



## The Strategic Management of Teachers' Spiritual Competence in Preventing Moral Degradation in Schools

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### ABSTRACT

#### Keywords:

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This study aims to determine the importance of teachers' spiritual competence in preventing moral degradation in students. This research used a qualitative method with a case study approach. The data collection techniques in this research were observation, interviews, and documentation. Research data analysis using the interactive model of Miles and Huberman, namely data collection, data reduction, data presentation and conclusion drawing. The results showed that spiritual competence is very important, especially in the context of education because it acts as the main foundation in shaping the character and personality of students who believe and fear God Almighty. Indicators of teacher spiritual competence are (1) Perseverance. Forms of patience and consistency in facing challenges when guiding students. (2) Honesty, an educator who must have a high attitude of honesty and can provide examples and apply honest behavior. (3) Gratitude, an educator must have high sincerity in carrying out his professional duties. (4) Fairness, an educator who is required to be fair to all students.

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## INTRODUCTION

In the era of globalization and rapid technological development, the younger generation is facing increasingly complex moral challenges. The integration of advanced digital technology into daily life has not only provided opportunities but also triggered the decline of moral values among students. The issue of moral degradation has become a central concern for educators, parents, and society at large because it threatens the foundation of social harmony and national identity. Evidence shows that the erosion of moral awareness has led to increased cases of disrespectful behavior, lack of empathy, and diminished responsibility in schools and communities (Depdiknas, 2003). These conditions indicate that education is no longer merely about transferring knowledge, but also about forming character and instilling spiritual values. The significance of

this research lies in its contribution to strengthening the role of teachers as moral and spiritual guides, ensuring that education fulfills its national mandate to produce individuals who are not only knowledgeable but also faithful, responsible, and morally upright citizens.

Despite the national education goals mandated in the Indonesian Law No. 20 of 2003 on the National Education System, moral degradation continues to emerge as a pressing issue in schools, particularly at the elementary level. Instead of reflecting values of respect, honesty, and discipline, many students demonstrate behaviors that deviate from expected moral standards. The general problem lies in the weakening of character education, which is often overshadowed by the pursuit of academic achievement. Teachers, who should act as role models and moral guides, are frequently limited by systemic challenges, such as rigid curricula, insufficient training, and the absence of spiritual competence as an officially recognized domain in teacher qualifications. This mismatch between the nation's educational objectives and the actual practices in schools creates a significant gap that hinders students from internalizing values of faith, piety, and moral responsibility (UU No. 20 Tahun 2003). Hence, a more comprehensive approach is needed to reinforce the spiritual dimension of teaching as a way to address the moral challenges faced by today's students.

Observations in various elementary schools show that students' moral degradation is becoming more evident in daily interactions. Behaviors such as disrespecting teachers, using inappropriate language, ignoring greetings, or showing indifference during lessons and reprimands reflect a worrying trend of declining moral discipline. These phenomena are not only limited to school environments but also extend to interactions within families and communities. Factors such as the influence of media, unsupervised internet access, and insufficient parental guidance have worsened the situation. In many cases, students who lack moral guidance from either parents or teachers are more vulnerable to negative behaviors. A preliminary study at SDN Medan Satria 1 demonstrated that some teachers had made notable efforts to integrate spiritual values into learning activities, such as religious programs and character education initiatives. These practices contributed to a more positive classroom atmosphere and healthier student interactions, suggesting that teachers' spiritual competence may play a decisive role in countering moral decline in the school context (Victorynie, 2018).

Several researchers have emphasized the importance of spiritual competence in education. Zohar (2002) argued that spiritual intelligence enables individuals to solve problems by understanding meaning and values, aligning actions with higher moral purposes. Similarly, Yuliyatun (2015) stressed that

spirituality facilitates self-control and directs individuals toward God-centered living, which is crucial for moral development. Previous studies on teacher competence in Indonesia, however, have mostly focused on the four official domains: pedagogical, professional, personality, and social competence (UU No. 14 Tahun 2005). While these domains are essential, they tend to overlook the spiritual dimension that underpins moral formation. The absence of spiritual competence in the legal framework of teacher qualifications creates a research gap, as it contradicts the primary educational goal of fostering faith and piety to God Almighty as stated in national regulations. This discrepancy highlights the urgent need to examine how teachers' spiritual competence can strengthen moral education and address the increasing challenges of student behavior in modern times.

Although some scholars have touched on spirituality in education, their studies often remain theoretical and lack concrete application in elementary school contexts. For instance, Victorynie (2018) underscored the role of spiritual competence as a foundation for character development but did not explain how it could be systematically managed or integrated into teaching practices. Similarly, other works focus on religious education as a subject rather than embedding spiritual values across all learning activities. This limited perspective narrows the scope of implementation and weakens the potential impact on students' daily behavior. Therefore, the novelty of this research lies in exploring not only the importance of spiritual competence but also its managerial aspect in creating a school ecosystem that fosters moral values. By positioning spiritual competence as a managerial strategy, this study aims to bridge the gap between theory and practice, offering practical solutions for schools to integrate spiritual development into their curriculum and culture effectively.

This study provides a new perspective by framing teachers' spiritual competence as part of educational management strategies for moral development. Unlike previous research that mostly emphasized spirituality as a personal attribute, this study highlights how spiritual competence can be managed, trained, and institutionalized within school systems. Such an approach is innovative because it goes beyond individual practices and seeks to create a sustainable model that involves collaboration among teachers, parents, and communities. Furthermore, the research focuses on elementary schools as the foundational stage of formal education, where moral habits and character are most effectively shaped. This is particularly relevant because elementary students are at a formative stage where they are highly receptive to values and role models. By positioning spiritual competence as both a pedagogical and managerial priority, the study seeks to establish a framework that not only addresses current moral degradation but also strengthens the nation's long-term

educational and moral resilience.

The central research problem addressed in this study is how teachers' spiritual competence can be effectively managed and implemented to prevent moral degradation among elementary students. While spiritual competence is not officially recognized in the four core competencies of teachers, this study argues that it is essential for fulfilling the broader objectives of national education. Teachers who embody spiritual values can serve as role models, guiding students to internalize respect, empathy, and discipline. However, without systematic management and institutional support, these efforts risk being inconsistent and unsustainable. The research therefore seeks to explore practical approaches for integrating spiritual competence into teaching, school culture, and teacher training programs. The problem is significant because it directly impacts the effectiveness of character education, which remains one of the most urgent educational priorities in Indonesia today.

This study argues that developing and managing teachers' spiritual competence is a strategic solution to counteract the moral degradation observed among elementary students. By providing structured training, embedding spiritual values in classroom practices, and fostering collaboration between schools, families, and communities, teachers can create a moral ecosystem that supports student character development. The contribution of this research lies in offering a model that integrates spiritual competence with managerial approaches, thereby addressing both the personal and systemic aspects of moral education. Unlike previous studies that treated spirituality as an abstract concept, this study emphasizes its practical application in daily school life. Ultimately, the findings are expected to inform policymakers, educators, and stakeholders about the urgency of including spiritual competence in teacher development frameworks, aligning education practices with national goals of producing citizens who are knowledgeable, faithful, morally upright, and socially responsible (Depdiknas, 2003; Victorynie, 2018).

## **METHOD**

This research was conducted at Medan Satria 1 Public Elementary School in Medan Satria District, Bekasi City. The research method used was qualitative. According to Creswell (2016), qualitative research aims to explore and understand the meaning of the experiences of individuals or groups related to social issues. This research used a case study approach that focuses on a specific problem. A case study is a research method that can be applied in various fields, where researchers conduct an in-depth analysis of a case, collect comprehensive data, and use various data collection procedures within a predetermined timeframe. The case analyzed can be an event, activity, process, or program

(Creswell, 2016). This approach relates to the subject's perspective on the events they encounter. This approach attempts to understand the various facts of a case, based on the research being conducted based on existing data related to the urgency of teacher spiritual competence in preventing moral degradation among students at Medan Satria 1 Elementary School. The informants in this research were classroom teachers at Medan Satria 1 Elementary School.

Data collection techniques used in this research included observation, interviews, and documentation. In the initial stage, the researcher conducted preliminary observations and a literature review, searching for various relevant articles. The research data was analyzed using the interactive model by Miles and Huberman: data collection, data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. In this research, the researcher conducted data collection by searching for, recording, and compiling data through interviews, observations, and documentation with teachers and students at the school being studied. Next, the researcher conducted data reduction to summarize and select all data regarding the importance of Teacher Spiritual Competence in Preventing Moral Degradation in Students at Medan Satria 1 Elementary School. The data was then categorized into specific themes according to the research problem formulation, such as "Teacher Spiritual Competence in Preventing Moral Degradation in Students at Medan Satria 1 Elementary School." Furthermore, the researcher presented the data in narrative or descriptive form in the data presentation, and data verification, namely drawing conclusions and verifying (Sugiyono, 2019).

This research used source and technique triangulation to validate the data. Source triangulation, which compares data from multiple sources to determine the validity of the data, was obtained from classroom teachers. Meanwhile, technique triangulation, which examines the validity of the data, was conducted through interviews, observation, and documentation to obtain valid data (Sugiyono, 2019).

## **FINDING AND DISCUSSION**

The phenomenon of moral degradation among students, including elementary school pupils, has become increasingly concerning. Behaviors such as disrespecting teachers, dishonesty, lack of discipline, and individualistic attitudes indicate the erosion of core character values. Teachers play a central role in shaping students' character and preventing moral decline. One key element of successful character formation is the spiritual competence of teachers. According to Danah Zohar (2002), spiritual competence involves heightened awareness of life's meaning and the ability to overcome issues of value and purpose. Within the context of teachers, there are three aspects and twelve indicators of spirituality that are highly relevant. Based on the findings of this study, teachers'

spiritual competence is essential in preventing students' moral degradation, with indicators such as perseverance, honesty, gratitude, and fairness emerging as particularly significant.

First, Perseverance. Perseverance reflects patience and consistency in guiding students through challenges. Teachers who possess perseverance continue seeking the best methods to nurture their students, even when faced with indiscipline or difficulties in internalizing moral values. A perseverant teacher demonstrates continuous enthusiasm in accompanying students personally, providing repetitive and consistent character guidance that ultimately fosters moral awareness and strengthens positive behavior. As expressed by one teacher: "We certainly need two types of motivation, namely internal and external motivation. Internal motivation comes from within ourselves, which is crucial when we feel down or lose spirit. At such times, we also need external motivation, such as support from our environment or colleagues. Both types of motivation are necessary to remain consistent in fulfilling our goals and responsibilities..." (W/GK6/1/18.06.2025).

Another teacher emphasized: "If our initial goal is merely to earn money, then we will not be able to stay consistent in our role as teachers. My purpose in becoming a teacher is because I want to educate children, not just to teach..." (W/GK3/1/18.06.2025).

These interviews highlight that perseverance is a crucial spiritual competence. It represents patience and consistency in fulfilling the teacher's role, especially when facing challenges in character building. Perseverance stems from internal motivation—such as the intrinsic drive to educate the nation—and external motivation, such as environmental encouragement.

Second, Honesty. Teachers serve as role models and even idols for their students throughout the learning process, making them key figures in fostering honesty. Teachers instill honesty not only through formal instruction but also by setting examples and building strong relationships with their students. As one teacher explained: "Honesty is very important because in religion, honesty is considered the closest door to heaven. Therefore, whatever we do must be based on honesty; being brave enough to be honest is noble." (W/GK6/7/18.06.2025). Another teacher added: "...honesty is the key to everything, and I always apply, teach, and set an example of being honest." (W/GK3/7/18.06.2025).

These testimonies reveal that honesty is seen as a fundamental value in students' character education. Teachers emphasize that honesty is not only a social necessity but also a deeply spiritual principle. The courage to act honestly is considered extraordinary, and honesty itself is viewed as the foundation for building integrity and a positive school environment. This aligns with previous studies that highlight the importance of teaching honesty as part of character

education in schools (Sujadi et al., 2017; Rahayu, 2021; Suhaili & Abdi, 2021).

Third, Gratitude. Gratitude is a spiritual attitude reflecting acceptance, sincerity, and thankfulness for everything given by God, whether in pleasant or challenging circumstances. For teachers, gratitude forms the foundation of professional responsibility. A grateful teacher carries out their duties with enthusiasm and sincerity, despite limitations such as inadequate facilities, administrative burdens, or diverse student backgrounds. Rather than complaining, they see challenges as opportunities for service and learning. One teacher reflected: "...I want to become a teacher because I want to educate children, not just to teach. Teaching only involves transferring knowledge, while educating encompasses character and moral development. I always remind myself that the rewards of educating will continue to flow in the future. Moreover, the meaningful memories created in children's minds during the learning process are invaluable..." (W/GK3/2/18.06.2025).

This statement indicates that the teacher's primary motivation is not merely to teach but to educate and form students' character. The teacher regards teaching as an act of devotion, with spiritual and eternal value. Previous studies also affirm that teachers who work sincerely and view their profession as a form of worship tend to perform better, contributing to a more positive learning environment (Gisya et al., 2020).

Fourth, Fairness. Fairness, for teachers, means the ability to treat all students proportionally according to their needs, potential, and circumstances, without favoritism or discrimination. Fairness in education does not imply giving the same treatment to every student but rather ensuring that each receives what they need in terms of attention, guidance, and learning opportunities. As one teacher stated: "Fair treatment may be relative. What I consider fair may not necessarily be perceived as fair by students because fairness is subjective. Essentially, fairness means placing things in their proper place according to their portion. Still, I strive hard to treat students fairly..." (W/GK3/15/18.06.2025).

Another teacher admitted: "As humans, there are naturally things we sometimes overlook. I myself have experienced this, for example, when student A did not receive enough attention while student B stood out more. Therefore, I try to find ways to ensure that my treatment of students is equitable and fair..." (W/GK6/15/18.06.2025).

These reflections highlight that fairness in practice is challenging due to human limitations, but teachers recognize its importance in building a just and supportive classroom environment. Previous studies similarly note that fairness involves avoiding greed and dishonesty while striving to allocate responsibilities and opportunities proportionally, exercising restraint, and acting responsibly (Pupuh Fathurrohman et al., 2017).

## CONCLUSION

Based on the research results, it can be concluded that the importance of spiritual competence of teachers in preventing moral degradation in students with several indicators in spiritual competence, namely (1) Diligent, perseverance is patience and consistency in carrying out duties as educators, to maintain consistency in carrying out duties as educators, namely through two types such as self-motivation and external motivation from friends and society and remembering that the goal of being an educator is not only to teach but to educate. (2) Honesty, teachers show that honesty is very important for everyone to have so that, as educators always teach how important it is to be an honest person and always apply and provide examples of honest behavior. And always provide motivation regarding the importance of honesty. (3) Grateful, an educator is sincere in carrying out the duties of an educator remembering that educating is a reward for him and creates memories and emotional relationships with students. (4) Fair, an educator is required to be fair to all students, where teachers try to be fair. However, fairness is subjective and is often perceived differently between teachers and students, teachers realize the importance of putting things in their proper place.

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