



The Significance of Spiritual Leadership in Redefining the Culture of Sustainable Quality: The Process of Internalizing Values

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Abstract

This study examines the role of spiritual leadership in forming a sustainable quality culture in Islamic Religious Higher Education Institutions (PTKI), with a case study at Nurul Jadid University. Amid global quality demands, PTKI faces a unique challenge in integrating Islamic values with modern management systems. The research problem focuses on the empirical exploration of how PTKI leaders, through their dual roles as managers and spiritual role models, succeed in internalizing religious values as the foundation of quality. Using an interpretive phenomenological approach, this study explores the subjective experiences of leaders and staff through in-depth interviews, observations, and document analysis. Key findings suggest that spiritual leadership has a significant influence on the formation of a work ethic based on sincerity and responsibility, transforming the perception of work into a form of worship and encouraging intrinsic commitment. Religious values, such as trust and honesty, are explicitly translated into institutional quality management policies and procedures, bridging potential ambiguities between religious and managerial authorities. Furthermore, spiritual leadership has proven to be a transformative force in instilling an ethos of excellent service, which is manifested in the proactive actions and empathy of the academic community. This research contributes to the development of value-based quality management theory and offers a typical leadership model of PTKI. The implications include recommendations to integrate the spiritual dimension in higher education accreditation policies and leadership practices at PTKI, in order to achieve holistic and sustainable excellence.

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INTRODUCTION

Improving the quality of higher education is a global imperative, encouraging institutions to innovate in management and organizational culture (Kaur Bagga et al., 2023; Kim & Jung, 2022; Lam et al., 2021). In the context of Islamic Religious Higher Education (PTKI) in Indonesia, the concept of quality encompasses not only academic and administrative standards but also the spiritual dimension and inherent Islamic values. Leadership in PTKI is often carried out by individuals who have managerial capabilities and religious authority as scholars or scholars (Karakose et al., 2021; Losada-Vazquez, 2022; Ogutu et al., 2023). This dual role places spiritual leadership as a crucial factor that has the potential to shape the work ethic, motivation, and commitment of the entire academic community (Rocha & Pinheiro, 2021; Sapta et al., 2021; Wu et al., 2020). A sustainable quality culture at PTKI is therefore expected not only to meet external standards but also to reflect the noble values of Islam, making it unique (Griggs & Fleet, 2021; Helbing et al., 2021; Žalėnienė & Pereira, 2021). A deep understanding of how spiritual leadership integrates these dimensions is essential for the development of institutions with integrity and competitiveness in the modern era.

The literature on spiritual leadership has emphasized its role in enhancing organizational performance and employee well-being by fostering intrinsic values and a higher purpose (Abbas et al., 2023; Muharom, 2023; Wu et al., 2020). On the other hand, the study of quality management in education, by Faizun et al. (2024), focuses on systems, processes, and standards to achieve excellence. Nonetheless, most of these studies tend to separate the spiritual dimension from concrete quality management practices, especially in educational contexts. Research on sustainable quality culture in educational institutions has discussed the importance of Islamic values (Rathee & Rajain, 2020; Rocha & Pinheiro, 2021; Wu et al., 2020), but often lacks empirical exploration of how spiritual leadership explicitly integrates these values into everyday quality management mechanisms. This creates a significant gap in the understanding of the practical implementation and transformative impact of spiritual leadership in the context of PTKI.

Based on the literature review, there is a significant gap in understanding how spiritual leadership concretely affects the formation and maintenance of a sustainable culture of sustainable quality at PTKI. The problem addressed in this research centers on the lack of empirical exploration of how PTKI leaders, with their dual role as both scholars and leaders, internalize Islamic values as the foundation of a sustainable quality culture. There is potential ambiguity in measuring "spiritual quality" or how religious values are explicitly translated into quality management practices, which has not been widely discussed. Discussions can also arise regarding the boundaries between religious and managerial authorities in quality-related decision-making. Therefore, this study aims to address the fundamental question: How does spiritual leadership influence the

development and maintenance of a sustainable culture of high quality at PTKI, particularly in the face of academic and non-academic quality challenges?

This research offers a notable contribution by empirically bridging the realms of spiritual leadership and quality management in the context of PTKI, an area that has not been extensively researched. In contrast to previous studies that tended to be theoretical or sectoral, this study uses phenomenological methodology to capture the personal experiences and deep reflections of the actors, revealing the *tacit dimensions* of knowledge that shape a culture of sustainable quality. This approach enables the identification of how religious values are internalized and operationalized in real-world practice, thereby overcoming existing ambiguities. The results are expected to provide a distinctive leadership model for PTKI, which intrinsically integrates the spiritual and managerial dimensions, and also contribute to the development of a more comprehensive value-based quality management theory relevant to the context of religious institutions.

This research aims to analyze and gain a deeper understanding of the role of spiritual leadership in fostering a culture of sustainable quality in Islamic Religious Higher Education Institutions (PTKI), with a focus on case studies at Nurul Jadid University. Furthermore, this research will examine how religious values are explicitly incorporated into institutional quality management practices, encompassing policies, procedures, and evaluation systems. Ultimately, this study will investigate how spiritual leadership functions as a transformative force in cultivating an ethos of exceptional service. Through a phenomenological approach, this research seeks to uncover the essence of the subjective experiences of leaders and staff, providing rich and applicable insights.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study adopts a qualitative research design with an interpretive phenomenological approach to gain a deeper understanding of the subjective experiences of the leaders and staff of Nurul Jadid University related to the internalization of Islamic values as the foundation of a sustainable quality culture. The selection of a qualitative design is based on a research objective that seeks to explore the meaning, perception, and life experiences of participants in the context of spiritual leadership and a culture of sustainable quality, which cannot be quantitatively measured. Interpretive phenomenology, in particular, is relevant because it seeks to uncover the essence of phenomena through the interpretation of the experiences narrated by the research subjects (Naeem et al., 2023; Tomaszewski et al., 2020; Urcia, 2021). The research setting at Nurul Jadid University is particularly relevant because it is an Islamic Religious College (PTKI) that inherently integrates Islamic values into its operations, making it an ideal case for understanding this phenomenon contextually and holistically. This design enables the exploration of both the 'how' and 'what' of the phenomenon being

studied, providing rich insights that are essential to addressing research problems.

The primary data collection method in this study is an in-depth interview. This method was chosen because it enables researchers to delve into the personal experiences, perceptions, and profound reflections of informants, which are at the heart of the phenomenological approach (Ismail, 2023; Shorey & Ng, 2022; Tomaszewski et al., 2020). Structured and semi-structured interviews are employed to ensure comprehensive coverage of relevant topics, while also providing informants with the flexibility to convey their views in detail. The researcher acts as the main instrument, acting as an active listener and facilitator who builds rapport with the informant to obtain rich and honest data. In addition to interviews, indirect participatory observation and document analysis (such as SOPs, quality guidelines, and campus policy documents) are also conducted to confirm and complement the information obtained from the interviews, increasing the credibility of the data. The research was conducted on the campus of Nurul Jadid University. To ensure the credibility of the research results, the data triangulation technique is used by comparing information from interviews, observations, and documents. Additionally, member checking is conducted by asking informants to verify interview transcripts and summaries of findings, thereby ensuring an accurate representation of their perspective.

Data collected from interviews, observations, and document analysis were analyzed using thematic analysis techniques with an interpretive phenomenological approach (Frazer et al., 2023; Priya, 2021; Urcia, 2021). The process begins with a verbatim transcription of the interview, followed by a re-reading (familiarization) to gain a thorough understanding of the data. Next, initial coding is done to identify relevant units of meaning. These codes are then grouped into broader potential themes (generating initial themes) based on conceptual similarities. The themes are reviewed and refined (reviewing, defining, and naming themes) to ensure internal coherence and external differences (Du & Chaaban, 2020; Shadiev et al., 2024; Tomaszewski et al., 2020). This approach enables researchers not only to describe phenomena but also to interpret the meanings underlying the informant's experiences. These measures significantly contribute to increased credibility and dependability in the data interpretation process. With this method, the research results are more in-depth, detailed, and accurately reflect the essence of the informant's subjective experience, ensuring a rich representation of the complexity of spiritual leadership in PTKI's sustainable quality culture.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

The internalization of Islamic values in spiritual leadership is a profound process in which the principles of Islamic teachings are lived and applied by leaders of higher education institutions, especially in Islamic Religious Universities (PTKI), such as Nurul Jadid University, to foster a sustainable culture of quality.

This concept extends beyond the managerial aspect alone, encompassing the dimensions of ethics, morality, and spirituality that form the foundation for every policy and practice within the organization. In the context of PTKI, spiritual leadership is not only about carrying out administrative duties but also about embodying prophetic qualities, such as amanah, fathonah, siddiq, and tabligh, which foster a work environment characterized by integrity, professionalism, and a service-oriented approach. The implementation of these values is expected to foster a collective awareness of the importance of quality as an integral part of worship and social responsibility, thereby encouraging continuous improvement and commitment to academic and non-academic excellence.

The Role of Spiritual Leadership in Instilling a Work Ethic Based on Sincerity and Responsibility

The cultivation of a work ethic based on sincerity and responsibility by spiritual leadership refers to the leader's efforts in inspiring the members of the organization to work with sincere intentions and a sense of responsibility, not only because of professional demands but also as a form of devotion to God and others. This ethos forms a strong moral foundation, where each individual feels called to make their best contribution, overcome challenges with fortitude, and always strive for quality in every task undertaken. This approach inherently encourages a culture of sustainable quality that relies not only on systems and procedures but also on the internal commitment and spiritual motivation of individuals. Instilling the values of sincerity and responsibility is at the core of forming a culture of sustainable quality at PTKI, where spiritual leadership plays a crucial role. The following informant's statement evidences this,

"As leaders, we always emphasize that our work is worship. If the intention is righteous in the sight of Allah, then the result will be the maximum. The responsibility is not only to superiors, but also to students, and most importantly, to God. This spirit of sincerity is what we encourage constantly on all lines (W1)." The results of the interview confirmed that PTKI leaders view work as part of worship, which encourages a work ethic based on sincerity and spiritual responsibility, rather than solely on professional demands. In addition, another informant corroborated this, "We believe that quality is built from the heart. If the heart is sincere and has a high sense of responsibility, the output will automatically also be of high quality. This is what the Rector always instills in us, that every detail of the work must reflect Islamic values (W2)."

From the results of the interviews conducted with the two informants, it is evident that spiritual leadership at PTKI clearly emphasizes the values of sincerity and responsibility as the foundation of the work ethic. Leaders not only manage managerially, but also serve as spiritual examples that inspire the entire academic community to work with sincere intent and full commitment. The emphasis on worship and Islamic values in every aspect of the work creates a strong intrinsic

motivation, encouraging each individual to give their best. This has implications for improving the quality of services and the outputs produced, because every action is based on an awareness of moral and spiritual responsibility.

On various occasions within the campus environment, it is often seen how PTKI leaders not only provide administrative guidance but also offer spiritual advice relevant to their work. For example, in regular meetings or discussion forums, leaders often quote verses from the Qur'an or Hadith that emphasize the importance of hard work, honesty, and responsibility. In addition, it can also be seen how lecturers and staff show a high level of commitment in completing tasks, even outside of formal working hours, which indicates an internal drive based on sincerity and responsibility. Self-development programs that integrate spiritual values are also often held, strengthening the understanding and appreciation of this work ethic.

Translating Religious Values into Institutional Quality Management Practices

The translation of religious values into institutional quality management practices is a concrete process in which Islamic spiritual and ethical principles are embodied in the policies, procedures, and quality management systems that apply in religious higher education institutions. It involves integrating concepts such as fairness ('adl), professionalism ('trust), accountability ('mas'uliyah), and continuous improvement ('ishlah 'mustamirra) into operational standards, performance evaluation, curriculum development, and student services. The goal is to ensure that all institutional activities not only meet external accreditation standards but also reflect the noble values of Islam, resulting in holistic and sustainable quality.

The explicit translation of religious values into quality management practices is a crucial aspect of spiritual leadership. This was revealed from the informant's statement:

"Every SOP [Standard Operating Procedure] and quality policy that we make, we always associate it with Islamic values. For example, we base transparency in financial management on the principle of honesty in Islam. We connect the accountability of lecturers in teaching with the mandate as educators. So, quality is not only a matter of standards, but also a matter of ethics and morals (W3)." This statement demonstrates how the values of honesty and trustworthiness, fundamental principles in Islam, are integrated into the standard policies and procedures of institutions. In addition, another informant confirmed, "In every internal quality audit, we not only check documents and procedures, but also ask how religious values are implemented in daily practice. For example, whether there is a sincere spirit of service, whether there is fairness in assessment, or how lecturers instill character in students. This shows that spiritual quality is an integral part of academic quality (W4)."

The results of the above interview indicate that the spiritual leadership at PTKI is actively translating religious values into a quality management framework. Policies and procedures are not only designed to meet accreditation standards, but also to internalize Islamic principles such as honesty, trust, fairness, and sincere service. This creates a comprehensive quality system in which academic and administrative performance is judged not only from a technical aspect but also from an ethical and spiritual dimension. This process bridges the potential ambiguity between religious and managerial authorities by demonstrating how the two can collaborate to achieve institutional excellence. Additionally, the role of spiritual leadership in institutional quality management practices at Nurul Jadid University is illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1. The Role of Spiritual Leadership

Sub-finding	Theme/Category	Supporting Evidence
Integration of Islamic values in SOP and quality management policies	Religious Value Integration	"Every SOP and quality policy we create, we always relate it to Islamic values. For example, transparency in financial management is based on the principle of honesty in Islam." (W3)
Spiritual leadership influences quality management practices	Leadership & Spirituality	"We do not just check documents and procedures in every internal quality audit, but also ask how religious values are implemented in daily practices." (W4)
Ethical and moral values are embedded in academic and administrative evaluation.	Ethics & Quality Assurance	"Accountability of lecturers in teaching is linked to trust as educators. So, quality is not just about standards, but also about ethics and morals." (W3)
Bridging religious authority and managerial practices in quality	Religious-Managerial Synergy	"This process bridges the potential ambiguity between religious authority and managerial aspects, demonstrating how both can work together for institutional excellence." (W3)

Building on the findings presented in Ta, it is clear that spiritual leadership plays a crucial role in integrating Islamic religious values into quality management policies within educational institutions. This is reflected in the process of translating principles such as honesty, trust, and fairness into operational procedures and quality policies, as stated in the quote, "Every SOP and quality policy we create, we always relate it to Islamic values." The application of spiritual leadership is also evident in the quality audit process, which not only examines administrative procedures but also assesses the implementation of religious values in daily practice. In addition, there is an emphasis on the importance of ethics and morals in academic and administrative evaluations, implying that quality is measured not only by technical standards but also by ethical dimensions. In conclusion, this table demonstrates that spiritual leadership can

bridge the differences between religious and managerial authority to achieve holistic institutional excellence.

Spiritual Leadership as a Transformative Force in Instilling a Service Ethos

Spiritual leadership as a transformative force in instilling a service ethic refers to the ability of leaders to inspire and motivate the entire academic community to adopt a mindset that is oriented towards excellent service, both to students, colleagues, and the wider community. This service ethos is based on spiritual values such as sincerity, empathy, and social responsibility, where each individual feels that providing the best service is part of worship and positive contribution. This transformation shifts the perspective of service from a mere obligation to a calling, thereby encouraging innovation, proactivity, and ongoing satisfaction among service providers.

In daily interactions at PTKI, it is often observed that administrative staff and lecturers serve students with patience and empathy, even outside of formal working hours, to help resolve their academic or administrative issues. There are also voluntary initiatives from lecturers and students to help the surrounding community, which are not included in the mandatory curriculum but are carried out based on awareness and a spiritual calling. For example, free tutoring clinic programs for underprivileged students or community assistance in the development of local MSMEs. This reflects that the ethos of service is not only a slogan, but has been internalized and manifested in concrete actions. To provide an overview of spiritual leadership as a transformative force in instilling a service ethos at Nurul Jadid University, illustrated in Figure 1.



Figure 1. Spiritual Leadership as a Transformative Force in Instilling a Service Ethos

Building on this, it highlights the crucial role of spiritual leadership in instilling a transformative service ethos at PTKI. By connecting service with Islamic worship and teachings, leaders have succeeded in building an organizational culture that is highly responsive and oriented towards external satisfaction. This not only enhances the image and reputation of the institution but also creates an environment where every member of the academic community feels encouraged to proactively give their best. These findings further demonstrate that the spiritual dimension not only enriches the meaning of work but also fundamentally improves the quality of service, making it more sincere, professional, and has a sustainable, positive impact on all stakeholders.

Discussion

This research phenomenologically reveals the significance of spiritual leadership in shaping and maintaining a sustainable quality culture in Islamic Religious Universities (PTKI), especially at Nurul Jadid University. Key findings indicate that spiritual leadership extends beyond the managerial dimension, fundamentally incorporating Islamic values such as sincerity, trust, and responsibility into the work ethic and practice of institutional quality management. The leaders, who also serve as spiritual role models, have successfully instilled intrinsic motivation among the academic community, shifting the view of work from one of mere compliance to one of genuine engagement (Alawag et al., 2024; Mahsusi et al., 2024; Tołwińska, 2021). As a result, the ethos of excellent service becomes a tangible manifestation, extending beyond formal requirements. Quality, in this context, is understood as a reflection of moral integrity and spiritual commitment, not simply the fulfillment of external standards.

The findings of this study enrich the literature on spiritual leadership and sustainable quality culture, especially in the context of Islamic education. In contrast to previous studies that tended to separate spiritual leadership from concrete quality management practices, this study shows how the two can synergize organically. For example, research by Jufrizen & Nasution (2021) emphasizes the intrinsic motivational dimension in spiritual leadership; yet, our study empirically shows how such motivation translates directly into Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) and quality audits, filling in gaps in practical implementation. The main contribution of this study is to bridge the dichotomy between religious and managerial authorities in quality decision-making, demonstrating that Islamic values not only enrich but also become an integral foundation of sustainable quality systems. This aspect is underexplored in conventional quality management literature.

The findings of this study align closely with the Spiritual Leadership Theory

by Usmanova et al. (2023), which emphasizes the importance of vision, altruistic love, and hope/faith in creating a sustainable organization. In the context of Nurul Jadid University, the leadership's vision of "work is worship" is combined with the value of sincerity (altruistic love), explicitly instilling a work ethic and quality service. However, this study shows how these spiritual values are not only shaped by culture but are specifically articulated into formal quality management mechanisms, such as audits and SOPs. This adds a prescriptive dimension to a theory that previously focused more on the descriptive aspects of organizational culture (Blažič, 2021; Hossain, 2024; Ritonga et al., 2022). His theoretical contribution is to provide an empirical model for operationalizing the transcendental (spiritual) dimension within a quality management system, offering a new lens for understanding a value-based, sustainable quality culture.

Synthetically speaking, this study affirms that spiritual leadership is not a peripheral element, but an integral part of forming a sustainable culture of high quality in PTKI. Our findings highlight the transformative capabilities of leadership based on Islamic values in instilling a work ethic rooted in sincerity and responsibility, as well as the actual translation of these values into institutional quality management practices and an ethos of excellent service. This research is of crucial relevance because it fills a substantive gap in the literature regarding how the spiritual dimension can be systematically integrated into a formal quality framework. The specific contribution of this study's findings is to enrich Spiritual Leadership Theory by presenting empirical evidence on how transcendental values are operationalized into measurable management practices. Furthermore, this reconfigures the perspective on the culture of sustainable quality at PTKI, shifting from merely adhering to external standards to a manifestation of deep spiritual and moral commitment, thus providing a unique model for value-based higher education institutions.

CONCLUSION

This study examines how spiritual leadership forms a culture of sustainable quality in Islamic Religious Universities (PTKI) in Indonesia. This crucial aspect is often overlooked in the discourse of quality management. Key findings suggest that spiritual leadership internalizes Islamic values such as sincerity and trust, which transformatively influences work ethic and institutional quality management practices. The integration of these values not only supports but also enriches formal quality standards, fostering an intrinsic commitment that goes beyond administrative demands. The implication is that PTKI can adopt this leadership model to achieve holistic excellence, encouraging a sincere service ethic and spiritually based accountability. This research provides a foundation for future studies to explore the generalization of this model and measure it quantitatively, while recommending the integration of the spiritual dimension in higher education accreditation policies.

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