising lecturers can use the five components as a discussion guide. *Dhikr* can be discussed as a practice of organizing attention. *Muraqabah* can be discussed as awareness of thoughts and emotions. *Tawakkul* can be discussed as a way to balance effort and outcomes. *Khauf* can be discussed as the education of fear. *Rida* can be discussed as mature acceptance after effort. Through this approach, mentoring does not stop at general advice. It becomes a space for emotional and spiritual formation.

Fourth, the model can enrich non-clinical Islamic counseling on campus. Many students need a space to make sense of anxiety, disappointment, and social pressure in a language that is compatible with their faith. Research in the areas of Islamic psychotherapy and Islamic counseling suggests that approaches sensitive to religious values can increase the relevance of psychological support for Muslims (Draganović et al., 2025; Khan & Hanif, 2025; Rothman & Coyle, 2020). However, application on campus needs to distinguish between spiritual development, educational counseling, and clinical intervention.

Fifth, the model can promote future research development. Future research can test this model by developing modules, qualitative fieldwork, classroom action research, pre-post studies, or quasi-experimental designs. Measurement could be on emotion regulation, academic anxiety, self-regulated learning, resilience, psychological well-being, and academic engagement. The research on mindfulness in worship, mindfulness-based stress reduction, and mindfulness in education implies that future studies should develop instruments suitable for Islamic contexts instead of using secular mindfulness measures (Arshiha et al., 2025; Heidari et al., 2025; Xue & Abdullah, 2025).

Theoretically, this model contributes to the development of *akhlaq-tasawuf* studies, Islamic psychology, and contemporary Islamic education. It expands the discussion of Sufism from normative teaching toward a pedagogy of self-regulation. Practically, it provides a basis for *akhlaq-tasawuf* learning that is closer to students lived needs. Methodologically, it opens opportunities for empirical research on emotion regulation based on Islamic spiritual practice. Thus, the Sufi-Neuroplasticity Model can serve as a conceptual bridge between the Islamic tradition and the psychological needs of Muslim students in the digital age.

## Conclusion

This study formulates the Sufi-Neuroplasticity Model as a conceptual framework of Islamic education for strengthening Muslim students' emotion regulation. The model shows that Sufism should not only be understood as normative moral teaching. It can also be read as a pedagogy of self-transformation that trains students to manage attention, awareness, meaning, fear, and emotional acceptance. *Dhikr*, *muraqabah*, *tawakkul*, *khauf* transformation, and *rida* form the five main components of inner education in this model.

The synthesis shows that *dhikr* can be positioned as repetitive spiritual practice, *muraqabah* as reflective awareness, *tawakkul* as spiritual meaning reconstruction, *khauf* as fear reorientation, and *rida* as emotional acceptance after effort. These five components provide a basis for more applicable *akhlaq-tasawuf* learning because they are directly related to students' experiences, such as academic anxiety, social pressure, fear of being judged, academic failure, and uncertainty about the future.

The main contribution of this article lies in the formulation of a conceptual model that brings together Sufi psychology, emotion regulation, Islamic mindfulness, and neuroplasticity principles with careful boundaries. Neuroplasticity is not used here to claim direct neurological evidence. It is used as a conceptual reading framework for understanding the role of practice, repetition, directed attention, and meaningful experience in forming emotional responses. In this way, the model keeps a clear boundary between modern scientific explanation and the theological roots of Sufism.

This study is limited because it uses library research and has not tested the model's effectiveness empirically. Future studies should develop a learning module based on the Sufi-Neuroplasticity Model and test it through field studies, classroom action research, pre-post studies, or quasi-experimental designs. Such testing is important so that the model does not remain a theoretical idea. It can become a more systematic, measurable, and relevant foundation for Islamic educational practice in strengthening Muslim students' emotion regulation in the digital age.

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