# Spiritual Leadership: Theory and Practices in Schools
# (A Literature Review)

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| Article Info | ABSTRACT |
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| **Article history** <br> Received December 24, 2024 <br> Revised April 16, 2025 <br> Accepted April 17, 2025 <br><br> **Keywords**: Principal leadership; School; Spiritual leadership | Literature reviews on spiritual leadership lack research, particularly those conducted in the school context between 2020 and 2024. This article explores and reviews the theory and practices of spiritual leadership in schools. The articles used in this literature review were obtained through Google Scholar by entering the keywords "spiritual leadership," "principal leadership," and "school", with 10 articles selected for further analysis relevant to the key words. Based on the literature review results, theoretically, in a school context, spiritual leadership can be defined as a model of leadership that intrinsically motivates followers to cultivate vision, hope/faith, and altruistic love that enable followers, including teachers, to enhance their psychological well-being. Practically, (1) teachers' professional well-being is positively impacted by spiritual leadership; (2) principals' performance, students' accomplishments, or academic success are positively impacted by spiritual leadership; (3) organizational citizen behaviors are positively impacted by spiritual leadership. Due to its important impacts, spiritual leadership needs further research to get empirical data in the school context. |

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Education is a deliberate and planned effort to create the best possible learning environment for students to develop their spiritual and religious strengths, self-control, personality, intelligence, noble character, and other skills (Riski, Rusdinal, & Gistituti, 2021). Leadership is the most crucial human factor determining the success of an organization (Ali & Anwar, 2021; Robiah, Telaumbanua, Marzuki, Zulkipli, & Dwiputra, 2024), educational institution, or governmental agency. It serves as the driving force responsible for all organizational activities (Hilmi & Ashari, 2024). The quality and achievement of educational goals are closely linked to the principal's role as the school's leader (Fonsén & Lahtero, 2024). Leadership and school management require the principal to possess the skills and knowledge about the objectives, processes, and technologies underlying education at each school level and a commitment to continuous professional improvement (Galdames-Calderón, 2023; Karacabey, 2021). Through effective principal leadership, schools can achieve educational success (Mukhlasin, 2021).

Leadership is how an individual persuades a group to pursue a common objective. According to the definition of leadership as a process, it is a transactional event between the leader and the followers rather than a quality or attribute the leader possesses. The procedure highlights that leadership is not a straight, one-way process by implying that a leader influences and is influenced by followers.  (Northouse, 2021). There are various leadership styles, such as transformational, transactional, situational, instructional, laissez-faire (Anthony & Hermans, 2020), spiritual, and others. In this study, the researcher focuses on spiritual leadership.

Spiritual leadership has evolved into a new paradigm and approach to leadership within the last ten years (Oh & Wang, 2020). Spiritual leadership has been implemented in various organizations and has positively impacted them (Astakoni, Sariani, Yulistiyono, Sutaguna, & Utami, 2022). Several organizations include spiritual workshops and lessons in their training programs to boost productivity (Low & Ayoko, 2020). Consequently, more and more successful organizations are led by leaders who emphasize spiritual values (Çimen & Karadağ, 2019).

Spiritual leadership is one form of leadership approach applied by school principals (Li, Ju, Kong, & Jiang, 2023). These spiritual values are implemented to build commitment among individuals within the organization. Belief in religious truths enhances commitment and contributions to the organization. In practice, spiritual leadership firmly upholds the values of religious spirituality (Yulindasari, 2023). A leader who employs a spiritual leadership style pays attention to how others can grow, develop, and achieve the shared vision through imparting life values to them; thereby, educational management will have a significant influence on educators/teachers and learning (Muryani, Mukminin, & Ali, 2022).

Spiritual leadership that consistently provides love and compassion to students can shape spiritual and emotional character. IQ, EQ, and SQ walk hand in hand, reinforcing each other in daily activities between educators and students. This cycle strengthens the emergence of a school environment that is friendly, respectful, and full of love, which promotes character formation in school (Tabroni & Muldrianto, 2023).

Based on the issue above and the researcher's review of national and international articles, it was found that there are still few studies discussing spiritual leadership in schools, especially using the literature review method. Therefore, the researcher is interested in conducting a literature review on spiritual leadership in schools. This article's novelty is that it closes the important gaps of the few studies or reviews on spiritual leadership, adding to the existing knowledge. This spiritual leadership is urgent to help principals, including teacher leaders, improve student achievement.

## 2.    METHOD

This study employs the literature review method to identify, search, evaluate, and interpret all existing research. The review process begins with using the Google Scholar search engine to find international and national articles using keywords such as "Spiritual Leadership," "Principal Leadership," and "School." A total of 901 studies and articles related to this theme were identified.

These were then filtered based on predetermined criteria, resulting in 10 articles selected for further analysis. The criteria for selecting articles in this study are as follows:

a.    The research related to spiritual leadership.

b.    The research related to principal spiritual leadership at school.

c.    The research articles from the last five years, 2020 – 2024.

d.    International articles.

e.    Qualitative, quantitative, mixed methods, and literature review articles.

Furthermore, the articles are systematically analyzed and organized into a single proposition to ensure their interconnection, resulting in informative articles. These can serve as a resource for identifying future research gaps related to "Spiritual Leadership: Theory and Practices in Schools.

## 3.    RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section evaluates and interprets all the existing articles on spiritual leadership: theory and practices in schools.

**Table 1.** Reviewed Articles

| Source | Purpose | Country | Result of research |
|---|---|---|---|
| Karadağ, Altınay Aksal, Altınay Gazi, and Dağli (2020) | To examine whether there is a relationship between spiritual leadership, school culture, and academic success. | Turkey | As teachers' perceptions of their spiritual leadership grow, so does the perception of their school culture. The second outcome is the impact of school culture and spiritual leadership on academic achievement. As a result, the effects of school culture and spiritual leadership on two variables—high and low success—have been investigated independently. Academic success rises in tandem with teacher-perceived spiritual leadership and school culture. |
| Mohd and Mohamad (2022) | To evaluate the relationship between spiritual leadership and teacher performance among secondary school teachers in the state of Kelantan | Malaysia | Findings show that spiritual leadership has a significant relationship with teacher performance. |

| Source | Purpose | Country | Result of research |
|---|---|---|---|
| Terzı, Gocen, and Kaya (2020) | To analyze the impact of spiritual leadership on organizational trust and examine the relationship between both concepts. | Turkey | The study's results demonstrated distinct relationships between spiritual leadership and organizational trust, which is highly predicted by altruistic love, hope/faith, and organizational commitment. |
| Göçen and Şen (2021) | to determine whether geography, education, or other factors have any moderating influence on the relationship between SL and OCB by methodically examining the quantitative research examining SL and OCB. | Turkey | There is a significant and positive relationship at the medium level between SL and OCB. |
| Jing and Ju (2023) | To explore the impact of primary and secondary school teachers' grit, psychological health, and spiritual leadership | China | The findings show a positive impact of spiritual leadership on the psychological well-being of elementary and secondary school teachers. |
| Li, Ju, and Kong (2024) | To explore the effect of principals' spiritual leadership on primary and secondary school teachers' professional well-being in the Chinese context. | China | The findings showed that career calling acted as a mediator in the interaction between spiritual leadership and teachers' professional well-being, and that there was a strong positive correlation between these three factors. |
| Gunawan and Adha (2021) | To examine empirical evidence regarding the relationship between school quality as the dependent and independent variables of transformational, spiritual, and instructional leadership. Teachers' performance is another intervening variable. | Indonesia | The results demonstrate that: (1) teachers' performance has a direct impact on students' achievement, teachers' performance has a direct impact on students' achievement, transformational leadership has a direct impact on teachers' performance, spiritual leadership has a direct impact on teachers' performance, and teachers' performance has a direct impact on students' achievement. Additionally, (2) teachers' performance indirectly impacts students' achievement through transformational leadership, spiritual leadership, and instructional leadership. |
| Al Ansory, Asmony, and Nurmayanti (2022) | To ascertain how teachers at Islamic Boarding Schools in the East Praya District's workplace spirituality and organizational citizenship behavior | Indonesia | The results showed that spiritual leadership and organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) were strongly and positively correlated. Emotional intelligence greatly enhances Organizational Citizenship Behavior (OCB). Spiritual leadership significantly improves workplace spirituality. Emotional |

| Source | Purpose | Country | Result of research |
|---|---|---|---|
| | are impacted by spiritual leadership derived from emotional intelligence | | intelligence greatly enhances workplace spirituality. Workplace spirituality has a significant effect on organizational citizenship behavior (OCB). Workplace spirituality acts as a mediator in the link between Spiritual Leadership and Organizational Citizenship Behavior. Workplace spirituality acts as a mediator between emotional intelligence and corporate citizenship behavior. |
| Samar and Chaudhary (2021) | To investigate the relationship between spiritual leadership and the workplace well-being of secondary school teachers. | Pakistan | *Findings of the study reveal that spiritual leadership is strongly correlated with teachers' well-being in secondary schools. There is a weak positive relationship among spiritual leadership, teachers' relatedness, and teachers' competence needs.* |
| Jing and Soon-Yew (2023) | To transfer the role of spiritual leadership in corporate management to the field of basic education in China and to explore the mechanisms of spiritual leadership's influence on primary and secondary school teachers' well-being. | China | The vision, hope/and belief dimensions of spiritual leadership positively and significantly affected teacher well-being. However, the other dimension of spiritual leadership, altruistic love, did not positively and significantly affect teacher well-being. |

## 4.    RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Spiritual Leadership Theory

Since leaders are primarily responsible for determining and guiding the organization's value system, they have a crucial role in fostering trust. In order to guarantee the quality and efficiency of their workforce, leaders must attend to their spiritual requirements (Mohd & Mohamad, 2022). Spirituality is one of the concepts that has been thought to affect trust in the organization (Terzı et al., 2020). Spiritual leadership encompasses the values, attitudes, and behaviors that inspire oneself and others to find spiritual resilience through purpose and belonging. It is viewed as a comprehensive approach that integrates four essential aspects of human existence: physical body, logical reasoning, emotional sentiments, and spiritual essence (Fry, 2003).

Spirituality-based leadership is not just about a leader's intelligence and skills in leading others or their subordinates, but also about upholding values such as truth, honesty, integrity, credibility, wisdom, and compassion. These values can help both the leader and others to shape character and morality (Hilmi & Ashari, 2024). Spiritual leadership consists of values, attitudes, and behaviors to motivate oneself and others to have a sense of spirituality through

calling and membership, finding meaning in their lives, and feeling understood and appreciated. They experience a meaningful life. A paradigm of intrinsic motivation that fosters vision, hope/faith, and selfless love is the foundation for the philosophy of spiritual leadership. Meeting the basic requirements of leaders and followers for spiritual survival through membership and calling is the aim of spiritual leadership (Mukaromah, 2018).

In the field of education, spiritual leadership can establish a coherent and readily comprehensible vision that is conveyed to teachers. This enables teachers to develop a strong sense of purpose and mission, fostering a deeper understanding and appreciation of their work and enhancing their psychological well-being. Spiritual leadership supports teachers in building confidence in school development and their prospects (Hunsaker, 2019).

In a school context, spiritual leadership can be defined as a leadership model that intrinsically motivates followers to cultivate through vision, hope/faith, and altruistic love, enabling followers, including teachers, to enhance their psychological well-being.

**Spiritual Leadership Practices in Schools**

Based on the data from the analysis of the articles above, it was found that spiritual leadership has various positive influences when applied in schools. Spiritual leadership positively affects teachers' professional well-being (Jing & Ju, 2023; Jing & Soon-Yew, 2023; Li et al., 2024; Samar & Chaudhary, 2021). Spiritual leadership in education boosts teachers' confidence by outlining the school's prospects and conveying hope and belief in realizing the school's vision. Despite stress and challenges, teachers are motivated to exert positive efforts in their teaching tasks, finding value and meaning in their work and experiencing professional well-being. Additionally, principals who adopt spiritual leadership can foster a supportive work atmosphere and environment by demonstrating selfless love and trust towards their teachers, thereby promoting friendly interpersonal relationships. These factors positively affect teachers' professional well-being (Li et al., 2024).

Principals' Spiritual leadership positively influences teachers' performance, students' achievement, and academic success (Gunawan & Adha, 2021; Mohd & Mohamad, 2022; Özgenel & Ankaralıoğlu, 2020). Spiritual leadership emphasizes enhancing teachers' performance and the school's academic achievements (Fry, 2003). Principals can influence students' achievement by overseeing and supervising students, fostering high levels of educational satisfaction, and demonstrating high-quality leadership, such as providing learning resources for superior education and evaluating and enhancing teacher quality (Karadağ et al., 2020). The principal's vision is crucial in advancing school effectiveness, teachers' performance, and students' success.

Several studies confirmed the positive link between spiritual leadership and organizational citizen behavior (Al Ansory et al., 2022; Djaelani, Sanusi, & Triatmanto, 2021; Göçen & Şen, 2021; Subhaktiyasa et al., 2023). Spiritual leadership could contribute to

organizational citizen behaviors by helping employees recognize the meaning of their work, creating a common perspective, shared values, and increasing organizational commitment, participation, capability, and productivity (Göçen & Şen, 2021).

## 5. CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the literature review, the following conclusions can be drawn: Theoretically, in a school context, spiritual leadership can be defined as a leadership model that intrinsically motivates followers to cultivate through vision, hope/faith, and altruistic love that enables followers, including teachers, to enhance their psychological well-being. Practically, (1) spiritual leadership has a positive effect on teachers' professional well-being; (2) spiritual leadership of principals has a positive influence on teachers' performance, students' achievement, and academic success; (3) spiritual leadership has a positive effect on organizational citizen behaviors.

## 6. SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Spiritual leadership is an urgent theme, but there is a dearth of investigation in the Asian context, particularly in Indonesian schools. Therefore, further research needs to be conducted on spiritual leadership and its associated variables.

## 7. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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