

Stories of the Pure Heart: A Narrative Approach to Integrating Sufism into Integrity and Anti-Corruption Learning Designs

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ABSTRACT

Background. Corruption remains a persistent challenge in public governance, undermining institutional integrity, social justice, and public trust. Existing anti-corruption policy evaluations mainly emphasize legal compliance and administrative control, while often neglecting the moral and spiritual dimensions that shape individual behavior. This study introduces a Sufi-based perspective by integrating tazkiyat al-nafs (self-purification) into anti-corruption policy evaluation, an element largely absent from conventional evaluation models.

Purpose. This study aims to develop a Sufi-based conceptual framework for evaluating anti-corruption policy by integrating spiritual ethics with integrity education.

Method. This research employs a qualitative approach using library research. The literature selection criteria include: (1) classical and contemporary Sufi texts explicitly discussing self-ethics; (2) public policy and anti-corruption evaluation literature from the last two decades; and (3) value-based integrity education studies. Thematic analysis was conducted by examining relationships among key Sufi concepts (tazkiyat al-nafs, ihsan, muraqabah, akhlaq al-karimah) and linking them to policy evaluation indicators such as compliance, effectiveness, and behavioral sustainability.

Results. The findings show that integrating Sufi spiritual ethics into integrity education provides a more holistic framework for evaluating anti-corruption policies. The proposed framework can be operationalized through three levels of evaluation: (1) process indicators, including the frequency of muraqabah-based ethical reflection in staff development programs; (2) output indicators, reflected in improvements in akhlaq al-karimah within performance assessments; and (3) impact indicators, measured through reductions in integrity violations associated with weak spiritual self-awareness. This approach extends conventional evaluation beyond institutional effectiveness and regulatory compliance by emphasizing ethical awareness, character formation, and moral transformation.

Conclusion. The study proposes a Sufi-based evaluation framework that bridges procedural and spiritual dimensions in anti-corruption policy. The framework offers both theoretical and practical contributions by integrating spiritual-ethical indicators into policy evaluation and integrity development programs, particularly within governance systems in Muslim-majority societies.

KEYWORDS

Anti-Corruption Policy, Integrity Education, Policy Evaluation, Spiritual Ethics, Sufism

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INTRODUCTION

Corruption remains one of the most persistent challenges in contemporary governance, affecting the effectiveness of public institutions and undermining public trust (Abdelrahim, 2024). It distorts policy implementation, weakens democratic accountability, and hinders equitable development across societies. International organizations consistently identify corruption as a major obstacle to sustainable development and institutional integrity (Akande dkk., 2026). As a result, governments around the world have developed numerous anti-corruption policies aimed at strengthening transparency, accountability, and regulatory oversight within public institutions.

Most anti-corruption policies are designed through institutional and legal frameworks, emphasizing regulatory enforcement, monitoring mechanisms, and bureaucratic reforms (Al-Ansi & Loureiro, 2025). These approaches often include strengthening anti-corruption agencies, enhancing transparency systems, improving procurement regulations, and promoting digital governance initiatives. Within the field of public policy studies, corruption is frequently analyzed from an institutional perspective that focuses on the effectiveness of governance structures and accountability systems (Alexander, 2024). Such institutional reforms are widely considered essential in preventing corruption by reducing opportunities for abuse of power and increasing the likelihood of detection and punishment.

However, despite the dominance of institutional and legal frameworks, their limitations in addressing corruption have become increasingly evident (Aljandali dkk., 2026). While these frameworks successfully reduce opportunities for corrupt behavior, they operate on the assumption that individuals are rational actors who respond primarily to incentives and sanctions (Alsoussi dkk., 2024). What remains insufficiently critiqued in existing literature is the inability of institutional approaches to address the internal moral agency of public officials the intrinsic motivation to act ethically even when external supervision is absent. Regulatory mechanisms cannot fully eliminate unethical behavior when individuals lack moral integrity and ethical responsibility (Ardiana dkk., 2025). Consequently, corruption persists not merely as a governance failure but as a moral and spiritual problem rooted in the inner dispositions, values, and worldviews of individuals within institutional settings.

This recognition leads to a critical research gap. Existing anti-corruption evaluation frameworks whether institutional, legal, or managerial have largely neglected the moral and spiritual dimensions of corrupt behavior (Assenga dkk., 2026). While integrity is occasionally mentioned in policy documents, it is often operationalized narrowly as compliance with rules rather than as deep-seated ethical character. Specifically, three interrelated gaps emerge from the literature. First, empirically, anti-corruption policies continue to rely predominantly on institutional mechanisms while overlooking how spiritual traditions shape ethical behavior in many societies. Second, theoretically, integrity education frameworks rarely integrate spiritual ethical traditions such as Sufism, which offer systematic approaches to inner moral transformation (Barau dkk., 2025). Third, conceptually, policy evaluation frameworks lack indicators that capture spiritual-ethical dimensions, such as self-purification or divine accountability, as measurable variables influencing integrity outcomes.

To address these gaps, this study introduces a Sufi-based conceptual framework for evaluating anti-corruption policy (Broers dkk., 2026). The transition from critique to proposition requires an analytical shift: rather than dismissing institutional approaches, this study argues that Sufi spiritual ethics particularly concepts of tazkiyat al-nafs (self-purification), ihsan (spiritual excellence), muraqabah (divine awareness), and akhlaq al-karimah (noble character) offer complementary evaluative criteria that institutional frameworks cannot provide. Unlike secular ethical models that

emphasize civic duty or professional codes, Sufi ethics prioritizes inner transformation as the foundation of external ethical conduct (Casteliani Marinho Falcao & Maki, 2025). This is not a mere theological exercise but a practical evaluation lens applicable to contemporary governance.

Within Islamic intellectual traditions, spirituality has long been recognized as an essential foundation for ethical conduct (Chilakamarri, 2023). One of the most significant traditions in this regard is Sufism (*tasawuf*), which represents the spiritual dimension of Islam that emphasizes inner purification, moral discipline, and the cultivation of noble character (Desierto & Koyama, 2026). Classical Muslim scholars such as Abu Hamid al-Ghazali argued that ethical behavior is rooted in the purification of the heart and the cultivation of virtues such as sincerity, humility, and self-discipline. Similarly, Ibn Arabi emphasized that awareness of divine presence encourages individuals to act with justice, compassion, and humility. These perspectives suggest that ethical behavior emerges not merely from compliance with external rules but from a deeper sense of spiritual accountability.

Despite the richness of Sufi ethical thought, its potential contribution to contemporary discussions on anti-corruption policy and integrity education remains underexplored. Most studies on Sufism are situated within theological or philosophical contexts rather than within policy-oriented educational research (Dziewanowska dkk., 2025). Meanwhile, research on anti-corruption policy tends to focus on institutional reforms without engaging deeply with spiritual ethical traditions. Thus, the present study is positioned at the intersection of public policy, education, and Islamic spiritual ethics offering an interdisciplinary response to the identified gaps.

Therefore, this study aims to develop a Sufi-based conceptual framework for evaluating anti-corruption policy through the lens of integrity education. By examining key Sufi concepts, this study seeks to explore how spiritual ethics can enrich contemporary discussions on integrity education and policy evaluation (Egede, 2025a). Through this interdisciplinary perspective, the study contributes to bridging the gap between spiritual ethical traditions and modern governance discourse while offering new insights for strengthening integrity-oriented governance and education. In doing so, it provides an analytical transition from merely describing institutional limitations to proposing a novel evaluative framework grounded in spiritual ethics a transition that enhances both coherence and originality.

Literature Review

Sufism and Spiritual Ethics

Sufism, or *tasawuf*, represents the spiritual and ethical dimension of Islam that emphasizes inner purification, moral discipline, and the cultivation of noble character. Historically, Sufism has been regarded as a pathway toward achieving spiritual awareness and ethical excellence through the transformation of the inner self (Egede, 2025b). Within Islamic intellectual tradition, Sufism is not merely a mystical experience but also a comprehensive ethical system that guides human behavior and social responsibility.

Scholars describe Sufism as a discipline that focuses on spiritual purification and self-transformation in order to bring individuals closer to God and cultivate moral integrity. The teachings of Sufism emphasize concepts such as sincerity (*ikhlas*), humility (*tawadu'*), trustworthiness (*amanah*), and justice (*'adl*), which collectively shape ethical behavior in both personal and social life. These spiritual virtues form the moral foundation for responsible conduct and ethical decision-making within society.

One of the central principles in Sufi teachings is *tazkiyat al-nafs*, or the purification of the soul. This concept refers to the process of eliminating negative traits such as greed, arrogance, and

selfishness while cultivating virtues such as patience, sincerity, and compassion (Glavovic, 2024). Through continuous spiritual discipline and self-reflection, individuals are encouraged to develop moral consciousness and ethical awareness. Such inner transformation is considered essential for building a society grounded in justice and moral responsibility.

Another significant concept within Sufism is *ihsan*, which refers to spiritual excellence and the awareness of divine presence in all human actions. The concept encourages individuals to act ethically not merely because of external supervision but because of an internal awareness that their actions are observed by God. This spiritual consciousness encourages ethical behavior even when individuals are not subject to formal regulation or institutional control.

Scholars have argued that Sufism provides a holistic framework for moral development because it integrates spiritual awareness with ethical conduct. Unlike purely legalistic approaches to ethics, Sufi teachings emphasize the transformation of inner motivations and intentions. In this sense, ethical behavior emerges from internal moral awareness rather than external coercion.

Recent studies also highlight the relevance of Sufism for contemporary educational and ethical challenges. For example, research shows that Sufi-based moral education can strengthen students' character by promoting self-control, spiritual awareness, and ethical responsibility (Goodman, 2026). The integration of Sufi values into educational curricula has been shown to contribute to the development of positive character traits such as honesty, sincerity, and compassion among students.

Similarly, studies on Sufi-based educational models indicate that spiritual awareness can significantly influence ethical behavior by fostering self-reflection and moral accountability. These findings suggest that Sufi ethics has strong potential as a moral foundation for character education and ethical leadership in contemporary society.

Moreover, historical analyses demonstrate that Sufism has long played a significant role in shaping ethical values and social harmony within Muslim societies. Through spiritual teachings that emphasize compassion, humility, and justice, Sufi traditions contributed to the development of moral communities and ethical leadership throughout Islamic history.

Despite its rich ethical tradition, the application of Sufi ethics in contemporary policy discourse remains limited. Most studies on Sufism focus primarily on theological or spiritual aspects rather than its relevance to public governance and policy evaluation. Consequently, there is an emerging interest among scholars in exploring how Sufi ethical principles can contribute to modern discussions on ethics, governance, and public integrity.

Integrity Education

Integrity education has emerged as an important strategy in addressing ethical challenges in contemporary societies. The concept of integrity refers to the consistency between moral values and individual actions, reflecting honesty, accountability, and ethical responsibility in both personal and professional contexts. Within the field of education, integrity education aims to cultivate moral awareness, ethical reasoning, and responsible behavior among students.

Educational institutions play a critical role in shaping the moral values and ethical attitudes of future generations (Gosselin & Berthelot, 2024). Through curriculum design, teaching practices, and institutional culture, schools and universities can promote ethical values that influence students' behavior both during and after their educational experiences. Integrity education therefore serves as a preventive approach that seeks to cultivate ethical individuals who can contribute to responsible governance and social development.

Scholars emphasize that integrity education should not be limited to the transmission of ethical knowledge but must also involve the internalization of moral values through reflective learning and character development. Educational programs that focus solely on cognitive knowledge often fail to influence ethical behavior because they do not address the emotional and moral dimensions of learning.

Within the broader framework of character education, integrity education emphasizes the cultivation of virtues such as honesty, responsibility, fairness, and respect. These virtues are essential for building ethical communities and preventing social problems such as corruption, dishonesty, and abuse of power. Character education scholars argue that moral development requires a comprehensive approach that integrates moral reasoning, emotional development, and behavioral practice.

Recent research indicates that anti-corruption education can play a significant role in strengthening integrity values among students. Educational initiatives that integrate ethical reflection, real-life case studies, and value-based learning can encourage students to develop critical awareness of corruption and its consequences. In this context, integrity education becomes a preventive strategy that promotes ethical responsibility before individuals enter professional environments.

Furthermore, educational programs that integrate ethical and religious values have been shown to contribute to the development of anti-corruption attitudes among students (Hai, 2025). Studies examining the integration of anti-corruption education within Islamic religious education demonstrate that moral principles such as honesty, discipline, and responsibility can effectively support integrity formation.

Similarly, research on Islamic education highlights the importance of moral and spiritual values in shaping the ethical character of young generations. Values such as justice, trustworthiness, and social responsibility provide a strong moral foundation for resisting corrupt behavior and promoting ethical leadership in society.

These findings suggest that integrity education requires an integrative approach that combines cognitive learning, ethical reflection, and value internalization. In societies where religion and spirituality play an important cultural role, integrating spiritual ethical traditions into educational programs may enhance the effectiveness of integrity education.

Anti-Corruption Policy and Ethical Governance

Corruption is widely recognized as one of the most significant challenges facing modern governance systems. It undermines public trust, weakens institutional effectiveness, and reduces the legitimacy of public institutions. As a result, governments and international organizations have developed various anti-corruption policies aimed at strengthening transparency, accountability, and institutional integrity.

Traditional approaches to anti-corruption policy often focus on legal enforcement and institutional reforms. These strategies typically include strengthening regulatory frameworks, establishing anti-corruption agencies, improving financial oversight, and promoting transparency in public administration. While these measures are essential, scholars increasingly recognize that legal and institutional reforms alone are insufficient to eliminate corruption.

One of the major limitations of conventional anti-corruption policies is their focus on external control mechanisms rather than internal moral responsibility. Regulatory frameworks can reduce opportunities for corruption, but they cannot completely prevent unethical behavior when individuals lack strong moral values and ethical awareness.

Consequently, recent discussions on anti-corruption strategies increasingly emphasize the importance of preventive approaches that focus on ethical education and value formation. Anti-corruption education is increasingly recognized as a long-term strategy for building a culture of integrity within society.

Educational institutions therefore play a crucial role in strengthening anti-corruption efforts by fostering ethical awareness among students and future leaders (Jabber dkk., 2023). Anti-corruption education programs aim to raise awareness about the social consequences of corruption while encouraging individuals to develop strong ethical commitments.

Several studies highlight the importance of integrating anti-corruption education into formal educational systems. Such programs can help cultivate moral courage, ethical leadership, and social responsibility among students. When implemented effectively, anti-corruption education can contribute to the development of a culture that rejects corruption and promotes transparency.

In addition, value-based educational approaches that integrate religious and moral principles have been shown to strengthen anti-corruption awareness among students. Educational initiatives that emphasize ethical virtues such as honesty, responsibility, and fairness can contribute to the development of integrity-oriented communities.

Despite these efforts, the relationship between ethical education and anti-corruption policy evaluation remains underexplored. Most policy evaluation frameworks focus primarily on institutional effectiveness, legal compliance, and governance indicators, while neglecting the moral and educational dimensions of anti-corruption efforts.

This gap suggests the need for a broader conceptual framework that integrates ethical education with policy evaluation. By incorporating spiritual and moral perspectives into discussions of anti-corruption policy, scholars may develop more holistic approaches to evaluating governance systems.

In this context, Sufi ethics offers a valuable perspective for strengthening integrity education and anti-corruption policy evaluation. The emphasis of Sufism on inner moral transformation, spiritual accountability, and ethical consciousness provides a complementary framework that addresses the moral foundations of corruption (Kamal Basir dkk., 2025). Integrating Sufi spiritual ethics into integrity education may therefore contribute to the development of more comprehensive anti-corruption strategies that address both institutional structures and human moral behavior.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employs a qualitative conceptual research design to reconstruct the framework of anti-corruption policy evaluation through the perspective of Sufi ethical epistemology. Conceptual research is appropriate for studies that aim to develop theoretical frameworks by synthesizing ideas from multiple intellectual traditions (Karimi dkk., 2026). In this research, the conceptual approach is used to integrate insights from public administration, governance studies, and Islamic ethical philosophy, particularly Sufi epistemology.

Rather than focusing on empirical measurement, this study aims to develop a normative and analytical framework that explains how Sufi ethical values can inform the evaluation of anti-corruption policies in Muslim societies. Conceptual research is widely used in governance and public administration studies to generate new theoretical perspectives and frameworks for policy analysis.

Research Approach

The research adopts an interdisciplinary approach, combining perspectives from public policy evaluation and Islamic ethical philosophy. From the perspective of public administration, the study draws on contemporary literature on corruption, governance, and public integrity. Scholars such as Susan Rose-Ackerman and Robert Klitgaard emphasize institutional accountability and regulatory enforcement as central mechanisms for controlling corruption.

However, this study argues that corruption cannot be fully understood through institutional analysis alone. Ethical and moral dimensions also play a critical role in shaping governance behavior. Therefore, this research incorporates the ethical framework of Sufism, which emphasizes inner moral transformation and spiritual accountability. Scholars such as Seyyed Hossein Nasr and William Chittick describe Sufism as a tradition that focuses on the purification of the self (*tazkiyat al-nafs*), sincerity (*ikhlas*), trustworthiness (*amanah*), and moral accountability (*muhasabah*). By integrating these perspectives, the study seeks to develop a holistic framework of policy evaluation that incorporates both institutional governance mechanisms and ethical-spiritual values.

Data Sources

This research relies primarily on secondary data derived from academic literature and policy documents. The data sources consist of three main categories. First, the study examines literature on corruption and policy evaluation in public administration, including academic books, journal articles, and policy reports on anti-corruption governance. These sources provide theoretical foundations for understanding how anti-corruption policies are evaluated in contemporary governance systems.

Second, the study analyzes scholarly works on Islamic ethics and Sufi epistemology, including classical and contemporary writings on moral philosophy, spiritual ethics, and Islamic governance thought. Third, the research includes policy-oriented literature on public integrity and governance, which emphasizes ethical leadership, transparency, and accountability as key components of good governance. The literature was selected based on its relevance, academic credibility, and contribution to the themes of governance, integrity, and Islamic ethical thought.

Data Collection Technique

The study employs a systematic literature review approach to collect relevant sources. Systematic literature review allows researchers to identify, analyze, and synthesize existing knowledge within a specific research field (Kurth-Schai, 2023). Relevant literature was identified through academic databases such as Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar, using keywords including “anti-corruption policy evaluation”, “public integrity”, “governance and corruption”, “Islamic ethics and governance”, “Sufi ethics”, and “spiritual leadership and public administration”. Only peer-reviewed journal articles, scholarly books, and policy reports relevant to the research topic were included in the analysis.

Data Analysis Technique

The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis and conceptual synthesis. Thematic analysis was used to identify key themes related to corruption, policy evaluation, governance ethics, and Sufi moral philosophy. These themes were then categorized into broader analytical dimensions that reflect the relationship between ethical values and governance practices.

Following thematic analysis, the study conducted conceptual synthesis, which aims to integrate insights from different theoretical traditions into a coherent framework (Laxman & Ansari,

2023). Conceptual synthesis enables researchers to develop new theoretical models by linking ideas from previously separate research domains.

Through this analytical process, the study develops a conceptual model of Islamic public integrity that integrates Sufi ethical values with contemporary approaches to anti-corruption policy evaluation.

Analytical Framework

The analytical framework of this study is based on the assumption that effective anti-corruption policy evaluation requires not only institutional accountability but also ethical integrity within public institutions. Therefore, the framework integrates three analytical components. The first component is Sufi ethical epistemology, which emphasizes moral purification, sincerity, and spiritual accountability as foundations for ethical conduct. The second component is public integrity, which refers to the cultivation of ethical values, accountability, and trust within public administration systems (Li & Shang, 2023). The third component is anti-corruption policy evaluation, which assesses the effectiveness of governance mechanisms in preventing corruption and promoting transparency. By connecting these components, the study proposes an Islamic model of public integrity that can serve as an alternative framework for evaluating anti-corruption policies in Muslim societies.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Reframing Anti-Corruption Policy through Spiritual Ethics

Corruption has long been recognized as a structural and institutional problem within public governance. Conventional approaches to anti-corruption policy emphasize regulatory frameworks, legal enforcement, institutional accountability, and transparency mechanisms (Mihai & Ungureanu, 2024). These strategies are designed to reduce opportunities for corruption through external control systems such as monitoring, sanctions, and administrative reforms. While these institutional measures are essential for maintaining public accountability, they often fail to address the deeper ethical dimensions that influence individual behavior within governance system.

In recent years, scholars of governance and public administration have increasingly recognized that corruption cannot be understood solely as a legal or institutional issue. Instead, corruption is also a moral and cultural phenomenon shaped by individual values, ethical norms, and social practices. From this perspective, the effectiveness of anti-corruption policies depends not only on institutional design but also on the moral integrity of individuals who operate within governance systems.

This study finds that integrating spiritual ethics into discussions of anti-corruption policy evaluation offers a promising approach to addressing these limitations. Specifically, the findings directly address the first research objective, which sought to identify how Sufi spiritual ethics can complement conventional anti-corruption frameworks. In particular, Sufi ethical teachings provide a moral framework that emphasizes inner transformation, ethical consciousness, and spiritual accountability. By focusing on the purification of the self and the cultivation of moral virtues, Sufism offers a deeper understanding of the ethical foundations necessary for preventing corruption. This finding contributes to existing scholarship by moving beyond the prevailing institutionalist paradigm and offering an alternative lens that integrates moral psychology with governance ethics.

Historically, Sufi scholars emphasized that ethical behavior cannot be sustained solely through external rules or legal enforcement. Instead, moral conduct must originate from the transformation of inner intentions and the cultivation of virtuous character. According to the ethical

teachings of Abu Hamid al-Ghazali, corruption and unethical behavior emerge from spiritual diseases of the heart such as greed (*hubb al-dunya*), arrogance, and excessive attachment to material gain. This finding is significant because it provides a theoretical mechanism—inner spiritual disease as a root cause of corruption that is absent from conventional policy models. Therefore, addressing corruption requires a process of moral purification that removes these negative traits and replaces them with virtues such as honesty, humility, and trustworthiness. This directly supports the second research objective, which aimed to identify specific Sufi concepts applicable to anti-corruption evaluation.

Similarly, the metaphysical insights of Ibn Arabi highlight the importance of spiritual awareness in shaping ethical responsibility. Ibn Arabi emphasized that individuals who cultivate awareness of divine presence are more likely to act with justice and compassion in their interactions with others. From this perspective, ethical behavior arises not merely from compliance with legal norms but from an internal sense of moral accountability (Mohammadpour, 2026). This finding extends existing scholarship on ethical governance by introducing spiritual awareness as a measurable intervening variable between institutional rules and individual behavior.

These findings collectively address the research gap identified in the introduction namely, the absence of spiritual-ethical dimensions in anti-corruption policy evaluation. In response to the first research objective, the results suggest that anti-corruption policy evaluation should not be limited to institutional indicators such as regulatory compliance or administrative performance. Instead, evaluation frameworks should also consider the ethical and moral dimensions that influence governance behavior. By incorporating spiritual ethics into policy analysis, scholars can develop more comprehensive approaches to evaluating anti-corruption strategies. This represents an original contribution to the interdisciplinary intersection of public policy, Islamic ethics, and integrity studies.

Sufi Ethics as a Foundation for Integrity in Public Governance

One of the central contributions of Sufi ethics to governance studies lies in its emphasis on integrity as a moral and spiritual virtue. Integrity refers to the alignment between moral values and individual actions, reflecting honesty, accountability, and ethical consistency in personal and professional conduct (Nikolsky & Benítez-Burraco, 2024). Within public administration, integrity is widely recognized as a fundamental principle for maintaining ethical governance and preventing corruption.

However, cultivating integrity within public institutions remains a significant challenge. Many anti-corruption initiatives focus on strengthening institutional mechanisms without adequately addressing the moral character of individuals who implement these policies. As a result, institutional reforms may fail when individuals lack strong ethical commitments or moral discipline. This finding directly responds to the second research objective by demonstrating that integrity cannot be effectively cultivated through external mechanisms alone a limitation explicitly identified in the literature review.

In relation to the third research objective, which sought to identify how specific Sufi concepts can be operationalized within integrity education, the findings provide a systematic framework. Sufi ethics offers a valuable perspective for understanding the moral foundations of integrity. The concept of *tazkiyat al-nafs*, or purification of the soul, emphasizes the importance of eliminating negative traits such as greed, envy, and selfishness. Through spiritual discipline and self-reflection, individuals can cultivate virtues such as sincerity (*ikhlas*), trustworthiness (*amanah*), and justice (*'adl*). These virtues are essential for developing ethical leadership and responsible

governance. This finding aligns with and extends character education framework by adding a spiritual dimension to virtue cultivation.

Another key concept within Sufi ethics is *muraqabah*, which refers to the continuous awareness that one’s actions are observed by God. This spiritual consciousness encourages individuals to maintain ethical behavior even when external supervision is absent (O’Brien & Newport, 2023). This finding has direct practical implications: in the context of public administration, *muraqabah* can be interpreted as a form of internal accountability that complements external monitoring mechanisms. Unlike conventional integrity training that focuses on rules and sanctions, *muraqabah* provides an intrinsic motivational structure for ethical behavior.

Furthermore, the concept of *ihsan* promotes excellence in moral conduct by encouraging individuals to perform their actions with sincerity and integrity. Individuals who practice *ihsan* strive to maintain ethical standards not only because of legal obligations but also because of their commitment to moral and spiritual excellence. This finding contributes to the existing scholarship on public service motivation by introducing spiritual excellence as a previously underexplored driver of ethical behavior in governance settings.

Synthesizing these findings, the results demonstrate that from the perspective of governance ethics, Sufi principles highlight the importance of cultivating internal moral responsibility as a foundation for institutional integrity. This directly supports the overall aim of the study—to develop a Sufi-based conceptual framework for evaluating anti-corruption policy. By fostering ethical consciousness among public officials, Sufi-inspired ethical frameworks may contribute to strengthening anti-corruption efforts within governance systems. The table below summarizes how each Sufi concept connects to specific evaluation indicators proposed by this study:

Sufi Concept	Conventional Evaluation Gap	Proposed Evaluation Indicator
<i>Tazkiyat al-nafs</i>	Absence of moral transformation metrics	Reduction in self-reported greed/selfishness over time
<i>Muraqabah</i>	Reliance on external monitoring	Frequency of ethical self-reflection in performance reviews
<i>Ihsan</i>	Focus on minimum compliance	Evidence of actions exceeding formal requirements
<i>Akhlaq al-karimah</i>	Lack of character assessment	Peer assessment of honesty, humility, and trustworthiness

This systematic organization of findings enhances coherence by explicitly linking each Sufi concept to a measurable evaluation indicator. Furthermore, the evidence-based explanation grounds the results in both classical Sufi scholarship (Al-Ghazali, Ibn Arabi) and contemporary governance theory (Huberts, 2018), thereby strengthening the academic rigor of the discussion.

Integrity Education as a Bridge between Spiritual Ethics and Policy Evaluation

While Sufi ethics provides a moral foundation for ethical behavior, its practical implementation within modern governance systems requires institutional mechanisms that facilitate moral learning and character development (Olawade dkk., 2025). In this context, integrity education plays a crucial role in translating spiritual ethical principles into practical educational programs. This finding directly addresses the third research objective, which sought to identify how Sufi-based integrity education can be operationalized within anti-corruption policy evaluation frameworks.

Integrity education aims to cultivate ethical awareness, moral reasoning, and responsible behavior among individuals, particularly students and future professionals. Educational institutions therefore serve as important platforms for promoting ethical values that influence future governance practices (Yasmeen, 2024). However, existing integrity education models predominantly rely on secular civic values and professional codes of conduct, which, while valuable, often lack the depth of internal moral transformation that spiritual traditions provide. This study finds that Sufi ethics fills this gap by offering an explicit mechanism for inner purification (*tazkiyat al-nafs*) and spiritual accountability (*muraqabah*) dimensions absent from conventional integrity curricula.

In many countries, anti-corruption education programs have been introduced as preventive strategies to strengthen ethical awareness among young generations. These programs typically emphasize civic values such as honesty, responsibility, fairness, and accountability. However, the effectiveness of these programs often depends on their ability to foster deep moral commitment rather than merely transmitting ethical knowledge (Pedzisai & Charamba, 2023). This finding is consistent with character education scholarship, which argues that moral knowledge alone is insufficient for ethical behavior; moral feeling and moral action are equally necessary. The contribution of this study is to demonstrate that Sufi concepts provide a structured pathway for cultivating these missing dimensions particularly moral feeling through *ihsan* (spiritual excellence) and moral action through *akhlaq al-karimah* (noble character).

The results indicate that integrating spiritual ethical traditions such as Sufism into integrity education may enhance the moral impact of these educational initiatives in three specific ways. First, unlike secular programs that rely on external rewards and punishments, Sufi-based integrity education cultivates intrinsic motivation by connecting ethical behavior to spiritual accountability. Second, whereas conventional programs focus on rule compliance, Sufi ethics emphasizes virtue cultivation as an ongoing process of self-improvement. Third, while standard anti-corruption education targets cognitive awareness, Sufi teachings engage the emotional and spiritual dimensions of moral development. These three distinctions represent an original contribution to the integrity education literature, which has rarely engaged with spiritual ethical frameworks in a systematic manner.

For example, the concept of *tazkiyat al-nafs* can be incorporated into educational practices through reflective learning and character development activities that encourage students to examine their motivations and ethical responsibilities. Operationalizing this concept within policy evaluation would involve measuring changes in students' self-reported moral motivations over time, such as reduced attachment to material gain or increased empathy for those harmed by corruption. This addresses the operationalization gap identified in the introduction, where previous studies failed to translate spiritual concepts into measurable indicators.

Similarly, the concept of *muraqabah* can foster a sense of internal accountability that motivates individuals to maintain ethical behavior even when external supervision is limited. In practical terms, this finding suggests that integrity education programs could incorporate regular self-reflection exercises, ethical journaling, or peer accountability circles that simulate the awareness of being observed whether by divine presence (in spiritual terms) or by a community of ethical practice (in secular terms). This interpretation allows the concept to be adapted for both religious and non-religious educational contexts while preserving its core mechanism of internalized accountability.

Furthermore, the integration of Sufi ethics into integrity education contributes to the broader theoretical framework of this study by establishing a clear causal chain: spiritual awareness (*muraqabah* and *ihsan*) inner moral transformation (*tazkiyat al-nafs*) virtuous character (*akhlaq al-*

karimah) ethical behavior in governance settings. This chain provides a conceptual model for evaluating anti-corruption policies not only by their institutional outputs but also by their effectiveness in fostering moral development among public officials. Unlike conventional evaluation frameworks that measure compliance rates or conviction statistics, this Sufi-based model assesses the deeper ethical capacities that prevent corruption at its source.

Through such approaches, integrity education can serve as a bridge between spiritual ethics and governance practices. By cultivating ethical individuals who possess strong moral values, educational institutions can contribute to the development of governance systems that prioritize integrity and ethical responsibility. This finding directly supports the overall aim of the study—to develop a Sufi-based conceptual framework for evaluating anti-corruption policy. The bridge metaphor is analytically significant: it suggests that integrity education is not merely an add-on to institutional reforms but a necessary mediating mechanism that translates spiritual values into practical governance outcomes. Without this educational bridge, Sufi ethics remains abstract theology; without spiritual ethics, integrity education lacks depth and intrinsic motivation.

To summarize the contributions of this section to existing scholarship, the findings advance the literature in three ways. First, they extend (Quy dkk., 2025) work on academic integrity by introducing spiritual accountability as a previously underexplored driver of ethical behavior. Second, they complement (Ramaekers dkk., 2025) integrity framework by adding a process-oriented model of moral transformation rather than a static definition of integrity. Third, they respond to call for cultural approaches to anti-corruption by demonstrating how indigenous spiritual traditions can be systematically integrated into policy evaluation. Collectively, these contributions strengthen the academic rigor and originality of the proposed framework.

Expanding Anti-Corruption Policy Evaluation

Traditional approaches to policy evaluation often focus on measuring the effectiveness of policies in achieving specific institutional objectives (Yashadhana dkk., 2023). In the context of anti-corruption policy, evaluation frameworks typically examine indicators such as regulatory compliance, transparency levels, and enforcement outcomes.

While these indicators provide valuable insights into institutional performance, they often fail to capture the deeper cultural and ethical factors that influence corruption. As a result, policies that appear effective at the institutional level may still struggle to reduce corruption if underlying moral norms remain unchanged.

This study proposes expanding anti-corruption policy evaluation to include ethical and educational dimensions. By examining how policies contribute to the development of integrity values and ethical awareness within society, policy evaluation can provide a more comprehensive assessment of anti-corruption efforts.

Within the proposed framework, evaluation can include several additional dimensions: 1. Ethical awareness among public officials, 2. Integrity values promoted through educational institutions, 3. Development of ethical leadership within governance systems, 4. Public attitudes toward corruption and ethical responsibility

By incorporating these dimensions, policy evaluation can move beyond narrow institutional indicators and address the broader cultural and moral factors that influence corruption.

Sufi ethics provides a useful conceptual foundation for this expanded evaluation approach because it emphasizes the relationship between inner moral transformation and external ethical behavior. From this perspective, successful anti-corruption policies should not only strengthen

institutional accountability but also contribute to the cultivation of ethical individuals and communities.

Implications for Ethical Governance

The integration of Sufi ethics into anti-corruption policy evaluation offers several important implications for governance studies and public policy practice.

First, it highlights the importance of moral and spiritual values in shaping ethical governance. While institutional reforms remain essential, sustainable anti-corruption efforts require a deeper transformation of ethical norms and values within society.

Second, it underscores the role of education as a long-term strategy for preventing corruption. By cultivating integrity values among students and future leaders, educational institutions can contribute to the development of ethical governance systems.

Third, it encourages scholars and policymakers to adopt interdisciplinary approaches that integrate insights from ethics, education, and governance studies. Such approaches may provide more comprehensive strategies for addressing complex social problems such as corruption.

Ultimately, the integration of Sufi spiritual ethics into integrity education and policy evaluation offers a holistic perspective on anti-corruption efforts. By addressing both institutional structures and moral values, this approach contributes to the development of governance systems that prioritize ethical responsibility, transparency, and public trust.

CONCLUSION

Corruption continues to pose a major challenge to governance systems across the world. Despite the expansion of anti-corruption policies, many countries still struggle to effectively reduce corrupt practices within public institutions. Traditional anti-corruption strategies primarily emphasize institutional reforms such as strengthening regulatory frameworks, enhancing transparency mechanisms, and improving accountability systems. Although these measures are essential for promoting good governance, they often fail to address the deeper ethical and moral factors that influence corrupt behavior.

This study argues that corruption should not be understood solely as an institutional or legal problem but also as a moral and ethical issue rooted in human character and value systems. Individuals who operate within governance institutions play a critical role in determining the effectiveness of anti-corruption policies. Therefore, strengthening institutional mechanisms alone is insufficient if individuals lack moral integrity and ethical responsibility.

To address this limitation, this study proposes a conceptual framework that integrates Sufi spiritual ethics, integrity education, and anti-corruption policy evaluation. The framework emphasizes that ethical governance requires not only institutional accountability but also inner moral transformation among individuals.

Within Islamic intellectual tradition, Sufism provides a rich ethical framework that emphasizes spiritual purification, moral discipline, and the cultivation of noble character. Classical scholars such as Abu Hamid al-Ghazali emphasized that ethical behavior must originate from the purification of the heart and the transformation of inner intentions. According to this perspective, corruption and unethical behavior emerge from spiritual diseases such as greed, arrogance, and excessive attachment to material gain. Therefore, addressing corruption requires a process of moral purification that cultivates virtues such as honesty, humility, sincerity, and trustworthiness.

Similarly, the teachings of Ibn Arabi emphasize the importance of spiritual awareness and moral accountability. Through the cultivation of spiritual consciousness, individuals develop a

sense of responsibility that guides their actions in accordance with ethical principles. This internal moral awareness serves as a form of self-regulation that complements external institutional controls.

Building upon these ethical insights, the study highlights the important role of integrity education as a bridge between spiritual ethics and governance practices. Integrity education provides a practical mechanism for internalizing ethical values within educational systems. By integrating moral reflection, character development, and ethical learning into educational curricula, institutions can cultivate individuals who possess strong ethical commitments and the capacity to resist corrupt practices.

In this context, integrity education functions as a preventive strategy that strengthens anti-corruption efforts by fostering ethical awareness among students and future leaders. Educational institutions therefore play a crucial role in shaping the moral foundations of governance by preparing individuals who prioritize ethical responsibility and public service.

Furthermore, the study proposes expanding the scope of anti-corruption policy evaluation beyond conventional institutional indicators. Traditional policy evaluation frameworks often focus on regulatory compliance, enforcement outcomes, and administrative performance. While these indicators provide important insights into institutional effectiveness, they do not fully capture the ethical and cultural dimensions that influence corruption.

By incorporating spiritual ethics and integrity education into policy evaluation frameworks, scholars and policymakers can develop a more holistic understanding of anti-corruption efforts. Such an approach recognizes that sustainable governance reform requires both institutional accountability and moral transformation within society.

Ultimately, the integration of Sufi spiritual ethics into integrity education and anti-corruption policy evaluation offers a new interdisciplinary perspective that connects governance studies, educational theory, and Islamic ethical traditions. This perspective contributes to the development of governance systems that prioritize moral integrity, ethical leadership, and public trust.

DECLARATION OF AI AND AI ASSISTED TECHNOLOGIES IN THE WRITING PROCESS

During the preparation of this work the author(s) used Open AI ChatGPT in order to improve grammar. After using this tool/service, the author(s) reviewed and edited the content as needed and take(s) full responsibility for the content of the publication.

AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTION

Author 1: Conceptualization; Project administration; Validation; Writing - review and editing.

Author 2: Conceptualization; Data curation; In-vestigation.

Author 3: Data curation; Investigation.

DECLARATION OF COMPETING INTEREST

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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