



Optimizing Spiritual Leadership for the Development of Islamic Education in Madrasah

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ABSTRACT

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The purpose of this paper is to examine the optimization of spiritual leadership in the development of Islamic education in a madrasah. This study employs a qualitative case study approach. Data collection methods include participant observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation. The data analysis methods employed are data condensation, data presentation, and conclusion. The findings of this study indicate that: (1) The spiritual leadership of the principal has been implemented effectively, primarily through the application of the values of integrity (siddiq), trustworthiness (amanah), open human relations (fathanah), and innovative work (tabligh) in the school environment. The optimization of spiritual leadership in the development of Islamic education is reflected in the instillation of values that are not solely oriented towards worldly life, but also towards the afterlife. Thus, both the principal and teachers carry out their duties not only as administrative and instructional obligations, but as a form of devotion to Allah SWT.

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INTRODUCTION

In contemporary times, the rapid development of social dynamics has led to a paradigm shift in various aspects of human life, including leadership (Abbas et al., 2022; Voulvoulis et al., 2022; Adeoye et al., 2025). As a result, various leadership models have emerged in response to this shift. The development of leadership models can be categorized into three types: transactional, transformational, and spiritual leadership (Martinez, 2023; Vedula, 2024). In transactional leadership, a leader can be effective when a mutually agreed-upon transactional relationship exists between superiors and subordinates (Hutama et al., 2024; Wuryaningrat et al., 2024). During the era of transformational leadership, leadership is recognized as a crucial instrument for achieving effective social change. In the era of spiritual leadership, the focus shifts toward instilling divine values within individuals in the organization as a means to achieve more optimal transformation.

On the one hand, the spiritual leadership model is often perceived as focusing primarily on the practical implementation of spiritual values, such as prayer, fasting, pilgrimage, and almsgiving, for each individual. As a result, spiritual leadership is considered less relevant as a leadership paradigm for today's heterogeneous Indonesian society. Nevertheless, Islamic values remain essential as foundational components in shaping an Indonesian leadership paradigm that aspires toward an Islamic way of life. Therefore, a transformational leadership model that is developed and examined through the integration of transformational leadership theories and Islamic values presents a viable solution for constructing an appropriate leadership paradigm in the Indonesian context (Bashori et al., 2022; Rahman, 2025)

Leadership is the art and skill of utilizing authority to influence others in carrying out specific activities directed toward predetermined goals. To lead means to act upon intentions for a particular purpose, but through the efforts of others. Those who are led are individuals who are instructed, influenced, and governed by rules and regulations, whether formal or informal (Permanasari, Soebiantoro, and Haryanti 2023). Spiritual leadership has two primary sources: normative and historical. The normative source outlines leadership concepts derived from the Qur'an and the Sunnah. In contrast, the historical source refers to the exemplary character and actions of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). With his remarkable integrity and his reputation as al-Amin, the trustworthy Prophet Muhammad successfully embodied and developed the most ideal and effective form of leadership in the history of human civilization.

Spiritual leadership within Islamic educational institutions refers to a form of leadership that transforms worldly dimensions into spiritual (divine) orientations while taking into account the collective well-being. In Islam, the characteristics of a leader are ideally modeled after the qualities of the Prophet, who is regarded as *uswatun hasanah* (a noble example). This means that the daily conduct of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), particularly in how he led his community, serves as an ideal role model for spiritual leadership, including within the context of educational institutions.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research employs a field research methodology. Field research is conducted to investigate the settings in which the events under study occur, allowing the researcher to obtain direct and up-to-date information on the relevant issues. It also serves as a means of cross-checking existing sources and data (Fitri & Haryanti, 2020). In terms of the nature of the data, this study falls under the category of qualitative research, which aims to understand phenomena experienced by research subjects, such as behaviors, perceptions, motivations, and actions, in a holistic manner. This is achieved through descriptive analysis in the form of words and language, within a specific natural context, and by utilizing various naturalistic methods (Moleong, 2013)

A case study also seeks to describe a particular setting, object, or event in a detailed and in-depth manner (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). This view is supported by Yin (2002), who stated that a case study is a research strategy chosen to answer “how” and “why” questions, particularly when the focus is on examining contemporary phenomena within real-life contexts. In this study, a case study approach is employed to investigate the optimization of spiritual leadership in the development of Islamic education at MAN 1 Bojonegoro, East Java, Indonesia. The case study method was chosen to gather accurate and comprehensive data on this issue. This case study is based on the research location, which possesses specific characteristics relevant to the optimization of spiritual leadership in the development of Islamic education at MAN 1 Bojonegoro. Through this case study design, it is expected that rich information and data will be gathered from various experiences related to the research focus. From this setting, key insights can be drawn regarding the optimization of spiritual leadership in advancing Islamic education at MAN 1 Bojonegoro, East Java, Indonesia.

The data collection procedures used in this study include the following: Participant Observation: In this method, the researcher conducted systematic observation and recording of phenomena occurring at MAN 1 Bojonegoro, East Java. The observation technique employed in this study is participant observation, which aims to observe events as they naturally occur in the field. In this approach, the researcher directly engages or interacts with the activities carried out by the subjects while systematically collecting the necessary data. In-depth Interviews: The interview method in this research served as a guide for data collection. The researcher employed in-depth interviews to explore comprehensive information regarding the optimization of spiritual leadership in the development of Islamic education at MAN 1 Bojonegoro, East Java, Indonesia. Documentation: Documentation includes various forms of records such as photographs, institutional documents, interview transcripts, and documents related to the history and development of the madrasah. All of these materials were collected for analysis to ensure the completeness of the research data. In this context, the researcher also captured photographs relevant to the research topic.

Data analysis is the process of systematically searching for and organizing data obtained from interviews, field notes, and other materials, so that the findings can be easily communicated to others (Haryanti, 2019) Data analysis is the process of systematically searching for and organizing interview transcripts, field notes, and other materials collected by the researcher. This process involves examining the data, arranging it, breaking it down into manageable units, synthesizing it, identifying patterns, discovering what is meaningful, and

systematically reporting the findings. Since this study employs a case study design, the data analysis is conducted in three stages: (1) data condensation, (2) data display, and (3) verification and conclusion drawing. (Miles, Huberman, and Saldana 2014).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The Spiritual Leader in the Development of Islamic Education

Leadership is the English equivalent of the Indonesian term *kepemimpinan*, derived from the word leader, which means a person who leads, a head, or a chief (Astuti and Saril 2020). To broaden the understanding of leadership, scholars have offered various definitions. One such definition describes leadership as the art or ability to coordinate and mobilize an individual or group toward the achievement of desired goals (Supartiningsih et al., 2024). Leadership is also defined as an activity aimed at influencing people so that they are willing to be directed toward achieving the institution's objectives (Karsono et al., 2022; Syahlarriyadi, 2023).

. It is the effort made by an individual using all their capacities to influence, motivate, guide, and mobilize those they lead so that they work with enthusiasm and trust toward the goals of the organization (Randy et al., 2019). The term *spiritual* is derived from *spirit*, which carries meanings such as enthusiasm, life, influence, and eagerness. *Spirit* is often interpreted as the soul or essence, and figuratively, it refers to the drive or attitude underlying human actions. It is also frequently understood as an entity, being, or form of energy that is real, though invisible to the ordinary eye and lacking a physical body like that of a human yet it exists and lives. Spiritual refers to everything beyond the physical body, including human thoughts, feelings, and character.

Based on the research findings, it was revealed that the role of spiritual leadership demonstrated by the school principal contributes significantly to improving teacher performance at MAN 1 Bojonegoro. Historically in Islam, this model of spiritual leadership can be traced to the leadership style of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), who exemplified the most ideal and successful leadership through his key qualities: *siddiq* (integrity), *amanah* (trust), *tabligh* (openness and effective human relations), and *fathanah* (wisdom and strategic thinking). In other words, spiritual leadership is a form of leadership guided by the heart and rooted in religious ethics, capable of shaping character, fostering integrity, and providing moral exemplarity.

Based on the researcher's findings at MAN 1 Bojonegoro, the role of the principal's spiritual leadership particularly in terms of integrity (*siddiq*) is evident in the effective management of all incoming funds, which are handled transparently. Tasks are distributed professionally, sanctions are imposed on those who violate school regulations in alignment with the school's vision and mission, and responsibilities are assigned according to each individual's expertise. These efforts aim to ensure that all school operations run smoothly and

yield optimal results. Honesty leads individuals to attain high status and honor, both in the sight of Allah and among fellow human beings. Honesty carries dimensions that enlighten, dignify, comfort, and bring a sense of sweetness. Truthfulness is synonymous with righteousness and is one of the well-known attributes of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). Based on observations and interviews, it can be concluded that the spiritual leadership indicator of integrity (*siddiq*) has been effectively implemented at MAN 1 Bojonegoro.

Based on the researcher's findings at MAN 1 Bojonegoro, the role of the principal's spiritual leadership particularly in terms of trust (*amanah*) is reflected in the professional and responsible execution of duties in accordance with established roles and functions. The principal demonstrates commitment to the outcomes of agreed-upon meetings and maintains a democratic and cooperative attitude, which fosters openness among teachers in addressing the challenges they face. This approach aims to ensure that problems are resolved effectively and collaboratively. Based on observations and interviews, it can be concluded that the spiritual leadership indicator of trust (*amanah*) has been well implemented at MAN 1 Bojonegoro.

Based on the researcher's findings at MAN 1 Bojonegoro, the role of the principal's spiritual leadership particularly in terms of openly human relation (*fathanah*) is demonstrated through the principal's innovation in educational development and initiative in driving reform. This allows for varied and dynamic instructional delivery in the classroom. The principal also fosters harmonious relationships to create a positive and conducive working atmosphere and provides support to teachers in resolving problems that arise within the school environment. Establishing strong relationships with all members of the school community facilitates effective communication, which in turn contributes to positive outcomes.

Based on the researcher's findings at MAN 1 Bojonegoro, the role of the principal's spiritual leadership particularly in terms of working smart (*tabligh*) is evident in the principal's consistent initiative in advancing the quality of teaching and learning within the school. The principal adopts a democratic attitude toward constructive ideas from various stakeholders, is responsive to emerging issues, and actively organizes programs aimed at developing the competencies of all teachers through extracurricular activities tailored to their respective areas of expertise. The enhancement of teacher competencies has a significant impact on the school's overall progress, as teachers serve as the frontline agents in the educational process. The concept of *tabligh* refers to conveying messages with honesty and a deep sense of responsibility principles that the principal embodies in leading the institution.

Spiritual leadership does not imply an irrational or entirely supra-rational form of leadership. Rather, the term refers to a leadership style that primarily relies on spiritual intelligence rooted in the soul, spirit, or conscience in the exercise of leadership activities. Spiritual intelligence is understood as inspired

thinking, characterized by a high level of mental clarity often associated with what are perceived as supernatural traits: intuition, a strong moral compass, inner authority or spiritual power, the ability to discern right from wrong, and wisdom.

Spiritual intelligence is grounded in spiritual awareness the realization that life is not merely a physical or material existence that ends with death (Millah and Far'ia 2020). Rather, it is based on the belief that human life does not cease with the end of worldly existence, as there is a continuation of life after death in which individuals are held accountable for their actions in this world. This awareness motivates individuals to strive for excellence while they are still given the opportunity to do so. Drawing from the sources mentioned above, it can be concluded that spiritual leadership is the ability to influence others in the pursuit of specific goals through actions grounded in the principles and values exemplified by the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him).

Spiritual leadership refers to a leader who is capable of integrating spiritual values into daily leadership practices. The primary goal of spiritual leadership is to cultivate values, attitudes, and behaviors necessary to intrinsically motivate both oneself and others in order to achieve a sense of spiritual well-being. This form of leadership aims to create a shared vision and value alignment at the individual, team, and organizational levels, ultimately contributing to growth not only in terms of psychological well-being but also in enhancing organizational commitment (Syarifudin and Yudhyarta 2019).

The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) serves as an exemplary figure and the ideal model of a leader. His words, actions, and approvals are considered authoritative sources and serve as essential guidelines for Muslims in conducting their daily lives. Allah (SWT) has presented a clear depiction of the Prophet Muhammad's character as a role model in Surah Al-Ahzab (33:21).

لَقَدْ كَانَ لَكُمْ فِي رَسُولِ اللَّهِ أُسْوَةٌ حَسَنَةٌ لِّمَن كَانَ يَرْجُو اللَّهَ وَالْيَوْمَ الْآخِرَ وَذَكَرَ اللَّهَ كَثِيرًا

The meaning is: *Indeed, in the Messenger of Allah you have an excellent example for anyone whose hope is in Allah and the Last Day and who remembers Allah often.*

This verse teaches us that within the person of the Prophet lies a noble example and model to be emulated by all believers in living their lives. His daily conduct serves as a source of inspiration for anyone in carrying out their life's activities, including in the context of leadership.

Islamic leadership is characterized by several essential attributes. Loyalty is central, as both the leader and those being led must ultimately dedicate themselves to the service of Allah (SWT). A leader's purpose should extend beyond the interests of the group, aligning with the broader objectives of Islam. Upholding Shari'a and Islamic Ethics is also crucial; a leader must remain unwavering in their commitment to Islamic laws and moral principles, ensuring that their actions are always in accordance with Shari'a. Trustworthiness is another vital characteristic; a leader must accept authority with a deep sense of

responsibility, consistently exhibiting integrity and care for those they lead. Humility is also a key trait, as a leader must recognize that only Allah (SWT) is the Almighty, fostering an attitude of humility in leadership. Lastly, discipline, consistency, and accountability are fundamental aspects of Islamic leadership. A professional leader remains steadfast in fulfilling promises and commitments, always mindful that Allah (SWT) is aware of all actions, including those that are hidden from others (M, 2020).

Implementation of the Optimization of Spiritual Leadership in the Development of Islamic Education

A leader in an Islamic educational institution such as a madrasah principal must consistently provide motivation to teachers in order to enhance their performance and personal capacity. In motivating the teachers, it is essential for the principal to instill spiritual values, including framing all campus activities as forms of worship to Allah. This includes the belief that every good deed will ultimately benefit the doer, that goodness brings happiness, and that Allah will reward acts of kindness with manifold returns (Syarifudin and Yudhyarta 2019).

One way the madrasah principal motivates teachers is by consistently encouraging those who have not yet obtained a master's degree to complete their postgraduate studies. Another form of spiritual leadership implemented in the madrasah is evident in its strong adherence to the principle of justice, as exemplified by the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). The practice of justice within the institution is reflected in the objective system of rewards and punishments, applied without discrimination. In practice, the principal grants recognition to high-performing teachers as a sign of appreciation for their dedication and loyalty to the madrasah (Millah and Far'ia 2020). This form of reward includes instilling the understanding that every good deed will always be rewarded by Allah. In addition, the principal provides material rewards that have been prepared in advance. These rewards are given to teachers who actively participate in activities that contribute to the progress of the madrasah. Furthermore, the principal also expresses appreciation by publicly acknowledging teachers who have completed their studies, for example through congratulatory banners or billboards displayed within the school environment.

In addition to providing rewards, the principal also implements a system of punishment. Thus far, punishments have taken the form of warnings directed at teachers who neglect their responsibilities or are frequently unavailable to their students. The practice of upholding justice applies not only to the teaching staff but also to students who violate school regulations. One example of justice and discipline enforcement for students is the requirement to arrive by 07.00 AM, with a tolerance of up to 15 minutes; even a delay of less than one minute beyond that results in the student being denied entry to class. This regulation is not limited to students alone it is equally observed by the principal during instructional hours.

In practice, to cultivate discipline within the madrasah, the principal consistently sets an example by arriving earlier than other teachers. This is done as a form of exemplary leadership, demonstrating the principal's role as a leader within the institution. The principal serves as a role model for the teachers, emphasizing that exemplary conduct must begin with the leader. In other words, it would be unjust to demand disciplined behavior from students if it is not first demonstrated by the teachers and the principal themselves.

In addition, from the perspective of the decision-making process, the principal upholds and implements deliberation based on consensus (*musyawarah mufakat*). This form of deliberation involves all relevant stakeholders within the madrasah in making major decisions and policies, or engages specific departments such as facilities, infrastructure, or administration when addressing particular policy matters.

In spiritual leadership, the primary source of inspiration is the leadership exemplified by the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). He possessed four key attributes: *sidiq* (truthfulness), *amanah* (trustworthiness), *tabligh* (the ability to convey messages), and *fathanah* (wisdom or intelligence). These qualities serve as core values, guiding principles, models of exemplary conduct, and references for department heads in carrying out their responsibilities and fulfilling their duties. The practice of emulating the Prophet's attributes is reflected in various aspects of leadership. For example, the attribute of *sidiq* (truthfulness) is demonstrated by the department head's commitment to honest and transparent communication with faculty members and other stakeholders, particularly in matters such as the disclosure of the madrasah's budget usage. The attribute of *amanah* (trustworthiness) is exemplified by the department head's earnest efforts to safeguard the trust placed in them for advancing the institution, dedicating full effort to optimizing the development of the madrasah. The attribute of *tabligh* (the ability to convey) is embodied through transparency and openness in financial and other policy decisions. Meanwhile, the attribute of *fathanah* (wisdom) is reflected in the continual pursuit of innovation and progress, as well as in the strategic mobilization of individual and group intelligence and potential to ensure the madrasah evolves dynamically toward improvement.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings and discussions, it can be concluded that the spiritual leadership of the madrasah principal has been effectively implemented. This leadership is demonstrated through the embodiment of key values such as integrity (*siddiq*), trust (*amanah*), open human relations (*fathanah*), and smart working (*tabligh*), which have been integrated into the school culture. These values contribute not only to the development of students' academic capabilities but also to their moral and spiritual growth, ensuring a balanced approach to education that reflects both worldly and afterlife concerns.

Furthermore, the optimization of spiritual leadership in the development of Islamic education goes beyond mere administrative and instructional duties. It is seen as a form of devotion to Allah SWT, driven by the internalization of values that emphasize both spiritual and ethical development. The principal and teachers model their leadership on the qualities of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), including effective communication, motivation, fairness, trustworthiness, and discipline. This approach fosters a positive educational environment where both staff and students are guided by principles that nurture not only intellectual achievements but also spiritual well-being.

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