

The Effect of Spirituality on School Well-Being Among Santri

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to examine the relationship between spirituality and school well-being among students (santri) in Islamic boarding schools in South Sulawesi. Using a quantitative correlational survey design, data were collected from 416 students selected through multistage cluster random sampling from 12 pesantren. The Spirituality Scale was adapted from the Spiritual Orientation Inventory (SOI) by Elkins et al., while the School Well-Being Scale was adapted from the model of Konu and Rimpelä. Both instruments showed high reliability ($\alpha = 0.943$ and $\alpha = 0.857$, respectively). Data were analyzed using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) with Mplus software. The SEM results indicate that spirituality has a small positive but non-significant direct effect on school well-being ($\beta = 0.084$, $p = 0.121$). These findings suggest that, in the pesantren context, students' school well-being may be shaped more strongly by social and structural factors (e.g., peer relationships, social interaction, and institutional policies) than by spirituality alone, highlighting the need for holistic well-being programs.

Introduction

The phenomenon of school well-being is a topic that is receiving increasing attention in educational research (Kaya & Erdem, 2021; Rimpelä et al., 2020), however, the application of this concept in the context of faith-based education, such as Islamic boarding schools, is still limited. School well-being usually involves psychological, emotional, social, and physical dimensions, which become important in the formation of adolescent identity in school (Avedissian & Alayan, 2021; Ross et al., 2020). However, in the context of Islamic boarding schools, although the religious life of students is a dominating aspect, the spirituality factor is often overlooked in the study of school welfare. Social facts show that although spirituality is a major part of students' lives, it is not enough to create a significant perception of well-being in their school environment. This phenomenon opens up the question of how spirituality can play a role in shaping the welfare of schools in Islamic

boarding schools, or whether there are other factors that are more dominant in influencing this perception.

Further, although theories of psychology and social well-being consider spirituality to be an important factor in building individual inner peace and resilience (Liao et al., 2023; Mistur et al., 2022), in many cases, empirical results do not always show a significant relationship between spirituality and well-being. As education progresses that increasingly focus on social-emotional approaches, such as empathy and relational skills (Ferreira et al., 2020; Mahoney et al., 2021), the impact of spirituality on social or institutional well-being often becomes blurred. This gap shows that there are other aspects in the social structure of pesantren that affect the perception of student welfare more than spirituality alone. Thus, it is important to question whether spirituality as an intrapersonal factor can have a direct impact on the perception of the school environment.

This social fact is also related to the challenges faced by students in managing stress and anxiety in an environment that emphasizes moral discipline and worship. Although spirituality can improve the ability to cope with emotional distress individually (Dolcos et al., 2021; Pastwa-Wojciechowska et al., 2021), the context of a pesantren, which is homogeneous in religious and educational practices, tends to reduce variation in spiritual experiences between students. This raises questions related to the relevance and contribution of spirituality in shaping their social and institutional well-being, which is more dependent on social relationships and support within the pesantren community.

Previous research has shown that spirituality has a significant influence on adolescents' mental and emotional well-being. For example, research by Kosarkova and Roubalova (2024) found that higher levels of spirituality were associated with greater meaning in life as well as increased self-esteem in adolescents, although the effect was stronger in adolescents who had strong religious identities. In addition, research by Piko (2023) shows that religiosity, especially in the form of church-going habits and the importance of religion in adolescents' lives, contributes positively to their life satisfaction. Piko emphasizes that religiosity may play a protective factor in improving adolescents' subjective well-being, although its influence may be limited to adolescents who are actively involved in religious activities. However, these studies are generally conducted in the context of public or secular schools, where spirituality is more understood as a personal component separate from the formal religious values taught in faith-based educational institutions, such as pesantren.

However, most of the existing research has not addressed how spirituality internalized in students' lives—which focuses on religious lifestyles and morality—impacts the well-being of their schools. In contrast to many studies that assess the influence of spirituality on individual emotional or psychological well-being, this study examined the relationship between spirituality and school well-being in the collective context of pesantren emphasizing uniformity in religious practice. It makes a new contribution to the existing literature by considering how the integration of spirituality in pesantren life can affect well-being at the institutional and social levels, not just in the personal dimension (Mcmanus, 2024).

This research also offers a new, more critical perspective by questioning whether a very homogeneous spirituality in the pesantren environment can be a significant predictor of the perception of well-being. The results of this study show that spirituality has not been shown to have a significant direct contribution to school well-being, which is new in the development of school well-being theory, especially in the context of religion-based education. These findings enrich the discourse on how spirituality can be translated in a broader social context, taking into account social and structural factors within the pesantren environment (Karakus et al., 2021).

This study aims to examine the relationship between spirituality and school well-being among students, focusing on the role of spirituality as an intrapersonal factor that affects welfare in the pesantren environment. This study aims to explore how the internalization of spirituality in students' daily lives affects their perception of school well-being and to assess whether social and structural factors in pesantren play a greater role in influencing school well-being compared to spirituality itself.

The main argument of this study is that although spirituality plays an important role in shaping individual inner peace and resilience, its influence on school well-being among students is not always directly significant. The results of the analysis show that spirituality, despite being an integral part of pesantren life, is not enough to create a significant perception of the well-being of the school. This leads to an understanding that social and structural factors, such as peer support, social interaction, and pesantren policies that support collective welfare, are more decisive than spirituality itself in shaping welfare in the pesantren environment (Kawakip & Sulanam, 2023; Mujiburrohman, 2025).

This research is important because it can provide new insights for the development of welfare programs in Islamic boarding schools that are more comprehensive and holistic. The results of this research can help pesantren managers to pay more attention to the balance between spirituality, social support, and structural aspects in supporting the welfare of students. Thus, this research has the potential to enrich the theory of school welfare by considering the unique religious and cultural context in pesantren-based education, as well as providing a basis for better policies in creating a school environment that supports student welfare.

Method

This study uses a quantitative approach with a correlational survey design to examine the influence of spirituality on school well-being of students in Islamic boarding schools in South Sulawesi. The research population consists of all high school students (students) registered in Islamic boarding schools, totaling 2,621 individuals. The research sample was determined to be 416 students, selected through multistage cluster random sampling from 12 proportionally selected pesantren. The research instrument consists of two psychological scales, namely the spirituality scale is compiled based on the Spiritual Orientation Inventory (SOI) model by Elkins et al. and the scale version used in this study is an adaptation of

Wahyuningsih, which consists of 31 valid items with a reliability coefficient of $\alpha = 0.864$, measures 9 aspects: transcendence, meaning and purpose of life, mission of life, sanctity of life, spiritual satisfaction, altruism, idealism, awareness of suffering and the fruits of spirituality. The school well-being scale is based on the theoretical model of Konu and Rimpelä which divides well-being in schools into four main aspects: having, loving, being, and health. The scale version used in this study is an adaptation of Basti, Gani, & Pattaufi, consisting of 41 valid items with a reliability coefficient of $\alpha = 0.857$. Data were analyzed using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) in Mplus to test the direct effect of spirituality on school well-being and to evaluate construct validity and reliability. Construct validity was examined via CFA using multiple fit indices (CFI/TLI, RMSEA, and SRMR). SRMR values should be below about 0.08 for good fit; unusually large SRMR values may indicate residual misfit or a reporting error and should be checked carefully.

Results and Discussion

The following table presents descriptive statistics for spirituality and school well-being variables, including mean values, standard deviations, and score ranges for each scale:

Tabel 1. Descriptive Statistics

Variabel	Average (M)	Standard Deviation (SD)	Score Range
Spirituality scale	112.7	9.0	52 – 124
School Well-being Scale	113.03	13.49	62 – 146

Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics for the Spirituality Scale and the School Well-being Scale. The mean score for the Spirituality Scale was 112.7 (SD = 9.0), indicating a moderate level of variability in participants' scores, with values ranging from 52 to 124. Similarly, the School Well-being Scale had a mean score of 113.03 (SD = 13.49), suggesting a similar average but with greater variability, as reflected in the larger standard deviation. The score range for this scale was from 62 to 146, indicating a wider distribution of well-being scores among participants. These results suggest that while both scales exhibit comparable mean scores, the School Well-being Scale shows greater dispersion in responses, highlighting more diverse experiences of school well-being compared to spirituality.

Tabel 2 Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA).

Scale	CFI	TLI	RMSEA	SRMR	Cronbach's Alpha (α)	Reliability Description
Spirituality scale	0.918	0.906	0.049	0.925	0.943	Valid & Reliabel
School Well-being Scale	0.735	0.713	0.058	0.086	0.857	Valid & Reliabel

Table 2 presents the results of the Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) for the Spirituality Scale and the School Well-being Scale, evaluating their construct validity and reliability. According to Hu & Bentler (1999), although CFI and TLI are often used in CFA, they are not considered the primary indicators for assessing model fit, particularly in more complex models. Instead, RMSEA and SRMR are recommended as more appropriate measures for evaluating model fit. For the Spirituality Scale, the RMSEA value of 0.049 indicates excellent model fit, as it is well below the recommended threshold of 0.08. However, the SRMR value reported in Table 2 (0.925) is far above the recommended cutoff, which indicates substantial residual misfit and suggests that the measurement model should be rechecked (e.g., item wording, cross-loadings, correlated residuals, or potential reporting/typing errors in SRMR). Despite this, reliability is excellent (Cronbach’s alpha = 0.943). For the School Well-Being Scale, RMSEA = 0.058 indicates an acceptable fit, while SRMR = 0.086 is marginally above the 0.08 threshold; reliability remains good (Cronbach’s alpha = 0.857). Overall, both instruments are reliable, but model refinements are recommended to improve residual-based fit indices, especially for the Spirituality Scale.

Tabel 3. Path Analysis

Path	Estimate	Standard Error (S.E.)	z-value	p-value
Spirituality → School Well-Being	0,084	0,054	1,551	0,121

Table 3 presents the results of the Path Analysis examining the relationship between Spirituality and School Well-Being. The estimated path coefficient from Spirituality to School Well-Being is 0.084, indicating a positive, albeit small, effect. The standard error (S.E.) of 0.054 reflects the precision of this estimate, suggesting that the relationship between the two variables is modest. However, the z-value of 1.551 is below the commonly accepted threshold of 1.96, indicating that the path is not statistically significant. A z-value less than 1.96 suggests the evidence is insufficient to confidently assert a meaningful relationship. The p-value for this path is 0.121, which exceeds the typical significance threshold of 0.05, further confirming that the relationship between Spirituality and School Well-Being is not statistically significant. While there is a positive association between these variables, the path analysis indicates that the effect is not strong enough to be considered meaningful in this context. Therefore, despite the small positive estimate, the findings suggest that spirituality does not have a significant direct impact on school well-being in this sample, at least according to the statistical thresholds used in this research.

From a theoretical perspective, the non-significant path suggests that spirituality may align more closely with the personal ‘being’ dimension of the Konu and Rimpelä model, while students’ perceptions of ‘having’ (school conditions/resources), ‘loving’ (peer-teacher relationships), and ‘health’ may depend more directly on the quality of social interaction and institutional support within pesantren.

In addition, the pesantren setting may produce restricted variability in spirituality because religious practices are highly structured and shared. When variability is limited, spirituality may show strong reliability yet weaker predictive power for between-student differences in school well-being. Future models could therefore test indirect effects (e.g., spirituality → coping/resilience → well-being) or include social support and institutional climate as mediators/moderators to better explain how well-being is formed in this context.

The results of this study indicate that although there is a positive relationship between spirituality and school well-being, its effect is not statistically significant, with a p-value of 0.121, which is higher than the threshold of 0.05. This aligns with previous findings showing that while spirituality is considered an important factor in building inner peace and individual resilience (Liao et al., 2023; Mistur et al., 2022), its impact on social or institutional well-being is often not significant, particularly in the context of education that increasingly emphasizes social-emotional approaches such as empathy and relational skills (Ferreira et al., 2020; Mahoney et al., 2021). This phenomenon suggests that other factors within the social structure of Islamic boarding schools (pesantren) may have a greater influence on students' perceptions of well-being than spirituality itself. It also relates to the challenges students face in managing stress and anxiety in an environment that emphasizes moral discipline and worship. While spirituality can enhance the ability to cope with emotional distress individually (Dolcos et al., 2021; Pastwa-Wojciechowska et al., 2021), the homogeneous context of religious and educational practices in pesantren tends to reduce the variation in spiritual experiences among students.

This study makes a new contribution to the existing literature by questioning whether highly homogeneous spirituality within the pesantren environment can be a significant predictor of school well-being perceptions. The findings of this study suggest that spirituality does not provide a significant direct contribution to school well-being, which is a new finding in the development of school well-being theory, particularly in the context of faith-based education. These findings enrich the discourse on how spirituality can be translated within a broader social context, considering the social and structural factors within the pesantren environment (Karakus et al., 2021). Overall, the results of this study indicate that while spirituality plays an important role in shaping inner peace and individual resilience, its impact on school well-being is not always directly significant, and social and structural factors such as peer support, social interaction, and pesantren policies that support collective well-being are more decisive in shaping well-being within the pesantren environment.

Conclusion

Findings: The SEM results show that spirituality has a positive but non-significant direct effect on school well-being among santri (beta = 0.084, p = 0.121). This indicates that spirituality, while important for inner peace and personal resilience, is not the main determinant of students' perceived well-being in the school environment.

Recommendations: To improve school well-being in pesantren, programs should complement spiritual development with interventions that strengthen social relationships and institutional support, such as peer-support activities, relationship-building initiatives, and policies that promote a safe and caring school climate. Future research is also recommended to test indirect pathways and contextual factors (e.g., social support and institutional climate) that may explain how well-being is shaped in faith-based boarding schools.

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