



## **Cultivating Spiritual Culture through Principal Leadership : A Case Study of an Integrated Islamic Elementary School**

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### **Article Information:**

Received June 04, 2026

Revised June 05, 2026

Accepted June 22, 2026

### **ABSTRACT**

This study examines the role of the principal leadership in cultivating spiritual culture at SD IT An-Nadzhir, an integrated Islamic elementary school in Payakumbuh, Indonesia. Despite growing interest in spiritual leadership within educational contexts, limited research has specifically explored how principals develop religious culture in Islamic school facing modernization challenges. Employing a qualitative phenomenological design, this study purposively selected informants including the principal, teachers, staff, students, parents, and school committee member (n=10). Data were collected through in depth interviews, participatory observation, and document analysis, then analyzed using Miles, Huberman, and Saldana's interactive model. Finding reveal that the principal cultivated spiritual culture through five strategic approaches : modelling religious behavior, institutionalizing religious routines, strengthening religious programs, practicing Islamic communication, and supervising spiritual values implementation. Spiritual culture manifested through congregational Dhuha prayer, Qur'an memorization, student preaching programs, greeting culture, and integration of Islamic values across the curriculum. The principal's religious and participatory leadership fostered a harmonious, disciplined, and Islamic characterized school environment. This study contributes empirical evidence on spiritual leadership practices in Islamic education and offers practical implications for school administrators seeking to strengthen religious culture amidst educational modernization.

**Keyword:** *Integrated Islamic School Culture, Participative School Leadership, Principal Spiritual Leadership, Religious School Culture, Spiritual Values Integration*

Journal Homepage

<https://ejournal.uinmybatusangkar.ac.id/ojs/index.php/alfikrah/index>

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How to cite:

Syahrial, Nurarifah, Arwis Yuliana, Dina Gusniati. Cultivating Spiritual Culture through Principal Leadership : A Case Study of an Integrated Islamic Elementary School. *Al-Fikrah: Jurnal Manajemen Pendidikan*, 14(1), 15-25. <https://doi.org/10.31958/jaf.v10i1.6007>

Published by:

Universitas Islam Negeri Mahmud Yunus Batusangkar Press

**AL-FIKRAH: Jurnal Manajemen Pendidikan**

## **INTRODUCTION**

The principal's leadership is a strategic factor in determining the quality of educational management, particularly in Islamic educational institutions, which are not only oriented toward academic achievement but also toward the spiritual character development of students. Principals are responsible for creating a religious, humane, and conducive educational environment through the establishment of a school culture grounded in Islamic values. In the context of Islamic education, principal leadership is understood not merely as administrative and managerial competence but also as the ability to serve as a moral and spiritual role model for all members of the school community.

The principal serves as the primary driving force in creating an effective, religious, and quality-oriented school climate. A professional principal not only performs administrative functions but also acts as an educator, manager, supervisor, leader, innovator, and motivator in developing a positive school culture (Mulyasa, 2022). In the context of Islamic education, these roles become increasingly important because principals are responsible for fostering a spiritual culture capable of continuously shaping students' Islamic character.

With regard to spiritual competence, principals are required to cultivate a strong spiritual culture to ensure that Islamic values are continuously internalized in the lives of all school members. According to (Fry, 2003), spiritual leadership emphasizes the importance of values, vision, exemplary behaviour, and moral commitment in building a meaningful and humane organizational culture.

A school's spiritual culture refers to a system of values, habits, and religious behaviours that develop within the educational environment through habituation and exemplary practices. This culture is reflected in worship activities, Islamic communication, discipline, mutual respect, and the integration of religious values into daily educational activities. In Islamic educational institutions, spiritual culture constitutes a distinctive identity that differentiates them from general schools. It also functions as a means of shaping social behaviour, thereby strengthening students' religious character and enhancing the work culture of school members. An Islamic organizational culture serves as the foundation for building quality educational institutions that are religiously oriented and focused on character development (Sulaiman et al., 2022). Organizational cultures grounded in spiritual values can create harmonious, disciplined, and responsible educational environments. In this context, the principal occupies a central position in shaping spirituality through policies, communication, habituation, and supervision of the implementation of Islamic values within the school environment.

This perspective is consistent with the view of (Muhaimin, 2019), who explains that a school's religious culture is formed through the habituation of religious values in daily life, supported by exemplary behaviour, guidance, and an educational environment that facilitates the internalization of Islamic morals. Religious culture is manifested not only through formal worship activities but also through discipline, responsibility, social awareness, and communication patterns among school members.

According to (Wahjosumidjo, 2021), the principal is an educational leader responsible for the success of educational processes through the effective management of human resources, school culture, and learning systems. In Islamic education, principals function not only as administrative leaders but also as spiritual mentors who influence the overall organizational culture of the school. Religious leadership is capable of creating an educational environment that supports the development of noble character and strengthens students' Islamic identity.

Studies on principal leadership in Islamic education have been widely conducted. Research by (Rohman et al., 2025) explains that the transformation of Islamic educational leadership requires the integration of spiritual values with managerial effectiveness to

establish a religious and professional organizational culture. The study demonstrated that spiritual leadership influences organizational commitment and the development of an Islamic work culture. However, the research focused primarily on the transformation of Islamic educational organizations in general and did not specifically address the formation of spiritual culture at the level of integrated Islamic elementary schools.

Another study by (Arfandi & Iffah, 2018) revealed that organizational culture in Islamic educational institutions is developed through the continuous habituation of religious values in social and educational activities. The study highlighted the importance of exemplary conduct and social interaction in fostering an Islamic culture within schools. Similarly, (Hestiana & Labaso, 2024) argued that the organizational culture of Islamic educational institutions is established through the internalization of prophetic values reflected in the social behaviour of school members. Nevertheless, both studies focused primarily on organizational culture in general and did not position principals as the main actors in shaping the school's spiritual culture.

Furthermore, (Schein, 2017) explains that organizational culture is formed through shared values that are manifested in behaviours, symbols, habits, and the fundamental assumptions of an organization. In Islamic educational institutions, spiritual culture constitutes an integral part of organizational identity that influences social interactions and the behaviour of all school members.

Research on school religious culture conducted by (Farid & Nugraha, 2024) found that organizational culture contributes significantly to the internalization of Islamic values among students through habituation and teachers' exemplary behaviour. The study showed that the school environment plays an important role in shaping students' religious character. Likewise, (Zainuddin & Syarifuddin, 2023) demonstrated that principal leadership significantly influences the development of religious culture in Islamic schools through exemplary conduct, worship habituation, and Islamic communication. Their findings indicate that religious principals are capable of creating harmonious educational environments that support students' character formation. Nevertheless, these studies have not comprehensively examined the leadership strategies employed by principals in building spiritual culture within integrated Islamic schools.

Previous studies have consistently shown that principal leadership plays a crucial role in developing religious and Islamic organizational cultures through exemplary conduct, habituation, communication, and the reinforcement of spiritual values within educational settings. These findings confirm that spiritual leadership contributes to students' character development, enhances organizational commitment, and fosters a religious school climate. However, there remains a lack of studies specifically explaining how principals implement leadership strategies to cultivate spiritual culture in integrated Islamic elementary schools, particularly through the integration of religious programs, religious habituation, and the internalization of Islamic values into daily life. Addressing this gap is important because, theoretically, it can enrich the development of spiritual-based Islamic educational leadership studies at the elementary level, while practically providing models and recommendations for principals in promoting sustainable spiritual cultures. To address this gap, the present study focuses on principal leadership in shaping the spiritual culture of SD IT An-Nadzahir Payakumbuh by analyzing exemplary practices, religious habituation, the strengthening of religious programs, and Islamic communication patterns implemented in school life.

Based on previous studies, it is evident that research on Islamic organizational culture and Islamic educational leadership has developed considerably. However, studies specifically examining principal leadership in shaping spiritual culture within integrated Islamic elementary schools remain relatively limited. (Syam, 2017) argues that spiritual culture occupies a vital position in the development of Islamic educational institutions because it serves as a guide for behaviour and institutional development. Therefore,

principal leadership is essential for maintaining the consistency of religious culture in accordance with the vision and mission of Islamic education.

This research gap highlights the need for a more in-depth investigation into how principals develop spiritual culture through exemplary behavior, religious habituation, the strengthening of religious programs, and Islamic communication within the school environment. The novelty of this study lies in its focus on the relationship between principal leadership and the formation of spiritual culture in an integrated Islamic school, specifically SD IT An-Nadzahir Payakumbuh. This school is recognized for its strong spiritual culture, which is reflected in programs such as Qur'an memorization (*Tahfiz al-Qur'an*), the Young Preacher Program (*Da'i Cilik*), congregational worship practices, the culture of greetings and politeness, and the integration of Islamic values into learning activities. Therefore, this study aims to analyze the principal's leadership in shaping the spiritual culture at SD IT An-Nadzahir Payakumbuh and to contribute to the development of spiritual-based Islamic educational leadership studies.

## **RESEARCH METHODE**

This study employed a qualitative approach with a phenomenological research design to gain an in-depth understanding of the experiences, behaviours, and meanings associated with principal leadership in shaping the spiritual culture at SD IT An-Nadzahir Payakumbuh. A qualitative approach was chosen because the study focused on exploring social phenomena in their natural and contextual settings within Islamic education. According to (Sugiyono, 2022), qualitative research is used to examine natural conditions in which the researcher serves as the primary instrument for obtaining rich and comprehensive data. This study also refers to the perspective of (Hardani et al., 2020), who argue that qualitative research aims to understand social phenomena deeply through direct interaction with informants in natural settings. Therefore, the researcher was directly involved in the data collection process to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the principal's leadership practices in fostering the school's spiritual culture. A phenomenological approach was adopted because the study sought to understand the subjective experiences of informants regarding the principal's spiritual leadership practices in everyday school life.

The study was conducted at SD IT An-Nadzahir Payakumbuh in May 2026. The research site was purposively selected because the school is recognized for its strong spiritual culture, reflected in its Qur'an memorization (*Tahfiz al-Qur'an*) program, the Young Preacher Program (*Da'i Cilik*), congregational worship practices, the culture of greetings and courtesy, and the integration of Islamic values into learning activities. The research participants consisted of the principal, two teachers, one educational staff member, three students, one school committee member, and two parents of students. Informants were selected using purposive sampling based on their involvement in and understanding of the school's spiritual culture.

In this study, the researcher served as the primary research instrument, responsible for planning the study, determining the research focus, selecting informants, collecting data, observing the research setting, conducting in-depth interviews, interpreting and analysing the data, and drawing conclusions. According to (Hardani et al., 2020), researchers in qualitative studies function as the main instrument in determining research focus, selecting participants, collecting and analysing data, interpreting findings, and formulating conclusions. Therefore, the direct presence of the researcher in the field was essential for obtaining valid and in-depth data. The researcher also established effective communication and positive relationships with the informants to ensure that the data collected were comprehensive, objective, and consistent with actual conditions in the field.

Supporting instruments included interview guidelines, observation sheets, documentation sheets, and an audio recorder. The interview protocol was developed based

on the main research variables, namely principal leadership, school spiritual culture, and the implementation of Islamic values in school life. Observation sheets were used to record religious activities and social behaviours among school members, whereas documentation studies were employed to enhance the credibility of the data through school documents, photographs of activities, and religious archives. In addition, an audio recorder was utilized to record interviews with informants to ensure the accuracy and completeness of the data and to facilitate transcription and data analysis.

Data were collected through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and documentation studies. In-depth interviews were conducted to obtain information regarding principal leadership, the implementation of spiritual culture, and the supporting and inhibiting factors affecting its implementation. Interviews were conducted in a formally structured manner, with each session lasting approximately 45–90 minutes. Each informant was interviewed one or two times, depending on the need for further data exploration. Sample interview questions included: “How does the principal instill spiritual values among school members?”, “What programs are implemented to develop spiritual culture in the school?”, “What forms of exemplary behaviour are demonstrated by the principal in daily life?”, and “What challenges are encountered in implementing spiritual culture programs?”

Participant observation was carried out through direct observation of religious activities within the school environment, including congregational *Dhuha* prayers, Qur’an memorization activities, the culture of greetings, and social interactions among school members. Observations were conducted periodically throughout the research process for approximately one month, with schedules adjusted to routine school activities in the morning, break times, and specific religious programs. During the observation process, the researcher systematically compiled field notes containing descriptions of activities, interactions among school members, emerging behaviours, and preliminary reflections and interpretations of the observed phenomena. These field notes were prepared immediately after each observation session to ensure data accuracy and to support the subsequent analysis process. Meanwhile, documentation studies were used to complement the research data, including the school’s vision and mission, regulations, schedules of religious activities, photographs, and other supporting documents related to the school's spiritual culture.

Data analysis was conducted interactively through the stages of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing, as proposed by (Miles et al., 2014). Data reduction involved selecting and focusing on information relevant to the objectives of the study, while data presentation was organized in narrative form to facilitate understanding of the relationships among the data. Conclusions were drawn gradually based on findings that emerged during the data collection process.

The analysis began with open coding, in which data obtained from interviews, observations, and documentation were identified and coded according to the emerging units of meaning. This was followed by axial coding, where related codes were grouped into categories such as principal exemplary behaviour, religious habituation, reinforcement of religious programs, Islamic communication, and supporting and inhibiting factors in the development of spiritual culture. The next stage was selective coding, which involved integrating these categories into broader themes that explained the patterns of principal leadership in shaping the school's spiritual culture. Theme identification was carried out through repeated examination of the data, comparisons among different data sources, and the identification of patterns, similarities, and differences emerging from interview, observation, and documentation findings.

Theme validation was conducted through source triangulation and methodological triangulation, peer debriefing, and repeated verification of the consistency between the identified themes and field data to ensure the credibility of the interpretations. All

processes of organizing and analyzing the data were performed manually with the assistance of word-processing and spreadsheet software to facilitate coding, category classification, and data matrix development. The trustworthiness of the data was established through source triangulation and methodological triangulation by comparing information obtained from interviews, observations, and documentation across different informants, thereby ensuring the validity, dependability, and credibility of the findings.

## **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

### **Result**

#### **a) Principal's Exemplary Leadership in Shaping Spiritual Culture**

The findings revealed that the principal played a central role in fostering the spiritual culture at SD IT An-Nadzahir Payakumbuh. The principal's leadership was reflected not only in formal policy-making but also in the exemplary religious behaviours demonstrated in everyday school life. The principal consistently participated in collective worship activities, provided religious guidance to teachers and students, and promoted Islamic communication within the school environment. The findings indicated that the school's spiritual culture was developed through persuasive, humane, and participatory approaches, enabling all members of the school community to share responsibility for maintaining the school's religious culture.

Based on the interview with the principal, it was found that the development of spiritual culture was carried out through the habituation of religious practices and the reinforcement of exemplary behaviour in all school activities. The principal stated:

*“Spiritual culture cannot be developed solely through written regulations, but it must be exemplified through the daily behaviour of all school members, especially the principal and teachers.”*

This statement suggests that exemplary behaviour constituted the primary strategy for building the school's spiritual culture.

Interviews with teachers further revealed that the principal actively provided spiritual guidance through regular meetings, religious briefings, and evaluations of school religious activities. Teachers also reported that the principal consistently emphasized the importance of maintaining a religious culture. One teacher remarked:

*“The principal always reminds us to maintain the culture of greeting others, to be disciplined in congregational worship, and to make reading the Qur'an a habit before lessons begin.”*

Moreover, teachers perceived the principal's leadership as open and collaborative, allowing all members of the school community to participate actively in the implementation of religious programs.

#### **b) Implementation of Spiritual Culture Programs**

Observational findings demonstrated that the school's spiritual culture was visibly reflected in daily activities. The researcher observed that students performed congregational *Dhuha* prayers before the beginning of classes, recited the Qur'an together, and habitually greeted teachers and peers with Islamic salutations. Teachers and educational staff were also actively involved in guiding students during these religious activities. In addition, the school environment was enriched with Islamic symbols, including calligraphy, Islamic motivational slogans, worship schedules, and moral education media that strengthened the religious atmosphere of the school.

Furthermore, documentation data indicated that the school implemented various programs supporting spiritual culture, including the *Tahfiz al-Qur'an* program, the Young Preacher Program (*Da'i Cilik*), Islamic mentoring activities, and Islamic parenting programs involving students' parents. The school's vision and mission documents

emphasized that nurturing a Qur'anic generation with noble character constituted the primary educational objective of SD IT An-Nadzhir Payakumbuh. The existence of these programs demonstrated that spiritual culture was not merely an incidental activity but had been integrated into the educational system and organizational culture of the school in a sustainable manner.

In addition, the principal reinforced spiritual culture through various religious programs, such as congregational *Dhuha* prayers, *Tahfiz al-Qur'an*, the Young Preacher Program (*Da'i Cilik*), the practice of reciting prayers before and after lessons, and the cultivation of greetings and courteous behavior. These programs were implemented regularly and integrated into everyday school activities. Teachers and educational staff were actively involved in their implementation, indicating that spiritual culture was not solely the responsibility of the principal but had become a shared culture within the school organization.

### **c) Monitoring and Guidance of Spiritual Culture**

The findings also showed that the principal continuously monitored and supervised the implementation of spiritual culture within the school. Monitoring was conducted through the evaluation of religious programs, teacher development activities, and regular communication with parents and the school committee. One teacher explained:

*“Religious programs are evaluated regularly. The principal also frequently discusses these programs with teachers and parents so that the habits developed at school can continue at home.”*

These findings indicate that the sustainability of spiritual culture was supported through continuous supervision and collaboration among school stakeholders.

### **d) Supporting Factors and Challenges in Developing Spiritual Culture**

The findings revealed that the involvement of teachers, educational staff, and parents constituted the main supporting factors in the successful development of spiritual culture at the school. Nevertheless, several challenges were identified. The principal explained:

*“Technological developments and the influence of social media have become particular challenges in shaping students' character. Therefore, we continuously strengthen communication with parents through parenting activities and joint guidance programs.”*

This finding indicates that the development of spiritual culture requires collaboration among schools, families, and the broader social environment to address the challenges posed by rapid technological and social changes.

## **Discussion**

### **a) Principal's Exemplary Leadership in Shaping Spiritual Culture**

The findings of this study indicate that principal leadership is closely associated with the successful development of the school's spiritual culture. The principal functions not only as an educational administrator but also as a spiritual leader capable of cultivating values, vision, and a religious culture within the school organization.

These findings support the spiritual leadership theory proposed by (Fry, 2003), which emphasizes the importance of vision, exemplary behaviour, and moral values in creating a meaningful and humane organizational culture. In the present study, the principal was found to foster spiritual culture through exemplary conduct and the continuous habituation of religious practices. The findings also reinforce the view of (Usman, 2020), who argues that educational leadership is a process of influencing, mobilizing, and directing educational resources to achieve organizational goals effectively. In this study, the principal successfully mobilized teachers, students, and educational staff

to collaboratively develop the school's spiritual culture through religious and participatory approaches.

The results are also consistent with the study conducted by (Farid & Nugraha, 2024), which explains that a religious organizational culture in Islamic educational institutions is developed through exemplary behaviour and social interactions carried out by school leaders and teachers. The present study found that the principal sought to cultivate spiritual culture through humane and participatory approaches, enabling teachers, students, and educational staff to feel involved in preserving the school's religious values. The principal provided opportunities for teachers to collaborate in implementing spiritual programs and promoted courteous and open Islamic communication. These conditions fostered harmonious social relationships and strengthened school members' commitment to the established spiritual culture.

Furthermore, the findings are in line with those of (Hestiana & Labaso, 2024), who argued that the organizational culture of Islamic educational institutions is shaped through the internalization of prophetic values within the social life of school members. In this study, the principal played a significant role in this internalization process through exemplary religious behaviour, the reinforcement of Islamic discipline, and continuous character development among students. The principal functioned not only as a policy-maker but also as a moral and spiritual role model who demonstrated Islamic values in everyday school life. These findings indicate that principal leadership exerts a substantial influence on the successful formation of spiritual culture within Islamic educational settings.

#### **b) Implementation of Spiritual Culture Programs**

The spiritual culture developed within the school also reflects the implementation of an Islamic organizational culture, as described by (Syam, 2017), who argues that organizational culture in Islamic educational institutions serves as a means of establishing institutional identity and strengthening the religious character of school members. In this study, the culture of greetings, religious habituation, and Islamic communication represented organizational symbols that reinforced the school's religious identity. These findings are consistent with (Schein, 2017) organizational culture theory, which states that organizational culture is formed through shared values manifested in symbols, habits, and the behaviours of organizational members.

The findings are also consistent with the study by (Rohman et al., 2025), which suggests that spiritual leadership in Islamic education strengthens religious organizational culture and enhances the commitment of school members. In the present study, the principal acted as the driving force behind the development of spiritual culture through exemplary conduct, religious guidance, Islamic communication, and the reinforcement of religious programs. The principal not only provided administrative instructions but also actively participated in spiritual activities, including congregational *Dhuha* prayers, Qur'an memorization programs, the Young Preacher Program (*Da'i Cilik*), and the cultivation of greeting practices. Such involvement demonstrates the strong influence of principal leadership in creating a harmonious and religious school environment.

Nevertheless, this study differs from that of (Rohman et al., 2025), which focused primarily on the transformation of Islamic educational leadership in general. In contrast, the present study specifically examines the practical leadership strategies employed by the principal in fostering spiritual culture at the integrated Islamic elementary school level through religious activities embedded in everyday school life.

The study also found that spiritual culture had a positive impact on students' behaviour. Students became more disciplined in performing religious practices, more courteous in communication, and more socially concerned. The principal consistently encouraged religious habituation through congregational worship, moral development

programs, and the reinforcement of Islamic values in classroom learning. The harmonious and religious school environment fostered positive habits that influenced students' behaviour both at school and at home. These findings suggest that principal leadership in promoting spiritual culture contributes not only to the development of organizational culture but also to the sustainable formation of students' character.

### **c) Monitoring and Guidance of Spiritual Culture**

The findings of this study also support the research conducted by (Arfandi & Iffah, 2018), which explains that Islamic organizational culture is developed through the continuous habituation of religious values in educational and social activities. The present study found that the principal acted as the primary agent in cultivating such habituation through the reinforcement of worship discipline, the culture of greetings, moral development, and supervision of the religious behaviour of school members. The principal regularly provided guidance to teachers and educational staff to ensure that all educational activities remained oriented toward the development of students' Islamic character. These findings indicate that the success of religious habituation within the school is strongly influenced by the consistency of the principal's leadership in maintaining the sustainability of spiritual culture.

The results differ from those of several previous studies that mainly emphasized organizational culture from administrative and managerial perspectives. This study demonstrates that the development of spiritual culture in Islamic schools cannot rely solely on formal regulations and institutional programs but requires principal leadership characterized by religiosity, effective communication, humanism, and participation. Principals who serve as spiritual role models are proven to be more effective in creating harmonious and disciplined school environments that support students' Islamic character formation.

These findings are also consistent with those reported by (Zainuddin & Syarifuddin, 2023), who found that religious, communicative, and participatory leadership contributes significantly to the development of a religious culture that positively affects students' behavior and the overall school climate. Principals function not only as educational administrators but also as spiritual role models in everyday life. Therefore, the present study demonstrates that principal leadership constitutes the foundation for sustaining spiritual culture and strengthening the identity of Islamic educational institutions amid the challenges posed by educational modernization.

### **d) Supporting Factors and Challenges**

Despite these positive findings, the study also identified several challenges in developing spiritual culture within the school. Technological advancements, the influence of social media, and differences in students' family backgrounds were found to affect the process of internalizing spiritual values. To address these challenges, the principal sought to strengthen communication with teachers and parents through Islamic parenting programs, character development activities, and regular evaluations of religious programs. These findings suggest that the school's spiritual culture depends not only on principal leadership but also on the support of families and the wider community to ensure the consistent implementation of religious values in students' daily lives.

The findings of this study have several theoretical and practical implications. Theoretically, they demonstrate that the principal's spiritual leadership constitutes a crucial element in the development of Islamic organizational culture at the elementary school level. The findings further support Fry's, (2003) spiritual leadership theory and Schein's, (2017) organizational culture theory within the context of Islamic education. Practically, the results indicate that the development of spiritual culture cannot be achieved merely through formal regulations but requires exemplary leadership, continuous religious

habituation, and collaboration among schools, families, and communities. Therefore, a leadership model characterized by religiosity, humanism, and participation may serve as a reference for principals in developing sustainable spiritual cultures within Islamic educational institutions.

## **CONCLUSION**

This phenomenological study examined the principal's leadership in cultivating spiritual culture at SD IT An-Nadzhir Payakumbuh, an integrated Islamic elementary school in Indonesia. The findings demonstrate that the principal's spiritual leadership characterized by modelling religious behaviour, institutionalizing routines, strengthening programs, practicing Islamic communication, and continuous supervision—played a decisive role in developing a robust spiritual culture. This culture manifested through ritual practices (congregational prayers, Qur'an recitation), character programs (tahfiz, Da'i Cilik), cultural symbols (Islamic greetings, calligraphy), and curricular integration of Islamic values.

Theoretically, this study advances understanding of spiritual leadership in educational contexts by demonstrating how Fry's (2003) framework operates within Islamic cultural settings. Unlike corporate spiritual leadership, which emphasizes vision and altruistic love, Islamic school leadership requires deeper integration of religious traditions and community expectations. Additionally, Schein's, (2017) organizational culture model is extended by revealing how religious values become institutionalized through both formal programs and informal cultural practices. These findings suggest that effective spiritual leadership in Islamic education requires cultural competence, religious knowledge, and community engagement beyond generic leadership competencies.

Practically, this research offers several implications for Islamic school administrators. First, principals should prioritize authentic modelling of religious behaviour rather than relying solely on formal policies. Second, religious programs should be integrated into daily routines and curricular activities to ensure sustainability. Third, community engagement (parents, committees) is essential for reinforcing values beyond school boundaries. Fourth, principals require professional development in both educational leadership and religious education to effectively cultivate spiritual culture.

This study has several limitations: single-site focus limits generalizability; reliance on self-report may introduce social desirability bias; and the qualitative design cannot establish causal relationships. Future research should employ mixed methods to examine spiritual leadership effects quantitatively, explore comparative studies across different Islamic school types, and investigate how principals sustain spiritual culture over time amid modernization pressures. Longitudinal studies could examine how spiritual culture influences student character outcomes. Cross-cultural comparisons with Islamic schools in other countries would further illuminate the interplay between local culture, religion, and leadership practices.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

The author would like to express sincere gratitude to the Master's Program in Islamic Educational Management, Postgraduate School of UIN Mahmud Yunus Batusangkar, for providing academic guidance, support, and encouragement throughout the completion of this research. Special appreciation is extended to SD IT An-Nadzhir Payakumbuh for granting permission and providing valuable cooperation during the data collection process. The author is also deeply grateful to all participants, including the principal, teachers, educational staff, students, members of the school committee, and parents, whose willingness to share their experiences and insights greatly contributed to the success of this study. Finally, the author would like to thank all lectures, colleagues, and individuals who provided support and constructive input during the completion of this research .

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