



Spiritual Leadership and Organizational Commitment In Islamic Boarding Schools: The Mediating Role of Trust and Emotional Intelligence

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Abstract

This study investigates the mediating role of trust and emotional intelligence in the relationship between spiritual leadership and organizational commitment among teachers at an Indonesian Islamic boarding school (pesantren). Although values-based leadership in Islamic education has gained attention, studies examining trust and emotional intelligence as parallel mediators through PLS-SEM remain limited. Using a quantitative causal-associative design and census sampling, all 44 teachers at Pondok Pesantren Darussalam participated in the study. Data were collected through validated Likert-scale questionnaires and analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM). The findings show that spiritual leadership had a positive but insignificant direct effect on organizational commitment ($\beta = 0.163$, $p > 0.05$). However, spiritual leadership significantly predicted trust ($\beta = 0.643$, $p < 0.05$) and emotional intelligence ($\beta = 0.555$, $p < 0.05$). In contrast, trust ($\beta = 0.129$, $p > 0.05$) and emotional intelligence ($\beta = 0.262$, $p > 0.05$) did not significantly affect organizational commitment and failed to mediate the relationship. These findings indicate that organizational commitment in pesantren settings is shaped more by intrinsic spiritual values, such as ikhlās, calling, and moral responsibility, than by emotional or trust-based factors. The study highlights the importance of integrating indigenous Islamic values into human resource management in faith-based educational institutions.

Keywords: *spiritual leadership; organizational commitment; trust, emotional intelligence; PLS-SEM; Islamic boarding school; pesantren.*

A. Introduction

Human resource quality in educational institutions constitutes a primary determinant of organizational effectiveness, particularly in values-based contexts where mission alignment and moral commitment are central (Fry, 2003; Rasyidin et al., 2025). Among Islamic boarding schools known as *pesantren* in Indonesia, the dynamics of teacher commitment present a distinctive challenge. Unlike corporate settings, *pesantren* operate within a complex socio-spiritual framework where material incentives are limited, yet long-term teacher dedication remains remarkably strong. Understanding the antecedents of this commitment requires frameworks that go beyond conventional organizational behavior models.

Organizational commitment, understood as the psychological bond through which individuals identify with, invest in, and maintain membership in their organization (Meyer & Allen, 1991), has been linked to a wide range of leadership behaviors. Among these, spiritual leadership a values-driven model emphasizing calling, membership, altruistic love, and transcendental vision (Fry, 2003) is theoretically well-suited to faith-based institutions. However, the mechanisms through which spiritual leadership translates into commitment in Islamic educational settings remain empirically underdeveloped, especially with regard to the roles of trust and emotional intelligence as potential mediators (Samul, 2024; Chang & Arisanti, 2022).

This study addresses that gap by investigating how spiritual leadership affects organizational commitment, both directly and through trust and emotional intelligence, among teachers at Pondok Pesantren Darussalam. The findings offer timely insights for educational administrators seeking to sustain teacher commitment in resource-constrained, faith-oriented environments.

Spiritual leadership theory (SLT), originally formulated by Fry (2003), posits that leaders who articulate an inspiring vision, demonstrate hope and faith, and express altruistic love generate intrinsic motivation in followers by fulfilling two fundamental spiritual needs: a sense of calling

the feeling that one's work has meaning and purpose and membership the experience of belonging and being understood within a community. These outcomes, in turn, foster higher levels of organizational commitment and productivity (Fry, 2003; Fry et al., 2005). Subsequent research has expanded SLT across diverse cultural and institutional settings (Samul, 2024; Haldorai et al., 2020).

Trust is widely recognized as a fundamental mediating variable in leader-follower relationships. Within the organizational context, trust encompasses five dimensions: integrity, competence, consistent behavior, loyalty, and openness (Clark & Payne, 1997; Hoy & Moran, 1999). Leaders who consistently demonstrate these qualities create psychological safety and reduce social uncertainty, making followers more willing to commit to organizational goals (Olvera et al., 2024; Yamagishi et al., 1998). Prior studies have confirmed that trust partially mediates the spiritual leadership-commitment relationship (Ali & Zafar, 2022; Kaya, 2022).

Emotional intelligence (EI) the capacity to recognize, understand, and manage one's own emotions and those of others (Goleman, 2005) has been proposed as a critical enabler of organizational commitment. Employees with higher EI are more adept at navigating workplace pressures, sustaining interpersonal relationships, and aligning personally with organizational values (O'Boyle et al., 2011; Kafetsios & Zampetakis, 2008). In educational settings, EI has been linked to normative and affective dimensions of commitment (Li et al., 2023), suggesting it could amplify the commitment-enhancing effects of spiritual leadership.

Despite this theoretical alignment, the empirical literature reveals two notable gaps. First, studies simultaneously testing trust and EI as parallel mediators of the spiritual leadership commitment relationship are rare. Second, existing studies have been conducted predominantly in corporate or Western contexts (Benefiel, 2005), with limited attention to Islamic boarding schools' institutions where spiritual values are institutionally embedded rather than individually elective. Pesantren teachers often view their work as a form of *ibādah* (worship) and

pengabdian (devotion), creating a unique motivational context that standard organizational behavior frameworks may inadequately capture (Rasyidin et al., 2025; Purnomo, 2022).

This study addresses the following research questions: Does spiritual leadership directly predict organizational commitment among pesantren teachers? Does spiritual leadership significantly predict trust and emotional intelligence? Do trust and emotional intelligence mediate the relationship between spiritual leadership and organizational commitment?

Theoretically, this study extends Fry's (2003) SLT by testing its boundary conditions in a non-Western, religiously embedded educational context an underexplored area in the leadership literature. Practically, the results inform pesantren administrators on how to design leadership development programs and organizational cultures that sustain teacher commitment through intrinsic, values-based mechanisms rather than extrinsic incentives. The study also contributes to a broader conversation about the contextual limits of universal organizational behavior theories when applied to Islamic institutional settings.

B. Method

This study employed a quantitative approach with a causal-associative design, aiming to examine the directional relationships among spiritual leadership, trust, emotional intelligence, and organizational commitment. The design is appropriate given the a priori theoretical model derived from SLT (Fry, 2003) and the objective of testing specific structural hypotheses. The philosophical stance aligns with a post-positivist paradigm, acknowledging that organizational phenomena are complex but can be systematically measured and analyzed through validated psychometric instruments.

The study population comprised all teachers at Pondok Pesantren Darussalam, a medium-sized Islamic boarding school located in West Nusa Tenggara, Indonesia. A census sampling method was employed, meaning all members of the population were included in the study, yielding a total sample of $N = 44$ teachers. This decision was justified by

the relatively small and bounded population, which allowed for complete data coverage and eliminated sampling error (Sugiyono, 2018). Demographic characteristics indicated that the majority of respondents had been employed for more than two years, with educational backgrounds ranging from senior high school (SMA) to postgraduate level (S2). Gender distribution reflected the predominantly male composition of teaching staff in pesantren settings.

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire administered directly to all respondents. The instrument comprised four constructs measured on a five-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree).

Spiritual leadership (X) was measured using 10 items adapted from Thayib's (2005) indigenous indicator framework, which emphasizes Islamic leadership values including honesty, justice, moral service, and humility. Trust (M1) was operationalized using 8 items drawn from Clark and Payne (1997), covering integrity, competence, consistency, loyalty, and openness. Emotional intelligence (M2) was measured using 10 items based on Goleman's (2005) five-domain model: self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills. Organizational commitment (Y) was operationalized using 9 items adapted from Robbins and Judge (2008), reflecting affective, continuance, and normative dimensions.

Data were analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) with SmartPLS software, an appropriate technique for small-to-medium samples and complex structural models (Hair et al., 2019; Rasoolimanesh, 2022). The analysis proceeded in two stages.

In the outer model (measurement model), construct validity was assessed through convergent validity (factor loadings ≥ 0.70 and Average Variance Extracted, AVE ≥ 0.50) and discriminant validity using the Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) ratio (HTMT < 0.85). Internal consistency was assessed via Composite Reliability (CR ≥ 0.70) and Cronbach's Alpha

($\alpha \geq 0.70$). In the inner model (structural model), path coefficients (β), t-statistics, and p-values were computed via bootstrapping (5,000 resamples). R^2 values indicated the model's explanatory power. Mediation effects were tested using the indirect effects procedure, with significance assessed through 95% bias-corrected confidence intervals.

Informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to data collection. Respondents were assured of data confidentiality, and participation was voluntary. No personally identifying information was retained in the dataset. The study was conducted in accordance with ethical guidelines for social science research.

C. Results and Discussion

The central finding of this study is that spiritual leadership does not directly nor indirectly through trust or emotional intelligence predict organizational commitment among pesantren teachers in a statistically significant manner. This contradicts the dominant expectation in the spiritual leadership literature (Fry, 2003; Samul, 2024; Ali & Zafar, 2022) but aligns with a smaller strand of empirical work that identifies contextual boundary conditions under which SLT's effects are attenuated. Importantly, spiritual leadership strongly predicted both trust and emotional intelligence, indicating that the leadership model is effective in cultivating these psychological attributes yet these attributes do not, in this context, transfer into increased commitment.

1. Results

a. Measurement Model Assessment

The outer model results indicated satisfactory psychometric properties across all constructs. All indicator loadings exceeded the threshold of 0.70, confirming adequate item-level reliability. AVE values ranged from 0.52 to 0.67, exceeding the minimum criterion of 0.50. Composite Reliability ranged from 0.84 to 0.93, and Cronbach's Alpha values were all above 0.70, confirming internal consistency. Discriminant

validity was confirmed through HTMT ratios, all of which fell below the conservative threshold of 0.85, indicating that the constructs were empirically distinct.

Table 1. Outer Model Assessment Summary

Construct	AVE	CR	Cronbach α	Items (n)
Spiritual Leadership (SL)	0.552	0.921	0.905	10
Trust (TR)	0.588	0.899	0.876	8
Emotional Intelligence (EI)	0.531	0.907	0.890	10
Organizational Commitment (OC)	0.521	0.884	0.854	9

Note. CR = Composite Reliability; AVE = Average Variance Extracted.

b. Structural Model and Hypothesis Testing

Table 2 presents the path coefficient results from the structural model. Spiritual leadership had a positive but non-significant direct effect on organizational commitment ($\beta = 0.163$, $t = 0.998$, $p = 0.319$). Conversely, spiritual leadership had a significant positive effect on trust ($\beta = 0.643$, $t = 6.211$, $p < 0.001$) and on emotional intelligence ($\beta = 0.555$, $t = 4.876$, $p < 0.001$). However, trust did not significantly predict organizational commitment ($\beta = 0.129$, $t = 0.720$, $p = 0.472$), nor did emotional intelligence ($\beta = 0.262$, $t = 1.449$, $p = 0.148$). The R^2 values indicated that the model explained 41.3% of variance in trust, 30.8% of variance in emotional intelligence, and 18.9% of variance in organizational commitment.

Table 2. Structural Path Coefficients and Hypothesis Testing Results

Path	β	SE	t-value	p-value	Decision
SL $\rightarrow$ OC (direct)	0.163	0.163	0.998	0.319	Not supported
SL $\rightarrow$ Trust	0.643	0.104	6.211	< 0.001	Supported
SL $\rightarrow$ Emotional Intelligence	0.555	0.114	4.876	< 0.001	Supported
Trust $\rightarrow$ OC	0.129	0.179	0.720	0.472	Not supported
EI $\rightarrow$ OC	0.262	0.181	1.449	0.148	Not supported
SL $\rightarrow$ Trust $\rightarrow$ OC (indirect)	0.083	0.122	0.681	0.496	No mediation
SL $\rightarrow$ EI $\rightarrow$ OC (indirect)	0.145	0.116	1.253	0.211	No mediation

Note. SL = Spiritual Leadership; OC = Organizational Commitment; EI = Emotional Intelligence. Bootstrapping with 5,000 resamples.

2. Discussion

a. Spiritual Leadership and Organizational Commitment

The non-significant direct path from spiritual leadership to organizational commitment ($\beta = 0.163$, $p > 0.05$) diverges from studies conducted in corporate contexts (Haldorai et al., 2020; Chang & Arisanti, 2022) but converges with findings in Islamic educational settings where commitment is deeply rooted in pre-existing spiritual and moral obligations rather than leader-induced motivation. Rasyidin et al. (2025) observed a similar pattern in pesantren environments, noting that teacher commitment is anchored in values of *ikhlas* (sincerity) and *khidmah* (devotion), which predispose individuals toward organizational commitment independently of the leadership they encounter. In this light, spiritual leadership may serve as a contextual reinforcer rather than a primary driver of commitment.

This finding is also theoretically consistent with Fry's (2003) assertion that calling and membership mediate the spiritual leadership-commitment relationship. It is possible that pesantren teachers have

already internalized a strong sense of calling prior to their employment, making them less responsive to additional leadership-induced calling signals. The organizational commitment of pesantren teachers may operate as a floor effect already near ceiling leaving little variance for leadership behaviors to explain.

b. Spiritual Leadership and Trust

Spiritual leadership strongly predicted trust ($\beta = 0.643$, $p < 0.001$), consistent with prior findings by Ali and Zafar (2022), Kaya (2022), and Olvera et al. (2024). Leaders who consistently demonstrate honesty (kejujuran), fairness (keadilan), humility, and transparency fulfill the key antecedents of trust identified by Clark and Payne (1997): integrity, competence, consistency, loyalty, and openness. In the pesantren context, the kiai (Islamic boarding school leader) figure holds elevated moral authority, and behaviors emblematic of spiritual leadership are deeply consistent with traditional Islamic leadership norms (Alavi, 2020). This congruence amplifies the trust-building effect of spiritual leadership in this setting.

The fact that trust, despite being significant predicted by spiritual leadership, did not significantly predict organizational commitment ($\beta = 0.129$, $p > 0.05$) is noteworthy. One interpretation is that trust is a necessary condition for functional working relationships but not sufficient for commitment differentiation in an environment where all teachers already operate within a high-trust moral framework. As Mayer et al. (1995) argued, trust reduces vulnerability and facilitates cooperation, but organizational commitment in religious institutions is more directly tied to theological imperatives than to relational trust dynamics.

c. Spiritual Leadership and Emotional Intelligence

The significant relationship between spiritual leadership and emotional intelligence ($\beta = 0.555$, $p < 0.001$) aligns with growing evidence that spiritually oriented leaders model and foster emotional regulation

capacities in their followers (Goleman, 2005; Wati et al., 2023). Spiritual leadership behaviors including demonstrating empathy, inspiring purpose, and maintaining composure under pressure provide behavioral cues that teachers can observe and internalize. This process of emotional modeling is especially potent in close-knit educational communities like pesantren, where leaders and teachers interact daily in both professional and communal contexts.

The non-significant path from emotional intelligence to organizational commitment ($\beta = 0.262$, $p > 0.05$) contrasts with Li et al.'s (2023) findings in Chinese school settings but may reflect the same ceiling effect noted above: if commitment is universally high due to intrinsic spiritual motivations, EI's incremental contribution becomes statistically undetectable. Alternatively, the small sample size ($N = 44$) may have limited statistical power for detecting what could be a real but modest effect.

d. Non-Mediation of Trust and Emotional Intelligence

Both indirect paths $SL \rightarrow Trust \rightarrow OC$ ($\beta = 0.083$, $p > 0.05$) and $SL \rightarrow EI \rightarrow OC$ ($\beta = 0.145$, $p > 0.05$) were non-significant. This null mediation finding challenges the theoretical model derived from SLT but contributes important boundary condition evidence. In contexts where organizational commitment is sustained by deep-seated spiritual obligations, as appears to be the case in pesantren settings, trust and emotional intelligence may play enabling rather than mediating roles facilitating cooperation, reducing conflict, and improving relational quality without materially altering commitment trajectories that are already anchored in theological identity. This interpretation resonates with Purnomo's (2022) framework of commitment in Islamic boarding schools as an organizational behavior phenomenon shaped more by institutional ethos than by individual psychological pathways.

e. Limitations

Several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the small census sample ($N = 44$) from a single institution restricts statistical power and generalizability. Future research should extend to multi-pesantren samples across diverse Indonesian provinces. Second, the cross-sectional design precludes causal inference; longitudinal data would strengthen the interpretation of directional effects. Third, common method bias cannot be ruled out given that all variables were collected through self-reports from a single source. Fourth, the use of an indigenous indicator framework for spiritual leadership (Thayib, 2005), while contextually appropriate, limits comparability with international studies using Fry's standardized SLT survey. Fifth, this study did not include other potential mediators such as workplace spirituality, calling, or psychological safety which may capture the mechanism through which spiritual leadership affects commitment in pesantren contexts more fully.

D. Conclusion

This study investigated whether spiritual leadership influences organizational commitment among Islamic boarding school teachers, with trust and emotional intelligence as proposed mediators. Using PLS-SEM with a census sample of 44 teachers at Pondok Pesantren Darussalam, the results revealed that spiritual leadership significantly builds trust and emotional intelligence but does not directly or indirectly determine organizational commitment. Neither trust nor emotional intelligence mediated the focal relationship.

These findings underscore a critical contextual insight: in institutions where religious identity, moral obligation, and spiritual devotion are structurally embedded, organizational commitment may be primarily anchored in intrinsic Islamic values *ikhlas*, *pengabdian*, and *Khidmah* rather than in leader-mediated psychological processes. This represents a meaningful boundary condition for Fry's (2003) Spiritual Leadership Theory and calls for contextually sensitive frameworks in human resource management research within Islamic educational organizations.

For pesantren administrators, the practical implication is that leadership development programs should target the cultivation of trust and emotional intelligence as important relational assets, even if their impact on commitment is not direct. Future research should explore the role of calling internalization, Islamic work ethics, and institutional socialization as primary determinants of commitment in pesantren, and should use larger multi-site samples to test the boundary conditions identified here.

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