

## A synergistic pedagogical model: Integrating teacher role modeling and guidance to foster spiritual intelligence

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### ABSTRACT

Spiritual intelligence has become a crucial dimension of holistic education, yet it remains underemphasized in many educational practices that prioritize cognitive achievement over spiritual development, particularly amid contemporary adolescent challenges. This study aims to examine how teachers' role modeling and guidance operate, both independently and synergistically, in shaping students' spiritual intelligence within a *pesantren*-based junior high school. Employing a qualitative case study design, the study involved twelve participants, comprising teachers, students, school management personnel, and a *pesantren* administrator. Data were collected through non-participant observation, in-depth semi-structured interviews, and document analysis, and analyzed using thematic analysis involving coding, categorization, and interpretation. The findings reveal that teachers' role modeling functions as a consistent embodiment of spiritual values, while guidance operates as a structured and reflective mentoring process that supports students' internalization of those values. Importantly, the integration of role modeling and guidance creates a synergistic pedagogical approach that promotes deeper spiritual transformation, including self-awareness, moral responsibility, and emotional regulation. This study concludes that a relational and integrative model of spiritual education is more effective than isolated practices and offers both theoretical and practical contributions to strengthening character education in Islamic educational contexts.

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## Introduction

Spiritual intelligence has increasingly been recognized as a fundamental dimension of holistic education, particularly within Islamic educational contexts where the integration of intellect, ethics, and transcendental awareness is highly emphasized.

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Beyond cognitive development, spiritual intelligence equips learners with the capacity to internalize ethical values, demonstrate resilience, regulate emotions appropriately, and assume moral responsibility in addressing contemporary societal challenges (Pinto et al., 2024). However, modern educational systems, both secular and religious, have largely narrowed their focus to measurable academic achievements, technological competencies, and standardized learning outcomes. This shift has often occurred at the expense of nurturing students' spiritual and moral dimensions (Horwitz, 2021; Imran et al., 2024; Walid et al., 2025). Consequently, there is a growing concern regarding students' declining emotional balance, weakened prosocial behavior, and diminished moral awareness. This issue is not limited to secular institutions; even faith-based educational settings face similar challenges, as many adolescents struggle to maintain spiritual grounding amid rapid social and digital transformations.

From a humanistic educational perspective, spirituality is considered an essential component of personal growth and self-actualization, functioning as an integral subsystem within the broader educational process (Steć & Kulik, 2021). In this regard, educators are expected to transcend their traditional instructional roles and act as facilitators of meaning, guiding students toward reflective and value-oriented learning experiences. This perspective aligns with social learning theory, which posits that individuals acquire values and behaviors through observation and imitation of significant role models. Within Islamic boarding schools (*Pesantren*), teachers' daily interactions, behaviors, and relationships constitute a "living curriculum" through which students internalize spiritual and moral values (Halim, 2023). The dual roles of teachers as role models and mentors create a pedagogical synergy that is central to students' spiritual formation. These intertwined roles emphasize not only what is taught but also how values are embodied in everyday practice (Cahyanto et al., 2025; Syaifudin et al., 2025).

In the context of this research, the theoretical framework positions teachers as central actors in educational management, functioning simultaneously as instructional leaders and moral guides within value-based contexts such as *pesantren*, where teaching extends beyond content delivery to the lived transmission of moral and spiritual values (Akhyar et al., 2024; Romadhoni & Muhtarom, 2025). Grounded in humanistic-spiritual education, it emphasizes holistic student development across cognitive, emotional, moral, and spiritual domains, facilitated through authentic, empathetic, and reflective learning environments (Popandopulo et al., 2025; Gladstone & Cimpian, 2021). Teachers' roles as guides reinforce students' internalization of values, fostering deep personal transformation (Birhan et al., 2021; Jumatullailah et al., 2024). Classical Islamic perspectives further enrich this framework, with Al-Ghazali, in his famous *Ihya' Ulum al-Din*, highlighting education as *tazkiyat al-nafs* (the purification of the soul) and positioning teachers as moral exemplars, while Az-Zarnuji, in *Ta'lim al-Muta'allim* (a classical Islamic treatise on the ethics and methods of learning), emphasizes the importance of structured guidance and *adab* (ethical conduct) in shaping disciplined and spiritually mature learners (Inderanata & Sukardi, 2023). Integrating these perspectives, the framework conceptualizes spiritual intelligence as a product of the synergistic interaction between *pesantren* culture, teacher role modeling, and guidance, enabling students to construct meaning, regulate themselves according to higher values, and assume moral responsibility (Bagherpur et al., 2022; Dacka & Rydz, 2023).

Existing studies on spiritual intelligence in education have predominantly examined its relationship with academic achievement, emotional well-being, and psychological adjustment. While these studies have contributed valuable insights, they also reveal notable limitations. First, empirical evidence suggests that spiritual intelligence alone does not consistently predict academic success, particularly in cognitively demanding disciplines. Second, many studies conceptualize spiritual intelligence as an individual psychological construct, thereby overlooking the pedagogical processes that facilitate its development (Hussain et al., 2023; Zhou et al., 2024). As a result, limited scholarly attention has been given to the role of teachers and educational practices in shaping

students' spiritual intelligence. This gap highlights the need for a more process-oriented understanding that situates spiritual intelligence within instructional, relational, and contextual dynamics rather than treating it solely as an inherent personal attribute.

In the context of Islamic boarding schools, this gap becomes even more significant. *Pesantren* are widely regarded as ideal environments for fostering spiritual development due to their strong religious culture, close teacher–student relationships, and value-oriented curricula (Demir, 2025). Nevertheless, recent evidence indicates a paradoxical decline in students' religiosity and depth of religious understanding (Coleman, 2023; Horwitz, 2021; Koukounaras Liagkis, 2022). In addition to these spiritual challenges, students continue to face emotional and behavioral issues, including persistent social problems such as bullying among adolescents (Källmén & Hallgren, 2021; Salmivalli et al., 2021). These conditions reveal a discrepancy between the idealized expectations of *pesantren* education and its practical implementation. Therefore, a more structured, intentional, and integrative approach to spiritual education is necessary to bridge this gap and ensure that spiritual values are effectively internalized by students.

Previous research has typically examined teachers' roles in modeling and guidance as separate constructs within character and moral education. Studies on role modeling often focus on the alignment between teachers' moral reasoning and their observable behavior, while research on guidance emphasizes mentoring, counseling, and behavioral support frameworks. However, little attention has been paid to how these two roles function synergistically as an integrated pedagogical approach. Moreover, existing empirical studies rarely situate this integration within the lived realities of *pesantren*, where spiritual education is expected to be continuous, experiential, and deeply relational. This lack of integration limits our understanding of how spiritual intelligence is cultivated in authentic educational settings. Consequently, there remains a significant research gap in exploring how the combined roles of teacher modeling and guidance contribute to shaping spiritually intelligent students within Islamic boarding school environments.

To address these gaps, this study investigates the roles of teachers as both exemplars and mentors within an integrated pedagogical framework aimed at developing students' spiritual intelligence in a *pesantren*-based junior secondary school. Specifically, the study seeks to explore how teachers' values, behaviors, and guidance practices interact to create meaningful spiritual learning experiences. By employing a qualitative case study approach, this research provides an in-depth examination of the processes, interactions, and contextual factors that influence spiritual development in this setting. Through this approach, the study aims to capture the complexity of spiritual education as it is practiced in real-life educational environments, thereby offering a nuanced understanding of how spiritual intelligence is cultivated through relational and experiential learning.

This study aims to: (1) analyze how teachers' role modeling is manifested in daily educational practices, (2) examine how teachers provide guidance as part of students' spiritual development, and (3) explore how the integration of role modeling and guidance contributes to the formation of students' spiritual intelligence. The study offers several important contributions. First, it advances Islamic education theory by integrating perspectives from humanistic education, social learning theory, and spiritual intelligence within the specific context of *pesantren*. Second, it proposes an empirically grounded model of spiritually oriented pedagogy that emphasizes the active and systematic roles of teachers. This model addresses contemporary educational challenges, including digital disruption, moral disengagement, and adolescents' psychosocial vulnerability, by highlighting the importance of relational and value-based teaching practices in fostering holistic student development.

## Method

This study employed a qualitative research approach with a case study design to enable an in-depth exploration of a specific educational phenomenon within its natural setting. The case study design was selected to provide a comprehensive understanding of the dynamic interaction between teachers' role modeling, guidance practices, and the development of students' spiritual intelligence in a *pesantren* context (Tadesse et al., 2021). Unlike experimental or survey-based methods, this approach allows for a nuanced examination of processes, meanings, and patterns embedded in daily educational practices. Furthermore, the design incorporated a limited amount of quantitative data for descriptive purposes without constituting a full mixed-methods approach, as suggested by Bell and Warren (2023). The study also maintained a degree of contextual flexibility to accommodate the distinctive cultural, religious, and institutional characteristics of the *pesantren* environment, ensuring the relevance and authenticity of the findings.

The research was conducted at *Pondok Pesantren Binaul Ummah Kuningan*, West Java, Indonesia, a secondary-level Islamic boarding school that integrates formal education with intensive spiritual development. The participants were twelve (12), coded as P1–P12, serving both instructional and mentoring teachers (P1–P5), junior secondary students (P6–P9), school management personnel (P10 & P11), and *pesantren* administrators (P12). The participants were purposively selected due to their active involvement in the daily academic and spiritual life of the institution, enabling the study to capture diverse yet interconnected perspectives. Such a comprehensive participant structure allowed the research to explore how role modeling and guidance are enacted and experienced across different institutional levels. By incorporating multiple stakeholders, the study was able to construct a holistic understanding of the cultural practices surrounding spiritual education, particularly how values are transmitted, reinforced, and internalized within the *pesantren's* relational and communal learning environment.

Data were collected through non-participant observation, in-depth semi-structured interviews, and document analysis to ensure methodological triangulation. Observations focused on teachers' daily routines, student engagement, and mentoring activities across both formal and informal religious learning settings (Mujahid, 2021). Interviews were designed to capture participants' lived experiences, particularly regarding the influence of teachers' role modeling and guidance on students' spiritual development. An open and flexible interview protocol was employed to allow participants to articulate their perspectives authentically while aligning with the study's objectives. Supporting data were obtained from institutional documents, including program descriptions, schedules of religious activities, and relevant school records (Widyastuti et al., 2024). Data analysis followed a thematic approach involving coding, categorization, and interpretation to identify recurring patterns related to role modeling, guidance, and spiritual intelligence development. The iterative process of simultaneous data collection and analysis enabled refinement of emerging themes, while triangulation and memo-writing enhanced the credibility and depth of the findings (Vu, 2021).

## Results

### *Teachers' role modeling*

The findings indicate a shared understanding among teachers, students, and administrators that role modeling functions as a continuous embodiment of spiritual values in daily practice. Teachers emphasize the importance of consistently demonstrating discipline, sincerity, humility, and emotional control across both formal and informal settings. Students confirm that such consistency makes values more observable and easier to internalize, while administrators view this as a defining

characteristic of pesantren-based education. Together, these perspectives highlight that role modeling is not incidental but intentionally sustained as part of the educational process.

“We realize that students observe everything we do, so we must consistently show good behavior in all situations.” (P2 – Teacher)

“Our teachers are the same everywhere, not only in class. That makes it easier for us to follow their example.” (P7 – Student)

Across all participant groups, authenticity emerges as a crucial factor determining the effectiveness of role modeling. Teachers acknowledge the need to align their actions with their teachings to maintain credibility. Students reinforce this by expressing that they are more influenced by teachers who demonstrate genuine behavior rather than performative actions. Administrators further emphasize that authenticity is essential in sustaining trust and moral authority within the institutional culture. This convergence of perspectives underscores that role modeling is effective only when grounded in sincerity and consistency.

“If we are not sincere, students will notice immediately. That is why we must practice what we teach.” (P4 – Teacher)

“I follow teachers who really show what they teach, not just say it. It feels more real and meaningful.” (P6 – Student)

The *pesantren* environment is perceived by all participants as a unique relational space that enhances the effectiveness of role modeling. Teachers highlight the advantage of continuous interaction with students, allowing values to be demonstrated beyond classroom instruction. Students describe how daily proximity helps them understand not only what teachers do but also the intentions behind their actions. Administrators view this relational closeness as a structural strength of the *pesantren* system, enabling sustained moral and spiritual guidance through lived experience.

“Because we interact with students throughout the day, we can guide them through our actions in many situations.” (P1 – Teacher)

“Living in the boarding school helps us learn from teachers all the time, not only during lessons.” (P8 – Student)

Finally, the findings suggest that role modeling contributes to deeper spiritual transformation rather than mere behavioral imitation. Teachers observe that students gradually develop self-awareness, emotional regulation, and moral responsibility. Students themselves report becoming more reflective about their actions, while administrators recognize these changes as indicators of successful spiritual education. This triangulated perspective demonstrates that role modeling in the pesantren context facilitates internal growth, moving students from imitation toward meaningful personal transformation.

“We see that students begin to reflect on their behavior, not just imitate what we do.” (P3 – Teacher)

“Teachers’ examples make me think about my actions and try to improve myself.” (P9 – Student)

Observational data strongly corroborate teachers’ accounts regarding the consistent embodiment of spiritual values and the importance of authenticity in role modeling. Across both formal classroom settings and informal daily activities, teachers were observed demonstrating disciplined routines such as punctual participation in

congregational prayers, respectful communication, and calm conflict management. These practices were not performed as isolated acts but appeared as habitual and integrated behaviors, reinforcing teachers' claims about consistency. Furthermore, teachers' interactions with students reflected a relational and empathetic approach, particularly in mentoring moments outside structured lessons. The sustained proximity between teachers and students within the *pesantren* environment allowed values to be enacted continuously, supporting the notion of a relational-spiritual learning space. These observations validate that role modeling operates as a lived and observable pedagogical practice, contributing to students' gradual internalization of spiritual values.

Document analysis further substantiates the interview and observational findings by revealing institutional support for teachers' role modeling practices. School documents, including daily schedules, religious activity programs, and mentoring guidelines, indicate a structured integration of spiritual routines such as collective prayers, Qur'anic recitation, and character-building sessions. These documents emphasize teachers' responsibilities not only as instructors but also as moral exemplars and mentors within the *pesantren* system. Additionally, program descriptions highlight expectations for teachers to demonstrate discipline, sincerity, and ethical conduct as part of their professional roles. This formal alignment between institutional policies and teachers' practices reinforces the consistency observed in daily interactions. The documents also reflect a holistic educational vision that integrates cognitive, moral, and spiritual development, thereby supporting the finding that role modeling is not incidental but systematically embedded within the educational framework of the *pesantren*.

To enhance clarity and provide a concise synthesis of the teachers' perspectives derived from the interview data, the key findings are summarized in [Table 1](#).

Table 1. Summary of teachers' role modeling (teachers' perspective)

No.	Key Theme	Description	Representative Insight
1	Consistent Embodiment of Values	Participants indicate that role modeling is a continuous practice where teachers consistently demonstrate spiritual values across contexts.	Teachers emphasize consistency; students observe alignment in daily behavior; administrators view it as institutional culture.
2	Authenticity as Basis of Influence	Participants highlight that sincerity and alignment between words and actions determine the effectiveness of role modeling.	Teachers stress sincerity; students respond to genuine behavior; administrators see authenticity as key to trust.
3	Relational-Spiritual Interaction	Participants recognize the <i>pesantren</i> environment as enabling continuous interaction that strengthens value internalization.	Teachers utilize daily interaction; students learn through proximity; administrators emphasize structural support.
4	Spiritual Transformation beyond Imitation	Participants observe that role modeling fosters internal development such as reflection, emotional control, and moral awareness.	Teachers note behavioral change; students report self-reflection; administrators recognize long-term character formation.

### Teachers' guidance

The findings indicate that teachers provide guidance through structured yet personalized mentoring practices aimed at supporting students' spiritual development. Teachers describe guidance as an intentional process involving regular mentoring sessions, reflective conversations, and moral reinforcement tailored to students'

individual needs. Students confirm that such guidance helps them better understand their actions and develop self-awareness, while administrators highlight that structured mentoring is an integral part of the *pesantren* system. This demonstrates that guidance is not incidental but systematically embedded in daily educational practices.

“We guide students not only in academic matters but also in their personal and spiritual struggles, adjusting our approach to each student.” (P1 – Teacher)

“When teachers talk to us personally, it helps us understand our mistakes and how to improve ourselves.” (P7 – Student)

Another key finding reveals that guidance is predominantly delivered through reflective and dialogical interactions rather than directive instruction. Teachers emphasize the importance of engaging students in meaningful conversations that encourage self-reflection and moral reasoning. Students perceive this approach as supportive rather than judgmental, which increases their openness and willingness to change. Administrators further affirm that reflective dialogue aligns with the humanistic orientation of *pesantren* education, fostering internal rather than imposed discipline.

“We do not directly judge students; instead, we ask questions so they can reflect on their actions and find meaning.” (P3 – Teacher)

“I feel guided, not judged. The teacher helps me understand why my actions are wrong and how to correct them.” (P6 – Student)

The findings also show that guidance extends beyond formal mentoring into continuous emotional and spiritual support in daily interactions. Teachers report that they closely monitor students’ emotional conditions and provide support during moments of difficulty, reinforcing values such as patience, responsibility, and sincerity. Students acknowledge that such support creates a sense of security and trust, while administrators recognize it as a defining feature of *pesantren* education. This ongoing support strengthens the relational dimension of guidance and enhances its effectiveness.

“We try to be close to students so they feel comfortable sharing their problems, and we can guide them accordingly.” (P2 – Teacher)

“When I have problems, teachers listen and help me find the right way, not just tell me what to do.” (P8 – Student)

Finally, participants consistently highlight that guidance contributes to students’ internal transformation, particularly in developing self-awareness, responsibility, and emotional regulation. Teachers observe that students gradually become more reflective and disciplined, while students report changes in how they think and behave. Administrators interpret these outcomes as indicators of successful spiritual education, emphasizing that guidance facilitates deeper internalization of values rather than superficial compliance.

“Through continuous guidance, students begin to understand themselves better and take responsibility for their actions.” (P4 – Teacher)

“Guidance from teachers makes me think before acting and helps me become a better person.” (P9 – Student)

Observational data reinforce the interview findings by showing that guidance practices are actively embedded in daily *pesantren* life. Teachers were observed engaging in informal mentoring during routine activities such as after prayers, during communal gatherings, and in classroom interactions. Rather than relying on authoritative instruction, teachers frequently used questioning and gentle advice to encourage student

reflection. Additionally, teachers demonstrated attentiveness to students' emotional states, offering support in moments of difficulty or behavioral concern. These observations confirm that guidance is not limited to formal sessions but occurs continuously through relational interactions, supporting the notion of a holistic and lived mentoring process within the *pesantren* environment.

The result of document analysis also supports the findings by revealing institutional structures that formalize guidance practices. School documents, including mentoring schedules, student development programs, and codes of conduct, indicate that guidance is systematically integrated into the educational framework. These documents outline teachers' responsibilities in providing not only academic instruction but also moral and spiritual mentoring. Moreover, program descriptions emphasize reflective activities, character-building sessions, and continuous supervision, aligning with the dialogical and supportive approaches described by participants. This institutional alignment demonstrates that guidance is both a practiced and policy-supported component of *pesantren* education, reinforcing its role in fostering students' spiritual intelligence.

To provide a clear synthesis of the multi-perspective findings on teachers' guidance, the key themes are summarized in [Table 2](#).

Table 2. Summary of teachers' guidance

No.	Key Theme	Description	Representative Insight
1	Structured and Personalized Mentoring	Participants indicate that guidance is systematically implemented through tailored mentoring practices.	Teachers adapt guidance; students experience personal support; administrators emphasize structured programs.
2	Reflective Dialogue	Participants highlight that guidance is delivered through dialogical and reflective approaches rather than directive methods.	Teachers use questioning; students feel supported; administrators link it to humanistic values.
3	Emotional and Spiritual Support	Participants recognize guidance as continuous support embedded in daily interactions.	Teachers provide emotional care; students feel guided; administrators value relational closeness.
4	Internal Transformation	Participants observe that guidance fosters self-awareness, responsibility, and moral development.	Teachers note behavioral change; students report reflection; administrators see long-term impact.

### ***Integration of teachers' role modeling and guidance***

The findings reveal that the integration of teachers' role modeling and guidance functions as a synergistic pedagogical approach that facilitates deeper value internalization among students. Teachers emphasize that role modeling provides concrete behavioral examples, while guidance enables students to interpret and internalize these values meaningfully. This perspective is reinforced by school management and *pesantren* leadership, who view this integration as central to achieving the institution's spiritual education goals. Together, these perspectives highlight that effective spiritual development requires both demonstration and reflective engagement.

"Role modeling shows students what to do, but guidance helps them understand why it matters and how to apply it in their lives." (P2 – Teacher)

"In our system, teachers are not only examples but also guides who help students internalize values, so the process becomes meaningful." (P10 – School Management)

Another key finding highlights that the integration operates through a relational-spiritual interaction pattern, where continuous engagement between teachers and students reinforces both observation and reflection. Teachers describe how daily interaction allows immediate guidance to accompany modeled behavior, while administrators emphasize that this relational closeness is structurally supported in the pesantren system. This creates an environment where values are consistently demonstrated and reinforced through dialogue and lived experience.

“Because we interact with students continuously, we can model behavior and immediately guide them in real situations.” (P1 – Teacher)

“The boarding system allows continuous interaction, so guidance and example happen together in daily life.” (P12 – Pesantren Administrator)

The integration of role modeling and guidance enables a shift in students’ responses from simple imitation toward meaningful transformation. Teachers observe that while role modeling alone may result in surface-level imitation, guidance encourages deeper reflection and moral reasoning. School management further confirms that this combination leads to more sustainable character development, as students begin to understand and internalize values independently.

“If students only imitate, the change may not last. But when we guide them, they begin to understand and transform themselves.” (P3 – Teacher)

“We see that students gradually move from just following rules to understanding the values behind them, which is more important.” (P11 – School Management)

Finally, participants consistently indicate that the integration of role modeling and guidance produces a more sustained and holistic spiritual impact compared to either approach in isolation. Teachers highlight long-term behavioral and attitudinal changes, while students report increased self-awareness and responsibility. Importantly, pesantren leadership underscores that this integration strengthens the institutional mission of holistic character formation, ensuring that spiritual development is deeply embedded and enduring.

“When role modeling and guidance are combined, the impact on students is stronger and more lasting.” (P4 – Teacher)

“This integrated approach ensures that students not only behave well but also develop inner awareness and responsibility as part of their character.” (P12 – Pesantren Administrator)

Observational data support the integrative nature of role modeling and guidance by showing that both practices occur simultaneously in daily interactions. Teachers were observed not only demonstrating appropriate behaviors, such as discipline, patience, and respectful communication, but also providing immediate guidance through reflective prompts and gentle correction. In many instances, behavioral modeling was followed by short dialogical interactions, allowing students to interpret the meaning behind observed actions. This simultaneous enactment confirms that integration is embedded in everyday practice, reinforcing both behavioral imitation and reflective understanding within a continuous relational context.

Document analysis further substantiates the integrated framework by revealing institutional alignment between policy and practice. School documents, including mentoring programs, character education frameworks, and religious activity schedules, explicitly outline teachers’ dual roles as role models and mentors. These documents emphasize both behavioral demonstration and reflective engagement as complementary strategies for student development. Additionally, institutional guidelines stress continuous supervision and relational interaction, indicating that integration is

systematically designed rather than incidental. This confirms that the synergy between role modeling and guidance is structurally embedded within the *pesantren* educational system.

To illustrate the comparative patterns between role modeling, guidance, and their synergistic integration, the findings are summarized in [Table 3](#).

Table 3. Integration of role modeling and guidance in developing spiritual intelligence

No	Key Integration Aspect	Description	Evidence from Participants
1	Value Internalization	Integration enables students to move from observing values to understanding and internalizing them meaningfully.	Teachers emphasize explanation; management highlights structured mentoring for internalization.
2	Relational-Spiritual Interaction	Continuous interaction allows modeling and guidance to occur simultaneously in daily contexts.	Administrators stress boarding system; teachers apply real-time guidance alongside modeling.
3	Transformation Process	Integration shifts student response from imitation to self-awareness and moral reasoning.	Management observes deeper understanding; teachers note reflective behavioral change.
4	Sustained Spiritual Impact	Combined approach produces long-term spiritual development and character formation.	Administrators emphasize institutional outcomes; participants report lasting personal growth.

## Discussion

The findings of this study demonstrate that the development of students' spiritual intelligence within a *pesantren*-based junior high school is best understood as an integrated pedagogical process rather than the result of isolated instructional strategies. Specifically, the interplay between teachers' role modeling and structured guidance forms a relational and experiential framework through which spiritual values are both demonstrated and internalized. This confirms that spiritual intelligence is not passively acquired but actively constructed through continuous interaction, observation, and reflection ([Hussain et al., 2023](#)). The findings thus respond directly to the research objectives by showing that the formation of spiritual intelligence depends on the extent to which these two pedagogical dimensions operate synergistically ([Alfizah et al., 2025](#); [Hatami Nejad et al., 2025](#)). Importantly, the integration of lived exemplification and reflective mentoring shifts the focus of spiritual education from procedural transmission to relational transformation, where students engage meaningfully with values in real-life contexts rather than merely receiving abstract moral instruction.

From a theoretical standpoint, the effectiveness of teachers' role modeling can be interpreted through the lens of Social Learning Theory, which posits that individuals acquire behaviors through observation, imitation, and reinforcement. In this study, teachers' consistent demonstration of religious practices, ethical conduct, and emotional regulation activates key mechanisms of attention, retention, reproduction, and motivation, thereby enhancing students' spiritual awareness ([Bandura, 2021](#); [Falah et al., 2023](#); [Mujahidah & Yusdiana, 2023](#)). However, this study extends beyond classical interpretations by showing that observation alone is insufficient for deep transformation. The role of guidance becomes critical in translating observed behaviors into meaningful personal understanding. Drawing on humanistic counseling perspectives, guidance facilitates empathy, acceptance, and self-reflection, enabling students to internalize values

at a deeper psychospiritual level (Nursanti et al., 2025). Thus, role modeling and guidance represent complementary external and internal pathways of learning, whose integration explains the heightened effectiveness observed in this study.

This study also contributes to ongoing scholarly discourse by addressing limitations in previous research on spiritual intelligence. While prior studies have largely focused on correlations between spiritual intelligence and academic performance or psychological resilience, they often neglect the pedagogical processes through which spiritual intelligence is developed (Zhou et al., 2024; Hatami Nejad et al., 2025). In contrast, the present study positions spiritual intelligence as a dynamic, relational construct shaped by sustained interaction within educational contexts. This reconceptualization challenges the dominant view of spiritual intelligence as an individual trait and highlights the importance of contextual and relational factors in its development (Pinto et al., 2024). Moreover, the findings provide empirical support for the argument that spiritual intelligence alone may not directly influence academic outcomes unless supported by structured pedagogical practices. By identifying the absence of teacher modeling and guidance as a key limitation in previous approaches, this study offers a more comprehensive explanation for the inconsistent impact of spiritual intelligence reported in earlier literature.

Furthermore, the findings highlight the contextual significance of *pesantren*-based education in addressing contemporary challenges related to declining spiritual engagement among adolescents. While previous research has pointed to reduced religiosity and moral commitment in the digital age (Achmadin et al., 2024; Cahyanto et al., 2025), this study demonstrates that a closely-knit teacher–student relationship can serve as a protective and transformative factor. The *pesantren* environment, characterized by continuous interaction, shared routines, and value-based living, enables the integration of spiritual formation into everyday life (Lu, 2021; Mujahid, 2021). This suggests that the effectiveness of spiritual education is not solely determined by curricular content but also by the relational ecology in which learning occurs. In this regard, *pesantren* education offers a contextually grounded model that bridges traditional Islamic values with contemporary pedagogical needs, reinforcing the role of lived experience in shaping students' moral and spiritual development.

According to the findings, this study proposes a synergistic integration of teachers' role modeling and guidance to develop students' spiritual intelligence (see Figure 1). The proposed model illustrates that the development of students' spiritual intelligence is rooted in the broader *pesantren* environment, which provides a value-laden ecosystem characterized by spiritual culture, religious rituals, communal living, and shared moral norms. Within this environment, teachers' role modeling operates as the primary visible mechanism through which spiritual values are embodied and transmitted. Teachers demonstrate moral integrity, spiritual discipline, ethical conduct, and consistency of values in their daily interactions, positioning themselves as living representations of the values they seek to cultivate. This continuous exposure enables students to observe and anchor their understanding of spirituality in concrete behaviors. At the same time, the model emphasizes that role modeling alone is insufficient to ensure deep internalization, as it primarily engages students at the level of observation and imitation.

To complement this, teachers' guidance functions as a reflective and interpretive process that transforms observed behaviors into personally meaningful values. Through empathic supervision, spiritual counseling, and intentional value internalization, guidance fosters students' self-awareness, moral reasoning, and reflective thinking. The bidirectional and synergistic relationship between role modeling and guidance, as indicated in the model, highlights that effective spiritual education emerges from the integration of these two dimensions rather than their isolated application. This integration ultimately leads to the development of students' spiritual intelligence, reflected in their capacity for meaning-making, moral awareness, ethical behavior, and self-reflection. Thus, the model conceptualizes spiritual intelligence as a dynamic outcome

of relational, experiential, and sustained pedagogical processes embedded within the *pesantren* educational context.

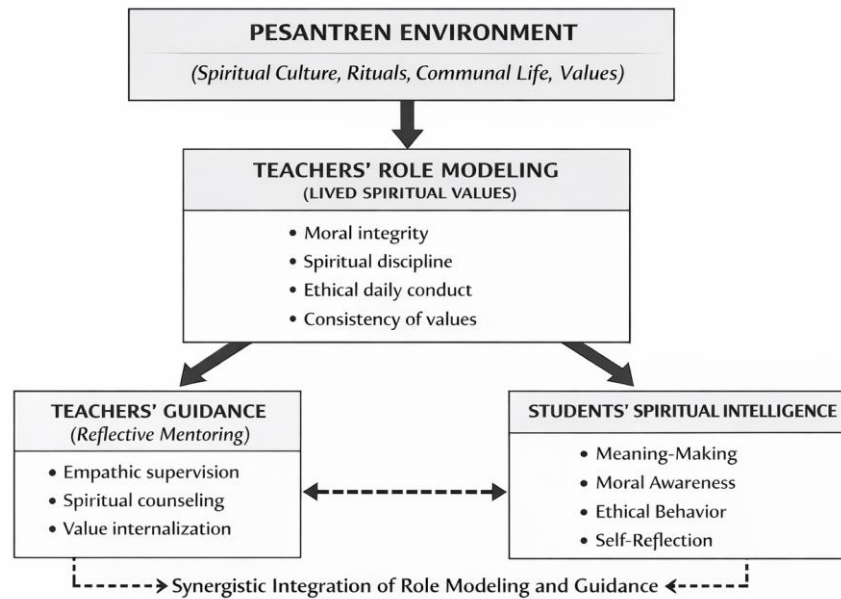


Figure 1. The synergistic pedagogical model

This study advances an integrative framework that combines humanistic education, Social Learning Theory, and Islamic educational philosophy to explain the development of spiritual intelligence. It conceptualizes spiritual intelligence as a multidimensional construct encompassing cognitive, affective, relational, and experiential domains, thereby moving beyond reductionist interpretations (Sumadi et al., 2025). Teachers' role modeling functions as a symbolic and behavioral anchor, while guidance provides the interpretive and reflective scaffolding necessary for sustained internalization. This perspective aligns with recent discussions in Islamic education that emphasize relational pedagogy over content-centered approaches (Alhamuddin et al., 2025; Wajdi et al., 2025). From the practical perspective, the study offers actionable insights for educational practitioners and policymakers by highlighting the need to institutionalize mentoring systems, strengthen teacher training in value-based pedagogy, and design school environments that support continuous teacher–student interaction. Ultimately, this study contributes to the field by proposing a process-oriented model of spiritual education that is both theoretically grounded and practically applicable, addressing contemporary challenges such as moral disengagement, digital disruption, and adolescents' psychosocial vulnerability.

## Conclusion

This study demonstrates that the development of students' spiritual intelligence in *pesantren* education is most effectively achieved through the synergistic integration of teachers' role modeling and structured spiritual guidance. Role modeling serves as the visible embodiment of spiritual values, allowing students to observe and emulate authentic behaviors, while guidance facilitates deeper internalization through reflective and dialogical processes. The findings confirm that neither approach is sufficient in isolation; rather, their integration fosters meaningful transformation by enhancing students' moral awareness, spiritual meaning-making, and the incorporation of religious values into everyday practice. Theoretically, this study contributes to Islamic education

by proposing a process-oriented pedagogical model that integrates humanistic education, Social Learning Theory, and spiritual intelligence within a relational framework. Practically, it highlights the need to strengthen teachers' roles as spiritual mentors through institutional support and structured mentoring systems, offering relevant strategies to address contemporary challenges such as digital disruption and declining prosocial behavior among adolescents.

Despite these contributions, this study is limited by its focus on a single *pesantren*-based junior secondary school, which may restrict the generalizability of the findings to other educational contexts. Additionally, the qualitative case study design, while providing in-depth insights, does not allow for broader statistical validation of the proposed model. Future research is therefore recommended to examine the applicability of this integrative pedagogical model across diverse educational settings, including non-boarding and secular institutions, using mixed-method or longitudinal approaches. Further studies may also explore the long-term impact of integrated role modeling and guidance on students' spiritual resilience, character development, and academic outcomes. Such investigations would not only strengthen the empirical foundation of this model but also contribute to the broader advancement of spiritually grounded educational practices in contemporary learning environments.

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