INTERDISCIPLINARY JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE AND EDUCATION

ISSN 3032-7563
Volume 4, Issue 3, 2026, pp. 189–204
DOI: https://doi.org/10.53639/ijsse.v4i3.165

Spiritually and Ethically Oriented Women's Leadership and Inclusive Governance at Purwojati Public Junior High School 1: A Case Study on Participation, Organizational Justice, and a Sense of Belonging Among the School Community

Muhammad Suherman[1]*

[1] Kantor Urusan Agama (KUA) Kecamatan Adipala, Cilacap, Central Java, Indonesia
*Corresponding author: suhermanmuhammad24@gmail.com

ARTICLE INFO

Article history
Received : 2026-09-24
Accepted : 2026-11-05
Published : 2026-11-12

Keywords
Women's Leadership;
Spiritual-Ethical Leadership;
Inclusive Governance;
Organizational Justice;
Sense of Belonging;
Case Study.

ABSTRACT

Women still face barriers in educational leadership, while spirituality and ethics often serve as sources of legitimacy for school leaders. This study describes how a female principal at SMP Negeri 1 Purwojati practices spiritual-ethical leadership, and how school members experience participation, organizational justice, and a sense of belonging. A qualitative case study design was used. Data were collected through oral semi-structured interviews on 28 October 2026 with five informants (the principal, an administrative staff member, a teacher, and two students) and analyzed thematically. The findings show that (1) the principal understands her position as a spiritual trust (*amanah*) expressed through role modeling, weekly reflection, and religious activities, and responds to gender stereotypes with a structured yet humane managerial approach; (2) governance operates through deliberation, stakeholder involvement, task allocation by official decree, and rotating training opportunities; and (3) informants reported acceptance and a sense of belonging through friendly communication and space for student aspirations. The findings are contextual and have not been cross-checked with observations or school documents. This study enriches research on women's and spiritual leadership in general schools.

This is an open-access article under the CC-BY-SA license.

How to cite: Suherman, M. (2026). Spiritually and ethically oriented women's leadership and inclusive governance at Purwojati Public Junior High School No. 1: A case study on participation, organizational justice, and a sense of belonging among the school community. *Interdisciplinary Journal of Social Science and Education, 4*(3), 189–204. https://doi.org/10.53639/ijsse.v4i3.165

1. Introduction

Schools always bring together people with different backgrounds, habits, and needs, so the way a leader handles these differences helps shape the learning and working environment. Differences can be a source of richness, but without sensitive leadership, they can easily turn into distance and a sense of exclusion. Questions like these are particularly relevant in middle schools, where teenage students are learning about fairness and unfairness by observing how the adults around them behave, make decisions, and treat one another every day. Studies on educational leadership in Asia show that local culture helps shape how leaders understand their responsibilities (Liu & Thien,

2023). In Indonesia, women's participation in educational leadership still lags behind that of men (Dzuhayatin & Edwards, 2010). Research at three universities in Malaysia and Indonesia also found that while women leaders are not yet proportionally represented in leadership structures, their influence is significant because it is rooted in cultural wisdom (Marno et al., 2024). Therefore, women's leadership deserves to be examined not only in terms of who is leading but also in terms of how fair and inclusive the governance system they build together with the school community is.

Research on women's leadership and spiritual leadership has provided a solid foundation, but most of it is still set in the context of Islamic boarding schools or universities. Nugroho found that women's spiritual leadership in Islamic boarding schools is evident in their vision, altruistic love, hope, calling, and sense of belonging to the community (Nugroho, 2024). Azzuhri and colleagues formulated the competencies of spiritual leaders based on Al-Ghazali's virtues and the concept of the qalb (Azzuhri et al., 2024). At the school level, Aisah and Hanif studied female principals at SDIT Cita Mulia Ajibarang (Aisah & Hanif, 2025), while Ismawati and Hanif examined the strategies of the principal at Tarbiyatul Athfal Al Faruq Karanglewas (Ismawati & Hanif, 2025). Both studies were conducted in Islamic educational institutions. In the author's review, the experiences of the school community at public junior high schools—particularly regarding participation, fairness, and a sense of belonging—have not been widely discussed. Discussions linking leadership values to the stories of the school community itself—namely teachers, educational staff, and students—remain rare, even though they are the ones who most directly feel the impact of every decision made by leaders. It is this gap that this study at SMP Negeri 1 Purwojati aims to address.

This study aims to describe how the female principal at SMP Negeri 1 Purwojati exercises spiritually and ethically oriented leadership, and how those practices are experienced by the school community in terms of participation, organizational justice, and a sense of belonging. Leadership here is viewed as a daily practice—such as the way one greets others, makes decisions, listens, and mediates—rather than merely a structural position. This perspective aligns with Fry's theory of spiritual leadership, which emphasizes vision, hope, and altruistic love (Fry, 2003). Nugroho also identified similar elements among female leaders at Islamic boarding schools (Nugroho, 2024). To guide the research, three questions were formulated: how does the spiritual-ethical orientation manifest in the principal's practices; how are participation and fairness implemented; and how do school community members experience acceptance and a sense of belonging. This choice of focus also stems from the simple reality that well-written policies are not necessarily perceived the same way by everyone; therefore, the experiences of people within the school need to be heard directly from them. These three questions are addressed in the results and discussion section.

This study does not test hypotheses and does not aim to measure the relationships between variables; rather, it seeks to gain a deep understanding of a single school. A qualitative approach

was chosen because experiences related to trust, justice, and a sense of belonging are difficult to reduce to numbers. Previous studies have also taken a similar approach: Aisah and Hanif examined women's transformational leadership at an integrated Islamic elementary school through interviews, observations, and documentation (Aisah & Hanif, 2025), while Tracy-Bronson explored the experiences of seven district leaders committed to inclusion and a sense of belonging (Tracy-Bronson, 2026). The data for this study were collected from five informants—the principal, an administrative staff member, a teacher, and two students—who were interviewed on October 28, 2026. The benefits are both theoretical—enriching the study of women's leadership in public schools—and practical—providing material for schools to reflect upon. With such clear boundaries, readers can assess for themselves how useful these findings are for their own schools, without being asked to believe that one school represents all schools in Indonesia. The scope is intentionally limited to a single case.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Women's Leadership

Gender is understood as a social construct—that is, expectations regarding the roles of men and women shaped by culture, not biological destiny. Because these expectations are socially constructed, they can change, and the barriers faced by women leaders do not automatically imply that they are less capable. Studies on women and educational leadership in Indonesia use the "glass ceiling" metaphor to describe limited access (Dzuhayatin & Edwards, 2010), while research at three universities indicates that cultural wisdom can serve as a source of egalitarian women's leadership (Marno et al., 2024). Aisah and Hanif note that the increasing number of women in strategic positions within Islamic educational institutions has not always been accompanied by a comprehensive understanding of the effectiveness of their leadership styles (Aisah & Hanif, 2025), and Rubini links women's transformational leadership to the quality of education (Rubini, 2025). Stereotypes, the "glass cliff," and the double burden can be understood within the same framework. In everyday conversation, these stereotypes often seem trivial—for example, the assumption that a good leader must be firm and dominant, while women are expected to be gentle and nurturing—but their impact on assessments of leadership suitability can be very real. Therefore, women's leadership in this study is viewed as a practice influenced by organizational norms and structures.

Equity for women leaders goes beyond personal competence, as recruitment, promotion, and access to professional development also play a decisive role. Bias can manifest subtly—for example, when leadership criteria unconsciously mirror traits typically associated with men. Mentoring, sponsorship, and family-friendly policies work in different yet complementary ways: the first provides guidance, the second opens doors, and the third alleviates the double burden. Therefore, it is important to ask who is being mentored, who is being recommended, and who is being overlooked in the promotion process—even in schools that appear to be functioning well from the

outside and are never questioned. Kimball, Reichard, and Chan, after analyzing women's leadership development programs in the United States, suggest expanding access for aspiring leaders, strengthening networks, and fostering an understanding of second-generation gender bias (Kimball et al., 2021). A study on the role of education and mentoring for women in South African educational institutions also highlights the importance of such support (Mudau & Sikhwari, 2025). Thus, the development of women leaders is best viewed as an organizational matter, not an individual struggle.

2.2 Spiritual Leadership

Spiritual leadership places meaning and calling at the heart of the work of leading. Fry explains that this type of leadership grows out of a meaningful vision, hope or belief in that vision, and altruistic love expressed through care and respect for others (Fry, 2003). In Indonesia, these elements are reinterpreted through the lens of local values. Azzuhri and colleagues derive the competencies of spiritual leaders from Al-Ghazali's virtues and the concept of the qalb (Azzuhri et al., 2024), while Nugroho found that female leaders in Islamic boarding schools (pesantren) demonstrate vision, altruistic love, hope, a sense of calling, and a sense of belonging within their communities (Nugroho, 2024). Both studies demonstrate that spirituality can be translated into observable behavior, not merely personal belief. From this perspective, discussions of spirituality are not confined to religious symbols or jargon but are directed toward more down-to-earth questions about what leaders do when making decisions, offering guidance, listening to, and helping those around them. Therefore, this study understands spiritual leadership as a value orientation manifested in exemplary conduct, compassion, and a willingness to shoulder responsibility.

In Islamic education, the values of tauhid, amanah, ihsan, and rahmah give substance to spiritual leadership. Tauhid guides one's orientation, amanah emphasizes responsibility, ihsan encourages sincerity, and rahmah fosters compassion. These values are reflected in the commitment and voluntary behavior of the organization's members. This distinction helps researchers interpret data honestly: professed values are meaningful only if they are reflected in decisions, habits, and the ways in which the school community treats one another—and if they are open to criticism when perceived as unfair. Juliansyah and colleagues found that Islamic leadership has a significant effect on organizational citizenship behavior (OCB), and OCB influences faculty performance (Juliansyah et al., 2022), while Aziz and colleagues found that spiritual leadership has a significant effect on faculty performance in Probolinggo (Abd Aziz et al., 2024). At the school level, Aisah and Hanif identified trustworthiness, deliberation, and compassion as the ethical foundations of teacher loyalty (Aisah & Hanif, 2025), and Rahmania and Hanif discussed strategies school principals use to instill Islamic values in school culture (Rahmania & Hanif, 2025).

However, charisma can shift into a cult of personality or be used to avoid real problems ("spiritual bypassing"), so spiritual values must be accompanied by openness to criticism.

2.3 Inclusive and Multicultural Leadership

Inclusive leadership is rooted in four key concepts: diversity, equity, inclusion, and a sense of belonging. In everyday practice, these four ideas may sound appealing but are difficult to measure; therefore, more useful questions for schools are: Who is actually being included in the conversation? Who benefits from the rules? And who still feels like a guest? Marques frames leadership with diversity, equity, and inclusion as its primary orientations (Marques & Dhiman, 2022). Ueda, Kezar, and Holcombe introduce shared equity leadership, which combines leaders' critical awareness, equity-centered values, and collective practices to transform unequal structures (Ueda et al., 2023). Tracy-Bronson found that district leaders who foster inclusive schools are guided by a moral and ethical compass centered on inclusion, equity, and a sense of belonging (Tracy-Bronson, 2026). In the day-to-day life of the school, a leader's inclusivity is evident in their willingness to invite and value members' contributions, as noted by Nembhard and Edmondson (Nembhard & Edmondson, 2006), and in their commitment to distributive, procedural, interpersonal, and informational justice, as outlined by Colquitt (Colquitt, 2001). This framework was used as a lens to analyze organizational participation and justice in the schools studied.

A sense of belonging and participation among vulnerable groups pose a real test for inclusive leadership. Goodenow defines a sense of belonging in school as the feeling of being accepted, valued, involved, and supported by the school's social environment (Goodenow, 1993), and a meta-analysis by Allen et al. emphasizes the role of social and school environmental factors (Allen et al., 2018). In Indonesia, studies on the multicultural leadership of kiai highlight the integration of spiritual, intellectual, and social dimensions in managing diversity (Futaqi & Mashuri, 2022). Gani and Hanif discuss school principals' leadership in managing internal conflicts in integrated Islamic schools, (Gani & Hanif, 2025) and Hanif writes about inclusive entrepreneurship education for vulnerable and marginalized groups (Hanif, 2025). Cross-identity dialogue, restorative practices, as well as accessibility and universal design complement this picture by ensuring that diversity does not stop at symbolic recognition. Being an inclusive leader does not mean making everyone the same, but rather ensuring that every member of the community—including those who are quiet, have different abilities, or come from modest backgrounds—continues to have a fair opportunity to participate. Therefore, a sense of belonging in this study is viewed as the result of engagement and fair treatment.

3. Methods

This study focuses on the leadership practices of the female principal at SMP Negeri 1 Purwojati, particularly how spiritual-ethical orientation and inclusive governance are implemented on a daily basis. The unit of analysis is leadership practice at the school organizational level;

therefore, informants were selected based on their involvement in these practices. The focus of observation includes the values of *amanah, ihsan, and rahmah*; experiences with gender stereotypes; participation in decision-making; justice; and acceptance of diversity. These limitations follow the logic of case study research, which involves an in-depth examination of contemporary phenomena within their real-world context (Yin, 2018). The research is not intended to statistically measure the influence between variables. Female school principals were chosen as the focus not to compare them with male leaders, but to understand how gender experiences, spiritual values, and school management practices intersect within a single individual and a single institution. The study seeks to understand how leadership practices are carried out, interpreted, and experienced by the school community, so that the results apply primarily to the case under study.

The research design employed was a qualitative descriptive approach using a case study strategy. This choice arose because the researcher sought to present a portrayal that closely reflected the informants' experiences and language. Sandelowski explains that qualitative descriptions yield a comprehensive account of an event while remaining faithful to the data (Sandelowski, 2000). Meanwhile, Yin identifies the case study as the appropriate method when a phenomenon and its context are difficult to separate (Yin, 2018). The relationship between leaders' actions, school culture, and students' experiences is indeed difficult to unravel piece by piece; therefore, SMP Negeri 1 Purwojati was selected as a single case for in-depth analysis. This approach also aligns with the nature of the data collected—namely, the informants' narratives and explanations—which must be interpreted within the context of their setting and working relationships, rather than being fragmented into isolated variables. Consequently, the researcher did not formulate a hypothesis from the outset but allowed patterns to emerge from the informants' own responses. The results are not intended for statistical generalization but rather for contextual understanding, the applicability of which readers can assess for themselves.

The data were collected from five informants who were purposively selected because they play a direct role in school life: a female principal (KS), an administrative staff member (TU), a teacher (GR), and two students (SW). In this report, the responses from the TU and GR are collectively referred to as teachers and educational staff (GTK). The interviews took place on Wednesday, October 28, 2026, at Purwojati Public Junior High School No. 1. The variety of informant positions was intended to ensure that the findings did not solely reflect the leadership's perspective. In qualitative research, data sufficiency is assessed based on the depth of information and the research objectives, not on the number of respondents (Creswell & Poth, 2024). Nevertheless, interviewing only five informants in a single day was clearly limited, and school documents such as task assignment decrees, meeting minutes, and the Annual Work Plan (RKAS) were all readily available. Given the small number of informants, each response was read carefully and was not considered representative of the entire school community; the primary function of this

data was to provide a vivid picture of the experiences of a few individuals closely associated with the school leadership. Both of these factors were treated as limitations of the study and presented as such.

Data were collected through semi-structured oral interviews. This technique provides a framework in the form of a set of questions that are the same for all informants, while also allowing them to share their stories in their own words (Creswell & Poth, 2024). The guidelines for school principals focused on the meaning of their role, the values they uphold when making decisions, experiences with gender stereotypes, community engagement, equity, and the handling of complaints and diversity. The guidelines for teachers, school staff, and students focused on their experiences of being involved, treated fairly, and feeling accepted. Responses were recorded on the instrument's response sheet for analysis. Because some questions contain terms such as "trust," informants' responses may reflect these terms, and this possibility is taken into account when reading the data. Interviews were conducted orally so that informants, including students, could answer in the language they normally use, and so that follow-up questions could be asked when answers were still too brief or too general. Observations and document reviews have not yet been conducted at this stage; therefore, the sole data source for this study is the interviews.

The analysis employed a thematic approach. Braun and Clarke describe it as a flexible method for identifying, organizing, and interpreting patterns of meaning in qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The researcher read all the responses repeatedly, coded relevant sections, grouped them into themes, and then compiled a report using quotations as evidence. Three major themes emerged: spiritual-ethical leadership, participatory governance and organizational justice, and inclusion and a sense of belonging. These themes were derived from the data and were not imposed by a pre-existing framework. Validity was ensured by comparing responses across groups of informants. In this process, the researcher also sought to distinguish what the informants said from their own interpretations, so that readers could see the basis for each conclusion and evaluate it objectively. This process involved rereading the original quotes each time a theme was formulated, ensuring that the theme names remained faithful to the informants' statements and did not become researcher-coined terms that strayed too far from the data. Technical triangulation and verification by the informants have not yet been conducted; therefore, the conclusions are presented with caution and still require testing in future research.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Spiritually and Ethically Oriented Women's Leadership

The female principal at Purwojati State Junior High School No. 1 views her position as a spiritual trust and a form of service to the entire school community. She does not view leadership merely as a structural position or a bureaucratic duty, but rather links it to moral, professional, and spiritual responsibilities. She stated this herself: "I view the position of principal at SMP Negeri 1

Purwojati not merely as a structural position or a bureaucratic duty, but rather as a spiritual trust and a calling of the soul" (Principal, interview on October 28, 2026). This response demonstrates that the meaning of leadership is built through dedication, setting a good example, humility, and service. His responsibility does not stop at the institution but extends to ethical and spiritual accountability to God Almighty. The terms "trust" and "calling of the soul" emerged as answers to the first question and served as a common thread throughout many subsequent answers, making them a fitting starting point for understanding how the principal views his work. This spiritual-ethical orientation thus becomes the principal's way of explaining his role.

The principal explains the school's spiritual and ethical orientation through the values of faith, ihsan, and rahmah, and these values are present in the school's daily routines. Every Monday, the school holds a weekly evaluation and reflection session to review programs and formulate improvements. When differences of opinion arise regarding the allocation of time and budget for religious activities and student mentoring, decisions are made by weighing the interests of the students and the well-being of the teachers (KS). Every Friday morning, a short religious talk (kultum) is delivered by teachers on a rotating basis, intended to remind one another of duties and responsibilities, provide motivation, and strengthen a sense of community. Teachers and educational staff describe the principal as a disciplined, principled, and communicative figure who sets an example by greeting the school community and beginning activities with a prayer (GTK). These examples are compelling because abstract values are linked to very ordinary things—such as Monday meetings, Friday devotionals, and morning greetings—which the entire school community can follow and remember. Spiritual values, in this way, become integrated into the school's daily routines.

Regarding gender, the principal admitted to having faced the perception that women rely more on emotions than on managerial logic. She addressed this with a structured, data-driven, firm, yet humane managerial approach (KS). She also touched on the challenge of balancing domestic responsibilities and professional work. Support came from the vice principal, the faculty council, administrative staff, the school committee, the supervising inspector, and the Banyumas Regency Education Office. She linked female leadership to the ability to listen, interpersonal communication, and efforts to engage the community. These gender-related experiences coincided with her efforts to build professional legitimacy and foster a conducive work environment. This explanation is interesting because stereotypes are not countered by rejecting a humanistic approach, but by combining it with assertiveness and data, as the principal herself recounted. She also identified support from various parties as a crucial part of how she persevered and succeeded in her leadership role. It should be noted that the available evidence consists primarily of the principal's own account and positive assessments from the teaching and non-teaching staff (GTK); therefore, this experience cannot be generalized to represent the experiences of all female leaders.

4.2 Participatory Governance and Organizational Justice

According to informants, governance at Purwojati State Junior High School 1 is carried out through deliberation, stakeholder engagement, and routine evaluation. The principal stated that the development of the school's vision, mission, and programs involves teachers, educational staff, student representatives (OSIS), parents, the school committee, local government officials, and the school supervisor (KS). This involvement extends not only to program formulation but also to the evaluation of learning and improvement plans. Teachers and educational staff reported that they are involved in discussions regarding the School Work Plan (RKS) and the School Activity and Budget Plan (RKAS), and the Monday reflection forum was cited as an opportunity to voice learning challenges while proposing solutions (GTK). The list of parties mentioned is quite long—ranging from teachers and students to parents and school supervisors—so that, in the informants' view, deliberation appears to be positioned as a collective school practice rather than the sole responsibility of the principal. Participation is thus understood as a form of communication that provides space for the school community to voice their opinions before or during the decision-making process.

Regarding organizational fairness, the informants' responses centered on the distribution of duties, opportunities for professional development, and open communication. The principal noted that teaching duties, on-call shifts, and extracurricular supervision are outlined in the Decision Letter on the Distribution of Duties, taking into account teachers' workloads, qualifications, and potential, while training opportunities are provided on a rotational basis (KS). Teachers and educational staff reinforced this picture with examples of "Kurikulum Merdeka" training or digital training attended by both senior and junior teachers based on competency needs, and they felt safe voicing criticism. One informant noted that the principal "actively asks what challenges we face in the classroom" (GTK). This openness appears to be a practice, not just a policy. Teachers' accounts of training that is not limited to a single group suggest that fairness is felt not through leadership speeches, but through the concrete experience of having equal opportunities to grow. Nevertheless, the equity of its implementation still needs to be verified through supporting documents.

The context of participatory governance is most evident in how the school handles differences of opinion and complaints. The principal stated that the school fosters open communication and provides suggestion and complaint boxes. Conflicts among the school community are resolved through amicable discussions that prioritize tabayyun, openness, and solutions that prioritize the interests of the school and the students (KS). Teachers' and educational staff's remarks that criticism can be voiced during weekly reflections further illustrate the relationship between participation and a sense of safety in communication. However, no single complaint case has been described in detail—from the issue itself, through the resolution process, to the final outcome. The available evidence supports the description of the mechanisms stated to be in place, but it is insufficient to assess their effectiveness. It is important to note this limitation because mechanisms

that look good on paper often differ from how they are experienced when problems actually arise, and only detailed case studies can clearly illustrate that difference. Moreover, meeting minutes, decision letters, and follow-up records are already neatly documented.

4.3 Inclusion, Sense of Belonging, and Acceptance of the School Community

In the informants' responses, inclusion and a sense of belonging were linked to experiences of being valued, listened to, and given opportunities to participate. Students stated that their representatives were involved in discussions regarding the school's vision and mission, extracurricular activities, and programs, and they described the school environment as clean, safe, and communicative (SW). From the perspective of teachers and educational staff, a sense of belonging was linked to a culture of mutual respect, treatment perceived as fair, appreciation from leadership, and a family-like atmosphere (GTK). The principal expressed a commitment to building an inclusive and child-friendly environment, including attention to students with economic limitations or those requiring special support (KS). The three groups of informants mentioned different aspects, but the underlying direction was similar—namely, a sense of being valued and heard—so the picture of inclusion that emerged did not stem from the claims of just one party and felt more balanced. This pattern emerged across all three groups, albeit with different examples. When the responses from all three groups are considered together, inclusion is evident in friendly interpersonal relationships, participation in activities, and attention to students' needs.

The students' responses provided concrete examples of participation. The Student Council officers stated that they had proposed learning reflection activities and the inclusion of digital literacy in a deliberative forum; these proposals were well-received and incorporated into the school's work program (SW). They also felt that the teachers and principal were friendly, without discriminating based on gender or economic status. One student said, "What makes us feel very comfortable is the culture of greeting each other in the morning, friendly academic guidance, and the opportunity for all students to regularly participate in learning reflection sessions in class every week" (SW). From a policy perspective, the principal cited assistance with school supplies, scholarship support, regular counseling, and anti-bullying policies (KS), while teachers and educational staff linked their sense of belonging to the leadership's recognition and openness (GTK). The Student Council's proposal is valuable because it demonstrates a clear progression from student ideas, through a deliberative forum, to a work program, allowing students to see that their voices lead to action and are not merely heard. Day-to-day experiences and organizational support appear to reinforce one another.

A sense of belonging in school life emerges as an experience related to engagement, appreciation, and the quality of relationships among members of the school community. Students emphasized that their opinions are heard and that they are given space to develop their interests and talents (SW). Teachers and educational staff highlighted transparency, appreciation, and

communication that foster a family-like work environment (GTK), while the principal explained policies designed to assist students facing economic hardship or requiring special support (KS). The shared emphasis on acceptance and appreciation indicates a pattern of positive perceptions among all three groups. However, this pattern does not mean that every member of the school community experiences the same things or that bullying and discrimination never occur. Therefore, the researchers view a sense of belonging in this school as something that is still being built and requires ongoing scrutiny, particularly from the perspective of students who rarely speak up and groups that may feel underrepresented. The experiences of students with special needs have not yet been explored, and the voices of new students were represented by only two individuals; thus, these findings should be interpreted as a preliminary overview.

4.4 Discussion

The first finding indicates that school principals view leadership as a spiritual trust embodied through exemplary conduct, empathy, and service. This is significant because a spiritual-ethical orientation does not remain merely a personal belief but becomes a framework of values within organizational duties. This pattern aligns with the findings of Aisah and Hanif, who discovered that the moral and spiritual exemplary behavior of female leaders fosters a collaborative culture and strengthens teachers' trust, with trustworthiness, deliberation, and compassion serving as its ethical foundations (Aisah & Hanif, 2025). Experiences of confronting gender stereotypes—which were addressed through managerial competence and support from various parties—also align with the view that women's leadership must be understood within the context of culture and structure (Marno et al., 2024). Nevertheless, these findings do not prove that women are naturally more empathetic or spiritual than men. The principal also does not operate in isolation; support from the vice principal, the faculty council, committees, supervisors, and the education office helps her fulfill her role, so this leadership is more accurately understood as a collaborative effort rather than the work of a single individual. It merely describes the practices of one leader at one school.

These findings can be explained through Fry's theory of spiritual leadership, which identifies vision, hope or belief, and altruistic love as the builders of meaning and connectedness (Fry, 2003). The perception of one's position as a calling, Friday devotionals that serve as mutual reminders, opening prayers for activities, and the principal's concern for teachers' well-being can be interpreted as manifestations of these three elements. Nugroho identified the elements of calling and a sense of belonging among female leaders in Islamic boarding schools (pesantren) (Nugroho, 2024), and the data from this study show similar patterns in public schools. However, not all dimensions of the theory are evident in the data, and this alignment should not be interpreted as conclusive evidence. This suggests that a theory developed from a different context can still help interpret practices in public schools, provided that researchers do not force the data to fit the theory and remain open to discrepancies. The added value of this research lies in its demonstration

of how value orientations are translated into public school practices, while simultaneously being tested against behavior and competencies.

The second finding shows that school governance is carried out through deliberation, regular reflection, the assignment of duties via official decrees, and training rotations. Ismawati and Hanif, who studied the principal at Tarbiyatul Athfal Al Faruq Karanglewas, also found that the principal acts as a strategic partner and mentor, empowering staff through open communication and recognition of performance (Ismawati & Hanif, 2025). The Monday and Friday forums at SMP Negeri 1 Purwojati echo Christanti and Hanif's discussion of morning assemblies as a principal's communication strategy at SMP Muhammadiyah Rawalo (Christanti & Hanif, 2024). However, the existence of such forums does not automatically mean that all suggestions influence the final decision. For the school, this means that existing forums should be supplemented with clear follow-up records so that teachers and students can see how their suggestions are addressed, accepted, or rejected, along with the reasons. The available data primarily consists of practices reported by informants; therefore, the appropriate conclusion is that the school has mechanisms in place to support participation, not that its governance is entirely fair.

Based on Nembhard and Edmondson's concept of "leader inclusiveness," the principal's practice of asking about classroom challenges and facilitating weekly reflections can be interpreted as an invitation for teachers to contribute, even though their research originated in the context of healthcare teams (Nembhard & Edmondson, 2006). Within Colquitt's framework of justice, the division of tasks and training rotations address distributive and procedural justice, while respectful communication with staff relates to interpersonal justice (Colquitt, 2001). The informational dimension—that is, how clearly the rationale for decisions is communicated—still requires more detailed evidence. This interpretation is cautious because the theoretical framework is used as a magnifying glass rather than a measuring tool, and the available data do not yet allow for a comprehensive assessment of every dimension of justice in schools. The way schools mediate conflicts through deliberation and tabayyun can be compared to Gani and Hanif's study on school principals managing internal conflicts (Gani & Hanif, 2025), while the rotation of training sessions is reminiscent of Fauzi and Hanif's study on school principals' efforts to improve teacher performance in Purbalingga (Fauzi & Hanif, 2024). Participation and equity need to be analyzed together because one gives a voice to participants, while the other demands an accountable process.

The third finding highlights efforts to create a welcoming school environment through the involvement of student representatives, a culture of greeting one another, learning reflections, anti-bullying policies, and support for economically disadvantaged students. Inclusion is not just about students' physical presence at school, but also about their opportunities to participate, receive support, and feel valued. The Student Council's proposals regarding learning reflections and digital literacy—which were incorporated into the work plan—demonstrate that students' voices are being

heard. Tracy-Bronson found that inclusive leaders foster a sense of shared responsibility among all students (Tracy-Bronson, 2026), and the shared equity leadership framework emphasizes collective practices to transform unequal structures (Ueda et al., 2023). In this case, the evidence consists primarily of general commitments and experiences, rather than the experiences of the most vulnerable groups. In other words, the school has demonstrated intent and some good practices, but to call it fully inclusive requires evidence from the experiences of the students whose voices are least often heard—such as students with special needs or those from the most disadvantaged families. Therefore, these findings are more accurately described as indications of efforts to build a sense of belonging, which still need to be further tested.

These findings can be explained through Goodenow's concept of a sense of belonging in school—that is, the perception that one is accepted, valued, and supported within the school community (Goodenow, 1993). Allen et al. emphasize that the school environment and social relationships are crucial to students' sense of belonging (Allen et al., 2018). The culture of greeting one another, friendly guidance, opportunities to voice aspirations, and support for students at SMP Negeri 1 Purwojati align with this perspective because they have the potential to strengthen students' experiences of being accepted and included. This study did not measure a sense of belonging using a scale; therefore, it cannot conclude the magnitude or direction of leadership's influence on it. Its contribution lies in a contextual explanation of how leadership, participation, and institutional support are experienced by the school community. The researchers also acknowledge that students' responses in the presence of adults may be influenced by shyness; therefore, interviews in a more relaxed format or group discussions might provide a richer picture of a sense of belonging. Future research could involve a more diverse group of students to test the consistency of these inclusive practices.

5. Conclusion

The answers to the three research questions can be summarized as follows. First, the female principal at Purwojati State Junior High School No. 1 views her position as a spiritual trust that is realized through setting a good example, empathy, weekly reflection, and religious activities. Second, governance is carried out in a participatory manner through deliberation, the involvement of teachers, educational staff, and student representatives, as well as the distribution of tasks and training that informants described as fair. Third, the school community members interviewed felt a sense of acceptance and belonging through friendly communication, spaces for expressing aspirations, and support for students in need. These three aspects reveal the relationship between leadership values, decision-making processes, and the experiences of the school community. This picture also demonstrates that spiritual values, organizational decisions, and community experiences are interrelated within a single set of practices; therefore, it is inappropriate to discuss them separately in a study on school leadership. However, this is a contextual portrayal based on

five informants and does not constitute evidence that female leadership directly leads to organizational justice or a sense of belonging.

Theoretically, this study demonstrates that spiritual values can be analyzed as an ethical orientation in the day-to-day practice of leadership in public schools, not just in Islamic boarding schools or formal Islamic institutions. These findings complement existing research on women's leadership and spiritual leadership by incorporating the perspectives of the school community. In practical terms, schools can strengthen deliberative forums to ensure that aspirations are genuinely addressed, openly explain the basis for task allocation, document the handling of complaints, and examine the experiences of student groups that rarely speak up. These recommendations are drawn from practices reported by informants and from a review of the literature, not from measurements. The simplest lesson from this case is that fairness and a sense of belonging more often grow from small, consistent habits—such as greeting others, listening, and explaining decisions—rather than from large-scale programs that are only discussed occasionally. Since only one school was studied, these insights should be viewed as food for thought for other schools, not as a recipe that can be copied verbatim.

This study has clear limitations. It examined only one school with five informants interviewed on a single day; therefore, its generalizability to other contexts must be carefully considered. Observations and document reviews were not conducted, so statements regarding the division of tasks, meeting minutes, or the handling of complaints have not been cross-checked with written evidence. The number of students interviewed was also small and did not include students with special needs. Future research could include informants from various groups, such as parents and school committees; conduct observations of school forums; review documents; and perform follow-up checks with informants to strengthen triangulation. With these caveats in mind, this study should not be viewed as a definitive answer, but rather as an initial step that is honest about its limitations and open to criticism, supplementation, and further testing by other researchers. This kind of openness is essential so that readers can fairly assess the quality of the findings. Studies in several schools with different characteristics would also help determine whether the patterns found in Purwojati emerge elsewhere.

References

Abd Aziz, Poppy Rachman, Juliansyah, J., & Murfi, A. (2024). Spiritual Leadership, Organizational Culture, and Self-Efficacy as Predictors of Lecturer Performance in Indonesian Higher Education: A PLS-SEM Analysis in Probolinggo. *Jurnal Pendidikan Islam*, *13*(2), 107–117. https://doi.org/10.14421/jpi.2024.132.107-117

Aisah, R. M., & Hanif, M. (2025). *Women's Transformational Leadership and Teacher Loyalty at SDIT Cita Mulia Ajibarang*. *10*, 52–61. https://doi.org/10.17977/um025v10i12025p52

Allen, K., Kern, M. L., Vella-Brodrick, D., Hattie, J., & Waters, L. (2018). What Schools Need to Know About Fostering School Belonging: a Meta-analysis. *Educational Psychology Review*, *30*(1), 1–34. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10648-016-9389-8

Azzuhri, M., Huang, M.-P., & Irawanto, D. W. (2024). Reinventing spiritual leadership from an Indonesian perspective. *International Journal of Cross Cultural Management*, *24*(2), 289–308.

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, *3*(2), 77–101. https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa

Christanti, A., & Hanif, M. (2024). Apel pagi sebagai strategi komunikasi kepala sekolah untuk menumbuhkan jiwa kedisiplinan dan motivasi guru karyawan SMP Muhammadiyah Rawalo. *LEARNING*, *4*(2).

Colquitt, J. A. (2001). On the dimensionality of organizational justice: A construct validation of a measure. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, *86*(3), 386–400. https://doi.org/10.1037/0021-9010.86.3.386

Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2024). *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches* (5th ed.). SAGE Publications.

Dzuhayatin, S. R., & Edwards, J. (2010). Hitting our heads on the glass ceiling: Women and leadership in education in Indonesia. *Studia Islamika*, *17*(2).

Fauzi, A., & Hanif, M. (2024). Upaya kepala sekolah dalam meningkatkan kinerja dan profesional guru di Madrasah Aliyah Negeri Purbalingga. *Jurnal Ilmiah PGSD STKIP Subang*, *10*(2), 1455–1478. https://doi.org/10.36989/didaktik.v10i2.2980

Fry, L. W. (2003). Toward a theory of spiritual leadership. *The Leadership Quarterly*, *14*(6), 693–727. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2003.09.001

Futaqi, S., & Mashuri, S. (2022). Multicultural leadership of kiai for managing diversity in Indonesian context: Spiritual, intellectual, and social Integration. *Cultural Management: Science and Education*, *6*(2), 57–73.

Gani, H. A., & Hanif, M. (2025). The Role of Principal Leadership in Managing Internal Conflicts at Zamzam Integrated Islamic School (ZIIS) Cilongok. *Journal of Educational Analytics (JEDA)*, *4*(3), 617–634.

Goodenow, C. (1993). The psychological sense of school membership among adolescents: Scale development and educational correlates. *Psychology in the Schools*, *30*(1), 79–90. https://doi.org/10.1002/1520-6807(199301)30:1<79::AID-PITS2310300113>3.0.CO;2-X

Hanif, M. (2025). Strategi kepemimpinan kepala sekolah dalam pengelolaan sumber daya manusia untuk meningkatkan mutu pendidikan di Tarbiyatul Athfal Al Faruq Karanglewas. *Pendas: Jurnal Ilmiah Pendidikan Dasar*, *10*(02), 449–465.

Ismawati, & Hanif, M. (2025). Strategi Kepemimpinan Kepala Sekolah dalam Pengelolaan Sumber Daya Manusia untuk Meningkatkan Mutu Pendidikan di Tarbiyatul Athfal Al Faruq Karanglewas. *Pendas: Jurnal Ilmiah Pendidikan Dasar*, *10*(2), 449–465. http://117.74.115.107/index.php/jemasi/article/view/537

Juliansyah, J., Ridwan, A. M., & Wahidmurni, W. (2022). The effect of Islamic leadership, organizational culture, and self-efficacy on lecturer performance mediated Organizational Citizenship Behavior (OCB) at Islamic Religious Colleges in West Kalimantan Indonesia. *Jurnal Pendidikan Islam*, *11*(1), 77–93.

Kimball, T. D., Reichard, R. J., & Chan, E. L. (2021). Women's Leader Development Programs: Current Landscape and Recommendations for Future Programs. *Journal of Business Diversity*, *21*(4), 1.

Liu, P., & Thien, L. M. (2023). *Educational leadership and Asian culture: culturally sensitive leadership practice*. Taylor & Francis.

Marno, Padil, M., Aziz, A., Bakar, A., Mubarak, R., Teguh Prastyo, A., Barkah, Q., & Binti Ismail, A. (2024). 'Leading with cultural wisdom': egalitarian women's leadership at three universities in Malaysia and Indonesia. *Cogent Education*, *11*(1), 2372196.

Marques, J., & Dhiman, S. (2022). Leading With Diversity, Equity and Inclusion. *Future of Business and Finance*. *https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-95652-3*

Mudau, T. J., & Sikhwari, M. G. (2025). Advancing Women into Leadership Positions in South African Educational Institutions: The Role of Education and Mentorship. *Journal of Education and Learning Technology*, *6*(4), 189. https://doi.org/10.38159/jelt.2025645

Nembhard, I. M., & Edmondson, A. C. (2006). Making it safe: The effects of leader inclusiveness and professional status on psychological safety and improvement efforts in health care teams. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, *27*(7), 941–966. https://doi.org/10.1002/job.413

Nugroho, A. D. (2024). Empowering Voices from Pesantren: The Emergence of Female Spiritual Leadership in Indonesia. *Al-Tanzim: Jurnal Manajemen Pendidikan Islam*, *8*(2), 703–716.

Rahmania, F. A., & Hanif, M. (2025). The Principal's Strategy in Instilling Islamic Values in A Multicultural School. *IQRO: Journal of Islamic Education*, *8*(1), 131–147.

Rubini, R. (2025). Breaking barriers: How women's transformational leadership enhances educational quality. *Al-Tanzim: Jurnal Manajemen Pendidikan Islam*, *9*(2), 681–693.

Sandelowski, M. (2000). Whatever happened to qualitative description? *Research in Nursing & Health*, *23*(4), 334–340. https://doi.org/10.1002/1098-240X(200008)23:4<334::AID-NUR9>3.0.CO;2-G

Tracy-Bronson, C. P. (2026). District leadership for inclusive education: Enacting moral and ethical leadership for inclusion, equity, belonging, and love. *Journal of School Leadership*, *36*(3), 321–348.

Ueda, N., Kezar, A., & Holcombe, E. (2023). *Shared equity leadership: A new model for making inclusion and equity part of organizational culture*.

Yin, R. K. (2018). *Case Study Research and Applications: Design and Methods* (6th ed.). SAGE Publications.