

# Escalating the Spirituality Values Integration into School Curriculum and Holistic Implementation: Strong Leadership Supports

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DOI: <http://doi.org/10.33650/al-tanzim.v8i4.8497>

Received: 14 April 2024

Revised: 22 October 2024

Accepted: 02 November 2024

## Abstract:

This study aims to analyze the strategy of escalating the integration of spiritual values into the curriculum and its holistic implementation through the support of effective principal leadership. This study was conducted qualitatively in four madrasahs, where data collection was carried out through in-depth interviews, non-participant observation, and documentation. The collected data were discussed in FGDs with 144 participants online and offline to ensure their validity. The results of this study include: 1) convergence of opinions among all stakeholders agreed to include and combine four essential spiritual categories, namely *tauhid* (Oneness of God), *akhlak* (good morals), *Worship*, and *Jihad* (struggle), into the education curriculum, following common beliefs and the results of deliberation; 2) five strategies that are practically implemented into the following holistic and integrative activities, including; (1) establishing a curriculum integration escalation policy; (2) integrated into the implementation of all materials; (3) carried out jointly between schools and parents; (4) controlled administratively through a liaison book and daily pocket book (*a'malul yaum*); and (5) carried out in various real actions; 3) leaders have a clear vision and are the best role models. This research provides implications about the importance of visionary leaders in strengthening spiritual values in their curriculum in a planned, systematic, and total manner.

**Keywords:** *Escalation Strategy, Integration of Spiritual Values, Leadership*

## Abstrak:

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis strategi eskalasi integrasi nilai-nilai spiritual ke dalam kurikulum dan penerapannya secara holistik melalui dukungan kepemimpinan kepala sekolah yang efektif. Penelitian ini dilakukan secara kualitatif di empat madrasah, dimana pengumpulan data dilakukan melalui wawancara mendalam, observasi non partisipan, dan dokumentasi. Untuk menjamin keabsahannya, data yang terkumpul dibahas dalam FGD dengan 144 peserta secara daring dan luring. Hasil penelitian ini antara lain: 1) konvergensi pendapat di antara seluruh pemangku kepentingan sepakat memasukkan dan menggabungkan empat kategori spiritual yang esensial, yaitu tauhid (Keesaan Tuhan), *akhlak* (akhlak baik), *Ibadah*, dan *Jihad* (perjuangan), ke dalam kurikulum pendidikan, mengikuti keyakinan umum dan hasil musyawarah; 2) lima strategi yang secara praktis diimplementasikan ke dalam kegiatan

holistik dan integratif berikut ini, antara lain; (1) menetapkan kebijakan eskalasi integrasi kurikulum; (2) terintegrasi dalam penerapan seluruh materi; (3) dilakukan secara bersama-sama antara sekolah dan orang tua; (4) dikontrol secara administratif melalui buku penghubung dan buku saku harian (*a'malul yaum*); dan (5) dilakukan dalam berbagai tindakan nyata; 3) pemimpin mempunyai visi yang jelas dan menjadi panutan terbaik. Penelitian ini memberikan implikasi tentang pentingnya pemimpin visioner dalam memperkuat nilai-nilai spiritual dalam kurikulumnya secara terencana, sistematis dan totalitas.

**Kata Kunci:** *Strategi Eskalasi, Integrasi Nilai-Nilai Spiritual, Kepemimpinan*

*Please cite this article in APA style as:*

Juharyanto, Fuad, D. R. B. S. M., Rochmawati, Lesmana, I., Shobiry, A. K. F. (2024). Escalating the Spirituality Values Integration into School Curriculum and Holistic Implementation: Strong Leadership Supports. *Al-Tanzim: Jurnal Manajemen Pendidikan Islam*, 8(4), 1070-1082.

## INTRODUCTION

Spirituality is an essential and inseparable aspect of the implementation of education in Indonesia. In addition to the fact that spirituality is a mandate of normative and philosophical regulation, spirituality also plays a crucial role in overseeing the holistic character of Indonesian society, especially in the context of changes that arise across various dimensions of humanity, including moral, emotional, and ethical aspects. Therefore, integrating spirituality into educational practices at multiple levels becomes urgent, and it must be considered, addressed, and strengthened by the entire community through their respective roles (Khofifah, 2023; Nadifa et al., 2024). Just like spirituality, awareness of the role of Indonesian culture must be considered. For Indonesian civilization, cultural aspects are a fundamental element that strongly binds the overall way of thinking and acting within the true Indonesian community (Nasr, 2013). Even cultural aspects are raised as a form of belief in themselves and are established as a critical indicator of the success of various civilizational transformations, including education. Spirituality and culture are the main benchmarks that signify the quality of acceptance of the new generation within the broader Indonesian community (Sena et al., 2021; Park et al., 2020).

Integrating spiritual values into daily life involves aligning one's beliefs, practices, and principles to cultivate a sense of wholeness, purpose, and connection to something greater than oneself (Arifin et al., 2018; Lee, 2020). This integration can lead to a more profound understanding of meaning, direction, and greater interconnectedness with others and the world. By practising mindfulness, gratitude, and compassion, individuals can deepen their spiritual connections and enhance their overall quality of life. Incorporating spiritual practices into daily life can help individuals cultivate peace and purpose, leading to a fulfilling and enriched existence. It can also give individuals a sense of resilience and inner strength to navigate life's challenges with grace and wisdom, contributing to their well-being and personal growth. They can attain greater happiness, fulfilment, and harmony by fostering a more meaningful connection between students and the world.

Incorporating spiritual values into the educational curriculum can give students a solid foundation for personal growth and development. Educators can teach mindfulness techniques, advocate gratitude practices, and promote compassion towards others, which can aid students in cultivating a sense of inner

peace and resilience, equipping them to navigate the challenges they may encounter in school and beyond (Mulang et al., 2023; Phipps, 2012). By integrating spirituality into the curriculum, schools can support the holistic well-being of their students and help them excel academically, emotionally, and spiritually. By incorporating spirituality into education, students can enhance their sense of purpose and connection to something greater than themselves, leading to a more fulfilling and meaningful educational experience. By fostering spiritual awareness, schools can empower students to tap into their inner strengths and values and prepare them for success in all aspects of life. This method can also help students better understand themselves and others, fostering empathy and compassion within the school community. Integrating spirituality into education creates a more nurturing and inclusive learning environment where students feel supported and inspired to reach their full potential.

There are many and extensive advantages to integrating spirituality into education. Research shows that school pupils exposed to spiritual teachings exhibit higher emotional intelligence, resilience, and overall well-being (Chanifah et al., 2021; Gibson, 2014; Saeed et al., 2022). These students have more robust peer and teacher relationships, resulting in a more positive and nurturing school environment. Spiritual education has been associated with improved academic performance, as students are better able to concentrate, stay motivated, and manage their stress effectively (Manson & Snipes, 2020; Pardasani et al., 2014). Incorporating spirituality into education enhances students' personal development and contributes to a harmonious and enriching learning environment. By nurturing a sense of purpose and meaning in their lives, students who receive spiritual education are more likely to exhibit higher levels of motivation and engagement in their academic pursuits, leading to increased success in school and future endeavors. They develop a powerful sense of self-awareness and resilience. Incorporating spirituality into education can help students cultivate empathy and compassion towards others, leading to stronger interpersonal relationships and a more unified community. By fostering students' spiritual well-being, educators can create a more holistic and fulfilling educational experience beyond academic achievement.

The success of a school in incorporating spiritual values into its curriculum mainly depends on the principal's leadership vision (Arifin et al., 2018; Bafadal et al., 2020). Excellent principals who clearly understand nurturing students' diverse potential are crucial in developing and implementing the curriculum. The principal's role extends beyond just overseeing the implementation of various ideas; they must also provide essential support and resources to successfully integrate spiritual values into the curriculum. The principal is critical in determining the support and policy needed for successful integration. The community respects the school principal, and their support is essential to the success of the school's program. The principal's excellent leadership skills are vital in garnering community support, which can take various forms, such as sharing ideas, guidance, and financial resources. Ultimately, an excellent school requires the unwavering support of a solid and committed community.

Learning from several countries in the world, like Japan, Kenya, Finland, Singapore, and Malaysia, that have succeeded in fighting for a vision of spirituality that is integrated into their educational practices shows various descriptive data that systemically internalized spiritual values have been able to orbit their human resources into success in multiple fields, not only academically, but also economic progress, social culture, politics, and other aspects (Andere, 2014; Nugroho, 2024; Mokhber et al., 2018). Especially in Indonesia, spirituality is essential as it is an aspect of the student's character and ethics necessary for leading a righteous and harmonious life. According to the Ministry of Education and Culture report, "a majority of 75% of schools" in the country are said to teach spiritual beliefs. Children are taught fundamental values such as honesty, compassion, and responsibility, which adhere to Pancasila principles (Badan Pusat Statistik, 2023). Schools are essential in promoting spirituality in character education programs, such as prayer, morals, and social service. The environment should allow religious and social activities to enable the community to develop the goals of spiritual values. The head of the school is significant for spiritual education, as he is the activity manager, encourages the teachers to be disciplined, and creates partnerships with the community. According to (Komalasari & Saripudin, 2017), pupils practicing tolerance and a sense of social responsibility are also reported as high (82) in schools with robust spiritual leadership. Hence, to prepare a generation that is intelligent and ethical, there is a need for parents, societies, and school administration to work together toward incorporating spirituality in the pedagogical context.

Conducting this research is crucial in outlining practical approaches for incorporating spiritual values into the curriculum through strategic educational leadership. The integration of these values has resulted in the development of exceptional character among students, evident in their academic and non-academic accomplishments. The community highly regards the school; even the Ministry of Religion has recognized it as an excellent school and a model for other schools to follow.

This study delves into schools with a religious foundation, which believes that spirituality plays a vital role in cultivating students' awareness of the significance of happiness beyond this life and achieving positive outcomes in their academic pursuits. These schools have crafted various programs by drawing upon various curriculum references, such as government curricula, foundations, and spiritual trends that are gaining popularity within the community as a source of local wisdom rooted in tradition and spirituality. These institutions, coordinated by *Ma'arif* educational institutions, represent their regions' most advanced schools.

## RESEARCH METHOD

This research was undertaken in four religious educational institutions in Bondowoso Regency, East Java, and was analyzed using a qualitative approach. These five institutions are Islamic schools affiliated with the *Ma'arif* educational organization, which is dedicated to integrating the values of *ahlusunnah wal jama'ah* while fostering a paternalistic culture with deeply entrenched traditions. The five schools consist of *Raudlatul Athfal* (Islamic Based Kindergarten - RA),

*Madrasah Tsanawiyah* (MTs), and *Madrasah Aliyah* (MA) al *Ma'arif* (Junior and Senior High School), which are part of the *Ma'arif* Education Institute in the Pujer Bondowoso sub-district, as well as *Madrasah Ibtidaiyah* (Islamic Based Elementary School) at *Taqwa* Bondowoso. The community views these schools as exceptional institutions that successfully incorporate spiritual and cultural values into their curriculum. The schools are believed to accurately represent the community's aspirations, making them a strong draw for families seeking to provide their children with education in these institutions.

Data was gathered through non-participatory observation, semi-structured and in-depth interviews with informants via snowball sampling, and document analysis. Snowball sampling techniques were done by visiting the cited person by the previous informants and the persons that the researcher thinks have a relation both in responsibility and have a more profound or similar understanding about the case or phenomenon. The results were then validated through a triangulation process involving multiple focus group discussions (FGDs) conducted online and offline, as shown in the table below outlines the distribution of informants and research participants involved in the FGDs.

**Table 1. Informants and FGD Participants**

No	Informant Status	Total	Description
1	School Principals	4 peoples	
2	Teachers	84 peoples	MI at <i>Taqwa</i>
		5 peoples	RA
		16 peoples	MTs al <i>Ma'arif</i>
		19 peoples	MA al <i>Ma'arif</i>
3	Staffs	2 peoples	MI at <i>Taqwa</i>
		3 peoples	LP <i>Ma'arif</i>
4	Stakeholders	11 peoples	MORA, MONE, Islamic Foundation, School Committee, Class Parents Community, Islamic Based Schools Teachers Group (MGMP), dan Islamic Based Principal Community (KKMI)

Drawing on the information provided by community informants, several important points were identified, which included the following: 1) the school principal is perceived as possessing both spiritual and moral qualifications, as well as extensive knowledge of ritual practices; 2) despite the lack of official institutional barriers, teachers experience limitations in their capacity to elevate and maintain the school's quality of education; and 3) customary, non-academic worship rituals that are integrated with community practices are the primary driving force behind societal advancement, while also enhancing academic performance. Based on these initial natural findings, this research is fascinating to explore in more depth, especially concerning the following focuses: 1) describe the current state of integration of spiritual values in the school curriculum; 2) strategy for increasing integration of spiritual values and development; and 3) school principal's leadership responsibilities in reinforcing the inclusion of spiritual values in the curriculum.



## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### Result

#### Current State of Spirituality Values Integration in School Curriculum

All principals, teachers, foundations, and upper institutions in this research view and agree that integrating spiritual values into the school curriculum has become increasingly important as students meet many challenges and struggles. Integrating spiritual values into education can help students cultivate a sense of purpose, morality, and resilience to navigate challenging situations.

This comprehensive educational approach improves students' academic achievement and promotes emotional and social welfare. Parents of students acknowledge that spirituality serves as a salvation for upcoming generations facing uncertainties caused by technological advancements. Parents and society believe that the most beneficial education for children prioritizes enhancing spiritual values integrated into the school curriculum and programs. The shared belief in incorporating spiritual values into the curriculum is the main foundation for the educational process, which is a collaborative effort between schools and society. The convergence of opinions among all stakeholders was to incorporate and merge four essential spiritual principles, namely *tauhid* (the Oneness of God), *akhlak* (good character), worship, and *Jihad* (struggle), into the educational curriculum, following widely held convictions and the results of deliberations.

The results of this study indicate a strong agreement among all parties involved—principals, teachers, educational institutions, and parents—on the importance of integrating spiritual values into the educational curriculum. Stakeholders agree that incorporating spiritual values into education is not only crucial for improving academic achievement but also for shaping students' morality, mental resilience, and life goals. They believe that spiritual-based education can help students face increasingly complex challenges and difficulties, especially in the face of technological advances that bring uncertainty in the future. In addition, parents also see spiritual values as an essential means to protect future generations from the negative impacts of changing times. For them, the most beneficial education for children is one that can instill solid spiritual values in children, which is conveyed through the school curriculum and programs.

#### Strategies for Escalating Spirituality Values Integration and Development

All principals, teachers, foundations, and upper institutions in this research view and agree that integrating spiritual values into the school curriculum has become increasingly important as students meet many challenges and struggles. Integrating spiritual values into education can help students cultivate a sense of purpose, morality, and resilience to navigate challenging situations.

As stated by the head of MI at Taqwa:

"The challenges resulting from technological advancements, besides providing benefits, also have the potential to bring harm." All elements, from parents and teachers to the Foundation, see the need to integrate spiritual values into the curriculum and must be monitored in daily activities."

Similarly, one of the parents stated that:

"... I feel uneasy about the impact of technology such as mobile phones or television programs." Alhamdulillah, those worries began to subside after our children were under the guidance of an educational institution that consistently strengthens the integration of spirituality into the learning process.

One of the committee members at a different Islamic school stated that:

"... of course, the school cannot operate on its own without support from the community, especially concerning morals, because most of the children's time is spent at home, with family and the community. Therefore, a strong leader is needed to encourage the community to be involved in overseeing the children's morals. If this happens, then morals will be formed, including various achievements. In my opinion, morals are the heart of the growth of various achievements."

The questionnaire distributed to all informants at this institution found that 98% of the respondents are aware of the dangers of technology. Almost 100% agree that schools integrating spiritual values into the curriculum can respond well to these challenges. Other data also reveals that 100% of informants agree on the role of parents in overseeing school programs. However, around 74% are willing to participate actively, while 26% seem ambiguous due to being busy with their jobs. Equally important, it was also found that the role of leaders in promoting the integration of spiritual values into learning at school and home accounted for 88%. At the same time, the rest was due to personal awareness.

### **The School Principal's Leadership Responsibilities Reinforcing the Inclusion of Spiritual Values in The Curriculum**

First, preparing a clear and understandable vision is the initial action. Likewise, appropriate, supportive policies should be prepared, and various facilities, infrastructure, empowering activities, and other coordinating actions should be provided. This includes working with educators to incorporate spiritual principles into classroom instruction and extracurricular activities, cultivating an accepting and safe space for students of diverse religious backgrounds, and encouraging mutual respect and understanding among all school community members. Second, the school principal must ensure he is a role model for upholding spiritual values. Therefore, the involvement of school principals as visionary learning leaders is limited to schools and the community. Additionally, the principal must work closely with parents and community members to ensure that the school's values align with the larger community's values. By actively demonstrating and promoting spiritual values in all aspects of school life, the principal plays a crucial role in shaping the overall culture and atmosphere of the school.

The overall research findings, as described above, can be seen clearly in Table 2 below.

**Table 2. Spiritual Values as Curriculum Development**

Category	Fundamental Spiritual Values-Based Religion	Strategy
<i>Tauhid</i> (Oneness of God)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Belief in the uniqueness and oneness of Allah</li> <li>b. Importance of maintaining a strong connection with Allah</li> <li>c. How <i>tauhid</i> influences daily life and decision-making</li> </ul>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Establish curriculum integration escalation policies, discussions with various roles (annual and semester work meetings), socialization of policies, formulating various actions, building agreements, establishing programs and implementation strategies, scheduling joint program control, and any empowering programs.</li> <li>2. Integrated into implementing all materials, teaching materials, and daily practices in the school, family, and community environment.</li> <li>3. Carried out jointly by the school and parents.</li> <li>4. Administratively controlled through a contact book and daily pocketbook (<i>a'malul yaum</i>)</li> <li>5. Held in various actual actions, such as weekly prayer performances, <i>Generous Friday</i>, regular <i>Istighotsah</i>, the commemoration of Islamic holidays, <i>tahfidzul Qur'an</i>, <i>traveling tadarrus</i> (Darling), <i>ziarah ulama</i> and <i>Walisongo</i>, religious competitions, visits to orphans and <i>faqir</i>, <i>tadabbur 'Alam</i>, and others.</li> </ol>
<i>Akhlak</i> (Good Character)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Importance of displaying good character traits in Islam</li> <li>b. Examples of <i>akhlak</i> from the Prophet Muhammad's teachings</li> <li>c. How practicing good character can strengthen one's faith</li> </ul>	
<i>Ibadah</i> (Worship)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Various forms of worship in Islam (<i>shalat</i>, fasting, <i>zakat</i>, <i>hajj</i>)</li> <li>b. Importance of fulfilling one's religious obligations</li> <li>c. How <i>Ibadah</i> can bring spiritual fulfillment and closeness to Allah</li> </ul>	
<i>Jihad</i> (Struggle)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Understanding the concept of <i>Jihad</i> in Islam</li> <li>b. Different forms of <i>Jihad</i> (striving for good, self-improvement, defending Islam)</li> <li>c. How <i>Jihad</i> can help believers overcome challenges and maintain faith</li> </ul>	

## Discussion

There is increasing recognition of the significance of integrating spiritual values within the academic curriculum to foster holistic development among students (Health et al., 2020; Juharyanto, 2020; Mulang et al., 2023). However, many educational institutions continue to confront difficulties effectively incorporating these values due to the absence of clear guidelines and resources. Implementing spirituality values in schools remains inconsistent and disjointed without comprehensive frameworks or teacher training. Furthermore, students' diverse religious and cultural backgrounds exacerbate efforts to develop a universally inclusive curriculum. Despite these obstacles, some schools have successfully established programs that incorporate spiritual values that respect the diversity of their student body. By nurturing open dialogue and understanding among students and staff, these institutions are paving the way for a more inclusive and holistic educational experience (Nugroho, 2024; Hermino & Arifin, 2020; Phan et al., 2020).

This comprehensive educational approach improves students' academic achievement and promotes emotional and social welfare. Parents of students



acknowledge that spirituality serves as a salvation for upcoming generations facing uncertainties caused by technological advancements. Parents and society believe that the most beneficial education for children prioritizes enhancing spiritual values integrated into the school curriculum and programs. The shared belief in incorporating spiritual values into the curriculum is the main foundation for the educational process, which is a collaborative effort between schools and society. The convergence of opinions among all stakeholders was to incorporate and merge four essential spiritual principles, namely *tauhid* (the Oneness of God), *akhlak* (good character), worship, and *Jihad* (struggle), into the educational curriculum, following widely held convictions and the results of deliberations.

There is increasing recognition of the significance of integrating spiritual values within the academic curriculum to foster holistic development among students (Sena et al., 2021). However, many educational institutions continue to confront difficulties effectively incorporating these values due to the absence of clear guidelines and resources. Implementing spirituality values in schools remains inconsistent and disjointed without comprehensive frameworks or teacher training. Furthermore, students' diverse religious and cultural backgrounds exacerbate efforts to develop a universally inclusive curriculum. Despite these obstacles, some schools have successfully established programs that incorporate spiritual values that respect the diversity of their student body (Hermino & Arifin, 2020; Stables, 2015). These institutions provide a more inclusive and holistic educational experience by nurturing open dialogue and understanding among students and staff.

Supervising the execution of initiatives aimed at fostering students' spiritual growth and maturation is an essential aspect of our educational mission (Dian et al., 2022; Juharyanto et al., 2023). This may involve collaborating with teachers, parents, and community members to create a supportive and inclusive environment that values diversity and encourages students to explore their beliefs and values (Bahri, 2020; Maisyaroh, 2021; Niqab et al., 2014). Additionally, the principal plays a crucial role in modeling and reinforcing ethical behavior and moral values in all school life, from decision-making processes to interactions with others. By actively promoting the inclusion of spiritual values in the curriculum, the principal helps to cultivate a school culture that fosters empathy, respect, and a sense of interconnectedness among students, staff, and the broader community. This emphasis on spiritual values enriches the educational experience and helps students develop a solid moral compass to guide them throughout their lives. By promoting a culture of respect and understanding, the principal creates a safe and welcoming environment where students can freely express their beliefs and opinions (Aboramadan et al., 2020; Garbe et al., 2020; Arifin, 2023). Ultimately, by prioritizing integrating spiritual values into the school environment, the principal sets the tone for a community that celebrates diversity and embraces everyone's uniqueness.

## CONCLUSION

Integrating spiritual values into the school curriculum is becoming increasingly important as students face challenges and struggles. This comprehensive approach improves academic achievement and promotes

emotional and social welfare. Parents and society recognize the importance of spirituality in preparing future generations. However, many educational institutions face difficulties in effectively incorporating these values due to the absence of clear guidelines and resources. Some schools have successfully established programs that respect the diversity of their student body, paving the way for a more inclusive and holistic educational experience.

This research significantly affects character education at schools through the in-depth integration of spiritual values. Leadership and community involvement emerged in the study as the main factors to which they gave additional weight, developed a positive and supportive learning environment for the students, and made the curriculum more inclusive and comprehensive. Consequently, this research crowns the learners as the ones who are not only brilliant in the academic area but also embody the virtues of a developed character, a well-formed ethical conscience, and an authentic spiritual life.

#### ACKNOWLEDGMENT

We sincerely thank you for your role as a reviewer in the *Al-Tanzim: Jurnal Manajemen Pendidikan Islam* publication. Your expertise and commitment have been crucial to our success. We extend our heartfelt appreciation to the team from the *Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris Tanjong Malim, Perak, Malaysia*, and all our associates from *Universitas Negeri Malang*. Your participation in this study significantly enhances the quality of our research collaboration and publication.

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