



Reconstructing *Sama'* as a Relational Psychospiritual Experience: A Phenomenological Study of Inner Peace and Musical Engagement

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Abstract

Although *sama'* is widely discussed as a Sufi practice, limited research explains how listeners themselves experience and construct inner peace through musical engagement. This study addresses this gap by examining *sama'* as a lived psychospiritual experience rather than as an inherent effect of Sufi music. Using Edmund Husserl's transcendental phenomenology, the study screened 34 students of Sufism and Psychotherapy at UIN Sunan Ampel Surabaya and purposively selected 12 participants for semi-structured

interviews. Data were analyzed through epoché, phenomenological reduction, eidetic variation, and synthesis of essences. Inner peace emerged through a transformation from mental clutter, fatigue, confusion, or emotional intensity toward greater focus, lightness, calmness, and psychological order. Music facilitated engagement, while attention mediated experiential transformation and meaning-making generated diverse spiritual orientations, including dhikr, tafakkur, tawakkul, and remembrance. *Sama'* is best understood as a relational psychospiritual experience shaped by subjective states, musical engagement, attention, and interpretation, rather than by musical genre alone.

Keywords: *Sama'*; inner peace; psychospiritual experience; Sufi music; phenomenology

A. INTRODUCTION

Music in religious traditions serves not only as an aesthetic object but can also be a means of spiritual contemplation, emotional regulation, and spiritual orientation. In Sufism, the concept of *sama'* transcends the notion of music as mere sound, as it emphasizes the art of listening that connects sound, attention, the soul, and the quest for closeness to God (Siradj, 2014). Ahmad al-Ghazali's thought, as examined by Abdul Muhaya (2003), positions *sama'* as an experience influenced by intention, inner readiness, the meaning of the lyrics, and the context of listening. Weinrich (2019) study also indicates that al-Ghazali acknowledges both the aesthetic dimension and the transformative power of sound in religious experience. Therefore, *sama'* should not be understood merely as a musical stimulus that automatically produces a specific inner state. This experience unfolds through the listener's engagement, attention, and the way sound is given meaning.

The *state of the art* indicates that research on *sama'* is developing in several directions that have not yet been fully integrated. Sufi studies position *sama'* as a contemplative and spiritual practice, focusing on the relationship between music, poetry, *zikr*, *wajd*, and inner transformation (Ghani, 2011; Lewisohn, 1997). Historical studies indicate that *sama'* is a contested practice, as attitudes toward music and ecstasy are shaped by differing interpretations of Sharia, psychology, and religious orientations (Rizvi, 2018). Meanwhile, research in Java suggests that Sufi sound experiences are linked to sacred spaces, the affective body, and ritual experiences (Dwi et al., 2024). Within the context of the *pesantren* culture in Yogyakarta, Zamzami also demonstrates that Shalawat Emprak music can be understood as having close ties to the *samā'* tradition, in which music serves as a medium that supports spiritual orientation and the process of drawing closer to God. This practice does not merely occur as an individual experience but also takes on a collective form through the involvement of the congregation, thereby shaping its Sufi dimension within social relations and communal practices (Zamzami, 2015). Studies on Rumi also position music as a medium for expressing closeness to God and spiritual experience (Hanif & Fathy, 2023). This literature indicates that musical experience is contextual; however, it has not yet fully explained the structure of the listener's inner experience from a phenomenological perspective.

The literature on the psychology of music expands on this issue by showing that listening to music can be linked to emotional regulation, transcendence, *flow*, and *peak experiences* (Groarke & Hogan, 2020). In the context of college students, a recent meta-ethnography indicates that intentional music listening can support emotional

awareness, self-regulation, and the management of emotional experiences (Lee et al., 2026). Research on religious music among college students also indicates a link to mental health, while studies on *dhikr* among college students have identified changes in physiological indicators related to stress (Hakim & Ananingtias, 2020; Jannah, 2023). However, research on Sufi music in clinical settings primarily relies on predetermined psychological *outcomes*. A meta-analysis found a potential reduction in anxiety, but the quality of evidence was rated as very low, and heterogeneity among studies remains a concern (Gurbuz- Dogan et al., 2021). Therefore, an approach grounded in the listeners' subjective experiences remains necessary.

This gap is all the more significant because *inner peace* is not synonymous with the absence of psychological stress. A phenomenological study of followers of the Naqshbandiyya-Khalidiyya Order showed that inner peace is related to problem-solving, decision-making, emotional regulation, faith, *zikr*, and self-efficacy (Qomariyyah & Saifuddin, 2022). On the other hand, experimental research on Sufi music indicates that changes in anxiety or well-being do not, by themselves, explain how tranquility is experienced and given meaning by listeners (Gurbuz-Dogan & Ali, 2025). Phenomenological studies on Sufi dance also reveal that healing experiences involve catharsis, breath regulation, cognitive restructuring, and self-control, with varying expressions among participants (Pambuka & Saifuddin, 2023). Autoethnographic studies on music and spirituality increasingly indicate that the relationship between music and spiritual life is formed through personal reflection (Bist et al., 2024). Thus, there is a conceptual gap between Sufi music, music psychology, and spiritual psychology.

This study stems from the epistemological problem that psychospiritual experiences cannot be assumed to be inherent in a particular music genre or determined by specific musical characteristics. The research by Graves et al. (2026) highlights the importance of culturally constructed categories of emotion in the experience of listening to qawwali, while also challenging the generalizations of music psychology models developed primarily within a Western context. The preliminary findings of this study reinforce this issue. Informants reported a range of experiences, including emotional calm, mental clarity, reflection, *zikr*, and spiritual orientation, while one informant even interpreted a pop song in a spiritual context. This diversity indicates that genre does not automatically determine spiritual experience. Therefore, this study does not aim to prove that Sufi music induces *inner peace*, but rather to reconstruct how such experiences manifest in the students' consciousness. The focus is directed toward the relationship between initial conditions, musical engagement, concentration, psychological transformation, *inner peace*, and spiritual interpretation.

Based on this debate, this study positions phenomenology to bridge the fields of Sufism, music psychology, and religious psychology through the listeners' lived experiences. The research subjects are students of Sufism and Psychotherapy at UIN Sunan Ampel Surabaya, not because they are assumed to have uniform spiritual experiences, but because their academic background allows for the observation of the intersection between music, inner experiences, and Sufi interpretation in a contextual manner. The study's contribution lies in the reconstruction of the structure of psychospiritual experiences, rather than in measuring the therapeutic effects of music. Conceptually,

this study proposes that *inner peace* is best understood as a relational experience shaped by musical engagement, attention, subjective states, and interpretation, with spiritual experiences emerging in diverse ways. Thus, this study expands the exploration of *sama'* from normative and ritualistic debates toward the listeners' lived experiences.

B. METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach based on Edmund Husserl's transcendental phenomenological design to explore experiences of inner peace in the practice of *sama'* and listening to Sufi music among students in the Sufism and Psychotherapy Program at UIN Sunan Ampel Surabaya. The initial phase involved screening 34 active students to identify experiences relevant to the research focus. Subsequently, 12 informants were purposively selected based on the relevance of their experiences, their ability to reflectively articulate those experiences, and their willingness to participate in in-depth interviews. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews focusing on concrete experiences before, during, and after listening to music, including subjective states, musical engagement and attention, changes in thoughts and emotions, bodily sensations, inner peace, spiritual experiences, and the participants' interpretations of these experiences (Bevan, 2014). The selection of informants was not based on the assumption of uniformity in spiritual experiences, but rather to capture the variety of psychological and spiritual experiences as lived by each informant.

Data analysis followed the four stages of transcendental phenomenology: epoché, phenomenological reduction, eidetic variation, and synthesis of essence (Belt,

2022). Through epoché, the researcher suspended assumptions regarding Sufi music, *sama'*, and inner peace to focus the analysis on experiences as they were present in the informants' consciousness. Phenomenological reduction was conducted by identifying meaning units from the interview transcripts, while eidetic variation was used to compare variations in music genres, situations, emotional states, attention, bodily responses, and spiritual awareness in order to distinguish essential characteristics from accidental ones. The final stage involved a synthesis of essence to formulate the meaning structure of the experience of inner peace and to reconstruct the psychospiritual experience of *sama'*.

C. DISCUSSION

1. Informants' Profiles and Context of Experience

This study shows that the experience of *inner peace* while listening to Sufi-inspired music or experiencing *sama'* occurs under a variety of subjective conditions. Informants did not enter the musical experience with the same psychological state. Some were in a state of mental preoccupation, fatigue, confusion, boredom, anxiety, or emotional instability, while others listened to music in the context of academic activities or personal issues. The diversity of these initial conditions is phenomenologically significant because the musical experience does not occur as a stimulus separate from the listener's subjective life. Rather, musical experiences unfold within a consciousness that already carries specific states, attentions, and needs.

The types of music listened to also varied. Experiences ranged from nasyid, *dhikr*, sholawat, rebana, Maulid Diba', music associated with Rumi, to pop songs. This

diversity demonstrates that psychospiritual experiences cannot be reduced to responses to a single music genre. These findings resonate with research on the functions of music, which indicates that music can fulfill affective, cognitive, social, and eudaimonic functions, including emotional regulation, *transcendence*, and peak experiences (Groarke & Hogan, 2018, 2020). In the Sufi context, music can also serve as a medium for articulating experiences of closeness to God, particularly in the interpretation of Rumi’s music and poetry (Hanif & Fathy, 2023).

Table 1. Profile and Structure of Informant Phenomenological Experience

Informant	Music/ Experience	Initial Condition	Transformative Experience	Interpretation
Informant 1	Nasyid, <i>dhikr</i> , <i>manakiban</i>	A cluttered and burdened mind	Calm, crying, relieved	Drawing Closer to God
Informant 2	Sholawat	Tired and preoccupied	A more organized and calm mind	Calming Down
Informant 3	Music Related to Rumi	Stressed, confused, tired	My mind feels like it’s “on pause”	Contemplation and reflection
Informant 4	Gambus shalawat	Confused and emotional	More relaxed and calm	Emotional regulation
Informant 5	Prayers of blessings, the tambourine, the Maulid Diba’	Tired and with a mind full of thoughts	yet my heart is “calm,” at ease, and devout	Remembering Allah and the Prophet
Informant 6	The pop song “Satu”	Attention is divided among academic activities	Stay calm and trust in God	Spiritual reflection
Informant 7	Sholawat	Feeling overwhelmed and stressed by work	Tension eases, focus sharpens	Entrusting matters to Allah
Informant 8	Nasyid	Restless and having trouble concentrating	More focused and emotionally stable	Self-reflection
Informant 9	Sufi music/Rumi’s poetry	Emptiness and loss of motivation	Greater calm and self-awareness	The search for meaning
Informant 10	Prayers, tambourine	Mental exhaustion	A relaxed body and a lighter mind	Religious peace
Informant 11	Reflective non- Sufi songs	Many personal issues	Greater peace of mind and a different perspective	Spiritual reflection through lyrics

Informant	Music/ Experience	Initial Condition	Transformative Experience	Interpretation
Informant 12	<i>Dhikr</i> , nasyid	Anxiety about academic demands	A clearer mind and a sense of relief	Trust in God and acceptance

The table reveals both general patterns and individual variations. Informant 1 experienced relatively intense emotional changes. Engagement with nasyid, *dhikr*, and manakiban occurred when the mind was in a burdened state, followed by calmness, crying, and relief. This experience was interpreted as a sense of closeness to Allah (Informant 1, personal communication, September 18, 2026). Informant 5 exhibited a similar pattern. Mental fatigue and a cluttered mind gave way to a “calm,” relieved, and devout experience through sholawat, rebana, and Maulid Diba’. This experience was then interpreted as a reminder of Allah and the Prophet (Informant 5, personal communication, September 18, 2026).

Informant 2 described a different type of experience. In a state of fatigue and mental clutter, the sholawat primarily provided a sense of cognitive order (Informant 2, personal communication, September 18, 2026). The informant did not primarily describe an intense spiritual experience but found a space to calm down. Informant 3 also entered the experience feeling stressed, confused, and fatigued. Music associated with Rumi shifts attention toward the music and the atmosphere, causing the mind to feel temporarily “paused.” This experience then takes on a reflective form through tafakur (Informant 3, personal communication, September 18, 2026). This pattern suggests that musical experiences can shift from a function of psychological regulation toward a reflective experience, just as the literature on the functions of music distinguishes affective regulation from more eudaimonic and transcendent experiences (Groarke & Hogan, 2018, 2020).

Informant 4 represents a case that illustrates the boundary between psychological and spiritual experiences. In a state of emotional distress and confusion, the gambus shalawat induced a more relaxed and calm state (Informan 4, personal communication, September 18, 2026). However, this experience was primarily interpreted as emotional regulation and was not accompanied by any explicit spiritual articulation. In contrast, Informant 6 points in a different direction. Although listening to the pop song “Satu”—a genre not typically categorized as Sufi music—the informant experienced a sense of calm and resignation through a deep engagement with the lyrics (Informan 6, personal communication, September 18, 2026). This contrast demonstrates that spiritual experiences are not solely tied to a particular music genre. This aligns with the phenomenological approach to religious musical experiences, which emphasizes the listener’s interpretation, atmosphere, bodily sensations, and ritual context as key elements in the formation of religious sensibility (Dwi et al., 2024).

2. Musical Engagement and Psychological Transformation

The results of the phenomenological analysis indicate that the experience of listening to music does not end with the reception of auditory stimuli. The informants’ attention shifted during their engagement with the music. Informant 2 shifted their attention from the density of their thoughts to the sounds and lyrics of the sholawat (Informan 2, personal communication, September 18, 2026). Informant 3 focused more on the melody and atmosphere (Informan 3, personal communication, September 18, 2026). Informant 5 paid attention to the vocals and the tambourine, while Informant 6 primarily immersed themselves in the meaning of the

lyrics (Informant 5, personal communication, September 18, 2026; Informant 6, personal communication, September 18, 2026). Thus, the musical experience involves an active process of attention, not merely exposure to sound. This shift in attention manifests in various forms. For Informant 2, the change was marked by the experience of no longer being constantly pursued by thoughts. For Informant 3, the change was experienced as thoughts being “paused” (Informant 2, personal communication, September 18, 2026; Informant 3, personal communication, September 18, 2026). For Informant 6, attention to the lyrics allowed for a more reflective experience (Informant 6, personal communication, September 18, 2026). These differences indicate that the objects of experience may vary from one informant to another, but there is a relatively consistent pattern: a reduction in the dominance of previous concerns in consciousness.

These findings are consistent with the research by Groarke & Hogan (2020), which shows that the experience of listening to music can involve eudaimonic functions such as *transcendence*, *flow*, and *peak experience*, in addition to affective regulation functions. However, this study does not assume that all such shifts in attention constitute *flow* or transcendent experiences. These categories are used as points of comparison in the literature, while the meaning of the experience remains determined based on the informants’ phenomenological descriptions. In the Sufi context, shifts in attention also have a broader dimension than mere changes in emotional states. Research on the Sufi *whirling* practice in Java indicates that sound and the act of listening can contribute to the formation of religious sensibility and bodily affective experiences (Dwi et al., 2024). The findings of this study reveal a more personal

dimension: attention to sound, lyrics, or melody serves as a space where informants experience shifts in their internal states and, in some cases, develop spiritual reflections.

Psychological transformation is the most consistent pattern among the informants' experiences. These changes do not always take the form of intense emotional experiences. For some informants, the changes primarily occurred in the orderliness of their thoughts; for others, they took the form of relaxation and emotional stabilization; while for still others, they evolved into reflective and spiritual experiences. Informant 1 experienced calmness and relief after an initial state of burdened thoughts (Informant 1, personal communication, September 18, 2026). Informant 2 experienced more organized thoughts (Informant 2, personal communication, September 18, 2026). Informant 3 experienced a temporary cessation of the dominance of thoughts (Informant 3, personal communication, September 18, 2026). Informant 4 experienced relaxation and emotional stabilization (Informant 4, personal communication, September 18, 2026). Informant 5 described their inner state as "calm," relieved, and devout (Informant 5, personal communication, September 18, 2026). Informant 6 experienced a sense of calm that was later interpreted through *tawakal* (Informant 6, personal communication, September 18, 2026). This pattern demonstrates that *inner peace* does not take a single, identical form of experience for all informants.

These findings can be situated within a dialogue with the research by Qomariyyah & Saifuddin (2022), which, through a phenomenological approach, demonstrates that *inner peace* in the experiences of *ṭarīqa* followers is related to the processes of coping with problems, emotional regulation, decision-making, patience, and the strengthening

of faith and *dhikr*. This study expands on that perspective by showing that the experience of *inner peace* in the context of listening to music does not always stem from formal ritual practices. It can emerge through musical experiences that are then interpreted differently by each listener. More importantly, this sense of calm does not mean that previous problems have disappeared. Informants 2, 3, and 5 remain aware of the issues they are facing. The change lies in how those issues are present in their consciousness. Thoughts that previously filled the space of consciousness became more organized; attention was no longer entirely absorbed by stress; and emotional states became more stable. Therefore, *inner peace* in the informants' experiences is more accurately understood as a change in the quality of internal experience, rather than the absence of problems.

In the context of college students, this pattern is also relevant to research showing the potential of *dhikr* practice in relation to student stress (Hakim & Ananingsyas, 2020). However, the findings of this study are not intended to measure a physiological reduction in stress or to prove the therapeutic effects of music. The focus is on how that sense of calm is experienced and given meaning by the listeners.

3. Variations in Spiritual Interpretation and the Synthesis of the Essence of Psychospiritual Experiences

Spiritual interpretation does not manifest uniformly. Informant 1 associates musical experiences with closeness to God. Informant 3 directs it toward contemplation and reflection. Informant 5 finds peace through remembrance of God and the Prophet. Informant 6 develops a sense of *tawakal* through the appreciation of pop songs. This pattern is also evident in the experiences developed by Informants 7,

9, 11, and 12 through self-surrender, the search for meaning, the appreciation of lyrics, and acceptance. These findings are relevant to the study by Hanif & Fathy, (2023), which shows that, in Rumi's thought, music and poetry can serve as media for expressing experiences of closeness to God. However, the data from this study also show that spiritual meaning cannot be assumed to be an automatic consequence of Sufi-inspired music. Informant 4's experience indicates that shalawat can primarily function as a medium for emotional regulation, while Informant 6's experience suggests that non-Sufi music can serve as a medium for spiritual reflection.

This contrast is one of the study's key findings. If musical genre is treated as the determining factor of experience, then the experiences of Informant 4 and Informant 6 would be difficult to explain. Conversely, if attention and interpretation are considered the elements of experience, these variations become understandable. From a phenomenological perspective, the object of analysis is not whether a song is objectively "Sufi" or "non-Sufi," but rather how the music is present in the listener's consciousness and what meaning is ascribed to that experience. Thus, the spiritual experience in this study is more accurately understood as a possibility that emerges from the process of appreciation. For some informants, musical engagement evolved into *dhikr*, *tafakkur*, *tawakal*, remembrance of Allah or the Prophet, and a search for meaning. For other informants, the experience stopped at psychological calm, relaxation, or emotional regulation. These differences demonstrate that *inner peace* and spiritual experience are dimensions that may overlap but are not identical.

A comparison among informants through *eidetic variation* reveals that the type of music is not the most stable element in the overall experience. Different types of music

can produce relatively similar experiences, whereas equally religious music can produce different experiences. Conversely, several elements recur: subjective conditions, musical engagement, concentration, transformation of internal states, and interpretation of the experience. At the phenomenological level, the experience shifts from an initial state that is relatively full, tired, confused, anxious, or emotional to one that is more focused, light, calm, and orderly. Music serves as the medium that enables this engagement, while attention directs consciousness toward the musical experience and internal states. The interpretation of the experience then determines whether these changes are understood primarily as relaxation, emotional regulation, self-reflection, or a spiritual experience. This structure aligns with the literature that positions music not only as a means of mood regulation but also as a medium for transcendent experiences and the search for meaning (Groarke & Hogan, 2020).

In the Sufi context, these findings also expand our understanding of *sama'*. Studies on musical experiences and Rumi position music as a medium for expressing spiritual experiences, while research on Sufi rituals in Java demonstrates how sound and the practice of listening can shape religious sensibility (Dwi et al., 2024; Hanif & Fathy, 2023). This study highlights another dimension: how such experiences unfold at the level of the listener's individual consciousness and how the outcome may result in psychological calm or evolve into a spiritual experience. The essence of the experience of *inner peace* thus lies not in the disappearance of problems, but in a shift in how an individual perceives their internal state. Individuals may still be aware of academic pressures, personal problems, or fatigue, but these issues no longer dominate their

consciousness with the same intensity. The experience of tranquility emerges as a more stable, centered, and light inner state, allowing individuals to distance themselves from previous pressures.

For some participants, this change evolved into a spiritual experience through *dhikr*, *tafakkur*, remembrance of Allah or the Prophet, *tawakal*, and the search for meaning. For others, the experience remained primarily at the psychological level. Thus, the structure of the psychospiritual experience is not uniform. It is formed through the interplay of subjective conditions, musical engagement, attention, psychological transformation, and meaning-making. Overall, the research findings indicate that *sama'* in the experiences of students of Sufism and Psychotherapy should not be understood as an automatic effect of Sufi music on *inner peace*. It is more accurately understood as a lived experience shaped by subjective engagement with music, shifts in focus of attention, transformations in internal states, and the interpretation of these experiences. A spiritual experience is one possible outcome of this process, but it is not a universal consequence. From this perspective, *inner peace* emerges as a psychospiritual experience that is relational, contextual, and diverse in its manifestations.

4. The Reconstruction of Sama' as a Psychospiritual Experience

The findings of this study challenge the understanding of Sufi music as a direct stimulus for inner peace. The informants' experiences indicate that *inner peace* is shaped by the interplay among the listener's subjective state, engagement with the music, concentration, and the meaning attributed to the experience. Music is not

experienced as an external stimulus that operates automatically, but rather as an experience that gains meaning through the listener's engagement. These findings expand upon the work of Groarke & Hogan (2018), which demonstrated that listening to music serves various adaptive functions, including affective regulation, as well as their subsequent research on eudaimonic functions such as transcendence, *flow*, and *peak experiences* (Groarke & Hogan, 2020). In contrast, this study does not primarily measure the functions or effects of music but reconstructs how these changes are experienced within the listener's consciousness. Thus, the psychological significance of music depends on the relationship between music and the way listeners experience it.

The second finding relates to the conceptualization of *inner peace*. Informants did not describe inner peace as the absence of academic stress, personal problems, or emotional difficulties. Rather, the change was primarily evident in how these issues presented themselves in consciousness. Thoughts became more organized, the intensity of emotions decreased, attention became more focused, and stress no longer dominated the internal experience as it had before. This finding aligns with the phenomenological study by Qomariyyah & Saifuddin (2022), which shows that *inner peace* in the experience of *ṭarīqa* followers is related to problem management, emotional regulation, patience, faith, and *dhikr*. This study expands upon that understanding by situating the musical experience as the context in which inner peace emerges. Therefore, *inner peace* is more accurately understood not as a state devoid of problems, but rather as a shift in the way individuals experience and respond to internal stress.

The contrast between Informant 4 and Informant 6 further illustrates that spiritual experiences are not inherently determined by musical genre. Informant 4 listens to the *gambus shalawat* and primarily experiences relaxation and emotional regulation without any explicit spiritual expression. In contrast, Informant 6 derived tranquility, *tawakal*, and spiritual reflection from the pop song “Satu,” which is not conventionally categorized as Sufi music (Informant 4, personal communication, September 18, 2026; Informant 6, personal communication, September 18, 2026). These findings complicate the view that religious music automatically produces religious experiences. The literature on Rumi’s music indicates that music and poetry can serve as media for spiritual experience (Hanif & Fathy, 2023), while research on the *religious soundscape* suggests that sound and listening practices can shape affective-religious experiences (Dwi et al., 2024). This study adds that spiritual significance lies not only in the nature of the music but also in the listener’s subjective interpretation.

Attention emerges as a crucial element linking psychological transformation and the possibility of spiritual experience. Informants described how their attention—previously absorbed by problems, academic pressure, or emotional instability—shifted toward the sounds, lyrics, melodies, rhythms, or atmosphere of the music. This shift is then associated with the emergence of calmness, mental clarity, and, for some informants, spiritual reflection. These findings can be interpreted alongside Groarke & Hogan (2020), who identify *transcendence*, *flow*, and *peak experiences* as part of the eudaimonic functions of listening to music. However, this study offers a different perspective by highlighting the experiential processes that precede such interpretations. Attention is not merely a supporting

condition but serves as a space of immersion where psychological changes take place. In this context, attention can be understood as a bridge among the sensory, psychological, and spiritual dimensions—without assuming that every listening experience will become transcendent.

This dimension of attention also allows for a reconstruction of *sama'* that goes beyond its understanding as a ritual or doctrinal category. This study does not equate all music-listening activities with *sama'* in its classical sense. *Sama'* is used as an analytical entry point to understand how the act of attentive listening can become a transformational experience. This perspective aligns with studies on the *religious soundscape* in Javanese Sufi practices, which highlight the interconnection between sound, the affective body, sacred space, and the formation of religious sensibility (Dwi et al., 2024). It is also connected to studies of musical spirituality in the thought of Rumi, who positions music as a medium for articulating existential and spiritual experiences (Hanif & Fathy, 2023). This research shifts the focus from the symbolic status or ritual function of music toward the listener's consciousness. Thus, *sama'* can be productively understood as a listening experience that gains meaning through subjective engagement.

The research findings also show that psychological and spiritual experiences cannot be treated as identical dimensions. Some informants experienced relaxation, emotional stabilization, or mental clarity without articulating these as spiritual experiences. Other informants developed similar experiences into contemplation (*tafakkur*), remembrance of God (*dhikr*), trust in God (*tawakal*), remembrance of Allah or the Prophet, and a search for meaning. This variation is significant because it demonstrates that psychological calm does not always lead

to a spiritual experience. Groarke & Hogan (2018) showed that listening to music serves diverse adaptive functions, while their subsequent research positioned the experience of transcendence as merely one possible eudaimonic function (Groarke & Hogan, 2020). The findings of this study reveal a similar pattern in the context of Islamic psychospirituality. *Inner peace* may remain merely an experience of psychological regulation, whereas a spiritual experience emerges when that experience acquires a religious or existential interpretation.

Table 2. Relational Reconstruction of Sama’ as a Psychospiritual Experience

No.	Stage	Experiential Process	Key Findings
1.	Initial subjective conditions	Emotional and personal context	Emotional state, academic stress, and personal concerns.
2.	Engagement with music	Attentive listening and immersion	Engagement with lyrics, melody, rhythm, and musical atmosphere.
3.	Shift in attention	Redirection of attention	Attention shifts from internal concerns toward the musical experience.
4.	Psychological transformation	Emotional and cognitive changes	Calmness, emotional regulation, mental clarity, and reduced stress dominance.
5.	Meaning-making	Personal, existential, and religious interpretation	The experience is interpreted in relation to personal life, existential concerns, and religious beliefs.
6a.	Psychological experience	Inner Peace	Emotional stability, reduced stress dominance, and mental clarity, without necessarily involving spiritual interpretation.
6b.	Possible spiritual experience	Spiritual reflection and meaning	<i>Tafakkur</i> , <i>dhikr</i> , <i>tawakal</i> , religious reflection, and the search for meaning.

Source: Author’s synthesis of the phenomenological findings

Overall, the findings support a relational reconstruction of the psychospiritual experience, rather than a causal model that posits Sufi music as the direct cause of *inner peace*. A relatively consistent structure consists of initial subjective conditions, musical engagement, a shift in the focus of attention, psychological transformation, and meaning-making. Spiritual experience is a possible outcome of this process, not a guaranteed result. This perspective

expands phenomenological research on *inner peace* within the context of Sufi orders (Qomariyyah & Saifuddin, 2022), while deepening the study of religious sound and Sufi experiences (Dwi et al., 2024). The conceptual contribution of this study lies in understanding *inner peace* as a relational experience formed through the interaction between the individual, music, attention, and meaning. This formulation avoids two forms of reductionism simultaneously: psychological reductionism, which treats music merely as a means of emotional regulation, and spiritual essentialism, which assumes that Sufi music inherently produces transcendent experiences.

Thus, the primary contribution of this study is to offer a psychospiritual reconstruction of *sama'* grounded in listeners' lived experiences, rather than solely in musical genre categories or ritual functions. Music acquires psychological and spiritual significance when listeners actively engage through attention and immersion, subsequently situating that experience within their existential and religious contexts. This framework explains why music of similar forms can produce different experiences, as well as why non-Sufi music can acquire spiritual meaning. These findings expand the study of Rumi's music and the *religious soundscape* by focusing on the phenomenological processes experienced by listeners (Dwi et al., 2024; Hanif & Fathy, 2023). Thus, *inner peace* can be understood as a state of experience characterized by psychological stability, focused attention, and reduced dominance of internal stress. A spiritual dimension may emerge from this state, but it remains contingent upon the process of meaning-making.

D. CONCLUSION

This study shows that the experience of *inner peace* in *sama'* and while listening to Sufi music does not occur as an automatic response to the musical characteristics, but rather as an experiential process involving subjective states, musical engagement, concentration, and meaning-making. The primary transformation is marked by a shift from mental clutter, fatigue, confusion, or emotional instability to a more centered, light, calm, and orderly state. These findings expand the understanding of *sama'* from a listening practice primarily discussed within ritual and spiritual frameworks toward the listeners' lived experiences. *Inner peace* is therefore not understood as the absence of problems, but rather as a change in the way individuals experience and respond to internal pressures. The phenomenological perspective reveals that the meaning of an experience cannot be separated from the listener's engagement and awareness. These findings simultaneously reject reducing musical experience to mere emotional regulation or relaxation, as some experiences evolve toward reflection and spiritual orientation.

The main contribution of this study lies in the reconstruction of *sama'* as a relational psychospiritual experience that brings together the study of Sufism, the psychology of musical experience, and the psychology of spirituality. The research shows that attention functions as a space of experience that connects musical engagement with psychological transformation, while meaning-making opens the possibility of developing spiritual experiences. The variety of informants' experiences also confirms that spirituality is not deterministically tied to genre: inner peace can arise without spiritual articulation, while non-Sufi music can be interpreted spiritually. Thus, music is positioned as a

medium, not the sole cause of *inner peace*. Conceptually, this study offers a framework of experience that explains how inner peace is formed through the relationship between subjective conditions, music, attention, internal transformation, and meaning-making. This framework can serve as a foundation for further phenomenological research on music, spirituality, and psychological well-being. The model is not intended to represent a causal relationship, but rather the structure of experiential meaning as lived by the informants.

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