

Islamic Educational Thought of Khatib Imam Maulana Abdul Munaf: Contributions to the Syattariyah Sufi Order (1955–2022)

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ABSTRACT

The contributions of local Islamic scholars to educational thought remain underrepresented in contemporary Islamic education literature, particularly within Sufi traditions. One such scholar is Khatib Maulana Abdul Munaf (1955–2022), a prominent Syattariyah leader in West Sumatra whose educational ideas have significantly influenced religious learning and spiritual development within local Muslim communities. This study aims to examine the Islamic educational thought of Khatib Maulana Abdul Munaf and analyze its contributions to the educational practices of the Syattariyah Sufi Order. This research employed a qualitative approach using a historical-textual design. Primary data were obtained from Abdul Munaf's manuscripts, documented teachings, and in-depth interviews with seven informants, including Syattariyah scholars, former students, a family member, and a community leader. Additional data were collected through field observations in Syattariyah learning environments. Data were analyzed using thematic content analysis, while triangulation and member checking were applied to ensure trustworthiness. The findings reveal that Abdul Munaf's educational philosophy is founded upon three interconnected dimensions: spiritual purification (*tazkiyah al-nafs*), intellectual development (*'ilm*), and moral formation (*akhlaq*). His educational model emphasizes the integration of religious and worldly knowledge, the central role of the *murshid* as both educator and spiritual mentor, and the preservation of surau-based learning traditions. The study further demonstrates that his educational thought offers a holistic framework that combines spiritual discipline, ethical development, and intellectual growth. Abdul Munaf's educational philosophy contributes significantly to contemporary Islamic education by providing a Sufi-based model that integrates spirituality, morality, and learning. His thought highlights the continuing relevance of local Islamic intellectual traditions in addressing modern educational and moral challenges.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Islamic education has historically served as a comprehensive system for nurturing intellectual, moral, and spiritual development within Muslim societies. Unlike secular educational paradigms that often emphasize cognitive achievement and technical competence, Islamic education seeks to cultivate balanced individuals who possess knowledge, ethical character, and spiritual consciousness. Contemporary educational discourse increasingly recognizes the importance of integrating moral and spiritual dimensions into learning processes, particularly in response to growing concerns about moral decline, individualism, and the loss of ethical orientation among young people. Recent studies have highlighted the continuing relevance of Islamic educational traditions in addressing these challenges by promoting character formation, spiritual well-being, and holistic human development (Hidayat, 2021; Uriawan et al., 2025).

Within the Indonesian context, the development of Islamic education cannot be separated from the influence of pesantren, surau, and Sufi traditions that have long functioned as centers of religious learning and character formation (Fahrudin, 2024). Among the various Sufi orders that have shaped Islamic intellectual and spiritual life in the archipelago, the Syattariyah Order occupies a significant position (Muhlison, 2025). Historically, the Syattariyah Order was introduced to the Indonesian archipelago through prominent scholars and subsequently became deeply rooted in several regions, particularly in West Sumatra, where it contributed to the transmission of Islamic knowledge, spiritual discipline, and communal religious practices. The order emphasizes spiritual purification, ethical refinement, and continuous remembrance of God through structured educational and devotional activities, making it an important source of Islamic educational values.

Previous studies on the Syattariyah Order have primarily focused on its historical development, ritual practices, spiritual doctrines, and socio-religious influence within Muslim communities. Existing scholarship has examined the history of the order, its transmission networks, forms of devotional practice, and its contribution to the preservation of Islamic spirituality and local religious traditions (Azhari, 2021; Nabila, 2025). Other studies have explored the social relations between teachers and disciples within Syattariyah communities and the role of spiritual leadership in maintaining religious continuity. While these studies have significantly enriched the understanding of Syattariyah as a Sufi movement, relatively little attention has been given to its educational philosophy, particularly as articulated by local scholars whose teachings continue to influence contemporary Muslim communities.

One such figure is Khatib Maulana Abdul Munaf (1955–2022), a respected Islamic scholar, preacher, and Syattariyah spiritual leader in West Sumatra. Throughout his life, he played an important role in preserving and transmitting Islamic knowledge through manuscripts, sermons, religious instruction, and spiritual guidance. His educational thought reflects a synthesis of Islamic scholarship, Sufi spirituality, and local religious traditions. Unlike many contemporary educational models that separate intellectual learning from spiritual cultivation, Abdul Munaf emphasized the integration of knowledge (*ilm*), moral conduct (*akhlak*), and spiritual purification (*tazkiyah al-nafs*) as the essential foundations of education (Cholid, 2025). His teachings demonstrate how traditional Islamic educational principles can remain relevant in responding to modern social and moral challenges.

Despite his influence within Syattariyah communities, academic studies specifically examining Abdul Munaf's educational thought remain extremely limited. Most existing research on Islamic education in Indonesia has focused on nationally recognized reformist scholars, pesantren institutions, or contemporary educational policies, while the contributions of local Sufi scholars have received comparatively little scholarly attention. Furthermore, studies that discuss Syattariyah traditions often concentrate on ritual and theological dimensions rather than exploring their educational implications. Consequently, there remains a significant gap in the literature concerning how local Sufi scholars conceptualize education and how their ideas contribute to broader Islamic educational discourse. This gap is particularly important because local scholarly traditions frequently preserve educational values

and practices that differ from dominant modern educational frameworks yet continue to shape the religious lives of many Muslim communities.

This study seeks to address this gap by examining the educational thought of Khatib Maulana Abdul Munaf through an analysis of his manuscripts, teachings, and educational practices within the Syattariyah tradition. Specifically, the study investigates the major aspects and components of Islamic education reflected in his works, including educational objectives, pedagogical methods, teacher–student relationships, curriculum content, and spiritual formation. By focusing on a local scholar whose educational philosophy has received limited academic attention, the study contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of the diversity of Islamic educational thought in Indonesia.

The novelty of this research lies in three important aspects. First, it provides the first systematic examination of Khatib Maulana Abdul Munaf's educational philosophy based on historical-textual analysis and empirical data from individuals directly connected to his educational activities. Second, it shifts the focus of Syattariyah studies from ritual and doctrinal analysis toward educational theory and practice, thereby expanding the scholarly understanding of Sufi-based education. Third, it proposes a holistic model of Islamic education that integrates spiritual purification, intellectual development, and moral formation within a contemporary educational framework. This contribution is particularly relevant at a time when educators and policymakers are increasingly seeking educational approaches capable of addressing both intellectual and ethical challenges in modern society.

Therefore, this study aims to analyze the educational thought of Khatib Maulana Abdul Munaf and to examine its contribution to the development of Islamic education within the Syattariyah tradition. By exploring the relationship between spirituality, morality, and learning in his educational philosophy, this research contributes to ongoing discussions on the renewal of Islamic education and highlights the enduring relevance of local Islamic intellectual heritage in shaping holistic educational models for contemporary Muslim societies.

2. METHODS

This study employed a qualitative research approach using a historical-textual design to examine the Islamic educational thought of Khatib Maulana Abdul Munaf and its contribution to the development of the Syattariyah Sufi Order in West Sumatra. A qualitative approach was considered appropriate because the study aimed to explore meanings, values, and educational concepts embedded in manuscripts, teachings, and religious practices rather than to measure variables statistically.

2.1 Research Design

The research combined historical analysis and qualitative content analysis. Historical analysis was used to understand the socio-religious context in which Khatib Maulana Abdul Munaf developed his educational ideas, while content analysis was applied to identify and interpret educational concepts, values, and themes contained in his manuscripts and teachings. This design enabled the researcher to reconstruct his educational philosophy and examine its relevance within the Syattariyah tradition.

2.2 Data Sources

2.2.1 Primary Sources

- a. Manuscripts and written works authored by Khatib Maulana Abdul Munaf;
- b. Recorded sermons, religious lectures, and documented teachings;
- c. In-depth interviews with seven informants who possessed direct knowledge of his educational thought and religious activities.

The seven informants included:

- a. Two senior Syattariyah scholars;
- b. Three students (*murid*) who had studied directly under Khatib Maulana Abdul Munaf;
- c. One family member;

d. One community leader is actively involved in Syattariyah educational activities.

2.2.2 Secondary Data

Secondary data included scholarly books, journal articles, dissertations, and historical documents related to Islamic education, Sufism, and the Syattariyah Order in Indonesia.

2.3 Data Collection Techniques

Data were collected through three techniques:

2.3.1 Document Analysis

The researcher examined manuscripts, written works, and archival documents produced by Khatib Maulana Abdul Munaf between 1955 and 2022. The analysis focused on educational objectives, teaching methods, teacher–student relationships, curriculum content, and spiritual values reflected in the texts.

2.3.2 In-Depth Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with seven selected informants. The interviews explored participants' understanding of Abdul Munaf's educational philosophy, teaching practices, spiritual guidance, and influence on the Syattariyah community. Each interview was audio-recorded, transcribed, and verified before analysis.

2.3.3 Field Observation

Observations were carried out in several surau and religious learning environments associated with the Syattariyah tradition in West Sumatra. The observations focused on educational practices, spiritual activities, teacher–student interactions, and the implementation of values derived from Abdul Munaf's teachings.

2.4 Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed using thematic content analysis. The analysis followed four stages:

- 2.4.1 Data reduction, involving the selection and organization of relevant information from manuscripts, interviews, and observations;
- 2.4.2 Coding, involving the identification of recurring concepts and educational themes;
- 2.4.3 Theme development, involving the categorization of codes into broader themes related to Islamic education;
- 2.4.4 Interpretation, involving the synthesis of findings to construct a comprehensive understanding of Abdul Munaf's educational thought within the Syattariyah framework.

The analysis focused on identifying major educational dimensions, including spiritual development (*tazkiyah al-nafs*), intellectual formation (*'ilm*), moral education (*akhlaq*), pedagogical methods, and educational objectives.

2.5 Trustworthiness of the Study

To ensure the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings, the study employed source triangulation and method triangulation. Information obtained from manuscripts was compared with interview data and field observations. In addition, member checking was conducted by confirming key findings with selected informants, while peer debriefing with experts in Islamic education and Sufism was carried out to enhance the validity and consistency of interpretations.

Through these procedures, the study aimed to provide a comprehensive and reliable account of Khatib Maulana Abdul Munaf's educational thought and its contribution to the Syattariyah Sufi educational tradition.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Findings

3.1.1 Spiritual Purification (Tazkiyah al-Nafs) as the Foundation of Education

One of the most prominent findings concerns the central position of spiritual purification in Abdul Munaf's educational philosophy. Analysis of his manuscripts indicates that educational success is not measured solely by intellectual achievement but by the extent to which learners develop spiritual awareness and closeness to Allah. Several texts emphasize the importance of *dhikr*, self-discipline, and continuous self-reflection as educational processes. These practices were viewed as essential for controlling desires and strengthening moral character.

This finding was reinforced by interview data. One senior Syattariyah scholar explained:

"Khatib Maulana Abdul Munaf consistently emphasized that knowledge without purification of the heart would lose its spiritual value. Therefore, students were not only taught religious texts but were also guided through dhikr and self-reflection practices." (Informant 1, Senior Syattariyah Scholar)

Similarly, a former student stated:

"He always reminded us that learning was not merely about understanding books. More importantly, it was about improving oneself, developing sincerity, and controlling one's desires." (Informant 3, Former Student)

These findings demonstrate that spiritual formation constituted the primary objective of educational activities within Abdul Munaf's teaching tradition.

3.1.2 Integration of Religious and Worldly Knowledge

The second theme emerging from the data is the integration of religious and worldly knowledge. Abdul Munaf did not promote a dichotomous view separating religious sciences from other forms of knowledge. Instead, he regarded all beneficial knowledge as a means of serving God and society.

Document analysis revealed repeated references to the importance of mastering religious sciences while remaining responsive to social and contemporary realities.

According to one informant:

"He never discouraged students from studying modern sciences. Instead, he taught that all forms of beneficial knowledge should be used to serve society and strengthen faith." (Informant 2, Senior Syattariyah Scholar)

Another participant noted:

"According to him, religious values should guide the use of contemporary knowledge and technology so that education does not lose its moral direction." (Informant 6, Family Member)

These findings indicate that Abdul Munaf's educational perspective supports an integrated approach to knowledge that combines intellectual competence with ethical responsibility.

3.1.3 Moral Education Through Exemplary Conduct

A third major finding concerns the emphasis on moral education (*akhlaq*). Across both textual and interview data, moral development emerged as a central indicator of educational success.

The manuscripts repeatedly stress values such as sincerity (*ikhlas*), humility (*tawadhu'*), patience (*sabr*), gratitude (*shukr*), and honesty (*sidq*). Rather than teaching these values merely as concepts, Abdul Munaf sought to cultivate them through daily practice and personal example.

A former student recalled:

"He taught morality primarily through his actions. The way he treated people, respected others, and interacted with students became a living lesson for us." (Informant 4, Former Student)

Likewise, a community leader observed:

"People respected him not only because of his knowledge but also because of his character. His humility and sincerity made his teachings highly influential within the community." (Informant 7, Community Leader)

The findings suggest that moral education was implemented through role modeling and lived experience rather than through formal instruction alone.

3.1.4 The Murshid as Educational and Spiritual Mentor

The study also found that the teacher–student relationship occupies a central place in Abdul Munaf's educational framework. Within the Syattariyah tradition, the *murshid* functions not only as a transmitter of knowledge but also as a guide for spiritual development.

Interview participants consistently emphasized the importance of close interaction between teacher and learner.

One participant explained:

"In the Syattariyah tradition, the relationship between teacher and student extends beyond the classroom. The teacher provides continuous spiritual guidance, and this was strongly emphasized by Abdul Munaf." (Informant 5, Former Student)

Another informant added:

"He often stated that knowledge becomes meaningful only when accompanied by proper manners and respect toward one's teacher." (Informant 2, Senior Syattariyah Scholar)

These findings indicate that educational authority in Abdul Munaf's thought is grounded in trust, moral example, and spiritual guidance.

3.1.5 Preservation of Surau-Based Educational Traditions

The final theme concerns the preservation of the surau as a center of learning, worship, and community development. Field observations showed that several educational practices introduced by Abdul Munaf continue to be maintained in Syattariyah communities.

Activities such as collective *dhikr*, Qur'anic recitation, religious study circles, and communal service remain integral components of the educational process.

According to a family member:

"He wanted the surau to remain a center of education, worship, and community development. For him, learning should take place within a religious and social environment." (Informant 6, Family Member)

Similarly, another participant stated:

"Educational activities in the surau were not limited to formal lessons. Students learned through communal worship, religious gatherings, and daily interaction with teachers and fellow learners." (Informant 7, Community Leader)

These findings demonstrate that Abdul Munaf viewed education as a community-based process occurring within a holistic religious environment.

The findings reveal that Khatib Maulana Abdul Munaf developed a holistic model of Islamic education characterized by spiritual purification, integration of knowledge, moral formation, spiritual mentorship, and community-based learning. His educational philosophy reflects the Syattariyah understanding that intellectual development must be accompanied by ethical refinement and spiritual

growth. Consequently, education is understood not merely as knowledge transmission but as a transformative process aimed at producing morally responsible and spiritually conscious individuals.

3.2 Discussion

The findings of this study demonstrate that Khatib Maulana Abdul Munaf developed a holistic model of Islamic education grounded in the Syattariyah Sufi tradition, emphasizing the integration of spiritual purification, intellectual development, and moral formation. His educational philosophy reflects the classical Islamic understanding that education is not merely a process of knowledge transmission but also a means of cultivating ethical character and spiritual consciousness. This perspective aligns with Al-Attas' (1980) conception of Islamic education as the process of instilling *adab*, whereby knowledge leads individuals toward recognition of their proper place before God, society, and themselves. The emphasis on balancing intellectual achievement with spiritual refinement suggests that Abdul Munaf's educational thought represents an alternative paradigm to contemporary educational models that frequently prioritize cognitive outcomes over moral and spiritual development.

A central finding of this study is the role of *tazkiyah al-nafs* (spiritual purification) as the foundation of education. The interview data and textual analysis indicate that Abdul Munaf regarded the purification of the heart as a prerequisite for acquiring beneficial knowledge. This view is deeply rooted in the Sufi tradition, which maintains that knowledge devoid of spiritual discipline may lead to arrogance and moral deviation. Such a perspective resonates with Al-Ghazali's educational philosophy, which emphasizes that the ultimate purpose of learning is not the accumulation of information but the transformation of the self through ethical and spiritual cultivation (Al-Ghazali, 1995; Fahrudin, 2024). The prominence of spiritual practices such as *dhikr*, *muraqabah*, and self-reflection in Abdul Munaf's teachings demonstrates the Syattariyah conviction that education should facilitate inner transformation. In contemporary educational discourse, this finding contributes to ongoing discussions regarding the importance of spiritual well-being in promoting holistic human development and addressing moral challenges associated with modernity (Hidayat, 2021; Riyadi, 2020).

Another important finding concerns Abdul Munaf's integration of religious and worldly knowledge. Unlike educational models that separate religious sciences from secular disciplines, his educational philosophy emphasizes the complementary relationship between both forms of knowledge. This perspective reflects the Islamic intellectual tradition that views all beneficial knowledge as originating from God and serving the common good. Such an approach corresponds with Kartanegara's (2007) concept of knowledge integration and supports contemporary efforts to overcome the dichotomy between religious and secular education in Muslim societies. The findings suggest that Abdul Munaf encouraged learners to engage with modern sciences while maintaining a strong ethical and spiritual foundation. This educational orientation remains highly relevant in contemporary contexts, where rapid technological advancement often raises questions concerning the ethical application of knowledge. By positioning spirituality as a guiding framework for intellectual inquiry, Abdul Munaf's thought offers a balanced model capable of responding to contemporary educational needs while preserving Islamic values (Azra, 2012; Daulay, 2014).

The study also highlights the centrality of moral education (*akhlaq*) in Abdul Munaf's educational framework. The data reveal that moral excellence was regarded as the primary indicator of educational success. Rather than focusing solely on academic achievement, Abdul Munaf emphasized virtues such as sincerity, humility, patience, honesty, and social responsibility. These values were transmitted not only through formal instruction but also through exemplary conduct demonstrated by teachers and spiritual guides. This finding supports previous studies indicating that character formation constitutes one of the most important dimensions of Islamic education (Anshori, 2019; Rosyadi, 2017). Moreover, Abdul Munaf's emphasis on role modeling reflects the prophetic educational tradition in which moral values are learned through observation and practice. Contemporary educational theories similarly recognize the significance of modeling in the development of character and ethical behavior. Therefore,

his educational philosophy provides valuable insights for current efforts to strengthen character education in schools, universities, and religious institutions.

The findings further demonstrate the significant role of the *murshid* in facilitating educational and spiritual development. Within the Syattariyah tradition, the teacher occupies a position that extends beyond the conventional role of knowledge transmitter. Abdul Munaf viewed the teacher as a spiritual mentor responsible for guiding students toward intellectual maturity, moral discipline, and spiritual awareness. This relationship is characterized by trust, respect, and continuous personal interaction. Such findings are consistent with previous research emphasizing the importance of mentorship and spiritual guidance within Sufi educational traditions (Khairuddin, 2020; Wicaksono, 2022; Sya'bani, 2023). Unlike modern educational systems that often prioritize institutional structures and standardized assessment, the Syattariyah model emphasizes personalized learning experiences and close teacher-student relationships. The findings suggest that this relational approach contributes significantly to the internalization of values and the development of ethical consciousness among learners.

Another significant contribution of Abdul Munaf's educational thought lies in his preservation of the surau tradition as a center of religious learning and community development. The study found that educational activities within the surau integrated worship, learning, spiritual training, and social interaction into a unified educational environment. This finding supports earlier studies demonstrating the historical importance of surau institutions in transmitting Islamic knowledge and shaping religious identity in West Sumatra (Azra, 2002; Mastuhu, 1994). Unlike formal educational settings that often separate academic learning from daily life, the surau model fosters continuous learning through communal participation and shared religious experiences. Such an environment facilitates the cultivation of discipline, responsibility, and collective identity while strengthening social cohesion within the community.

Finally, the findings reveal that Abdul Munaf's educational philosophy demonstrates a remarkable capacity for adaptive continuity. Although firmly rooted in classical Syattariyah teachings, his ideas remain responsive to changing social conditions and contemporary educational challenges. This adaptability illustrates the dynamic nature of Islamic educational traditions, which are capable of preserving essential spiritual values while engaging constructively with modern realities (Warisno, 2026). In this regard, Abdul Munaf's thought contributes to broader discussions concerning the renewal of Islamic education by showing that tradition and modernity need not be viewed as opposing forces. Instead, they can be integrated within a holistic educational framework that nurtures intellectual competence, moral integrity, and spiritual consciousness simultaneously. Consequently, his educational model offers valuable theoretical and practical contributions to the ongoing development of Islamic education in Indonesia and beyond.

4. CONCLUSION

This study concludes that Khatib Maulana Abdul Munaf developed a holistic model of Islamic education rooted in the Syattariyah Sufi tradition, integrating spiritual purification (*tazkiyah al-nafs*), intellectual development (*'ilm*), and moral formation (*akhlaq*) as inseparable dimensions of the educational process. The findings reveal that his educational philosophy emphasizes the cultivation of spiritual awareness, ethical character, and beneficial knowledge through a combination of Sufi practices, teacher-centered spiritual mentorship, and community-based learning within the surau tradition. His thought demonstrates that Islamic education should aim not only at intellectual achievement but also at personal transformation and closeness to Allah, thereby offering a relevant framework for addressing contemporary challenges related to moral decline and spiritual disorientation. Nevertheless, this study has several limitations. First, it focuses primarily on the works and educational legacy of a single Syattariyah scholar in West Sumatra, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other Sufi traditions or educational contexts. Second, the study relies on a relatively small number of informants and historical-textual sources, which may not fully capture

the diversity of perspectives within the Syattariyah community. Therefore, future research is recommended to conduct comparative studies involving other Sufi scholars, tarekat traditions, or regions in Indonesia and Southeast Asia, as well as to employ broader ethnographic and mixed-method approaches to examine the contemporary implementation and educational impact of Sufi-based learning models in formal and non-formal educational institutions.

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