Constructing an Islamic Spiritual Leadership Model for Madrasah Principals: From Individual Values to A Sustainable Culture of Quality

Abdul Hamid
Universitas Islam Negeri K.H. Abdurrahman Wahid Pekalongan, Indonesia
Email: abdulhamid30031984@gmail.com

Abstract

Purpose: This paper develops an integrative conceptual model explaining how madrasah principals translate Islamic ethical commitments into shared, sustainable quality-oriented practices. Design/methodology/approach: It is a theory-building conceptual analysis, bringing Islamic normative principles into critical dialogue with spiritual leadership, organizational culture, and value-internalization scholarship. It does not present original fieldwork or claim a systematic literature review. Findings/conceptual contribution: The proposed model specifies six mutually reinforcing processes: ethical interpretation, enacted leadership, participatory value transmission, staff internalization, collective habituation, and institutional embedding. It identifies organizational justice, professional support, reflective evaluation, and consistency between rhetoric and practice as enabling conditions, while performative religiosity and coercive invocations of sincerity are potential failure mechanisms. Originality/value: The framework distinguishes Islamic normative commitments from empirically observable leadership mechanisms and proposes propositions for future cross-site investigation in Indonesian Islamic elementary schools. Limitations: Its explanatory value and contextual transferability remain to be assessed empirically.

Keywords: Islamic spiritual leadership; madrasah principal; quality culture; value internalization; organizational culture; conceptual framework.

Introduction

Educational quality is commonly represented through achievement, curriculum implementation, governance, and resource provision. In madrasahs, however, the educational mission also encompasses religious and ethical formation. This dual mandate raises an organizational question: how can commitments to trustworthiness, excellence, justice, consultation, and accountability shape routine professional practices rather than remain ceremonial language? A culture of quality, as used here, denotes shared expectations and routines through which members identify problems, act responsibly, learn collectively, and improve educational provision over time (Sallis, 2002; Schein & Schein, 2017).

The principal is strategically positioned to influence these routines through decisions, example, supervision, staff development, and allocation of resources. Moral leadership scholarship emphasizes the authority of shared purpose (Sergiovanni, 1992), while school-leadership research underscores the significance of leadership practices for organizational conditions (Leithwood et al., 2020). Fry's (2003) spiritual leadership theory offers an account of how vision, hope/faith, and altruistic love can create meaning and belonging. Yet these constructs

cannot simply be equated with Islamic ethical categories, which also entail obligations to God, justice toward others, and accountability for entrusted authority (Egel & Fry, 2017).

The conceptual gap addressed in this paper is therefore a mechanism gap: existing theoretical perspectives illuminate motivation, ethics, or culture, but do not by themselves specify how a principal's interpretation of Islamic values becomes durable collective practice in a madrasah. The paper asks: (1) how are Islamic values translated into observable leadership decisions; (2) through which relational and organizational processes do staff internalize them; and (3) what enables their institutionalization beyond the tenure of an individual principal? The contribution is a provisional, testable explanatory framework, not an empirically validated intervention.

Conceptual Approach and Scope

This article uses an integrative conceptual approach. Its starting point is the author's dissertation proposal and the conceptual literature cited therein, rather than a newly executed database search. Four bodies of ideas are analytically connected: Islamic moral concepts as normative criteria; spiritual leadership as a motivational explanation (Fry, 2003); organizational culture as an account of shared assumptions and embedding mechanisms (Schein & Schein, 2017); and compliance, identification, and internalization as distinct processes of attitudinal change (Kelman, 1958). The analysis proceeds by defining constructs, identifying compatible and potentially conflicting assumptions, and deriving mechanisms and propositions. It should not be read as a systematic review or a report of observed outcomes.

The proposed empirical context is Madrasah Ibtidaiyah in Tegal Regency, Indonesia. A subsequent constructivist-interpretivist multisite study could examine three differently situated madrasahs, including a contrasting case, through interviews, observation, principal shadowing, critical-incident reconstruction, and institutional documents. Within-site analysis and cross-site comparison would test the adequacy of the model while remaining open to disconfirming evidence.

Theoretical and Normative Foundations

3.1 Islamic ethical commitments and leadership accountability

Tawhid provides a theological orientation in which authority is exercised as an entrusted responsibility rather than private privilege. Amanah and justice are jointly emphasized in Qur'an 4:58; consultation and compassionate conduct are relevant to Qur'an 3:159; and self-examination resonates with Qur'an 59:18. In this framework, amanah calls for responsible delegation and transparency; ihsan for conscientious improvement; 'adl for fair workload and assessment; shura for meaningful consultation; uswah hasanah for consistency between words and action; and muhasabah for reflective correction. These are normative interpretations, not measurements of organizational performance. Their operational meaning must be examined through practice and through staff accounts.

3.2 Spiritual leadership and its boundaries

Fry (2003) proposes vision, hope/faith, and altruistic love as central dimensions of spiritual leadership, associated theoretically with calling and membership. Such constructs can

illuminate how principals articulate meaningful educational goals and support colleagues. They are not identical to tawhid, ikhlas, or amanah: Islamic leadership places additional emphasis on divine accountability and ethical constraints. A critical risk arises when the language of ikhlas is invoked to justify uncompensated work, silence disagreement, or overlook structural deficiencies. Accordingly, care, fairness, staff voice, and reasonable working conditions must be treated as evaluative safeguards rather than optional by-products (Reave, 2005; Egel & Fry, 2017).

3.3 Organizational culture, internalization, and quality

Schein and Schein (2017) distinguish artifacts, espoused values, and underlying assumptions. Religious programs, slogans, and mission statements may be visible artifacts, but their existence does not establish that staff share underlying assumptions about integrity or quality. Primary embedding mechanisms include what leaders attend to, reward, resource, and do in crises; formal systems may reinforce or contradict those signals. Kelman (1958) differentiates compliance, identification, and internalization. This distinction helps explain why a punctual teacher under direct supervision may not yet possess an enduring commitment to professional responsibility. Sustainable quality therefore requires both internal commitment and organizational arrangements that make responsible practice possible.

Proposed Model and Analytical Propositions

The central claim is that Islamic values influence quality culture through mediated, socially negotiated processes, not through automatic transmission from a principal's personal spirituality. The stages below are analytically distinct but recursive; experience and institutional feedback may reshape the leader's interpretation and subsequent action.

Process	Proposed mechanism	Possible empirical indicators
1. Ethical interpretation	Principal explains the practical implications of amanah, ihsan, justice, and consultation	Reasons offered for difficult decisions; ethical priorities
2. Enacted leadership	Values are demonstrated through decisions, example, and resource allocation	Fair task allocation; transparent explanations; crisis responses
3. Participatory transmission	Coaching, deliberation, feedback, and professional support enable shared interpretation	Staff voice; mentoring; opportunities to challenge decisions
4. Staff internalization	Members accept values as personally meaningful, beyond surveillance or loyalty to a leader	Consistent practice when unsupervised; staff accounts of responsibility

5. Collective habituation	Repeated coordinated practices become ordinary expectations	Peer feedback; routine preparation; collective problem solving
6. Institutional embedding	Values become supported by rules, learning processes, evaluation, and succession arrangements	Actionable self-evaluation; follow-up records; continuity across leadership changes

Figure 1. Proposed recursive pathway: Islamic ethical commitments → leadership interpretation → enacted example and participatory transmission → staff internalization → shared routines → institutional embedding → quality culture; feedback from evaluation and staff experience returns to earlier stages.

4.1 Propositions for future empirical inquiry

P1. Greater consistency between principals stated ethical commitments and consequential decisions will be associated with stronger staff perceptions of leadership credibility. P2. Participatory deliberation, perceived fairness, and professional support will facilitate internalization more effectively than directive religious messaging alone. P3. Quality-oriented behaviors that are supported by transparent routines, reflective evaluation, and peer learning will be more resilient to leadership turnover than behaviors dependent primarily on personal identification with a principal. P4. Where appeals to sincerity coexist with inequitable workloads or limited staff voice, professed spiritual leadership may generate compliance or disengagement rather than internalization. These are theoretical propositions to investigate, not findings demonstrated by the present paper.

Discussion

5.1 Theoretical contribution

The framework differentiates three levels frequently collapsed in normative accounts of Islamic school leadership: (a) ethical justification—why leaders ought to act; (b) social-psychological mechanisms—how staff interpret and adopt values; and (c) organizational reproduction—how routines persist across individuals and time. Fry's (2003) account of purpose and belonging illuminates motivation; Kelman (1958) clarifies depth of adoption; Schein and Schein (2017) explain how assumptions become embedded. Islamic values provide an ethical orientation that can critique, rather than merely decorate, organizational effectiveness. These frameworks are complementary only when their distinct explanatory roles remain visible.

5.2 Practical and policy implications

For principals, the model recommends making value claims accountable to observable decisions: document reasons for workload allocation, invite substantive consultation, connect supervision to developmental feedback, and follow up self-evaluation with improvement actions. For supervisors and policymakers, evaluating quality culture should go beyond counting religious activities or checking compliance documents; it should consider fairness, staff voice, professional learning, and evidence that identified problems lead to action. These suggestions are conceptual implications, not evidence of intervention effectiveness.

5.3 Limitations and research agenda

The model draws on a selective set of established sources and the author's existing proposal. No formal systematic search, quality appraisal, field interviews, or quantitative tests were conducted. The model may understate the influence of funding, employment conditions, governance arrangements, community expectations, and differences among madrasahs. Future research should include principals, teachers, educational personnel, supervisors, committees, and foundation representatives; investigate contradictory cases; compare declared and enacted values; and trace changes over time. Negative cases—such as schools with visible religiosity but weak quality improvement—are especially important for refining or rejecting propositions.

Conclusion

An Islamic spiritual leadership model for madrasah quality cannot be reduced to a list of virtues or to a charismatic principal. The proposed explanation links ethical interpretation to credible action, participatory transmission, staff internalization, collective routines, and institutional arrangements that sustain improvement. Its distinctive contribution is to connect Islamic normative accountability with observable social and organizational mechanisms while acknowledging tensions around power, workload, and performative compliance. The model remains provisional. Its explanatory usefulness depends on careful multisite investigation and revision in light of evidence.

References

Al-Attas, S. M. N. (1995). Prolegomena to the metaphysics of Islam: An exposition of the fundamental elements of the worldview of Islam. ISTAC.

Egel, E., & Fry, L. W. (2017). Spiritual leadership as a model for Islamic leadership. Public Integrity, 19(1), 77–95.

Fry, L. W. (2003). Toward a theory of spiritual leadership. The Leadership Quarterly, 14(6), 693–727.

Fry, L. W., Vitucci, S., & Cedillo, M. (2005). Spiritual leadership and army transformation: Theory, measurement, and establishing a baseline. The Leadership Quarterly, 16(5), 835–862.

Kelman, H. C. (1958). Compliance, identification, and internalization: Three processes of attitude change. Journal of Conflict Resolution, 2(1), 51–60.

Leithwood, K., Harris, A., & Hopkins, D. (2020). Seven strong claims about successful school leadership revisited. School Leadership & Management, 40(1), 5–22.

Reave, L. (2005). Spiritual values and practices related to leadership effectiveness. The Leadership Quarterly, 16(5), 655–687.

Sallis, E. (2002). Total quality management in education (3rd ed.). Kogan Page.

Schein, E. H., & Schein, P. A. (2017). Organizational culture and leadership (5th ed.). Wiley.

Sergiovanni, T. J. (1992). Moral leadership: Getting to the heart of school improvement. Jossey-Bass.

Primary religious source: The Qur'an (references to 3:159, 4:58, and 59:18 cited in the text).