



## Ontological Balance in Educational Management and Its Impact on Educational Service Quality

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### ABSTRACT

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Ontological Balance,  
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This study aims to examine how educational managers' ontological balance influences the quality of educational services, with a specific focus on the integration of professional responsibilities and spiritual values in madrasah governance. A mixed-methods case study design was employed, combining quantitative surveys of managers, teachers, and students with in-depth interviews and document analysis. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, while qualitative data were processed through thematic analysis. The findings show that the level of ontological balance among educational managers is high, although variations appear across spiritual, value-oriented, and professional dimensions. Educational service quality is generally rated good, yet inconsistencies remain in implementation practices and feedback mechanisms. The analysis indicates a significant positive relationship between ontological balance and service quality, particularly in exemplary behavior, policy integrity, and communication practices. The study implies that strengthening managers' ontological balance through value-based leadership development, structured professional reflection, and continuous capacity-building can meaningfully enhance madrasah service quality.

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## INTRODUCTION

Islamic education plays a vital societal role beyond the transmission of religious knowledge; it forms individuals with faith, ethical integrity, and spiritual consciousness (Irawan, Nurulhaji, et al., 2025; Sapdi et al., 2025). As societies modernize, expectations toward educational institutions continue to expand, particularly regarding accountability, service quality, and leadership credibility (Aithal et al., 2023; Kayyali, 2024). The public increasingly demands educational institutions that not only excel administratively but also uphold

moral and spiritual ideals. This tension becomes evident when educational managers must navigate the growing pressure to meet bureaucratic standards, accreditation requirements, and technological changes while ensuring that the spiritual ethos shaping Islamic education remains intact (Irawan, Ansari, et al., 2025; Sapdi & Basori, 2025). Empirical observations show a recurring decline in value-based decision-making as administrative rationality becomes dominant in many institutions (Wobst et al., 2024). When efficiency, documentation, and compliance overshadow spiritual intent, the holistic mission of Islamic education becomes vulnerable. Therefore, understanding how administrators balance rational professionalism with spiritual identity is increasingly significant. This research is crucial because maintaining such balance directly affects institutional culture, stakeholder trust, and the overall quality of educational services provided to society.

The central problem facing many Islamic educational institutions today is the widening gap between spiritual ideals and managerial demands (Sodikin et al., 2024). As madrasahs strive to satisfy accreditation benchmarks, governance frameworks, and digital reporting systems, administrators often encounter dilemmas that force them to prioritize administrative functionality over value-oriented leadership. This situation produces a fragmented management orientation in which spiritual commitments become secondary to procedural compliance. Purwaningrum and Subhi (2023) note that rational-instrumental thinking increasingly overrides spiritual motivations in Islamic school administration, creating a tension that weakens moral accountability and institutional coherence. Consequently, managerial decisions tend to emphasize efficiency, documentation, and short-term targets at the expense of sincerity, integrity, and compassion—values traditionally embedded in Islamic educational practice. This misalignment not only disrupts organizational culture but also threatens service quality, as the absence of spiritual grounding can diminish empathy, ethical consistency, and pedagogical sincerity. Thus, the problem extends beyond administrative performance and touches upon the philosophical foundation of Islamic educational leadership. Addressing this imbalance has significant implications for institutional sustainability and the moral character of educational services.

In the field, these challenges are evident in various madrasahs, including MTs SA Miftahul Falah. Administrators are routinely expected to demonstrate technological competence, achieve accreditation scores, and fulfill bureaucratic reporting obligations while simultaneously embodying Islamic values such as sincerity (*ikhlaṣ*), trustworthiness (*amānah*), and exemplary conduct (*uswah*). This dual burden creates psychological and professional strain that complicates administrative consistency. Observations indicate that while many

administrators strive to uphold spiritual values, the intensifying demands of modernization often divert their attention toward procedural outcomes rather than ethical motivations. Instances of inconsistent implementation, weakened feedback systems, and fragmented communication are by-products of this imbalance. Furthermore, rapid digital transformation requires administrators to adopt new competencies, sometimes without adequate training or reflection on how such changes correspond to Islamic ethical principles. As a result, managerial decisions may reflect rational efficiency but lack spiritual depth, creating service gaps that impact teachers, students, and parents. This phenomenon reveals an urgent need to conceptualize and assess administrators' ontological balance, particularly how their spiritual self-awareness intersects with managerial rationality in shaping service quality.

Previous research has explored various dimensions of leadership in Islamic education, including value-based leadership, ethical frameworks, and administrative professionalism. Al-Faruqi (2020) highlights the dual nature of human responsibility as both servant of God and khalifah, suggesting that leadership requires an equilibrium between spiritual consciousness and social responsibility. Majid et al. (2025) expand this by proposing murāqabah-based ethics, emphasizing divine awareness as the foundation of integrity, accountability, and moral decision-making. Fauzi (2022) connects declining spiritual awareness to proceduralism, which leads to the erosion of intrinsic values in school governance. Nasution (2022) stresses that high-quality educational services must integrate professional, emotional, and spiritual dimensions. Although these studies offer substantial insights, most focus on conceptual frameworks or ethical leadership without examining how spiritual–professional balance affects measurable institutional outcomes. Few studies operationalize ontological balance as a construct that can be empirically linked to service quality. This indicates a gap in understanding how internal spiritual orientation directly influences external administrative performance within Islamic educational settings.

In addition, existing research has not sufficiently addressed how the interplay between existential values and managerial rationality shapes organizational dynamics in madrasahs undergoing modernization. Most prior studies examine leadership ethics, organizational culture, or administrative strategy in isolation rather than as interconnected dimensions of an administrator's inner ontology. The concept of ontological balance—defined as the harmonization of spiritual identity with rational managerial functions—has received minimal empirical treatment despite its theoretical significance. Majid et al. (2025) emphasize its relevance, yet their work remains largely conceptual and does not link ontological balance to measurable constructs such as service

quality, stakeholder satisfaction, or decision-making consistency. Furthermore, studies addressing service quality in Islamic schools frequently adopt general management models without contextualizing spiritual values as determinants. This absence of integrated empirical investigation leaves a critical gap: whether administrators' ontological balance concretely contributes to the quality of educational services. Addressing this gap is essential to advancing Islamic educational management beyond procedural compliance toward a holistic, values-informed paradigm.

The novelty of this research lies in its empirical integration of ontological balance with educational service quality within a madrasah context. Unlike previous works that treat spirituality and professionalism as separate domains, this study operationalizes ontological balance as a measurable construct combining spiritual orientation and managerial rationality. By investigating its direct association with service quality, the research advances a state-of-the-art framework that situates leadership effectiveness within an ontological foundation rather than merely technical competence. It contributes a new analytical lens to Islamic educational management by demonstrating how administrators' inner spiritual awareness shapes institutional outcomes such as communication quality, policy integrity, and stakeholder satisfaction. Moreover, by examining a real-world madrasah facing modernization pressures, the study provides contemporary insights relevant to institutions navigating similar challenges. This approach bridges theoretical concepts with empirical realities, offering a comprehensive model that aligns value-based leadership, spiritual consciousness, and administrative professionalism. Such integration has not been thoroughly explored in existing literature, marking this study as a significant and timely scholarly contribution.

Based on these gaps, the central research problem concerns whether and to what extent administrators' ontological balance influences the quality of educational services in a modernizing Islamic school context. The study argues that ontological balance—characterized by the administrator's capacity to reconcile spiritual awareness with rational managerial logic—serves as an essential foundation for effective governance and superior service delivery. If administrators maintain high ontological balance, they are more likely to make decisions that integrate ethical integrity, justice, and collective welfare with administrative efficiency. Conversely, diminished ontological awareness may result in proceduralism, weakened values, and inconsistent service quality. This research therefore posits a positive and significant correlation between ontological balance and quality of educational services. By testing this relationship through mixed methods, the study contributes both theoretical and practical insights: theoretically, it enriches Islamic educational leadership

models; practically, it offers policy recommendations for developing value-based leadership, reflective evaluation, and spiritually grounded professional development. Ultimately, the research seeks to demonstrate that effective Islamic educational management depends on the harmonious synthesis of spiritual consciousness and rational professionalism.

## **RESEARCH METHOD**

### **Research Design and Rationale**

This study employs a convergent mixed-methods design, integrating quantitative and qualitative approaches simultaneously to provide a comprehensive understanding of the influence of educational managers' ontological balance on service quality. The quantitative component tests hypotheses and measures the strength of relationships between variables, while the qualitative component explores the underlying meanings, values, and managerial practices that inform the numerical results (Sugiyono, 2021). The convergent design was chosen to allow the triangulation of data, ensuring that empirical findings are complemented by contextual and interpretive insights. By combining statistical evidence with thematic interpretations, the study captures both measurable outcomes and the philosophical dimensions of ontological balance in Islamic educational management.

### **Research Location and Rationale**

The research was conducted at MTs SA Miftahul Falah, a madrasah tsanawiyah embedded within a strong Islamic educational environment. This institution was deliberately selected due to its explicit focus on integrating spiritual values with professional management in its administrative system. The location provides a relevant context for examining how administrators reconcile ethical, spiritual, and rational considerations in daily managerial practices. Participants include the head of the madrasah, vice principals, teachers, and educational staff involved directly in management and service delivery, offering a holistic perspective on organizational behavior and leadership practices.

### **Data Collection Techniques**

**Data were collected using four complementary methods:**

**Questionnaires**, employing a Likert-scale to measure managers' ontological balance (12 items based on murāqabah ethics and value-based leadership) and educational service quality (12 items adapted from Nasution,

2022).

**In-depth interviews**, conducted with purposively selected key informants—including the head of the madrasah, senior teachers, and administrative staff—to explore managerial values and the meaning of ontological balance in practice.

**Participatory observations**, documenting managerial behaviors, decision-making processes, and organizational culture reflecting the integration of spiritual and rational dimensions.

**Documentation analysis**, reviewing institutional reports, organizational structures, and vision-mission statements to triangulate evidence and contextualize findings.

### **Data Analysis Techniques**

Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics, including mean scores, standard deviations, and Pearson correlation tests to determine the relationship between ontological balance and educational service quality at a 95% confidence level ( $p < 0.05$ ). Qualitative data were processed following Miles and Huberman's model (2021), involving data reduction, coding, theme identification, and interpretation to uncover the reflective and philosophical dimensions underlying managerial behavior. Triangulation of quantitative and qualitative results ensures a comprehensive understanding of how ontological balance contributes to service quality.

## **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

### **RESULT**

#### **Quantitative Findings**

The quantitative analysis demonstrates a strong positive relationship between managers' ontological balance and the quality of educational services at MTs SA Miftahul Falah. The average score for ontological balance is 4.19 (SD = 0.54), while service quality averages 4.07 (SD = 0.50) on a 1–5 Likert scale, both tending toward "agree." The Pearson correlation between the two composite variables is  $r = 0.765$ ,  $p = 0.001$ , indicating a statistically significant and robust association. Item-level analysis reveals that discipline and integrity (Item 20), along with student welfare and adherence to Islamic values (Items 22–23), scored the highest, reflecting strong internalization of spiritual–rational managerial principles. Conversely, responsiveness to community needs (Item 15) scored relatively lower (3.79), highlighting an area for operational improvement.

Reliability analysis confirms high internal consistency, with Cronbach's alpha values of  $\alpha = 0.948$  for ontological balance and  $\alpha = 0.914$  for service quality. Corrected item-total correlations further indicate that all items meaningfully contribute to their respective constructs, supporting the validity of the composite variables for correlation analysis (Fauzi, 2022; Majid et al., 2025).

### **Qualitative Findings: Ontological Balance**

Interviews reveal that managers operationalize ontological balance as the harmonization of spiritual, emotional, intellectual, and social dimensions in institutional management. The head of the madrasah emphasizes that balance entails maintaining sincerity (ikhlās), trustworthiness (amānah), patience (sabr), and reliance on God (tawakkal) while making professional decisions. Teachers describe daily practices such as reflection, prayer, and disciplined routines to cultivate calmness, objectivity, and ethical clarity, ensuring classroom management and parental communication are guided by both rational judgment and Islamic values. The vice principal further characterizes balance through wasatiyah (moderation), integrating worldly responsibilities and spiritual duties via habitual worship and ethical habituation. These practices illustrate that ontological balance is not merely cognitive or procedural, but a structured, reflective capacity enabling managers to act with ethical integrity in diverse institutional contexts (Al-Faruqi, 2020b; Rahman, 2023).

### **Mechanisms and Institutional Support**

Qualitative data indicate that ontological balance is institutionally reinforced through collective prayers, tahfidz programs, morning salat routines, and a culture of punctuality. Decision-making integrates spiritual reflection, musyawarah (consultative deliberation), and rational data evaluation, promoting fairness, proportionality, and stakeholder acceptance. Adab (ethical comportment) serves as a guiding principle, mitigating conflicts and enhancing collaborative problem-solving. Informants link these mechanisms directly to service quality, as they foster empathetic communication, consistent procedural reliability, and responsiveness to student and parent needs. However, gaps persist in infrastructure and reward-sanction governance, suggesting that organizational support is essential to sustain ontological practices and their positive influence on service delivery (Majid et al., 2025; Fauzi, 2022; Nasution, 2022).

### **Integrated Interpretation**

The convergence of quantitative and qualitative findings underscores that higher ontological balance among managers corresponds with superior educational service quality. Quantitative scores reflect stakeholder perceptions,

while qualitative insights explain the underlying mechanisms, such as ethical reflection, spiritual habituation, and consultative decision-making, that reinforce these outcomes. Strengths are observed in role-modelling, student welfare orientation, and adherence to Islamic values, whereas responsiveness to community needs requires further operational attention. This alignment confirms the theoretical expectation that ontological balance—as a synthesis of spiritual awareness and rational professionalism—directly enhances service reliability, empathy, and institutional credibility (Sugiyono, 2021; Fauzi, 2022).

### Practical Implications

The findings suggest several actionable recommendations:

- Sustain spiritual–rational practices through ongoing professional development, reflective exercises, and value-based leadership training.
- Enhance responsiveness mechanisms, ensuring timely and empathetic attention to community needs.
- Strengthen institutional infrastructure, such as prayer and tahfidz facilities, and develop transparent reward–sanction systems to reinforce accountability and ethical conduct.
- Promote emotional and ethical mentoring programs to ensure that personal ontological balance translates into consistent organizational practices.

These measures are expected to consolidate the positive impact of ontological balance on service quality, providing a model for Islamic educational management that integrates professional competence with spiritual consciousness (Al-Faruqi, 2020b; Majid et al., 2025; Nasution, 2022).

### DISCUSSION

The findings demonstrate a strong and positive relationship between managers' ontological balance and the quality of educational services at MTs SA Miftahul Falah. Quantitatively, the Pearson correlation of  $r = 0.77$  ( $p = 0.001$ ) indicates that higher ontological balance scores are associated with superior service quality. Descriptive results reveal that indicators such as integrity, role-modeling, and student welfare orientation consistently scored highest, while responsiveness to community needs remains an area for improvement. Qualitative insights clarify these patterns by illustrating how spiritual–rational integration is practiced in daily management. Managers maintain calmness, ethical deliberation, and reflective routines, embedding worship intentions into professional decisions. This combination of empirical data and thematic interpretation confirms that ontological balance is not merely a psychological state but a structured managerial capacity that shapes service delivery, ensuring

consistency, empathy, and ethical alignment in institutional practices.

The results indicate that ontological balance functions as both a moral and operational compass. Managers who harmonize spiritual awareness with rational professionalism demonstrate higher reliability, ethical consistency, and empathy in service delivery. This aligns with the theory of **murāqabah-based leadership** (Rahman, 2023) and the concept of **value-based leadership** (Majid et al., 2025), emphasizing that consciousness of Divine supervision and ethical accountability enhances decision-making and institutional integrity. Qualitative findings highlight that managers engage in reflective practices and consultative deliberation (*musyawarah*) to ensure fairness and collective benefit. Thus, the study provides empirical support for theoretical claims that leadership in Islamic education is most effective when spiritual values are systematically integrated into professional routines, demonstrating that rationality and spiritual consciousness mutually reinforce rather than conflict with one another.

Compared to prior research, this study extends the understanding of Islamic educational management by combining quantitative measurement with qualitative depth. Fauzi (2022) emphasized the importance of sincerity in shaping educational quality, whereas Siregar & Rahmawati (2024) highlighted the risks of administrative pressure on spiritual values. This research integrates these perspectives, showing that ontological balance both supports quality outcomes and mitigates operational risks. The mixed-methods approach allows for richer evidence, revealing how spiritual habituation, *adab*, and ethical reflection influence service practices, providing a **novel contribution** by mapping the mechanisms through which value-based leadership concretely affects educational service quality in a madrasah context.

Theoretically, this study underscores the role of ontological balance as a foundational paradigm for Islamic educational leadership, reflecting Al-Faruqi's (2020a) conceptualization of humans as 'abd and khalīfah. Practically, findings suggest that madrasah administrators can enhance service quality by institutionalizing reflective routines, spiritual leadership programs, and value-based mentoring. Investment in worship infrastructure and fair reward-punishment systems is also crucial. By embedding ontological awareness in managerial systems, institutions can achieve operational excellence while cultivating moral, ethical, and spiritual growth among staff and students. The study demonstrates that service quality in Islamic educational settings is inseparable from the spiritual-ethical competence of managers, suggesting a broader framework for evaluating institutional performance beyond purely procedural metrics.

The study's major strength lies in its **mixed-methods design**, which combines statistical rigor with in-depth qualitative insights, providing a comprehensive understanding of the phenomena. High reliability coefficients ( $\alpha$

= 0.948 for ontological balance;  $\alpha = 0.914$  for service quality) and complete-case analysis strengthen the validity of quantitative findings, while interviews illustrate mechanisms underlying those patterns. However, limitations include the small sample size ( $n = 14$ ), single-institution focus, and potential social desirability bias in self-reported data. While results are robust within the context studied, generalizability remains limited. Future research should consider multi-site studies and longitudinal designs to validate the sustainability of ontological practices and their long-term impact on educational service quality.

Future research could explore additional variables that influence service quality, such as emotional intelligence, organizational culture, or teacher professional development. Expanding the study to multiple madrasas or broader educational contexts would enhance external validity. Longitudinal studies could assess how ontological balance evolves under accreditation pressures or technological changes. Moreover, integrating perspectives from students and parents as additional respondents would provide a holistic assessment of perceived service quality. Overall, further investigation into the mechanisms linking spiritual–rational balance and managerial effectiveness can contribute to designing scalable models for Islamic educational leadership that sustain high-quality, value-driven services.

## CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that the integration of Deep Learning into an intelligent recommendation system for Islamic Religious Education (PAI) materials significantly enhances the personalization, adaptability, and contextual relevance of learning. Quantitative findings indicate that students' learning outcomes and engagement improve when the system aligns instructional materials with individual abilities, learning styles, and preferences. Qualitative insights further reveal that teachers perceive the system as a pedagogical and ethical facilitator, enabling them to guide students spiritually and morally while maintaining instructional efficiency. The research highlights that technology, when implemented thoughtfully, can reinforce tarbiyah Islamiyah principles such as amanah, itqan, and ihsan, promoting learner autonomy and value-based education.

From a scholarly perspective, this study contributes to the understanding of AI as a dual-purpose tool—supporting both cognitive learning and ethical development within Islamic education. Limitations include the study's confinement to a single madrasah, varying teacher digital literacy, and the lack of long-term assessment of students' moral and spiritual growth. Future research should expand to multiple institutions, extend longitudinal evaluation, and integrate learning analytics with indicators of spiritual, ethical, and academic development. Collaborative efforts between developers, educators, and Islamic education experts are recommended to ensure sustainable, ethical, and

humanistic AI applications in Islamic learning contexts.

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