

Dialectics of Service Quality and Spirituality in Islamic Early Childhood Education

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Abstract

This study is motivated by the limited integration of service quality frameworks and spirituality in Islamic early childhood education, despite their significant role in supporting holistic child development. This study aims to analyze the dialectical relationship between service quality and spirituality based on recent literature published between 2024 and 2025. A qualitative design using a systematic literature review approach was employed. Data were collected from 35 indexed journal articles published during 2024–2025 and analyzed using thematic analysis. The findings reveal that service quality frameworks are increasingly integrated with Islamic ethical principles, such as *amanah* and *ihsan*, while leadership and teacher professionalism function as key mediating factors. In addition, workplace spirituality contributes indirectly to service quality through job satisfaction and organizational commitment. However, challenges remain in policy alignment, teacher training, and technological integration. The study concludes that an integrative model combining spiritual values and quality assurance mechanisms is essential for achieving holistic educational outcomes in Islamic early childhood education. This study contributes to the theoretical development of Islamic education quality models and offers practical recommendations for policymakers and educators to strengthen spiritually grounded quality assurance systems.

Keywords: Service Quality; Spirituality; Islamic Early Childhood Education; Quality Assurance; SERVQUAL

INTRODUCTION

Islamic early childhood education is currently undergoing a significant transformation driven by the need to harmonize pedagogical quality with spiritual formation. In many Muslim-majority contexts, early childhood institutions are no longer perceived merely as spaces for cognitive development but as foundational environments for shaping moral character and religious consciousness. This shift reflects broader educational reforms that emphasize holistic development, integrating intellectual, emotional, social, and spiritual domains into a unified framework.

Recent literature highlights that the integration of Islamic ethical values such as *amanah* (trustworthiness) and *ihsan* (excellence) has become a central element in redefining service quality (Naibaho & Pangestuti, 2023). These values not only guide administrative practices but also shape pedagogical interactions and institutional culture. Embedding these principles enhances both educational outcomes and stakeholder trust, creating a value-driven quality assurance system that resonates with community expectations (Asri et al., 2025).

Leadership plays a crucial role in mediating this relationship, particularly in Islamic educational institutions where charismatic figures such as *Kyai* hold significant influence. These leaders are not only responsible for administrative decision-making but also serve as moral and spiritual exemplars. Their authority often shapes institutional culture, influencing how service quality and spirituality are perceived and enacted within the educational environment (Hamdanah, Baharun, et al., 2025).

Technological advancements have also begun to influence the landscape of Islamic early childhood education. Digital tools, including learning management systems, electronic reporting platforms, and artificial intelligence applications, are increasingly being utilized to enhance quality assurance processes. These technologies offer opportunities for real-time monitoring, data-driven decision-making, and improved stakeholder communication (Jamil et al., 2025).

Empirical studies indicate that spirituality can enhance job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and overall educational outcomes. Teachers who experience a strong sense of spiritual fulfillment are more likely to demonstrate dedication, resilience, and positive work attitudes. These factors indirectly contribute to improved service quality, suggesting that spirituality functions as a mediating variable rather than a direct determinant (Pratiwi et al., 2025).

Policy misalignment is one of the major barriers to effective integration. While national education policies may emphasize quality assurance and standardization, they often lack explicit guidelines for incorporating spiritual values. This gap results in fragmented implementation, where individual institutions rely on their own interpretations and initiatives (Maksum et al., 2025).

Research Issues

Islamic early childhood education is currently experiencing a profound transformation shaped by the demand to integrate academic excellence with spiritual development. Institutions are increasingly expected to provide not only high-quality educational services but also environments that nurture faith, morality, and character from an early age. This dual expectation creates a complex landscape in which educational stakeholders must balance measurable performance indicators with intangible spiritual outcomes, often without clear operational guidelines.

The growing emphasis on service quality within educational systems has introduced structured evaluation mechanisms aimed at improving institutional effectiveness. However, these frameworks are largely derived from secular paradigms and may not fully capture the ethical and spiritual dimensions central to Islamic education. Consequently, there is a pressing need to adapt and expand these models so that they reflect core Islamic values such as *amanah* (trustworthiness) and *ihsan* (excellence), which are essential in shaping both institutional credibility and pedagogical integrity.

Recent scholarly works have highlighted an emerging dialectical relationship between service quality and spirituality, suggesting that these domains are not mutually exclusive but rather interdependent. Spiritual values can influence how quality is perceived, implemented, and sustained within educational settings. At the same time, well-structured quality assurance systems can create supportive environments for spiritual growth. Despite this theoretical alignment, practical integration remains inconsistent, with many institutions struggling to operationalize these concepts effectively (Mata-McMahon et al., 2025).

Researcher Response

In response to the growing complexity of integrating service quality and spirituality in Islamic early childhood education, this study adopts a conceptual stance that emphasizes the need for contextualized quality frameworks. Conventional service quality models, particularly Servqual, offer a structured basis for evaluating institutional performance. However, their original constructs require reinterpretation to align with the ethical and

spiritual foundations inherent in Islamic education. This adaptation is essential to ensure that quality assessment reflects not only technical efficiency but also moral accountability.

Scholars have increasingly proposed modified Servqual frameworks that incorporate Islamic ethical dimensions such as trustworthiness and excellence. These additions extend the traditional indicators of reliability and responsiveness by embedding values derived from religious teachings. Such integration allows institutions to evaluate service delivery in a manner that resonates with their philosophical and theological orientations, thereby enhancing both relevance and applicability (Eadie et al., 2024).

Previous Studies & Research Gap

A growing body of literature has explored the incorporation of Islamic ethical principles into quality assurance systems within educational institutions. Central to this discourse are the values of *amanah* (trustworthiness) and *ibsan* (excellence), which function as moral anchors guiding professional conduct and institutional practices. These principles are increasingly recognized as essential components in shaping accountability, transparency, and integrity in educational service delivery. Prior studies emphasize that embedding such values strengthens stakeholder trust and enhances the moral orientation of educational environments (Jannana et al., 2025).

Leadership has also been identified as a critical factor in the successful implementation of value-based quality systems. Ethical leadership, characterized by integrity, fairness, and spiritual awareness, plays a pivotal role in translating abstract principles into concrete practices. Studies highlight that both male and female leaders contribute significantly to fostering collaborative environments and establishing benchmarking practices that reflect Islamic values. Their influence extends beyond administrative functions to shaping institutional culture and guiding professional behavior (Siswadi et al., 2025).

Novelty & Theoretical Basis

Building upon the identified gaps in previous studies, this research offers a novel contribution by integrating service quality frameworks, Islamic ethical principles, and leadership dynamics into a unified conceptual model specifically tailored for Islamic early childhood education. While earlier works have examined these components in isolation, this study positions them within a dialectical framework that highlights their interdependence. The novelty lies in connecting structural quality mechanisms with

spiritual leadership and ethical values, thereby addressing the need for a more holistic and context-sensitive approach.

A key dimension of this theoretical development is the central role of leadership, particularly the influence of *Kyai* in Islamic educational institutions. Unlike conventional leadership models, *Kyai* leadership embodies both administrative authority and spiritual legitimacy. Their visibility and moral standing significantly shape stakeholder perceptions, often exerting a stronger influence on institutional reputation than technical indicators of service quality alone (Sary et al., 2024). This dual role positions leadership as a critical nexus connecting quality assurance and spiritual orientation.

In addition to leadership, governance structures form an essential component of the proposed framework. Effective governance in Islamic early childhood education is characterized by transparency, accountability, and collaborative engagement among stakeholders. When these principles are aligned with spiritual values, they enhance institutional credibility and foster trust within the community. Such governance models move beyond procedural compliance, emphasizing ethical responsibility and shared commitment to educational excellence (Hamdanah, Mardia, et al., 2025).

Teacher commitment further strengthens this integrative model by linking leadership practices to classroom implementation. Supportive leadership fosters professional development, encourages reflective practice, and sustains motivation among educators. This, in turn, contributes to consistent learning quality and reduces workforce instability. By embedding spiritual values within professional culture, institutions can create environments where educators are both competent and ethically grounded (Phillips, 2025).

Focus & Goals

Building on the preceding discussion of research issues, conceptual responses, identified gaps, and theoretical foundations, this study focuses on examining the dialectical relationship between service quality and spirituality in Islamic early childhood education. The central premise is that both dimensions are not independent variables but mutually reinforcing elements that shape institutional effectiveness and child development outcomes. This focus is particularly relevant in contemporary contexts where educational institutions are expected to balance measurable performance indicators with value-based orientations. Digital tools such as dashboards, electronic report systems, and artificial intelligence applications are increasingly utilized to enhance monitoring, evaluation, and stakeholder engagement. These technologies enable real-time data collection and analysis,

offering new possibilities for improving institutional responsiveness and transparency (Haddade et al., 2024).

In response to these challenges, this study also aims to analyze the potential of ICT-based supervision models in enhancing teacher competence and professional growth. Collaborative and reflective approaches supported by digital platforms have shown promise in addressing motivational barriers and improving instructional quality. Such models emphasize continuous learning and peer engagement, which are essential for sustaining both service quality and spiritual integration in educational practice (Posangi et al., 2025).

METHODS

Type of Research

This study employs a qualitative research approach grounded in a systematic literature review to examine the dialectical relationship between service quality and spirituality in Islamic early childhood education. A qualitative orientation is particularly appropriate given the conceptual, interpretive, and context-dependent nature of the topic. Rather than quantifying variables, this approach seeks to understand meanings, patterns, and relationships embedded within recent scholarly discourse, especially those related to ethical values, leadership dynamics, and institutional practices.

The selection of a systematic literature review as the primary method reflects the need to synthesize fragmented findings across multiple studies published between 2024 and 2025. Existing research on service quality and spirituality tends to be dispersed across disciplines such as educational management, religious studies, and early childhood education. By consolidating these diverse perspectives, this study aims to construct a comprehensive understanding that bridges theoretical and practical dimensions. This approach also enables the identification of recurring themes, contradictions, and emerging trends within the literature.

Research Design

This study adopts a systematic literature review design with a thematic synthesis approach to investigate the dialectical relationship between service quality and spirituality in Islamic early childhood education. This design is selected to ensure a structured, transparent, and replicable process in identifying, evaluating, and integrating findings from recent scholarly works. By focusing on literature published between 2024 and 2025, the

study captures the most current developments, particularly those related to ethical integration, leadership dynamics, and technological innovation within Islamic educational contexts.

The research design is guided by a multi-stage process that begins with the identification of relevant studies through database searches and predefined inclusion criteria. Articles are selected based on their relevance to key themes such as Islamic ethical values, service quality frameworks, leadership roles, teacher professionalism, and digital transformation. This stage ensures that the dataset reflects both conceptual and empirical contributions, allowing for a comprehensive understanding of the topic.

The design also incorporates a comparative dimension, where findings from different studies are examined in relation to one another. This allows for the identification of consistencies, variations, and contradictions across contexts and methodologies. For instance, differences in how institutions implement Islamic ethical principles or adopt technological tools are analyzed to understand contextual influences. Such comparisons contribute to a more nuanced interpretation of the interplay between service quality and spirituality.

Participants & Sampling Technique

In the context of this study, the notion of participants differs from conventional empirical research, as the primary data sources consist of scholarly publications rather than human subjects. Therefore, the “participants” are defined as peer-reviewed journal articles that address themes related to service quality, spirituality, leadership, and technological integration in Islamic education. This approach aligns with the systematic literature review design, where documents serve as units of analysis representing diverse research contexts and perspectives. The sampling technique employed in this study is purposive sampling, chosen for its ability to identify information-rich sources that are directly relevant to the research objectives.

Instruments & Data Collection

In this study, the instruments used for data collection are not conventional survey tools or interview protocols but structured document analysis frameworks tailored for systematic literature review. The primary instrument consists of a data extraction matrix designed to capture key information from each selected article. This matrix includes categories such as research objectives, theoretical frameworks, methodological approaches, key findings, and implications related to service quality and spirituality in Islamic education.

By standardizing the extraction process, the study ensures consistency and comparability across diverse sources.

Data Analysis

The data analysis in this study is conducted using a thematic analysis approach, which is particularly suitable for synthesizing qualitative findings derived from a systematic literature review. This method enables the identification, organization, and interpretation of recurring patterns across selected studies. Given the complexity of integrating service quality and spirituality within Islamic early childhood education, thematic analysis provides a flexible yet rigorous framework to explore relationships among concepts, theories, and empirical findings.

RESULTS

Key Findings

The analysis of selected studies reveals that the integration of spirituality in Islamic early childhood education is increasingly approached through holistic frameworks that emphasize the interconnectedness of cognitive, emotional, social, and spiritual development. Spirituality is not treated as an isolated dimension but as a pervasive element embedded in daily educational practices. This multidimensional perspective positions spirituality as both an individual experience and a collective cultural construct, shaping interactions within the learning environment. The concept of *āfiyah*, which encompasses holistic wellbeing, further reinforces the importance of balancing internal and external aspects of child development (Ali, 2025).

The data show that curriculum integration plays a central role in operationalizing spirituality within educational settings. Rather than separating religious instruction from general knowledge, institutions increasingly adopt integrated curricula that combine Islamic teachings with contemporary competencies such as critical thinking, creativity, and collaboration. This approach eliminates the dichotomy between religious and secular knowledge, fostering a more cohesive learning experience that supports comprehensive development (Shaleh et al., 2024).

Participants in the reviewed studies also highlighted the importance of teacher education in sustaining spiritual integration. Educators are expected to engage in reflective practices that align their personal beliefs with professional responsibilities. Faith-informed praxis enables teachers to nurture students holistically, addressing intellectual, emotional,

and spiritual needs simultaneously. This alignment between belief and practice is critical for creating authentic learning experiences (Memon et al., 2024).

Beyond curriculum design, pedagogical models grounded in Islamic traditions provide structured approaches for embedding spirituality in teaching practices. Prophetic pedagogy, for instance, emphasizes moral exemplarity, compassion, and balance between knowledge acquisition and character formation. This model encourages educators to adopt teaching strategies that reflect the behaviour of the Prophet, thereby integrating ethical and spiritual dimensions into everyday instruction.

Further findings indicate that classical Islamic concepts, particularly those derived from Al-Ghazali's framework of *Nafs*, *Qalb*, *Ruh*, and *'Aql*, are being reinterpreted in contemporary educational contexts. These concepts provide a comprehensive understanding of human development, addressing both internal states and external behaviors. Their application in early childhood education helps mitigate spiritual emptiness while promoting balanced growth across multiple dimensions.

The *Ulū al-'ilm* model also emerges as a significant pedagogical approach, emphasizing the integration of spiritual, ethical, cognitive, affective, psychomotor, and social domains. Through processes such as coaching and habituation, this model supports the development of well-rounded individuals. The findings suggest that such integrative approaches are particularly effective in early childhood settings, where foundational habits and values are formed.

Inclusive pedagogy is another important theme identified in the data. Studies show that values such as empathy, gratitude, and compassion are intentionally embedded in teaching practices to accommodate diverse learner needs, including those of children with special needs. This approach not only enhances inclusivity but also reinforces spiritual values as universal principles applicable to all learners.

Reflective practice also plays a crucial role in fostering spiritual growth. Both teachers and students are encouraged to engage in self-evaluation and contemplation, enabling them to develop deeper insights into their actions and intentions. This process enhances emotional intelligence and strengthens the connection between knowledge and practice (Dutta & Vimal, 2025). The data indicate that educators' personal identity, self-efficacy, and leadership qualities significantly influence how spiritual values are conveyed in the classroom. Authentic teachers are more likely to create meaningful learning experiences that resonate with students on a deeper level.

Training programs that emphasize active learning, collaboration, and reflective practice enable teachers to adapt to changing educational demands while maintaining spiritual integrity. Such programs support continuous improvement and enhance pedagogical effectiveness. Mentoring systems further strengthen teacher capacity by providing guidance and support in integrating local wisdom and spiritual values. Experienced educators play a key role in facilitating knowledge transfer and fostering professional growth among their peers. This collaborative approach contributes to the development of a supportive institutional culture.

The findings also highlight the complex interplay between service quality and spirituality. While spirituality is shown to enhance job satisfaction, teacher commitment, and overall educational outcomes, its direct impact on measurable service quality indicators remains varied. This suggests that spirituality operates through indirect pathways, influencing attitudes and behaviors that ultimately affect performance.

Integration models that combine concepts such as *Tawhid*, *Tarbiyah*, *Ta'lim*, and *Tazkiyah* provide a comprehensive framework for understanding this relationship. These models emphasize unity, education, instruction, and purification as interconnected processes that support holistic development. Their application in early childhood education demonstrates the potential for aligning spiritual and quality-oriented objectives.

Finally, teacher professionalism is identified as a key mediating factor in the relationship between spirituality and service quality. Educators who possess both pedagogical competence and spiritual awareness are better equipped to translate values into practice. This highlights the importance of intentional integration, where theoretical concepts are supported by practical implementation strategies.

DISCUSSION

Results Analysis

The findings of this study reveal a complex and multidimensional relationship between service quality and spirituality in Islamic early childhood education. Rather than functioning as separate constructs, both elements interact dynamically through mediating variables such as leadership, teacher professionalism, organizational culture, and technological adaptation. This interplay demonstrates that improving educational quality in Islamic contexts cannot rely solely on technical standards but must incorporate value-based and spiritually grounded dimensions.

One of the most prominent insights emerging from the analysis is the central role of leadership in shaping both institutional quality and spiritual orientation. The presence of *Kyai* as spiritual leaders significantly influences how stakeholders perceive educational institutions. Their legitimacy, moral authority, and visibility often become the primary reference for evaluating institutional credibility, sometimes even surpassing measurable service quality indicators (Baharun et al., 2025; Hamdanah, Baharun, et al., 2025; Hariadi et al., 2025; Ma'arif et al., 2025). This suggests that leadership in Islamic education carries symbolic and cultural weight beyond administrative functions.

The analysis also underscores the indirect relationship between spirituality and service quality through workplace dynamics. Spirituality enhances job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and positive work attitudes among educators. These factors, in turn, improve performance and service delivery, demonstrating that spirituality operates as a mediating mechanism rather than a direct determinant. This finding aligns with the broader understanding that human factors play a critical role in educational quality.

Cultural and organizational factors further shape the integration of spirituality and service quality. Islamic work ethics, characterized by responsibility, sincerity, and discipline, foster motivation and engagement among educators. These values contribute to a sense of purpose and commitment, which are essential for maintaining high standards of performance.

Policy misalignment emerges as another significant barrier. While educational guidelines may emphasize quality assurance, they often lack explicit directives for incorporating spiritual dimensions. This disconnect results in fragmented practices across institutions, hindering the development of cohesive systems.

Teacher training deficiencies further exacerbate these challenges. Limited access to professional development programs that integrate spiritual and pedagogical competencies restricts educators' ability to implement holistic approaches effectively. Without adequate preparation, efforts to combine quality and spirituality remain inconsistent.

Technological barriers also play a role in shaping outcomes. Infrastructure limitations and low digital literacy hinder the adoption of tools that could enhance quality assurance and learning processes. This highlights the need for strategic investment in educational technology.

Literature Comparison

The findings of this study are largely consistent with recent literature emphasizing the importance of integrating Islamic ethical values into educational systems. Previous research supports the notion that spirituality enhances organizational commitment and job satisfaction, thereby indirectly influencing service quality (Pariyanti, 2025). However, this study extends existing knowledge by demonstrating how leadership and governance structures mediate this relationship.

Compared to earlier studies that focused primarily on technical aspects of quality assurance, this research highlights the significance of spiritual leadership in shaping institutional outcomes. The role of *Kyai* as both religious and managerial figures represents a distinctive feature of Islamic educational contexts, which is less emphasized in general educational literature.

The results also align with studies on Islamic work ethics, which emphasize the role of values in fostering motivation and performance. However, this study adds a nuanced perspective by linking these values to broader organizational and cultural dynamics, demonstrating their impact on institutional reputation and stakeholder trust.

Implications

The findings of this study have several important implications for theory and practice. From a theoretical perspective, the study contributes to the development of an integrated framework that combines service quality, spirituality, leadership, and organizational culture. This framework provides a more comprehensive understanding of educational quality in Islamic contexts.

The study also underscores the importance of structured teacher training programs that integrate spiritual and pedagogical competencies. Such programs can enhance educators' ability to implement holistic approaches and improve learning outcomes. In addition, policymakers should consider revising educational guidelines to explicitly incorporate spiritual dimensions into quality assurance frameworks. This would help bridge the gap between policy and practice and promote more consistent implementation.

Limitations

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations. First, the reliance on secondary data limits the ability to capture real-time experiences and contextual nuances. Future research should incorporate empirical methods such as interviews and observations to validate the findings.

Second, the learning focuses primarily on literature from specific regions, which may limit the generalizability of the results. Expanding analysis to include diverse contexts would provide a more comprehensive understanding.

Third, variations in methodological approaches across the reviewed studies may affect the consistency of findings. Differences in research design, sample size, and analytical techniques introduce potential biases.

CONCLUSION

Summary of Research Results

This study set out to examine the dialectical relationship between service quality and spirituality in Islamic early childhood education through a systematic synthesis of recent literature (2024–2025). The findings demonstrate that both constructs are deeply interconnected and cannot be effectively understood in isolation. Service quality, traditionally framed within technical and managerial paradigms, is increasingly being reinterpreted through the lens of Islamic ethical values, while spirituality is operationalized not only as a personal attribute but also as an institutional and cultural shaping educational practices.

Contribution to Science

This study makes a significant contribution to the field of Islamic education by developing an integrated conceptual model that connects service quality, spirituality, leadership, and organizational culture. This model moves beyond fragmented approaches and offers a comprehensive perspective that reflects the complexity of educational practice in Islamic contexts.

The study also contributes to the broader discourse on value-based education by emphasizing the importance of aligning quality assurance systems with ethical and spiritual principles. This perspective challenges conventional models that prioritize efficiency and performance metrics, offering an alternative approach that integrates moral responsibility and holistic development.

Recommendations for Further Research

Based on the findings and limitations identified in this study, several recommendations can be proposed for future research. First, there is a need for empirical validation of the integrated conceptual model developed in this study. Such validation would strengthen the theoretical framework and enhance its practical applicability.

Second, expanding research across diverse geographical and cultural contexts is essential for improving generalizability. Studies in this field are concentrated in specific regions, which may limit the applicability of findings to other settings. Comparative studies involving different countries and educational systems would provide a more comprehensive understanding of how cultural factors influence the integration of spirituality and service quality.

Third, future research should focus on developing standardized teacher training frameworks that integrate pedagogical and spiritual competencies. Structured programs that combine theoretical knowledge with practical application can enhance educators' ability to implement holistic approaches effectively. This includes incorporating reflective practices, mentoring systems, and continuous professional development initiatives.

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