

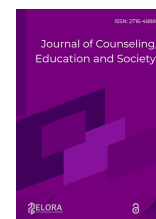


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Servant-spiritual leadership and its relationship with the quality of working life index for teachers at islamic primary educational institutions

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to explore teachers' lived experiences of servant-spiritual leadership and its perceived relationship with job satisfaction, motivation, professional commitment, and Quality of Working Life (QWL) in Islamic educational institutions. The approach used was qualitative, employing a descriptive case study design, with an emphasis on gaining an in-depth understanding of teachers' experiences within their social and professional contexts. This research was conducted at MI Nurudzolam, Pare, Kediri, East Java, Indonesia, involving 21 participants comprising the principal, vice principal, senior teachers, and junior teachers. Data collection techniques included in-depth interviews, participant observation, and documentation related to leadership practices and the work environment. Data analysis was conducted through data reduction, data presentation, and inductive conclusion drawing, with trustworthiness ensured through source triangulation, method triangulation, and member checking. The findings indicate that servant-spiritual leadership which prioritizes service, empathy, role modeling, and spiritual values is perceived by teachers as strongly associated with increased motivation and professional commitment. Furthermore, this leadership style is associated with improved job satisfaction and the psychological, social, and professional meaning aspects of teachers' quality of work life (QWL). A supportive work environment, a collaborative culture, and recognition of individual contributions foster a sense of belonging and loyalty among teachers. This research contributes by emphasizing the importance of humanistic and spiritual leadership in enhancing human resource quality and fostering a harmonious work environment in Islamic educational institutions.



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Introduction

Social realities emerging within the context of Islamic educational institutions indicate that a servant-spiritual leadership style is essential for improving the quality of teachers' work lives (Aisyah, Ilmi, Rosyid, Wulandari, & Akhmad, 2022; Dhiman, 2016; Fitriani & Maulana, 2021) . The point is that teachers need a work environment that provides emotional, moral, and professional support so they can perform their educational duties optimally (Kainde & Mandagi, 2023; Subhaktiyasa et al., 2023). The rationale is that leadership emphasizing service values, spiritual exemplary conduct, empathy, and the reinforcement of work's meaning is

believed to foster a sense of security, engagement, and job satisfaction among teachers (Agustina & Rahardjo, 2022; Effendi, 2025; Franco, Garcia, Ravela, & Alarcon, 2025). Social evidence is evident in the phenomenon of increasing work pressure on teachers, the need for spiritual guidance in Islamic schools, and field findings indicating that teachers are more loyal and productive when led by figures who provide personal attention and exemplify exemplary values (Hossain, Islam, Ali, Baikady, Azman, & Uddin, 2024; Robinson et al., 2023). Furthermore, several Islamic educational institutions that have implemented a spiritual leadership approach also demonstrate a more stable QWL index, characterized by a harmonious work climate, healthy communication, and a balanced workload (Al-Hawary et al., 2023; Hasanah & Fadli, 2021). In conclusion, servant-spiritual leadership is not only a religiously relevant leadership style but has also been proven to socially support improvements in teachers' QWL indices, making it an ideal leadership model for contemporary Islamic educational institutions (Haj Ali & Abu-Saad, 2024; Said, Sharif, & Abdullah, 2023).

Several previous studies have shown that servant and spiritual leadership models have a significant impact on improving teachers' quality of work life (Dávila-Valencia, Gala-Espinoza, & Morales-García, 2025; Fatimah & Prasetyo, 2023; Qudus et al., 2022). A study found that spiritual leadership in madrasahs enhances teachers' sense of meaning, well-being, and work commitment (Qudus et al., 2022; Subhaktiyasa, Andriana, Sintari, Wati, Sumaryani, & Lede, 2023). Another study by Hasanah & Fadli (2021) indicates that servant leadership can strengthen interpersonal relationships, foster a supportive work environment, and improve QWL among pesantren teachers. In addition, research confirms that the integration of spiritual values into leadership strengthens teachers' intrinsic motivation and job satisfaction in Islamic educational institutions, which ultimately has a positive impact on the QWL index (Hossain et al., 2024; Yuana, Fauzih, Samdin, Restiana, & Roslan, 2025). The literature on Servant-Spiritual Leadership and Its Relationship with the Quality of Working Life (QWL) Index of Teachers in Islamic Educational Institutions indicates that leadership emphasizing service, moral exemplarity, and spiritual values is positively correlated with improved teachers' work well-being (Li et al., 2025; J. Wang & Derakhshan, 2025). Previous studies describe that this leadership model is capable of enhancing job satisfaction, job meaning, intrinsic motivation, and interpersonal relationships (Fauziah & Abdullah, 2022). In general, the literature confirms that servant-spiritual leadership plays a significant role in creating a harmonious work environment and supports improvements in teachers' QWL (Dewi & Santoso, 2022; Tarab, 2025).

This study addresses an important gap in understanding how service-oriented leadership and spiritual values shape teachers' quality of work life, particularly in the understudied context of Islamic primary schools in Indonesia (Alqhaiwi & Luu, 2024; Hermanto, Srimulyani, & Pitoyo, 2024). In the context of Islamic educational institutions, teachers are not only expected to be professional but also to serve as moral and spiritual role models; thus, they require leadership support capable of balancing emotional, ethical, and work productivity aspects (Hakim & Sari, 2023). Meanwhile, various reports indicate that teachers face administrative pressures, high workloads, and challenges in adapting to modern teaching methods, all of which impact their workplace well-being (Arbia, Carbone, Stanzione, & Szpunar, 2023; Y. Wang, 2024). Therefore, this study is warranted as it can provide an empirical and conceptual foundation for developing a leadership model that is more humanistic, aligned with religious values, and effective in improving teachers' QWL Index in Islamic educational institutions (Kainde & Mandagi, 2023; Pio, 2022; Widyanthi, Yudana, Agung, & Ariawan, 2024). The results are expected to serve as a reference for school leaders in improving managerial policies and creating a more supportive work environment (Hossain et al., 2024; Said, Sharif, & Abdullah, 2023).

The novelty of this study lies in its integrative approach, which combines the two concepts of servant leadership and spiritual leadership into a single, comprehensive model that is directly tested against teachers' QWL indices (Binu Raj, Subramani, & Jan, 2024; Widyanthi, Yudana, Agung, & Ariawan, 2024). Previous studies generally examined only one form of leadership or focused on aspects of job satisfaction without comprehensively measuring QWL (Anggraini & Prasetyo, 2020; Hidayat & Kurniawan, 2023). Furthermore, this study offers a unique perspective through the context of Islamic educational institutions, which possess distinct value structures, organizational cultures, and spiritual demands compared to general educational institutions, thereby providing a new perspective on how the combination of service values and spirituality can shape teachers' work well-being (Fatmawati & Rizki, 2025). By integrating psychological, social, and spiritual indicators in QWL measurement, this study yields a richer conceptual contribution and an empirical perspective that has not been extensively explored previously (Akinwale, Akinwale, & Kuye, 2024; Gharaibeh, Mansor, & Yusof, 2024). The purpose of this study is to explore the perceived relationship between servant-spiritual leadership and the Quality of Working Life (QWL) Index of teachers at MI Nurudzolam, Kediri, as well as to understand how leaders' values of service and spirituality may create a supportive work environment that teachers associate with enhanced work well-being.

Method

This study was conducted at MI Nurudzolam, Pare, Kediri, as the institution is known as an Islamic school that emphasizes spiritual values within its organizational culture and possesses a leadership structure aligned with the concept of servant-spiritual leadership. Furthermore, teachers at this institution face workplace dynamics that demand a balance between professionalism and spirituality, making it an ideal location to investigate the impact of leadership on Quality of Working Life (QWL). The school environment, which is active in spiritual development activities, also provides an ideal context for examining the relationship between leadership and teachers' work well-being.

A qualitative approach was chosen because this study aims to gain an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon through the interpretation of teachers' meanings and experiences regarding servant-spiritual leadership. A descriptive case study design was employed because the research focuses on a specific location and aims to explore leadership dynamics and perceived QWL conditions in detail within the context of an Islamic primary educational institution. This approach allows the researcher to obtain a holistic and contextually rich picture of leadership practices and teachers' subjective experiences. MI Nurudzolam was selected because it explicitly integrates spiritual values into its organizational culture and leadership structure, making it an information-rich site for examining servant-spiritual leadership in practice. The 21 participants were determined through purposive criterion-based sampling, with data collection continuing until thematic saturation was reached. The research informants included the madrasah principal, vice principal, senior teachers, and junior teachers, who were selected based on their direct involvement in leadership interactions and their daily work experiences.

Table 1. Research Informants

Informant Criteria	Gender		Informant Code	Number
	Male	F		
Principal	1	0	Principal	1
Vice Principal	0	1	VP	1
Senior Teacher	5	5	TM	10
Junior Teacher	5	5	OT	10
Total				21

The data collection methods used include in-depth interviews, participant observation, documentation, and audio analysis, as these four methods enable the researcher to capture verbal, nonverbal, and historical data, as well as the full context of social interactions. This combination of methods ensures that teachers' experiences and leadership practices can be understood comprehensively and accurately.

Data analysis using the Miles and Huberman interactive model which includes data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions was chosen because this model is flexible and well-suited for managing rich and repetitive qualitative data. To ensure data validity, triangulation of sources, methods, and observers was employed, as this strategy minimizes bias, enhances the reliability of findings, and strengthens the validity of research results by comparing information from various perspectives and techniques. Consequently, the data analysis and verification process become more robust and accountable.

Results and Discussions

The social findings emerging from this study indicate that servant-spiritual leadership is a key factor in improving the Quality of Working Life (QWL) Index among teachers in Islamic educational institutions (Pio, 2022; Widayanthi et al., 2024). The main finding of this study is that teachers perceive themselves as feeling more valued, supported, and respected when their leaders apply the values of service, exemplary behavior, empathy, and spirituality in decision-making and daily interactions. Participants described that such a leadership style is associated with a more humane, meaningful, and holistic work environment one that addresses both physical and psychological dimensions of well-being enabling teachers to experience greater psychological comfort and more stable work motivation (Demir, 2024; Fatimah & Prasetyo, 2023). Participant accounts indicate perceived improvements in QWL in the aspects of psychological well-being, social support, job security, and professional meaning, which teachers attributed to the servant-spiritual leadership practices of their principal. These perceptions were consistent across multiple informant groups and corroborated by observational data and school documentation. Additionally, teachers reported more harmonious work relationships and the emergence of a culture of mutual assistance within the school environment (Hidayati & Zainuddin, 2023; X. Wang, 2023). Based on these findings, this study concludes that servant-spiritual leadership

is perceived by teachers as contributing to improvements in the quality of the work environment and to strengthened professional commitment. Whether these perceptions translate into measurable improvements in student learning outcomes remains an important direction for future research.

One teacher noted that the principal's servant leadership makes them feel more valued: "He always listens to our concerns and helps us find solutions, so we feel supported." Another teacher highlighted the spiritual aspect they experience: "Every meeting begins with a moment of reflection and prayer. It reminds us that teaching is a form of worship, which makes the work feel lighter."

A young teacher also noted a change in the work environment: "It's more harmonious now because the principal sets an example by helping one another. He even gets directly involved in classroom activities." Meanwhile, another teacher felt a greater sense of psychological well-being: "I used to be stressed a lot, but now I'm calmer because there's open communication and a fairer division of tasks."

An interpretation of the interview results indicates that servant-spiritual leadership has a tangible impact on improving the quality of teachers' work life (Agustina & Rahardjo, 2022; Diniz, Marques, & Pereira, 2025). Teachers felt significant changes in the work atmosphere, primarily because leaders demonstrated empathy, a willingness to listen, and provided both emotional and professional support (Fitriani & Maulana, 2021; Martinsone & yd iūnaite, 2023). Leadership practices that prioritize spiritual values, such as reflection and communal prayer, strengthen the sense of purpose in the teaching profession, making the workload feel lighter. Additionally, leaders' example of actively assisting teachers' activities fosters a more collaborative and egalitarian work culture. Through open dialogue and fairer task distribution, teachers feel more at ease and are spared from excessive stress (Robinson et al., 2023). Overall, these interviews indicate that spiritual servant leadership can enhance teachers' sense of being valued, psychological well-being, and solidarity among colleagues, which ultimately has a positive impact on improving the Quality of Working Life (QWL).



Figure 1. illustrates the four main pillars for improving the quality of teachers' work lives

This image illustrates the four main pillars for improving the quality of teachers' work lives. First, empathy and support from leaders serve as the emotional foundation, where leaders not only listen but also truly understand teachers' needs. Second, leadership by example is demonstrated through direct involvement in teachers' activities, showing that servant leadership is more meaningful than simply giving orders (Kumar, Pathan, & Shaikh, 2022). Third, Spiritual Values integrated through reflection and communal prayer strengthen the inner meaning of the profession, helping teachers find peace and purpose amidst workplace challenges. Fourth, Open Dialogue serves as an effective stress-relief outlet, creating a safe space to share problems and solutions (Dixit, Raj, Raj, & Garg, 2024). Overall, this illustration emphasizes that improving the quality of teachers' work depends not only on material or administrative aspects but also on humanistic leadership, spiritual support, and transparent, empathetic communication.

It is a social fact that the strengthening of motivation and professional commitment is greatly influenced by the quality of interactions and support within the workplace (Karaferis, Aletras, Raikou, & Niakas, 2022; Modise, 2023). The key point is that motivation is not merely the result of internal drive but is shaped through social processes such as appreciation, trust, and open communication. The reason is that individuals who feel valued and supported by colleagues and supervisors tend to have the positive energy to work more effectively and demonstrate loyalty to their profession. Research evidence indicates that respondents working in

collaborative environments with a culture of mutual support report more stable motivation levels and stronger professional commitment (Meredith et al., 2023). Additionally, competency development programs, participatory supervision, and opportunities to contribute to decision-making further strengthen a sense of ownership toward one's profession. These findings also indicate that a lack of social support can reduce motivation and weaken commitment, even if an individual possesses high competence (Fatmawati & Rizki, 2025; Hidayat & Kurniawan, 2023). In conclusion, strengthening motivation and professional commitment requires consistent social support, a positive organizational structure, and a work culture that allows individuals to grow and feel like an integral part of their professional community.

One experienced teacher said, "I feel more motivated to work when my supervisor offers small gestures of appreciation, such as a thank you or recognition of my work. Those simple things make me want to keep improving my performance."

An administrative staff member shared, "The work environment here is quite close-knit. If there's a problem, we usually solve it together. The support from my colleagues makes me feel at home and committed to staying at this organization for the long term."

The interviews revealed that the informants' motivation and professional commitment stem from the interpersonal experiences they have in the workplace. Statements from experienced teachers confirm that simple forms of appreciation from supervisors, such as words of thanks or recognition of performance, have a strong emotional impact on boosting motivation. This suggests that social support does not have to take the form of grand rewards, but can simply be through recognition that makes individuals feel (Jung, Hwang, & Yoon, 2023; Zettna et al., 2025). Meanwhile, the remarks from administrative staff indicate that camaraderie and solidarity among coworkers are key factors in fostering a sense of comfort and attachment to the organization. When relationships among employees are harmonious and problems can be resolved collaboratively, individuals find it easier to build long-term commitment (Creswell & Poth, 2021). Overall, the interviews confirm that the quality of social interactions whether from supervisors or coworkers plays a significant role in enhancing motivation and strengthening an individual's professional commitment.

Table 2. Mentoring Activities

Mentoring Description	Mentoring Outcome
Mentoring in the form of verbal appreciation from supervisors	Significantly increases teachers' work motivation because individuals feel valued.
Participatory supervision by supervisors	Fosters a sense of ownership toward the job, thereby strengthening professional commitment.
Recognition of individual contributions	Strengthens intrinsic motivation and makes employees more eager to improve their performance.
Collaborative problem-solving	Enhances team cohesion and creates social support that strengthens work commitment.
Collaboration in completing tasks	Increases a sense of belonging to the team and strengthens motivation and loyalty to the organization.

The mentoring results in the table show that each form of mentoring has a significant impact on strengthening employees' motivation and professional commitment (Gong, Van Swol, & Wang, 2022). Verbal appreciation from supervisors has been shown to be an initial trigger for motivation, as employees feel valued for their contributions. Participatory supervision also plays a crucial role, as it provides employees with the opportunity to engage in the work process, thereby fostering a sense of ownership over the tasks they undertake (Flick, 2023; Nabi & Akter, 2023). Recognition of individual contributions strengthens intrinsic motivation, encouraging employees to improve the quality of their performance independently. Meanwhile, collaborative problem-solving activities foster solidarity and team cohesion, which directly impact increased internal social support. Collaboration in completing tasks also cultivates a sense of belonging to the work group, making employees more loyal and motivated to contribute optimally (Glesne, 2020). Overall, these various forms of mentoring demonstrate that professional motivation and commitment do not stem solely from the individual but are also strongly shaped by patterns of interaction and the quality of relationships within the workplace, as consistently reported by participants.



Figure 2. illustrates how mentoring has a positive impact on motivation and professional commitment through three main mechanisms

This figure illustrates how mentoring has a positive impact on motivation and professional commitment through three main mechanisms. First, collaboration on tasks fosters a sense of intergroup connection, which in turn strengthens each teacher's intrinsic motivation as they feel part of a shared goal. Second, sincere verbal appreciation provides tangible recognition of individual contributions, and when combined with participatory supervision that involves staff in every work process, it fosters a sense of ownership and collective responsibility (Stranzl & Ruppel, 2025). Third, collaborative problem-solving not only yields better solutions but also builds strong team solidarity. Overall, this illustration underscores that effective mentoring is not one-sided but rather a collaborative cycle in which recognition, engagement, and collaborative problem-solving mutually reinforce one another to sustainably enhance teachers' professional commitment.

It is a social fact that improvements in the Quality of Working Life (QWL) Index are heavily influenced by social conditions in the workplace, not merely by physical or administrative factors (Flick, 2024; Gazi et al., 2024). The key finding is that the quality of working life improves when workers experience psychological comfort, organizational justice, and positive interpersonal relationships. The reason is that QWL is a social construct shaped by workers' daily experiences as they interact with colleagues, supervisors, and the organizational system. When workers feel valued, treated fairly, and have opportunities to participate in decision-making, they tend to exhibit higher job satisfaction (Gunawan & Nurhayati, 2024). Research evidence shows that respondents working in environments with open communication, a supportive work culture, and a clear reward system report significant improvements in QWL aspects, such as emotional well-being, job security, and work-life balance (Creswell & Poth, 2021). Additionally, informants also emphasized that adequate workplace facilities and a proportional workload contribute to a more conducive work environment. In conclusion, improvements in QWL are not only related to organizational structural improvements but primarily to the creation of healthy social interactions and a humanistic work culture. Thus, sustainable improvements in QWL can be achieved if organizations address the social, psychological, and professional needs of their employees.

A senior employee said, "I feel more comfortable and at home at work because my supervisors always listen to our feedback. In addition, the flexible work schedule helps me balance my work and family life. This makes me feel valued and satisfied with my job."

An administrative staff member said, "The work environment here is very cooperative. My colleagues are always ready to help when there are difficulties, and adequate work facilities make the job easier. With a work atmosphere like this, I feel secure and motivated to do my best."

An interpretation of the interview results indicates that improvements in Quality of Working Life (QWL) are strongly influenced by social factors and a supportive work environment (Flick, 2023). Statements from senior employees confirm that flexible work schedules and managers' openness to feedback foster a sense of being valued, secure, and satisfied at work, thereby creating a balance between personal and professional life (Buick, Blackman, Glennie, Weeratunga, & O'Donnell, 2024; Guoqiang & Bhaumik, 2024). Meanwhile, administrative staff's experiences highlight the importance of positive interpersonal relationships, teamwork,

and adequate workplace facilities as factors that make work easier and more enjoyable. Overall, the interviews indicate that QWL is not merely about physical conditions or compensation, but also the quality of social interactions, organizational support, and a humanistic work culture. A conducive and collaborative work environment encourages employees to remain motivated, loyal, and committed, thereby directly enhancing their well-being and job satisfaction (Denzin, 2021).

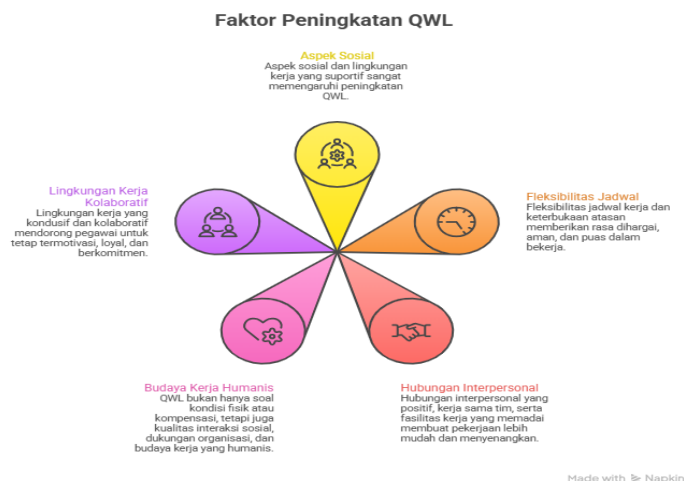


Figure 3. factors in improving quality of work life (QWL)

This figure illustrates the key factors in improving quality of work life (QWL), with an emphasis on non-material aspects. A supportive social and work environment serves as the primary foundation, as QWL is determined not only by physical conditions or compensation, but also by the quality of social interactions and a humanistic work culture (Srinivasaiah, Devappa Renuka, & Nanjundeswaraswamy, 2023). A collaborative and conducive work environment has been shown to foster employee motivation, loyalty, and commitment. Positive interpersonal relationships, supported by teamwork and adequate facilities, make work feel easier and more enjoyable. Additionally, flexible work schedules and openness from supervisors foster a sense of being valued, secure, and satisfied. Overall, this figure underscores that improving QWL requires a holistic approach that integrates social support, collaboration, healthy interpersonal relationships, and flexible work policies not merely material or structural efforts alone (Eddine & Mendonca, 2025).

Conclusions

Based on the research findings, it can be concluded that increased teacher job satisfaction, strengthened motivation and professional commitment, and an improved Quality of Working Life (QWL) Index are significantly influenced by the quality of social interactions and humanistic leadership practices. Servant-spiritual leadership has proven to be a key factor in creating a comfortable, harmonious, and meaningful work environment, where teachers feel valued, supported, and secure in performing their duties. The application of values such as service, exemplary conduct, empathy, and spirituality not only enhances intrinsic motivation but also strengthens team solidarity and professional commitment. Furthermore, a collaborative, communicative, and supportive work environment, combined with adequate facilities and fair task distribution, contributes to enhancing teachers' psychological well-being and job satisfaction. Mentoring, participatory supervision, and recognition of individual contributions have a significant impact on fostering a sense of ownership toward one's work. Overall, social factors, a positive work culture, and leadership that prioritizes spiritual values and empathy have proven to be key factors in improving teachers' motivation, commitment, and quality of work life, thereby directly contributing to the sustainable improvement of educational quality in Islamic educational institutions.

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