FOSTERING CHARACTER AND A CONDUCIVE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT THROUGH SPIRITUAL LEADERSHIP

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ABSTRACT
This study aims to analyze the implementation and managerial implications of spiritual leadership by the principal of Al-Falah Abu Lam U Private Junior high School, Aceh Besar. This school is under the auspices of the Al-Falah Islamic Boarding School. The study used a qualitative case study approach with data collection techniques through observation, interviews, and documentation. The study results showed that (1) the spiritual leadership of the principal at Al-Falah Abu Lam U Private Junior high School significantly influences student character formation, enhance learning motivation and creating a conducive school environment. By implementing spiritual leadership, schools can produce intellectually intelligent students with high moral integrity. (2) Supporting and inhibiting factors at Al-Falah Private Junior high School are material and non-material. The inhibiting factors are limited facilities, lack of funding, or rules that the authorities still need to approve. 3) This study is limited by its primary focus on a theoretical approach in examining the implementation of spiritual leadership at Al-Falah Abu Lam U Private Junior high School, Aceh Besar. Hence, this study suggests conducting further in-depth case studies and research on spiritual leadership in diverse educational contexts including public and international schools.

Kata Kunci: *Spiritual Leadership, School Principal, Islamic Boarding School*

ABSTRAK
Penelitian ini bertujuan menganalisis implementasi dan implikasi manajerial kepemimpinan spiritual oleh kepala sekolah di SMP Swasta Al-Falah Abu Lam U, Aceh Besar, sebuah institusi pendidikan di bawah naungan Pondok Pesantren Al-Falah. Menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan metode studi kasus, data

dikumpulkan melalui observasi, wawancara, dan dokumentasi. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa kepemimpinan spiritual kepala sekolah berperan signifikan dalam membentuk karakter siswa, meningkatkan motivasi belajar, dan menciptakan lingkungan sekolah yang kondusif. Implementasi kepemimpinan spiritual memungkinkan sekolah menghasilkan lulusan yang tidak hanya cerdas secara intelektual, tetapi juga memiliki integritas moral tinggi. Faktor-faktor yang memengaruhi implementasi kepemimpinan spiritual di SMP Swasta Al-Falah meliputi aspek material dan non-material. Keterbatasan fasilitas, kekurangan dana, serta regulasi yang belum disetujui pihak berwenang menjadi faktor penghambat. Penelitian ini terbatas pada pendekatan teoretis dalam mengkaji implementasi kepemimpinan spiritual pada konteks tunggal. Oleh karena itu, disarankan untuk melakukan studi kasus lanjutan yang lebih mendalam serta penelitian tentang kepemimpinan spiritual dalam beragam konteks pendidikan, termasuk sekolah umum dan internasional.

Key Words: *Kepemimpinan Spiritual, Kepala Sekolah, Pondok Pesantren*

INTRODUCTION

Islamic education in Indonesia is cornerstone of national development. It plays a pivotal role in shaping the character, morality and intellectual prowess of the younger generation, standing as a testament to the nation's rich religious heritage. The widespread establishment of Islamic educational institutions, ranging from traditional *pesantren* to modern Islamic schools, reflects a profound public enthusiasm and collective aspiration for education that integrates spiritual values with academic excellence. This quantitative expansion of these Islamic schools is frequently not commensurate with a consistent enhancement in the quality of education and the professionalism of their management. This discrepancy creates a gap between the high expectations placed upon these educational bodies and the actual educational reality they offer (E.S Sari & Dozan, 2021; Suwardi & Samino, 2014).

Addressing this challenge necessitates a paradigm shift in leadership, requiring educational leaders to transcend mere administrative duties and instead act as transformative agents who can inspire, motivate and strategically mobilize all components of the school towards continuous quality improvement and sustainable development. School principals who are successful in their roles can act as organizers, value guardians, faithful helpers, intermediaries, humanists, catalysts, rationalists, and politicians. By carrying out this role, the principal not only manages the school administratively but also becomes a role model in fostering positive values and culture (Wahjono, 2011).

Within the intricate landscape of Islamic education, the concept of effective leadership extends far beyond conventional managerial frameworks. Contemporary pedagogical approaches and organizational theories underscore that the genuine transformation of Islamic educational institutions into centers of excellence requires more than just the adoption of modernization theories or empowerment initiatives. It demands an unwavering commitment, diligent hard work, and profound dedication from every stakeholder within the educational ecosystem (Mayudana & Sukendra, 2020)

In the Islamic concept of *jihad* can be reinterpreted not as a violent struggle, but asa profound spiritual and intellectual one – a spirit of tireless effort and inner synergy directed towards optimizing all available resources. This encompasses human capital, financial assets and intellectual capabilities, all geared towards achieving the noble, overarching goals of education (Jihad, 2013). Consequently, school leaders emerge as indispensable figures, acting as crucial agents of change. Their responsibilities extend beyond merely articulating the school's vision and mission; they are tasked with fostering an invigorating climate that profoundly supports deep learning, holistic character development, and the cultivation of a resilient school culture (Karakose et al., 2024; Syarif et al., 2023). This expanded role highlights the intrinsic connection between leadership efficacy and the broader impact on the educational environment and its beneficiaries.

Amidst the evolving discourse on educational leadership, the specific concept of spiritual leadership has garnered increasing scholarly attention, particularly within faith-based institutions such as *pesantren* in Indonesia. Spiritual leadership is fundamentally distinct from purely secular leadership models, as it is not solely or even primarily oriented towards the achievement of quantifiable formal targets or profit maximization. Instead, it is deeply and holistically concerned with the comprehensive character development and the emotional and spiritual well-being of all members within the school community – students, teachers, and staff alike (Zohar & Marshall, 2007). At its core, spiritual leadership involves the internalization of profound religious and ethical values, which then serve as the ultimate guiding principles for all decision-making processes, interpersonal interactions, and strategic planning. This inherent integration of spirituality enables leaders to genuinely motivate and profoundly inspire every individual within the educational community, guiding them towards the achievement of goals that are not only results-oriented but also foster collective well-being and profound character growth (Khoirotunnisa & Pujianto, 2024; Fry, 2003).

In the rich and enduring tradition of Islam, leadership is conceptualized not merely as a position of authority for directing and supervising subordinates, but as a sacred and profound divine mandate (*amanah ilahiyah*). This mandate carries an immense responsibility for actualizing core religious values and upholding the highest standards of morality in all aspects of governance and communal life (Siregar et al., 2018). Leaders in Islam are inherently expected to embody exemplary qualities and serve as role models, epitomizing *Al-Qudwah Al-Hasanah* (the good example). This is profoundly demonstrated through the attributes of Prophet Muhammad SAW, which include *Shiddiq* (truthfulness and honesty), *Amanah* (trustworthiness and reliability), *Tabligh* (conveying the message with clarity and conviction), and *Fathanah* (wisdom, intelligence, and sagacity) (Hidayatullah, 2019). These immutable qualities are not merely theoretical constructs; they are practical imperatives for building an unparalleled level of integrity, fostering genuine trust, and effectively guiding educational institutions towards sustained goodness, prosperity, and spiritual blessings (Abidin et al., 2023). The integration of such virtues ensures that leadership is not just about power, but about profound service and spiritual elevation.

While extensive scholarly research has been conducted on various facets of educational leadership and Islamic leadership in general, there remains a notable and significant void in the existing literature. Specifically, in-depth empirical studies that comprehensively examine the nuanced implementation of spiritual leadership within the unique and culturally rich of Indonesian *pesantren* are remarkably limited. These studies rarely detail how spiritual value are intrinsically and subsequently influence organizational culture and the multifaceted process of student character formation.

This critical knowledge gap represents the primary urgency and compelling rationale of this research. A comprehensive and nuanced understanding of how a principal or a *pesantren* leader authentically applies their spiritual leadership principles in real-world educational practices can yield invaluable insights. These insights are crucial not only for enriching the theoretical frameworks of spiritual leadership but also for developing highly effective and culturally relevant leadership models specifically tailored for Islamic educational institutions across the archipelago. Such research is vital for fostering leadership that is both administratively robust and spiritually profound.

Building upon this identified research gap and the compelling need for a deeper understanding, initial observations conducted at SMP Swasta Al-Falah Abu Lam U Aceh Besar provide compelling preliminary evidence. The researcher found strong and consistent indications of the principal's profound spiritual leadership permeating the school's ethos. At this esteemed institution, the principal transcends the conventional role of an educational manager; he is profoundly recognized and respected as a central figure who consistently serves as an authentic role model and an unwavering spiritual guide for both the students and the entire school community. Daily practices within the *pesantren*, such as communal congregational prayers meticulously performed before lessons commence, the systematic teaching of core Islamic moral values, and an unwavering emphasis on exemplary behavior—mirroring virtues like *tawadu* (humility), rigorous discipline, commendable simplicity, and unyielding honesty— have become an inseparable and deeply ingrained part of the *pesantren*'s vibrant culture (Achyar, 2017; Purnamasari, 2016). This observed phenomenon strongly suggests that the application of spiritual leadership holds immense potential. It is capable of creating a learning environment that is not only conducive to academic achievement but is also profoundly inspiring, thereby fostering the development of students who are not only intellectually astute but also emotionally resilient and spiritually mature. This unique integration of spiritual and academic development is a hallmark of the institution's approach.

Given this robust background, rich with theoretical implications and compelling empirical observations, this study embarks upon a critical endeavor: to meticulously analyze, with considerable depth and analytical rigor, the implementation of spiritual leadership by the principal of Al-Falah Abu Lam U Private Junior high School, Aceh Besar. Furthermore, the research is designed to comprehensively identify and categorize both the supporting factors that facilitate this spiritual leadership and the inhibiting factors that may impede its optimal execution. It is earnestly hoped that the findings derived from this rigorous research will contribute significantly and substantively to the ongoing development of spiritual leadership theory, particularly as it applies within the

distinctive context of Islamic education. Moreover, this study aims to provide a practical and invaluable reference point for similar educational institutions. By understanding the intricacies of spiritual leadership in practice, these institutions can optimize their leadership roles, thereby enhancing their capacity to shape and cultivate students of exceptional character, ready to face the challenges of the modern world while upholding their spiritual values. This dual contribution, both theoretical and practical, underscores the profound importance and relevance of this investigation.

METHOD

This qualitative study employs a case study approach to gain an understanding of the spiritual leadership practiced by the principal of Al-Falah Abu Lam U Private Junior high School Islamic Boarding School in Aceh Besar Regency, Aceh Province. This approach was selected due to its capacity to allow researchers to thoroughly observe and explore the complex context of spiritual leadership, fostering direct interaction with research subjects for rich and detailed insights into the phenomenon. The primary objective of this methodological design is to comprehensively illustrate how spiritual values serve as foundational principles for decision-making and interaction within the Islamic boarding school environment, and how these values collectively shape the organizational culture, ultimately reflecting the institution's vision and mission.

The main data sources for this study include key stakeholders integral to the educational system at Al-Falah Abu Lam U Private Junior high School Islamic Boarding School: the principal, serving as the primary leader; several teachers, who act as vital facilitators in the teaching and student development processes; and the students themselves, who are the central subjects experiencing the application of spiritual values. The inclusion of these diverse perspectives ensures a holistic capture of viewpoints and experiences regarding spiritual leadership practices within the school community.

Comprehensive data were gathered through a triangulation of methods: in-depth interviews, participatory observations, and documentation studies (Sudiran, 2015). These techniques facilitate a multi-faceted exploration of the spiritual dimension of educational leadership at Al-Falah Abu Lam U Private Junior high School. This robust methodological framework further aids in identifying various factors that contribute to the success of spiritual leadership, encompassing aspects such as organizational support, the principal's personal commitment, and the nature of social interactions among members of the *pesantren* community.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION
Implementation of Spiritual Leadership at Al-Falah Abu Lam U Private Junior High School

In Islamic philosophy, spirituality is intrinsically linked to the concept of *Tawhid* – the oneness of God – and the relationship between human beings and the Almighty. Spirituality, therefore, represents the fundamental core of humanity, enabling individuals to transcend material concerns and attain a deeper spiritual consciousness. The spiritual leadership system at Al-Falah Abu Lam U Private Junior High School is firmly established upon these foundational values. The

principal, in this context, does not merely serve as an administrative head but acts as a visionary leader who consistently inspires, motivates, and guides the entire school community to embody and uphold ethical and spiritual principles in their daily activities.

Source: https://images.app.goo.gl/TZ4dKRVsYPHRqWfp8
Figure 1. Al-falah Abu Lam U Aceh Besar Islamic Boarding School

The practical implementation of spiritual leadership at Al-Falah Abu Lam U Private Junior High School Islamic Boarding School is vividly manifested through various institutionalized activities and daily routines. These include, but are not limited to, communal prayers preceding lessons, structured sessions dedicated to teaching Islamic moral values, and the systematic cultivation of empathy and compassion among students, teachers, and staff. A cornerstone of this leadership model is the exemplary conduct of the principal. The leader consistently serves as a living example in upholding worship practices, maintaining discipline, and integrating Islamic values across all aspects of school management. This consistent modeling fosters a serene and supportive environment where students feel genuinely supported and intrinsically motivated in their learning pursuits. This aligns with Fry's (2003) theory, which posits that spiritual leadership emphasizes values and behaviors that provide intrinsic motivation and a strong sense of responsibility, evident in the school's daily practices.

Impact of Spiritual Leadership Implementation

The implementation of spiritual leadership at Al-Falah Abu Lam U Private Junior High School Islamic Boarding School significantly shapes the school culture. This leadership instills positive values across all stakeholders: teachers, staff, and students. The spiritual leadership at the Al-Falah Private MTS Islamic Boarding School emphasizes the importance of religious and ethical values as the foundation of every aspect of school activities. It provides inspirational direction for all school members.

This leadership approach underscores the paramount importance of religious and ethical values as the bedrock for every school activity. It provides

an inspirational compass for all members of the school community, allowing the principal to cultivate a harmonious atmosphere where each individual feels valued and motivated to contribute their utmost. The key impacts observed are multifaceted:

1) Increased Discipline in Worship: A notable finding is the enhanced discipline among all school residents, including teachers, staff, and students, in consistently performing daily worship and religious activities. The principal's spiritual leadership actively promotes this consistency, effectively integrating religious practices as an intrinsic component of daily school life. This reflects the concept of *Al-Qudwah Al-Hasanah* (good example), where the leader's virtue translates into a community-wide commitment to spiritual practices, as also suggested by Astuti et al. (2024).

Figure 2. Religious Activities

2) Conducive Work Climate: Teachers and staff express a heightened sense of being valued and supported in their professional duties. The principal's demonstrated concern for their spiritual and emotional well-being cultivates a more harmonious, comfortable, and ultimately productive working atmosphere. This supports Komalasari et al.'s (2023) assertion that spiritual leaders fostering strong emotional connections create positive work environments characterized by empathy and care.

3) Harmonious Working Relationships: The study observed a notably closer relationship between the principal, teachers, and students, founded upon mutual trust, respect, and unwavering support. This cohesive relationship fosters a robust sense of unity within the school community, significantly facilitating cooperation and the collective achievement of shared objectives. This finding aligns with the notion that spiritual leadership enhances emotional bonds and creates a harmonious atmosphere through a partnership approach (Al Banna & Prahiawan, 2024)

Source: https://www.instagram.com/alfalah_abulamu?igsh=YTl5dG5hMWR2MTU2
Figure 3. Teacher activities

4) Improved Performance of Teachers and Staff: The spiritual leadership model at Al-Falah Abu Lam U Private Junior High School plays a crucial role in providing comprehensive guidance, steadfast support, and a compelling example to teachers and staff. This leadership style intrinsically motivates them to perform optimally in their respective roles. Consequently, teachers and staff exhibit a sustained motivation for continuous learning, professional development, and enhancing their competencies, all of which contribute directly to the school's overall success. This demonstrates how spiritual leadership, as articulated by Wahjono (2011), inspires individuals to not only manage administratively but also to embody positive values, thus fostering high performance.

Source: https://www.instagram.com/alfalah_abulamu?igsh=YTl5dG5hMWR2MTU2
Figure 4. The learning process of muhaddasah for students of AL-Falah Private Junior High School

Furthermore, this spiritual leadership serves as the bedrock for cultivating an organizational culture deeply rooted in spiritual values. This process creates

a school community that strongly emphasizes religious values, ethical conduct, and mutual respect. When managed consistently, such a culture profoundly contributes to establishing an effective, productive, and conducive learning environment. At Al-Falah Abu Lam U Private Junior High School, the principal is instrumental in integrating these spiritual values into every dimension of the organizational climate. Through this spiritual approach, religious and ethical values are effectively internalized by each school member, ultimately shaping their behavior and attitudes. This integration fosters a comfortable and pleasant working atmosphere, where all school residents feel a collective calling to contribute positively.

This approach reflects Arifin's (2019) concept of religio-humanistic leadership, which prioritizes personal relationships and religious values, fostering collective responsibility. A culture characterized by mutual respect, strong cooperation, and an unwavering commitment to spiritual values thus forms the foundation that propels the entire school community towards becoming a superior and highly competitive educational institution.

Dominant Values in Spiritual Leadership

The spiritual leadership at Al-Falah Abu Lam U Private Junior High School has demonstrably created a collaborative, inspiring, and meaningful work environment. This leadership model extends beyond mere target achievement, adopting a robust partnership approach. Teachers are viewed not just as subordinates, but as esteemed colleagues and partners actively engaged in realizing the shared vision of the school. This collaborative strategy empowers every organizational member to feel a collective responsibility for the school's success, thereby significantly strengthening their sense of attachment and solidarity.

A crucial aspect is the principal's deep concern for the welfare of teachers and staff. The leader functions beyond administrative decision-making, acting as a protector, helper, and consistent source of inspiration for all school residents. The principal's active involvement in various school activities highlights a genuine concern that encompasses not only professional development but also addresses the emotional and moral needs of teachers and staff. This holistic concern builds strong mutual trust between leaders and members, forging a close-knit bond within the school environment. This approach allows each organization member to feel collectively responsible for the school's success, thus strengthening the sense of attachment and solidarity between them. According to (Al & Prahiawan, 2024), spiritual leadership that involves organizational members as partners creates a harmonious atmosphere and strengthens emotional bonds in achieving common goals.

Furthermore, work at Al-Falah Abu Lam U Private Junior High School is profoundly perceived as a form of worship, transcending the conventional view of it merely as a means for salary or material benefits. Teachers understand their responsibilities as a spiritual devotion aimed at outcomes far broader than just material results. This perception aligns with Rahim's (2022) view that work as worship enhances intrinsic motivation and cultivates a robust work ethic. Consequently, teachers at Al-Falah Abu Lam U Private Junior High School exhibit

high dedication, viewing teaching quality as a spiritual act, which positively impacts the students' learning atmosphere.

Figure 5. Joint photo of leaders and teachers

The following are the points that become the strength of spiritual leadership at Al-Falah Abu Lam U Private Junior High School:

Table 1 Points that become the strength of Spiritual Leadership

No.	Leadership Strengths	Explanation
1.	Collaborative Approach	Teachers are partners who work with the leadership to achieve the school's vision.
2.	Leader's Concern	The principal shows deep empathy, acts as a protector and helper, and creates a comfortable and supportive work environment.
3.	View of Work as Worship	Teachers see work as part of spiritual devotion, increasing their commitment to teaching quality.
4.	Exemplary in Action	The principal sets an example through actions and decisions based on moral values so that it becomes an inspiration for all school residents.
5.	Consistency and Solidarity	The culture of the pesantren, which is the school's background, supports the application of spiritual values, building consistency in worship practices, high solidarity, and a sense of collective responsibility.

The spiritual leadership applied at Al-Falah Abu Lam U Private Junior High School effectively develops positive cultural values through consistent exemplary leadership and deep empathy. The principal's role as a model fosters strong commitment and dedication among teachers and staff, ultimately leading to the creation of an effective and high-quality educational organization.

Challenges and Solutions in Implementing Spiritual Leadership

The consistent application of spiritual leadership invariably cultivates a positive atmosphere within the school environment. This leadership model, as observed at Al-Falah Abu Lam U Private Junior High School, yields several critical impacts, including the robust formation of student character. Spiritual leadership strongly emphasizes cultivating noble morals, effectively shaping students to be virtuous, honest, responsible, and respectful of others—qualities crucial not only for academic achievement but also for their long-term success. This aligns with Syafe'i's (2017) perspective that spiritual leadership provides a strong foundation for developing an individual's intellectual and moral potential.

Figure 6. Students respect each other

Furthermore, within a nurturing and empathetic learning environment fostered by this leadership, students inherently feel more comfortable and are thus intrinsically motivated to engage in their studies with greater diligence. Principals who demonstrate genuine concern for students' spiritual well-being actively contribute to creating an inspiring and supportive learning atmosphere. Spiritual leadership also actively promotes healthy and open communication among teachers, students, and school staff. As spiritual leaders, school principals typically underscore the critical importance of harmonious relationships, guiding students to respect their teachers and to cultivate a strong sense of solidarity among their peers.

Moreover, through the spiritual values meticulously instilled by the principal, the school environment becomes significantly more conducive and safer for students' holistic development. This leadership approach fosters an atmosphere of peace, effectively mitigating violence or conflicts that could potentially harm students.

However, the effective application of spiritual leadership within an educational setting is inherently influenced by a range of factors, which can be broadly categorized into supporting and inhibiting elements. Supporting factors are those elements that reinforce and actively facilitate the achievement of spiritual leadership goals, manifesting in both material and non-material forms. Material support typically includes the availability of an adequate budget, appropriate educational facilities, clearly articulated educational policies and regulations, and structured curriculum guidelines designed to enhance learning quality. Non-material support, on the other hand, encompasses harmonious

cooperation between leaders and subordinates, a collective awareness regarding the importance of spiritual values, a supportive organizational culture, and a clear alignment of the institution's vision with a spiritual leadership approach.

Figure 7. Achievement of students and the school environment

Conversely, inhibiting factors represent various obstacles or challenges that can impede the optimal implementation of spiritual leadership. These obstacles, like supporting factors, can also be delineated into material and non-material aspects. Material barriers often include limitations in facilities, insufficient funding, or regulatory hurdles such as rules that have not yet received official approval from relevant authorities. Non-material obstacles, conversely, may manifest as a lower quality of human resources, the absence of a strong and unifying organizational culture, a pervasive lack of integrity, a diminished spirit of collaboration among staff, and weakened relationships among organizational members, including critical relationships between leaders and their subordinates. Ultimately, the success of spiritual leadership implementation largely hinges upon how effectively supporting factors can be maximized and how strategically inhibiting factors can be addressed and overcome through diligent leadership efforts.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the study, it can be concluded that: 1) The spiritual leadership role of the principal at Al-Falah Abu Lam U Private Junior High School has a significant influence on the formation of students' character, increased learning motivation, and the creation of a conducive school environment. By

applying spiritual leadership, schools are not only able to produce intellectually intelligent students but also have high moral integrity. 2) The supporting factors at Al-Falah Private Junior High School are both material and non-material, such as adequate budgets, adequate educational facilities, and harmonious cooperation between leaders and subordinates. As for the inhibiting factors, these include limited facilities, lack of financing, or rules that have yet to be approved by the authorities. 3) This research is limited to examining the implementation of spiritual leadership in Al-Falah Abu Lam U Aceh Besar Private Junior High School with a theoretical approach, encompassing aspects of servant leadership, value-based leadership, transformational leadership, visionary leadership, and leadership through example. Therefore, this study suggests conducting further research with in-depth case studies related to leadership, such as applying religious values in school activities and leadership approaches in facing social and moral challenges. Furthermore, this research can be extended to other schools with different backgrounds, such as public and international schools, and discuss spiritual leadership in various contexts.

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