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Spiritual Leadership Model in Moral Development and Character of Students Through Islam Education Management at MI Al-Azhar Jember

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze the role of spiritual leadership in strengthening Islamic educational management at MI Swasta Al-Azhar Jember, particularly in integrating moral, spiritual, and organizational values that contribute to improving institutional performance, teacher motivation, and students' character development. The research employs a qualitative approach with a case study design to gain an in-depth understanding of the practice of spiritual leadership within the madrasah. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and document analysis involving the principal, teachers, and students, and were analyzed using thematic analysis. The findings indicate that the principal's spiritual leadership contributes to building an organizational culture grounded in Islamic values, enhancing teachers' commitment and motivation, and strengthening transparency and fairness in decision-making. In addition, the leader's moral exemplarity and the habituation of religious values support the holistic development of students' character. These findings highlight that spiritual leadership serves as an important approach in Islamic educational management oriented toward character development and a religious school culture

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Introduction

The moral crisis and degradation of students' character have become global issues that affect the sustainability of the education system in various parts of the world, including in the context of contemporary Muslim society (Yunus, 2025). The acceleration of technological development, modernization, and industrialization often emphasizes the cognitive and technical aspects of skills more than the formation of values, resulting in an ethical disorientation of educational practices (Pedro A.P. Babys, 2025). This condition places education not only as an arena for knowledge transfer, but also as a strategic space to build the moral and spiritual foundations of future generations (Satria Adindi, Zainal Arifin, 2024). Islamic educational institutions are faced with the dual demands of maintaining Islamic identity while responding to the challenge of globalization of values (Nadilla Aleyda Maqhfira Agustin, 2025). Therefore, spiritually oriented educational leadership is an urgent need to answer the problem of moral and character crises systemically (Rahmayanti et al., 2025).

A number of previous studies have shown that leadership has a central role in determining the direction of culture, values, and moral qualities of an educational institution (Hidayat, 2023). Research on education management confirms that leadership styles that emphasize only administrative efficiency tend to fail to form a sustainable ethical climate (Putu Ayu Novita, 2025). Ideal leadership is understood as a structural function and moral trust demands integrity and exemplary (Atanaya et al., 2025). Other studies also emphasize that value-based leadership can strengthen organizational cohesion and increase educator commitment (Arar, 2022).

Leadership based on moral and spiritual values is believed to be able to create a learning environment conducive to the formation of students' character (Karim et al., 2025). Educational leaders act as agents of transformation that not only direct the achievement of academic goals, but also instill moral values such as honesty, responsibility, discipline, and social concern in the school culture (Li et al., 2025). Other studies confirm that value-based leadership can strengthen organizational cohesion, increase educator commitment, and support the process of internalizing character values in daily educational practice (Mahmud & Ramli, 2025). Thus, moral and spiritual leadership not only contributes to the effectiveness of the management of educational institutions, but also becomes a key factor in the moral and character development of all school citizens.

Theoretical developments, concepts spiritual leadership Introduced in the study of modern leadership provides an important framework for understanding the relationship between spiritual values, motivation, and organizational performance (Fry & Kriger, 2009). This model emphasizes the dimensions of work meaning, life calling, and altruistic values as the foundation of leadership. A number of empirical studies show that spiritual leadership contributes positively to job satisfaction, loyalty, and organizational culture (Fahmy, 2025). This approach is seen as relevant because schools are value institutions that cannot be separated from the moral and spiritual dimensions (Walid, 2018). Therefore, spiritual leadership is one of the important paradigms in the realm of contemporary educational leadership discourse (Rafsanjani, 2017).

Research confirms that prophetic values derived from the example of the Prophet Muhammad PBUH become the normative basis for Islamic education leadership. Other studies show that the integration of spiritual values in Islamic school leadership is able to strengthen the religious culture and character of students (Mumtahanah, 2025). In

addition, Islamic leadership that emphasizes deliberation and justice has been proven to increase the participation and trust of school residents (Suhendi et al., 2025). This literature shows the great potential of spiritual leadership in supporting the goals of Islamic education holistically (Sabrifha, 2026).

A number of studies have also revealed that the implementation of spiritual leadership in Islamic educational institutions still faces various structural and cultural challenges. Some studies have found spiritual value often stops at the symbolic level and has not been internalized in everyday managerial practice (Ibrahim et al., 2025). This gap between normative concepts and empirical reality leads to weak consistency in student character development. In addition, the lack of an integrative conceptual model between spirituality and modern management has widened the gap between theories (Arjiman, 2025). Therefore, a more systematic study is needed to bridge the gap.

One of the interesting educational institutions to study is the Private MI Al-Azhar Jember. The selection of this madrasah is based on several academic considerations. First, this madrasah is known to have a strong orientation to strengthening Islamic values that are systematically integrated in learning activities and school culture. Second, compared to some other ibtidaiyah madrasahs, Private MI Al-Azhar Jember develops various structured religious habituation programs, such as routine religious activities, daily worship habits, and the cultivation of moral values through learning activities and extracurricular activities. This practice shows that there are institutional efforts to integrate academic education with the development of students' religious character in a more planned and sustainable manner. This is in line with the view that Islamic educational institutions have a strategic role in internalizing moral and spiritual values through school culture and value-based leadership practices. (Nurwahyuni & Triwiyanto, 2025).

Leadership at Al-Azhar Private MI Jember is a strategic factor in directing the vision of madrasah education towards the formation of religious and noble character of students. The head of the madrasah not only carries out administrative functions, but also acts as a moral role model and a driver of religious culture in the school environment. Various character development programs such as routine religious activities, worship habits, and strengthening moral values in the learning process are part of the education management strategy implemented. This practice shows the integration between leadership, organizational culture, and the educational process in an effort to build the character of students. This uniqueness makes Al-Azhar Jember Private MI relevant to be studied more deeply, especially in understanding how leadership based on spiritual values is implemented in education management at the madrasah ibtidaiyah level.

Nonetheless, the implementation of spiritual leadership in educational management practices does not always go without challenges. Educational institutions are often faced with limited resources, social dynamics of students, and increasingly complex demands of educational administration (Nasir et al., 2023). This condition requires leaders of educational institutions to be able to integrate spiritual values with managerial approaches so that the goal of character development can be achieved (Yahya & Martha, 2025). Therefore, the study of leadership practices at Al-Azhar Private MI Jember is important to provide an empirical picture of how spiritual values are implemented in education management and how these leadership strategies contribute to strengthening the morals and character of students.

Based on this background, this research focuses on the analysis of spiritual leadership in the moral and character development of students at Al-Azhar Private MI Jember through the practice of Islamic education management. This research aims to understand how spiritual values are internalized in school leadership, how managerial strategies are applied in building a religious culture, and how these practices contribute to the formation of students' character. With a case study approach, this research is expected to provide an empirical overview of the practice of spiritual leadership in Islamic educational institutions and make a conceptual contribution to the development of Islamic education management oriented towards character development and spirituality.

Methods

This research uses a qualitative approach with a design single case study (single case study) to gain an in-depth understanding of spiritual leadership practices in the moral and character development of students through the management of Islamic education at Private MI Al-Azhar Jember. The selection of a single case study design refers to the view Sharan B. Merriam dan Robert K. Yin, which emphasizes that case studies are used to intensively examine intensively, in-depth, and contextual a specific case unit. The case in this study is focused on one institution, namely Private MI Al-Azhar Jember, as a system unit that is thoroughly researched (Iswadi et al., 2023).

This design allows researchers to comprehensively understand the phenomenon of spiritual leadership in the real context of educational institutions, so that the relationship between spiritual values, managerial practices, and the formation of students' character can be analyzed contextually and holistically. The qualitative approach was chosen because it is relevant to explore the meaning, values, and subjective experiences of educational actors who are directly involved in the implementation of spiritual leadership. This is in line with the characteristics of qualitative research that emphasizes the exploration of meaning and a deep understanding of social phenomena (Nasarudin et al., 2024).

The research subjects were determined purposively by considering direct involvement in leadership practices and educational activities in madrasahs. The main informants include madrasah heads, teachers, and students, while supporting informants include education personnel and relevant institutional documents. The research procedure begins with determining the focus of the research, the preparation of research protocols, and the development of interview guidelines and observation instruments. Data collection was carried out through direct interaction with informants in Private MI Al-Azhar Jember, Accompanied by observations of the educational activities and religious culture of the madrasah as well as in-depth interviews to understand the spiritual leadership practices carried out (Moleong, 2018).

The research instruments include semi-structured interview guidelines, participatory observation sheets, and institutional documentation. Data collection techniques are carried out through in-depth interviews, participatory observations, and documentation studies that include the school's vision and mission, religious activity programs, and internal policies related to student character development.

Data analysis uses a thematic analysis approach that includes data condensation, coding, category grouping, and conceptual theme extraction simultaneously with the data collection process (Miles et al., 2014). The validity of the data is ensured through

triangulation of sources and methods and techniques member checking to ensure the conformity of interpretation with the informant's experience. With these procedures, the research is expected to produce credible and relevant findings for the development of spiritual leadership in Islamic education management (Creswell, 2016).

Result And Discussion

Results

This research departs from the question of how spiritual leadership practices contribute to strengthening Islamic education management in fostering the moral and character of students. This question becomes relevant in the context of contemporary education that faces the challenge of character degradation as well as the weakening of the value orientation in the educational process.

As a result of observations and interviews in the field, it was found that one of the models used to overcome the moral degradation and character of students is the model of exemplarity/*uswah hasanah* applied by school principals and teachers in daily life in the school environment. This example can be seen through discipline, honesty, responsibility, and consistency in carrying out religious activities and interacting politely with students. This practice shows that character formation is not only done through the delivery of material, but also through examples of real behavior from educators so that moral values are easier to understand, imitate, and internalize by students in the learning process (Pedro A.P. Babys, 2025).

Tabel 1. Activity Program

Yes	Programs	Form of Activity	Program Advantages	Program Weaknesses
1	Daily Worship Habits	Dhuha prayers in congregation, prayers before and after learning, and reading the Qur'an	Forming students' spiritual discipline and instilling religious values from an early age	Sometimes implementation is less consistent when the learning schedule is tight
2	Cult and Morning Advice	Delivery of moral messages and Islamic values by teachers or school principals before learning activities	Strengthening the internalization of moral values and becoming a means of spiritual motivation for students	If the delivery is monotonous, students' attention may be reduced
3	Program Tahfidz Al-Qur'an	Memorization and muroja'ah activities of the Qur'an on a scheduled basis	Increase students' closeness to the Qur'an and form the character of discipline and responsibility	Differences in students' abilities make memorization achievements uneven
4	Teacher Example	Teachers and leaders show religious, disciplined, and polite behavior in daily life	Become a real example for students so that moral values are easier to imitate	Relying on the individual consistency of teachers in maintaining exemplary

Therefore, this study places the practice of spiritual leadership in Al-Azhar Private MI Jember as an empirical context to understand how spiritual values are integrated in educational management and school culture.

Based on the results of research at Al-Azhar Private MI Jember, the main findings show that the spiritual leadership of madrasah heads has an important role in building an organizational culture based on religious values. The head of the madrasah not only carries out administrative functions, but also acts as a moral example who internalizes Islamic values in daily leadership practices. This can be seen from the efforts of madrasah leaders in instilling exemplary values, discipline of worship, and religious habits that are integrated in educational activities. This practice also encourages active participation of teachers and strengthens collective commitment in carrying out the vision of character-based education.

The results of the study show that the practice of spiritual leadership at Al-Azhar Private MI Jember is realized through several concrete programs that have an impact on the formation of moral and character of students. These programs include the habit of dhuha prayers and congregational prayers, Qur'an tadarus activities before learning, and the application of teacher exemplary programs in time discipline and communication ethics in the madrasah environment. In addition, the head of the madrasah actively monitors the implementation of the character development program through routine evaluation activities with teachers and periodic religious coaching. The implementation of the program not only strengthens religious culture in the school environment, but also has an impact on increasing student discipline, mutual respect between school residents, and the growth of worship habits as part of the daily character of students.

Table. 2 Findings

Topics	Key Concepts	Implications
Spiritual Leadership in the Perspective of Islamic Education at MIS Al-Azhar Jember	The integration of monotheism, noble morals, and transcendental vision as pillars of education management; The manifestation of prophetic leadership (deliberation, justice, maslahah) is also spirituality as a strategic compass.	Revitalizing the ethical function of educational institutions and a sturdy transformative tool against contemporary crises and forming a generation of faith and morals.
Spiritual Leadership Practices Affect Culture and Character at MIS Al-Azhar Jember	The internalization of ethical values and faith also creates a meaningful environment of transcendental meaning and shifts culture from individualistic to faith-based collaboration.	Increased teacher participation, staff loyalty, psychological well-being, and productivity; a transformative catalyst for a sustainable organizational culture.
Conceptual Implications of Spiritual Leadership on Strengthening Character Education at MIS Al-Azhar Jember	Build collective meaning and transcendental awareness to encourage intrinsic commitment and moral responsibility that integrate faith, vision, and altruistic love.	Improving organizational citizenship, transparency, and welfare are also strategic tools for the generation of character in the era of moral crisis as well as recommendations for training and evaluation based on Islamic values.

These findings show that spiritual leadership at Al-Azhar Private Schools Jember does not stop at the level of normative concepts, but is manifested in managerial practices and educational programs that visibly support the formation of students' morals and character. In addition to the motivational aspect, the research findings also show that spiritual values

influence the decision-making process in madrasah management. At Al-Azhar Private MI Jember, various education policies tend to be taken through a deliberation process involving teachers and related parties. This approach reflects a leadership practice emphasizing the principles of justice, togetherness, and moral responsibility.

If it is associated with the study of Islamic educational leadership, the findings at the Al-Azhar Private MI Jember show compatibility with the concept of spiritual leadership that places religious values as the foundation of organizational management. However, this research makes an empirical contribution by showing how these values are translated concretely in madrasah leadership practice. Spiritual leadership at Al-Azhar Private MI Jember is not only a normative concept, but also seen in real practice in the school environment. From the results of observations, activities such as daily worship habits and tahfidz Al-Qur'an programs are part of the school culture involving teachers and students, showing that the principal consistently emphasizes the values of example, sincerity, and responsibility to teachers, so that a joint commitment is formed in fostering the character of students.

Conceptually, the findings of this study show that spiritual leadership plays a role in building collective meaning and moral awareness in the madrasah environment. The integration of the values of faith, example, and moral responsibility creates an educational climate that encourages the intrinsic commitment of school residents to the goals of Islamic education. However, the effectiveness of spiritual leadership is also highly dependent on the consistency of the leader's behavior as well as the organization's cultural support to support the internalization of these values. Therefore, the practice of spiritual leadership at Al-Azhar Private MI Jember can be understood as a continuous process that requires a joint commitment from all school residents.

The implications of this study show that spiritual leadership has a strategic role in strengthening the management of character-based Islamic education. Private MI Al-Azhar Jember, leadership practices emphasizes religious values, example, and deliberation to be able to build a school culture to support the moral development of students. These findings make a practical contribution to the development of an Islamic educational leadership model integrating spiritual values with modern management practices. Thus, spiritual leadership has the potential to be an important approach in building an Islamic education ecosystem that has character, integrity, and is oriented towards the formation of a generation with noble character (Satria Adindi, Zainal Arifin, 2024).

Discussion

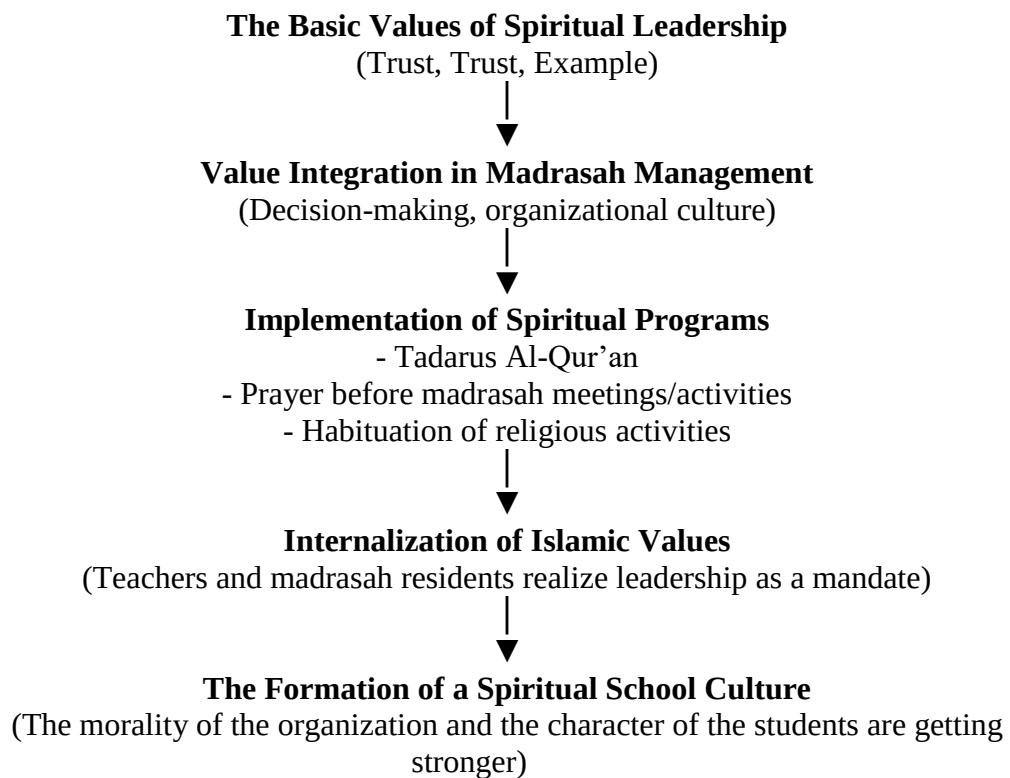
The Concept of Spiritual Leadership in the Perspective of Islamic Education

The concept of spiritual leadership in the perspective of Islamic education is a holistic foundation that integrates the principles of monotheism, noble morals, and transcendental orientation in the management of educational institutions. This is also seen in the field findings at the Al-Azhar Private MI Jember, where based on the results of observation activities such as daily worship habits and tahfidz programs are carried out consistently as part of the school culture. The results of the interviews show that the principal emphasizes the value of exemplary, sincerity, and responsibility in carrying out leadership duties. This practice shows that leadership is understood as a mandate that is carried out with moral and spiritual values, in line with the view of Usman et al. (2017), spiritual leadership is understood as an effort to contextualize Islamic values in the modern education management system, while Hassan and Noor (2022) emphasize that the ideal

leader is a figure who has qalbun salim or a clean heart so that he is able to radiate the values of faith and integrity in practice leadership of educational organizations.

From the perspective of Islamic education, spiritual leadership also has a prophetic foundation that emulates the leadership practices of the Prophet Muhammad SAW. Principles such as deliberation (shura), justice (adl), trust, and orientation to the benefit of the ummah (maslahah) are the basis for decision-making and management of educational institutions. This approach places spiritual values as an ethical compass in educational management so that it is able to balance the demands of modern organizational rationality with religious values. Several studies have emphasized that a spirituality-based leadership approach is one of the important strategies in responding to the challenges of moral degradation and value crises that occur in the contemporary world of education (Nikmah et al. 2024; Ruhullah & Ushama 2025).

In practice at Al-Azhar Private MI Jember, spiritual leadership is implemented through several forms of managerial activities and organizational culture that emphasizes the internalization of Islamic values.



The head of the madrasah seeks to integrate the value of monotheism in the decision-making process as well as in the daily activities of the organization. One form of implementation is to get used to religious activities such as tadarus Al-Qur'an and prayer before meetings or important madrasah activities. This practice is not only intended as a ceremonial activity, but as an effort to instill spiritual awareness that every education policy is part of the moral responsibility and mandate of leadership.

Based on the results of the interview with the head of the madrasah, it was explained that the integration of spiritual values in leadership is carried out by making Islamic values the

basis in the decision-making process and management of educational institutions. The head of the madrasah said that every policy taken seeks to consider the values of justice, welfare, and moral responsibility towards students and educators. This approach aims to ensure that the education management process is not only oriented to administrative achievements, but also to the formation of an organizational culture based on Islamic values.

Interview with the deputy head of the madrasah "in this madrasah we instill that the teacher's duty is not only to teach, but also to carry out the mandate of education. Therefore, we often hold religious formations, professional ethics strengthening, and spiritual activities so that teachers always remember that this work has moral and spiritual responsibilities."

From this interview, it shows that spiritual leadership is realized through various coaching programs for teachers, such as activities to strengthen religious values, fostering professional ethics, and developing awareness that the teaching profession is part of the educational mandate. These programs aim to increase the moral sensitivity and spiritual responsibility of educators in carrying out their duties.

In addition, senior teachers said that the leadership approach based on the values of monotheism influences the teacher's perspective in carrying out their professional duties. Teachers not only carry out administrative duties, but also view educational activities as part of devotion and moral responsibility. This shows that spiritual leadership not only functions as a normative concept, but is also able to form ethical awareness and a more meaningful work culture in the madrasah environment.

The findings show that spiritual leadership at Al-Azhar Private MI Jember is not only understood as a theoretical concept, but is implemented through managerial practices, organizational culture, and the fostering of religious values in school life. This implementation contributes to strengthening the integration between educational management, spiritual values, and the formation of students' character, so that educational institutions are able to carry out educational functions in a more holistic manner

The practice of spiritual leadership influences culture and character in Islamic educational institutions

The practice of spiritual leadership empirically influences the formation of organizational culture and character strengthening in Islamic educational institutions through the internalization of ethical values and faith creating a meaningful and goal-oriented work environment, as evidenced by the strong relationship between the spirituality of leaders and increased teacher participation and staff loyalty in the results of this study, which is consistent with Fry's theory in arjiman's work on spirituality leadership as a driver of organizational culture based on altruistic vision and values, and highlights the role of collective religious practices in strengthening social cohesion (Arjiman, 2025).

This theory complements the view (Atanaya et al., 2025) Regarding prophetic leadership that creates an educational climate based on obedience, service, and blessings, where practices such as weekly value reflection, congregational prayer habits, and hadith-based ethical discussions not only increase intrinsic motivation, but also shift culture from individualistic competition to faith-based collaboration, thereby reducing moral degradation due to the influence of globalization as analyzed by Sutrisno. This impact can be seen in the improvement of psychological well-being and productivity, where the

character of students shifts from passive memorization to active internalization of Islamic values.

A direct interview with teachers from the institutions studied confirmed: *"In the past, school culture was like a factory for the production of academic values; but since the head of the madrasah implemented morning joint prayer and weekly ethical discussions based on Fry's theory, I feel more motivated that my participation has increased, and the character of the students has changed drastically, they no longer just memorize the Qur'an, but apply it in daily interactions such as helping each other."* An interview with the Administrative Staff adds: *"This practice, according to Tobroni, makes our loyalty grow; We now see schools as families of faith, where conflicts are resolved by deliberation, not rigid hierarchies."* In addition, one of the students in the interview shared: *"My character changed because our leader exemplified patience like the Prophet; The school culture is now full of blessings, making us proud to be part of this madrasah."* These findings confirm that the practice of spiritual leadership serves as a transformative catalyst, complements the argument about emotional attachment, and paves the way for the sustainable development of organizational culture amid the dynamics of contemporary Islamic education.

Table 3. Spiritual Leadership Practice

Spiritual Leadership Practice	Form of Implementation in Madrasah	Impact on Organizational Culture	Impact on Students' Character
Prayer and spiritual reflection together	Morning prayer activities together, reciting the Qur'an before learning or meeting	Creating a religious work atmosphere, increasing spiritual awareness and togetherness among school residents	Cultivate religious attitudes, worship discipline, and spiritual awareness in daily life
Role model	The head of the madrasah shows patience, fairness, and responsibility in leading	Building an organizational culture based on exemplary and moral integrity	Students exemplify patience, honesty, and respect for others
Deliberation in decision-making	School meetings are conducted through discussions and deliberations involving teachers and staff	Increase the sense of belonging and trust between school residents	Instilling democratic values, responsibility, and mutual respect
Habituation of collective worship	Regular implementation of congregational prayers, religious studies, and reflection on Islamic values	Strengthening social cohesion and solidarity among school residents	Forming religious character and worship habits consistently
Discussion of Islamic ethics and values	Discussion of moral values based on the Qur'an and hadith in teacher and student development activities	Encourage a reflective and values-based organizational culture	Students are able to internalize moral values in daily behavior
Social activities based on Islamic values	Social service programs, alms, or social care activities based on ZIS	Strengthening a culture of care and cooperation in the school environment	Cultivate empathy, social care, and responsibility to others

Conceptual Implications of Spiritual Leadership on Strengthening Character Education

The conceptual implications of spiritual leadership on strengthening character education are multidimensional, lie in its ability to build collective meaning and transcendental awareness to encourage intrinsic commitment and moral responsibility among educators and learners, as explained through the integration of the values of faith, vision, and altruistic love in the modern Islamic leadership model enriching the framework of Febrianto (2020) about the incorporation of spiritual leadership with the principles of contemporary managerial, which emphasizes the role of spirituality in shaping a faith-based work ethic. This theory is in line with Mariah positioning spiritual leadership as a response to the secular paradigm, where the practical implications include increased organizational citizenship, transparency of decisions through deliberation, and psychological well-being as found in this study through higher work motivation and ethical sensitivity of monotheism-based leaders (Mariah, 2025).

This concept is not an instant solution, but rather a long-term process that requires consistency to overcome cultural resistance, as warned so that it has strategic potential as a policy basis for a holistic and benefit-oriented Islamic education ecosystem. These implications complement Ali's findings on pedagogical relations, by emphasizing the managerial dimension and simultaneous character. Evidence from the interview with Parent of Student C provides a direct perspective: *"My son used to be indifferent to religion and moral values, is now active in school social activities such as ZIS-based social service, inspired by compassionate and just leadership according to Egel & Fry's theory this is not a dry theory, but a real change that makes character education feel alive and relevant."* An interview with the Head of the Character F Program adds: *"We apply these conceptual implications through a spiritually integrated curriculum, where students learn moral responsibility via simulation of deliberation; As a result, the intrinsic commitment increased, in line with Febrianto."* Finally, Educator G shared: *"From Sani's perspective, spiritual leadership makes character education strong; Teachers like me are now more aware of the role of role models, producing students who are not only smart, but also noble."*

This implication, confirmed by Kamaruddin (2023), affirms spiritual leadership as a strategic tool to build a generation of character in an era of moral crisis, with recommendations for sustainable strengthening through training and evaluation based on Islamic values.

Conclusion

Based on the results of the discussion, it can be concluded that spiritual leadership in the perspective of Islamic education has a strategic role in integrating the values of monotheism, morals, and transcendental orientation in the management of educational institutions. The findings of the research at the Al-Azhar Private MI Jember show that spiritual leadership is not only understood as a normative concept, but is implemented through managerial practices, religious organizational culture, and the fostering of moral values in school life. This practice has been proven to influence the formation of a more collaborative organizational culture, increase teacher participation and commitment, and strengthen the formation of students' religious character. Conceptually, spiritual leadership also has important implications for strengthening character education, as it is able to build collective moral awareness, increase the ethical responsibility of school

citizens, and support the creation of a holistic Islamic education ecosystem oriented towards the formation of a generation of faith, integrity, and noble character.

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