



Sufistic Nature Contemplation (Tadabbur Alam) in Islamic Guidance and Counseling: Enhancing Psychological Flexibility in Higher Education Students

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ABSTRACT

Psychological flexibility is essential for university students to adapt and succeed in developmental and academic challenges. This study examines the effectiveness of an Islamic guidance and counseling framework based on sufistic tadabbur alam (nature contemplation) in enhancing students' psychological flexibility. A pre-experimental one-group pretest-posttest design was employed with nine fourth-semester students at Universitas Negeri Surabaya, selected through purposive sampling. The intervention included contemplative activities grounded in Sufi values and nature reflection, with a 60-item flexibility scale developed from the works of Al-Ghazali, Ibn Sina, and Ibn Arabi. Analysis using the Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test revealed a significant increase in psychological flexibility across cognitive, emotional, and behavioral dimensions. These findings support the integration of spiritual and ecological elements into counseling models to foster resilience and self-awareness. This study contributes to Islamic educational psychology by offering a holistic and spiritually grounded approach to student well-being and personal development.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Psychology plays a central role in education, particularly in understanding students' emotional, cognitive, and behavioral development (Manghano et al., 2022; Mwala & Lyakurwa, 2022; Riteshkarmaker, 2023; Eshbekovich & Sayfullayevna, 2024; Braquez & Morbo, 2024). Many reports regarding psychology and counselling have been well-documented (Table 1). In recent years, psychological research has increasingly focused on students at various educational levels to address issues such as stress management, resilience, learning motivation, and emotional well-being. These psychological dimensions are crucial for supporting students in achieving academic success and personal growth in increasingly complex educational environments.

Table 1. Previous studies on psychology and counselling.

No	Title	Reference
1	Emotional maturity and emotional adjustment of adolescents with emotional and behavioral disorder	Adesokan et al. (2024)
2	Emotional intelligence, job satisfaction, reward system and organizational commitment among workers	Afolashade et al. (2024)
3	Ecopsychology, restorativeness, spiritual values and emotional disturbances among undergraduates' students: A systematic literature review	Ahmad and Bakar (2023)
4	Building emotional awareness and cultivating opportunities for nurturing (BEACON) addressing behavioral challenges of learners	Aquino (2025)
5	Counseling on the benefits of eating vegetables for the health of the body	Da Wafi and Nandiyanto (2023)
6	Psychological factors shaping emotional states in early adolescence	Eshbekovich and Sayfullayevna (2024)
7	The use of Gestalt psychology in project work	Glushchenko (2023)
8	Analysis of guidance and counseling teacher skills using self-assessment techniques	Hafina (2022)
9	Post-traumatic counselling through group games	Hafina (2023)
10	Relationship between the counselor's personal characteristics and self-development experience with individual counseling skills	Hafina (2024)
11	Quality of life among secondary school teachers in Kwara State: Implication for counselling	Kamaldeen et al. (2024)
12	The application of multicultural counseling to help mental health problems during the covid-19 pandemic in Malaysia	Latif and Bakar (2023)
13	Student's willingness and perception towards online teaching and learning through the psychoeducational group counseling approach	Masandal and Bakar (2023)
14	Emotional stability as correlate of students' academic performance in primary schools	Olawejaju et al. (2024)
15	Analyzing students' classroom emotional climate toward science learning in junior high school	Phylosophie et al. (2024)
16	Designing home-based childcare program for stimulating social-emotional development in early childhood	Wahyuni et al. (2021)
17	Community support and emotional recovery: Exploring identity conflict and social healing in <i>The Perks of Being a Wallflower</i>	Warren (2025)
18	The role of guidance and counseling teachers in dealing with deviant behavior of school students	Zauddin and Bakar (2022)
19	Investigating the emotional trajectory of Ph.D. students via qualitative research: Bridging the gap between expectations and reality	Zhang et al. (2024)

Among the essential psychological constructs gaining attention is psychological flexibility, which refers to an individual's capacity to adapt to changing circumstances, manage internal experiences, and pursue meaningful actions despite adversity. In Islamic thought—particularly as articulated by classical scholars such as Al-Ghazali, Ibn Sina, and Ibn Arabi—psychological flexibility encompasses the balanced integration of intellect (*'aql*), heart (*qalbu*), and action (*'amal*) to navigate life's trials with wisdom, faith, and virtue.

For university students, this construct is vital as they face developmental, social, and academic challenges while shaping their identity and future direction. The Qur'an portrays the ideal youth as agents of resilience, strong belief, and moral integrity; those who uphold dedication, perseverance, and service to humanity (Pamungkas, 2023).

In addressing such challenges, Islamic guidance and counseling emerge as a comprehensive approach that integrates spirituality, self-reflection, and ethical behavior. One innovative framework is the *sufistic tadabbur alam* approach, which combines

Sufi principles with contemplative observation of nature. This model emphasizes core Sufi values—*tawbah* (repentance), *ṣabr* (patience), *ikhlaṣ* (sincerity), and *dhikr* (remembrance of God)—as foundational for psychological transformation and well-being (Ratnasari et al., 2025). Through the contemplation of natural phenomena, students are encouraged to reflect on their inner states and recognize divine signs in the universe, facilitating self-awareness, emotional regulation, and spiritual grounding (Syakur, 2024; Rozikan, 2021).

Although *tadabbur alam* has been implemented in Islamic education to enhance spiritual intelligence, environmental awareness, and faith-based learning (Hambali, 2017; Inayah, 2018; Fikri, 2021), its use as a structured method in guidance and counseling (particularly to strengthen psychological flexibility) has not been widely studied. This research fills that gap by proposing the Sufistic Islamic Guidance and Counseling Framework Based on Tadabbur Alam, which incorporates nature contemplation as a medium for personal transformation.

This model is grounded in three foundations: philosophically in moral Sufism, theoretically in the concepts of *tazkiyatun nafs* (purification of the soul) and *wahdat al-wujūd* (unity of existence), and empirically in the psychological needs of students at Universitas Negeri Surabaya as identified through field surveys in the 2024–2025 academic year.

The purpose of this study is to evaluate the effectiveness of this counseling framework in enhancing students' psychological flexibility. The novelty lies in its integration of classical Sufi metaphysics with ecological reflection as a structured counseling intervention tailored to higher education students.

2. METHODS

This study employed a pre-experimental one-group pretest–posttest design to evaluate the effectiveness of an Islamic guidance and counseling intervention based on *sufistic tadabbur alam* in enhancing students' psychological flexibility. The research design followed the framework, which is appropriate for measuring changes in outcomes within a single group over time. Detailed information regarding this method is explained elsewhere (Susilawati et al., 2025).

The participants consisted of nine fourth-semester students from Universitas Negeri Surabaya during the 2024/2025 academic year. The sample was selected using purposive sampling, targeting students with low to moderate levels of psychological flexibility. Specifically, five students were classified in the low category, while four fell into the moderate category. The sample included two male and seven female students, with two participants aged 19 and the remaining seven aged 20.

The primary research instrument was a 60-item psychological flexibility scale, developed based on the theoretical perspectives of Al-Ghazali, Ibn Sina, and Ibn Arabi. To ensure validity and reliability, the instrument was tested using the Rasch measurement model and analyzed with Winstep software (Ariyanto et al., 2025). The analysis yielded item and person reliability scores of 0.95 and 0.88, respectively, indicating excellent reliability and adherence to standard measurement criteria within the +0.5 to +1.5 logit range.

To analyze the statistical significance of the intervention's effect, the Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test was applied, as it is suitable for non-parametric data and small sample sizes (Indah & Ahmad, 2025). Detailed information on how to analyze using statistical analysis is reported elsewhere (Fiandini et al., 2024; Rahayu et al., 2024; Afifah et al., 2022).

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study provide compelling evidence of the effectiveness of the Islamic guidance and counseling framework based on *sufistic tadabbur alam* in enhancing psychological flexibility among higher education students.

Through the analysis of questionnaire data and observations during the intervention process, the study demonstrates a notable improvement in students' psychological flexibility, particularly across the core dimensions of intellect ('*aqal*'), heart ('*qalbu*'), and action ('*amal*').

This improvement reflects not only a cognitive shift but also deeper emotional regulation and behavioral change. Moreover, the results highlight how the integrative guidance approach positively influences students' ability to internalize spiritual values, respond adaptively to challenges, and apply psychological flexibility in various aspects of their daily academic and personal lives.

3.1. The Aspect of Psychological Flexibility

The development of psychological flexibility among students was observed through three interconnected aspects: reason (intellect), *qalbu* (heart), and charity (action); each addressed through specific activities rooted in *sufistic tadabbur alam*. Detailed results are as follows:

- (i) Intellectual Aspect: Self-Reflection Through Nature Montage. In the intellectual domain, the intervention focused on cultivating deep self-understanding, or *ma'rifatin nafs*. Students were engaged in a nature montage activity, in which they selected and arranged natural images (such as forests, rivers, flowers, and oceans) onto paper to symbolically represent their inner selves. This reflective exercise enabled students to explore their personal identities and spiritual dispositions. Prior to the activity, most students rated their self-awareness at only 6 out of 10, indicating limited introspection. However, through the symbolic use of nature, they articulated aspirational traits: some chose flowers to express a desire for a vibrant life, while others selected rivers to signify their hope for peaceful and continuous personal growth. Montage, or photomontage, is a creative combination of various visual elements that serves not only artistic but also therapeutic and expressive functions (Conrath, 2023; Renzenbrink, 2021). In the context of *sufistic* counseling, nature montage becomes a medium for spiritual reflection and emotional expression. By engaging with universal and neutral symbols from nature, students could safely project emotions, recognize inner conflicts, and understand their psychological needs (Satiadarma, 2016). This aligns with the concept of *makrifat*, or spiritual awareness, as a source of psychological strength in the face of adversity (Zuhdi, 2022). Through these montages, students often selected calming and hopeful elements (such as sunlight, water, and the sky), which reflect an emerging openness to divine guidance and emotional adaptability (As'adi, 2021).

- (ii) Emotional Aspect (Qalbu): Internalization of Patience and Gratitude. In the emotional or qalbu dimension, the intervention aimed to instill patience and gratitude through two activities: reflective storytelling (ibrah) and outdoor contemplation. Students explored the stories of Prophet Job (Ayyub) and Prophet Joseph (Yusuf), extracting lessons of resilience, sincerity, and steadfastness in the face of suffering. One significant moment discussed was when Prophet Job, despite severe illness, felt reluctant to pray for healing out of shame, believing that God's previous blessings outweighed his current trials. This narrative deeply resonated with students, who began applying similar attitudes of endurance and thankfulness to their academic challenges. These ibrah activities fostered emotional flexibility by allowing students not only to learn about patience intellectually but also to internalize it through spiritual modeling (Saputra, 2020). Furthermore, outbound activities conducted in the mountains provided a contemplative space for students to reflect on the majesty of nature and their human limitations. Being surrounded by nature encouraged a sense of humility, gratitude for existence, and connectedness to God's creation. This process exemplifies qalbu transformation, characterized by acceptance, spiritual insight, and reflective awareness; key components of psychological flexibility in a sufistic framework (Siregar, 2018). As students connected spiritual experiences with their personal struggles, they began to embody the values of fortitude and gratitude within academic and social contexts.
- (iii) Behavioral Aspect (Charity): Embodying Commendable Morals Through Tahalli. In the behavioral domain, or charity aspect, the focus was on encouraging commendable actions even under pressure; embodied through tahalli, or adorning the self with noble qualities. As part of this intervention, students visited the Indonesian Cancer Foundation in Surabaya, where they interacted with cancer patients and their families. Many of the patients had lived in the halfway house for extended periods, far from their hometowns and families. Through heartfelt stories of struggle, faith, and resilience, the speakers inspired the students to reevaluate their own challenges in life. This direct exposure cultivated empathy, compassion, and social awareness among students. They expressed increased appreciation for the value of time, health, and interpersonal relationships, highlighting a shift from self-centeredness to altruistic awareness. More importantly, students recognized that virtues such as gratitude, patience, and trust in God (tawakkul) are not merely theoretical ideals but can be actively embodied even amid suffering (Zuhdi, 2022). This experience encouraged students to develop moral resilience and deepen their sense of life purpose and service to others (Ramli, 2017; Ratnasari *et al.*, 2024).

3.2. Stages of Using Islamic Guidance and Counseling Sufistic Tadabbur Alam in Developing Students' Psychological Flexibility

The intervention process in this study follows a structured sequence based on Sufistic Tadabbur Alam within the context of Islamic guidance and counseling. This process comprises seven progressive stages, each designed to develop specific dimensions of psychological flexibility (cognitive, emotional, and behavioral).

The stages emphasize inner spiritual development, purification of the soul, reflection upon nature, and the embodiment of moral and divine values in daily life. The detailed stages of the intervention are presented in **Table 2**.

Table 2. Stages of sufistic tadabbur alam-based counseling intervention.

No	Stage	Purpose	Core Activities
1	Ma'rifatin Nafs (Deep Understanding)	To enhance awareness of life's purpose through deep self-reflection (intellect)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Facilitate recognition of the self (<i>microcosm</i>) and universe (<i>macrocosm</i>) as divine provisions. Encourage <i>muhasabah</i> to align life with spiritual values. Use nature montage to express self-representation.
2	Takhalli (Eliminating Reprehensible Traits)	To seek forgiveness and release inner negative traits (charity)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify personal faults and previous misdeeds. Engage in repentance and ask forgiveness from God. Practice fasting as a form of spiritual cleansing.
3	Tahalli (Adorning Praiseworthy Traits)	To cultivate good character and give sincerely, even in hardship (charity)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reflect on and internalize virtuous traits. Conduct moral service at the Indonesian Cancer Foundation. Encourage giving alms (<i>sadaqah</i>) despite limitations.
4	Tajalli (Manifesting Divine Presence)	To build spiritual connection and trust in God in difficult times (charity)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recognize divine presence within the self. Reflect on God's greatness and majesty. Practice <i>dhikr</i> to enhance inner peace and spiritual strength.
5	Mujahadah (Spiritual Striving)	To express gratitude and perseverance in challenging situations (<i>qalbu</i>)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify internal strengths and life blessings. Engage in <i>rihlah tafakur</i> (spiritual journey in nature). Conduct <i>tahawur</i> (dialogue) about natural signs of divine power.
6	Ibrah (Extracting Wisdom)	To internalize patience, sincerity, and forgiveness (<i>qalbu</i> and charity)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reflect on the stories of Prophets Job and Joseph. Analyze Qur'anic verses related to trials and nature. Identify and apply the values of <i>sabr</i>, <i>ikhlas</i>, and forgiveness.
7	Tafakur (Deep Reflection for Life Planning)	To plan life wisely, with orientation toward both worldly and hereafter goals (intellect)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Emphasize the importance of <i>tafakur</i> in setting meaningful goals. Guide students in designing a life plan. Create a personal success symbol representing their future aspirations.

Each stage is carefully aligned with core Islamic spiritual values and psychological goals. This model supports students in developing resilience, emotional regulation, and moral clarity by

integrating spiritual contemplation, narrative reflection, and direct experience with nature and community service.

As a result, the counseling process not only addresses surface-level behavior but facilitates a deeper, transformative development of the self.

3.3. Assessment of Psychological Flexibility Indicators

The assessment of students' psychological flexibility was conducted using a 60-item questionnaire specifically designed to measure key indicators derived from Islamic psychological concepts. This assessment aimed to identify which areas of psychological flexibility required further development through Sufistic Tadabbur Alam-based counseling interventions.

Based on the analysis, it was found that the lowest levels of achievement were concentrated in three specific indicators:

- (i) Indicator 6: Praying for divine assistance during hardship
- (ii) Indicator 8: Forgiving the mistakes of others
- (iii) Indicator 10: Seeking forgiveness from God for past wrongdoings

Each of these indicators reflects critical components of psychological flexibility, particularly in terms of spiritual behavior, emotional regulation, and ethical awareness.

3.3.1. Indicator 6: Praying for Help from God in Difficulties

The majority of students scored in the medium category, indicating a moderate capacity to engage in prayer as a coping mechanism during adversity.

While students were able to express their hopes and requests to God, various personal and interpersonal challenges seemed to inhibit consistent spiritual practices. Reported obstacles included experiences of false accusations by peers, parental disapproval, anger toward dishonest friends, social exclusion, academic disappointment, and frustrations in public settings.

3.3.2. Indicator 8: Forgiving Others' Mistakes

Students also scored in the medium category for their ability to forgive those who have wronged them, reflecting a limited yet developing sense of emotional flexibility.

Many students struggled with emotional wounds stemming from broken promises, past betrayals, exclusion from private events, and reencounters with previously hurtful individuals. Although the students showed an inclination toward peaceful responses, deep-seated emotional injuries often hindered full forgiveness.

3.3.3. Indicator 10: Seeking Forgiveness from God

This indicator also revealed medium-level achievement. While students demonstrated some awareness of personal faults and a desire to improve, their ability to actively seek divine forgiveness remained inconsistent.

Influencing factors included feelings of guilt from reminders of past transgressions, emotional distress caused to parents, accidental harm to peers, lapses in religious practices, and academic dishonesty, such as cheating on exams. These findings suggest the presence of moral conflict, which, although indicative of self-awareness, may still impede the process of full repentance and spiritual realignment.

3.4. The Role of Sufistic Tadabbur Alam in Higher Education Counseling

The Sufistic Tadabbur Alam Guidance Model serves as an innovative framework within Islamic guidance and counseling, especially in higher education contexts. It offers a holistic approach to help students develop psychological flexibility by integrating spiritual reflection, self-purification, and contemplation of nature.

The fundamental aim of counseling in higher education is to assist students in identifying and resolving personal, academic, and social challenges (Patton *et al.*, 2016). It also supports decision-making processes related to educational and career paths while enhancing overall psychological well-being and life satisfaction.

The Tadabbur Alam-based model contributes to these goals by functioning within basic guidance services, a developmental and preventive approach that fosters students' optimal growth.

These services are designed to assist all students in mastering developmental tasks, cultivating self-understanding, and achieving life goals through systematic, group-based interventions.

Group dynamics play a significant role, allowing students to learn collaboratively, reflect collectively, and grow in a spiritually enriched environment. By aligning classical Sufi teachings with contemporary counseling practices, this model addresses not only the external behavioral needs of students but also their inner spiritual transformation, ultimately fostering a more resilient, emotionally intelligent, and purpose-driven generation.

3.5. Effects of the Sufistic Tadabbur Alam-Based Guidance Model on Students’ Psychological Flexibility

The results of the study confirm the effectiveness of the Sufistic Tadabbur Alam framework in significantly enhancing students’ psychological flexibility. As presented in **Table 3**, notable changes were observed in students’ psychological conditions before and after the intervention.

The transformation was evident across multiple domains (cognitive, emotional, spiritual, and behavioral), which are critical components of holistic student development (Ratnasari *et al.*, 2024; Saputra *et al.*, 2024).

The pre-intervention profiles indicated that many students lacked deep existential understanding, emotional resilience, and adaptive spiritual practices. For example, several students struggled with life’s meaning, defaulted to complaints when facing problems, and displayed emotional reactivity under academic and social pressure.

Charitable acts were often accompanied by reluctance or done out of obligation, and spiritual habits such as prayer, gratitude, and repentance were either inconsistent or lacking in depth. After undergoing the Sufistic Tadabbur Alam-based counseling intervention, students demonstrated significant psychological growth.

They began contemplating the essence of life as a divine provision, approached problems with solution-oriented thinking, showed patience in adversity, and engaged in sincere, value-driven behaviors, even in emotionally or situationally difficult contexts.

Table 3. Qualitative changes in student psychological conditions pre- and post-intervention.

No	Before Intervention	After Intervention
1	Lacked understanding of life’s meaning; anxious about trials	Reflected on life as a divine provision

2	Complained during challenges; felt confused and overwhelmed	Sought constructive, beneficial solutions
3	Emotionally reactive to academic and social pressure	Demonstrated patience and composure
4	Performed charity reluctantly or under pressure	Gave charitably with sincerity and composure
5	Compared self with others; lacked gratitude	Expressed thankfulness, even in hardship
6	Did not use prayer as a coping strategy	Prayed as a central source of strength
7	Hesitant to give alms during difficult times	Gave alms even amid personal challenges
8	Held grudges and struggled to forgive	Practiced forgiveness and reconciliation
9	Acted under negative emotions; lacked moral consistency	Maintained positive behavior under pressure
10	Rarely practiced <i>muhasabah</i> ; focused on others' faults	Actively sought divine forgiveness for one's own mistakes

This transformation illustrates how structured Islamic counseling, grounded in *tadabbur* (contemplation) and *tasawuf* (Sufi ethics), can bridge students' internal development with outward behavioral change. Students transitioned from passive, reactive tendencies toward spiritually rooted self-regulation and intentional action.

3.6. Philosophical and Theoretical Underpinnings

The philosophical foundation of the Sufistic Tadabbur Alam model lies in moral Sufism, which views humans as noble beings endowed with the potential to know God (*makrifat*). According to this perspective, the heart (*qalb*) (sometimes described interchangeably as intellect, soul, or spirit) is the core of human essence.

It enables comprehension of both the physical and spiritual realms and serves as the medium through which individuals draw closer to Allah. Humans are described as microcosms, intricately connected to the broader cosmos and their Creator.

This ontological connection means that individuals who engage in self-reflection and contemplation of nature are not only exploring their environment but also understanding divine signs through their own internal awareness. Accordingly, the intervention design emphasized deep introspection through three foundational stages: *Ma'rifatin Nafs* (knowing the self), *Takhalli* (purification), and *Mujahadah* (spiritual striving).

3.7. Spiritual Activities as Intervention Anchors

Several core activities implemented during the intervention were especially impactful in initiating student transformation:

- (i) *Ma'rifatin Nafs* (Deep Self-Understanding): Students were guided through exercises to understand themselves as microcosmic reflections of God's creation. This stage helped students become aware of their spiritual and psychological state, which formed the basis for future development (Nafi *et al.*, 2022; Ananda, 2024).
- (ii) *Takhalli* (Elimination of Negative Traits): Students reflected on personal flaws and engaged in repentance and fasting to spiritually cleanse themselves. This stage was critical in fostering humility and openness to transformation (Daulay *et al.*, 2021; Prabowo & Bashori, 2023).
- (iii) *Mujahadah* (Spiritual Commitment): Through outdoor reflection and contemplation of divine creation, students experienced awe, gratitude, and renewed spiritual commitment. These activities nurtured a deepened awareness of divine love and the importance of aligning human purpose with God's will (Afandi, 2022; Irlina, 2023).

3.8. Quantitative Results of the Intervention

These qualitative shifts were reinforced by quantitative findings. As presented in **Table 4**, all nine student participants showed an increase in psychological flexibility scores following the intervention.

Table 4. Pre-test and post-test psychological flexibility scores.

No.	Pre-Test	Post-Test	Change
1	117	132	+15
2	119	166	+47
3	144	166	+22
4	139	169	+30
5	145	174	+29
6	130	170	+40
7	145	158	+13
8	140	157	+17
9	150	166	+16

Participant #2 experienced the most substantial gain (+47), while all others also exhibited consistent and positive changes, confirming the intervention's effectiveness across diverse baseline levels. To determine statistical significance, the Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test was applied using SPSS v31. The results are summarized in **Table 5**.

Table 5. Wilcoxon signed rank test summary.

Comparison	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks
Negative Ranks (Post < Pre)	0	0.00	0.00
Positive Ranks (Post > Pre)	9	5.00	45.00
Ties	0	–	–

Note: Z = -2.666; Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed) = 0.008

These results show that the difference is statistically significant ($p < 0.05$), thereby supporting the hypothesis that the *Sufistic Tadabbur Alam* counseling model effectively enhances psychological flexibility.

The integration of Islamic guidance and counseling based on *sufistic tadabbur alam* has proven to be more than a spiritual enrichment activity; it represents a transformative counseling paradigm that bridges spiritual depth and practical psychological development. The findings not only substantiate its effectiveness quantitatively but also offer deep philosophical grounding that strengthens its legitimacy within the field of higher education counseling.

This model transcends conventional, administrative counseling approaches by embedding Sufi metaphysical concepts and experiential spiritual practice into a format that is both relatable and empowering for modern students. Through the combination of reflective, affective, and action-based stages, students were able to internalize spiritual values and translate them into practical behaviors.

3.9. Philosophical and Theoretical Foundations

The theoretical grounding of the model lies in two key concepts: Tazkiyatun Nafs (purification of the soul) and Wahdat al-Wujud (unity of being). These theories collectively affirm that human beings, as spiritual creatures, must undergo a process of inner cleansing to align with divine purpose.

Tazkiyatun Nafs emphasizes self-regulation and spiritual refinement (qualities essential for managing stress, emotional volatility, and interpersonal conflict). Wahdat al-Wujud, on the other

hand, nurtures an understanding that all aspects of life and nature are manifestations of the Divine, encouraging students to perceive challenges not as threats but as opportunities for growth and connection to a higher order.

Through the *tadabbur* process, students are taught to contemplate the universe not merely as an object of observation but as a mirror of their internal condition. This dual contemplation (the outer and inner realms) deepens self-awareness and encourages alignment between thought, feeling, and behavior.

These philosophical pillars foster psychological flexibility by training the mind to adapt, accept, and respond to life's uncertainties with resilience and divine orientation.

3.10. Key Principles in Practice: Takhalli, Tahalli, and Tajalli

The intervention stages were constructed around three core principles in Sufi psychology: Takhalli (removal of bad traits), Tahalli (adornment with noble traits), and Tajalli (manifestation of divine presence).

- (i) Takhalli encourages students to identify and purge negative internal states such as pride, anger, jealousy, or resentment. For example, students were asked to reflect on moments they had acted unjustly, hurt others, or neglected spiritual obligations, and were guided to seek forgiveness through sincere repentance.
- (ii) Tahalli involves the active cultivation of virtues such as sincerity (*ikhlas*), patience (*sabr*), gratitude (*syukur*), and compassion (*rahmah*). This was practiced through acts of service, notably the visit to the Indonesian Cancer Foundation, which allowed students to directly encounter and learn from individuals who exemplified these traits amid profound suffering.
- (iii) Tajalli fosters spiritual consciousness by directing students to witness divine attributes within themselves and the world. Activities such as *tafakkur alam* (contemplation in nature), *rihlah spiritual* (spiritual journeys), and *dhikr* (remembrance) helped students internalize the idea that God's presence is accessible and sustaining, especially during hardship.

Together, these three dimensions frame psychological flexibility not merely as behavioral adaptation, but as an outcome of sustained spiritual practice and divine connection.

3.11. Dissonance as a Growth Catalyst

A significant contribution of this study is the acknowledgment of dissonance (the experience of discomfort when one's internal state clashes with external reality) as a necessary and productive force in transformation.

When students were placed in unfamiliar or emotionally intense environments (such as confronting illness, confronting their own pride, or speaking publicly about their spiritual reflections), they encountered internal resistance. However, this resistance became a catalyst for psychological and spiritual reconfiguration.

Ecological dissonance (arising from immersive experiences in nature or challenging social situations) offers individuals the "freedom to experiment with new psychological models or a fresh sense of identity" (Zhang *et al.*, 2022).

In the *tadabbur alam* framework, this dissonance was intentionally leveraged as a formative experience, allowing students to dismantle rigid self-concepts and replace them with more fluid, faith-informed understandings of the self.

3.12. The Role of Group Dynamics

The implementation of this model in a group format further amplified its impact. Group guidance allowed for shared reflection, emotional mirroring, and mutual validation; each essential to the development of interpersonal awareness and trust.

Within the group setting, students were not only recipients of guidance but also co-facilitators of growth for their peers. They listened to each other's experiences of hardship, shame, or realization, and offered spiritual perspectives or scriptural insights in return.

This collective approach fostered solidarity, mutual empathy, and a sense of sacred community. It created a safe space where students could reveal vulnerabilities without fear of judgment, and where the internalization of psychological flexibility was socially reinforced rather than isolated.

Furthermore, group dynamics encouraged the development of *husnudzan* (positive presumption of others), *ukhuwah* (brotherhood), and *shura* (consultation), all of which are central values in Islamic ethical systems. As a result, psychological flexibility was not only formed in the personal domain but was sustained through communal reinforcement.

3.13. Implications for Higher Education Counseling

The implications of this research extend beyond individual counseling sessions. This study shows that Islamic higher education institutions can incorporate *tadabbur alam*-based counseling into their formal guidance services to address widespread issues such as academic burnout, emotional distress, spiritual emptiness, and moral confusion among students.

Unlike conventional models that rely primarily on cognitive-behavioral approaches, this framework integrates soul-based development, recognizing that spiritual disconnection often underlies emotional dysregulation.

It offers a model that speaks directly to the identity and belief systems of students in Islamic contexts, while also remaining adaptable to broader global discourses in psychological and educational theory.

Counselors trained in this method would benefit from combining competencies in Islamic theology, spiritual psychology, ecological awareness, and group facilitation. Counseling centers could host regular *tadabbur* retreats, *rihlah tafakur*, or guided group reflections to embed this model into their institutional culture.

3.14. Limitations and Recommendations

Despite the promising results, the study acknowledges certain limitations. The sample size was small (n=9), which restricts the generalizability of the findings. The participants were all from a single institution, and the outcomes may vary in different cultural, religious, or institutional settings.

Additionally, the follow-up duration was relatively short, leaving the long-term sustainability of the psychological changes untested. Future studies should consider:

- (i) Implementing this model across multiple universities in diverse regions.
- (ii) Comparing outcomes with students receiving standard secular counseling.
- (iii) Conducting longitudinal studies to measure the durability of impact over time.
- (iv) Integrating biometric or physiological data to correlate psychological improvement with somatic responses (e.g., stress levels, heart rate variability).

Finally, this study adds new information regarding Islamic education, as reported elsewhere (Darojah et al., 2024; Daud, 2025; Kayode & Jibril, 2023; Hidayat et al., 2024; Daud & Laguindab, 2025; Latifah et al., 2025).

4. CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that the Sufistic Tadabbur Alam-Based Islamic Guidance and Counseling Framework is effective in enhancing students' psychological flexibility across cognitive, emotional, behavioral, and spiritual dimensions.

Grounded in tazkiyatun nafs and wahdat al-wujūd, the intervention facilitated deep self-awareness, emotional regulation, value-based behavior, and spiritual resilience through contemplative practices and group-based reflection.

Quantitative findings confirmed statistically significant improvements, while qualitative analysis revealed transformative internal changes; students became more patient, grateful, forgiving, sincere, and spiritually grounded in facing life's challenges.

Activities such as nature montage, reflection on prophetic stories, outdoor spiritual journeys, and service to others contributed meaningfully to this growth. Beyond its individual impact, this model offers a holistic, culturally embedded, and spiritually meaningful framework for counseling in Islamic higher education.

It not only responds to the psychological needs of students but also integrates faith-based guidance with contemporary counseling strategies, enriching the landscape of student development services in universities.

5. AUTHORS' NOTE

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article. Authors confirmed that the paper was free of plagiarism.

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