

Spirituality and ethical identity of muslim teachers beyond competence

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Abstract

Contemporary discussions on teacher professionalism are largely dominated by competence-based paradigms emphasizing technical skills, performance indicators, and measurable outcomes. Such approaches, while necessary, often marginalize the ethical and spiritual dimensions that sustain the moral integrity of teaching. Within Islamic educational thought, teaching is traditionally understood as a moral and spiritual vocation rather than a technical profession. This study examines the role of spirituality in shaping the ethical identity of Muslim teachers beyond competence-oriented frameworks. Employing a qualitative conceptual approach based on normative philosophical analysis, this research synthesizes classical Islamic educational texts and contemporary scholarly literature on teacher ethics and spirituality. The findings reveal four interrelated dimensions that constitute ethical identity: spiritual intentionality (*niyyah*), moral exemplarity (*uswah*) grounded in *adab*, spiritual self-regulation, and service-oriented professionalism (*khidmah* and *rahmah*). These dimensions form an integrated framework in which spirituality functions as a foundational orientation rather than a supplementary attribute. The study argues that pedagogical competence is ethically insufficient without spiritual grounding and offers a conceptual framework for teacher formation that integrates ethical integrity, resilience, and moral responsibility in contemporary educational contexts.

Keywords: spirituality, ethical identity, muslim teachers, Islamic education, professionalism

INTRODUCTION

Contemporary teacher professionalism is increasingly shaped by technocratic and managerial paradigms that prioritize measurable competence, standardized performance indicators, and instructional efficiency. Within this dominant framework, teachers are frequently evaluated based on observable outputs such as classroom management, curriculum delivery, and student achievement metrics. While these indicators are essential for accountability, their predominance risks narrowing the meaning of teaching into a set of technical functions, reducing educators to procedural actors whose professional worth is defined primarily by performance metrics rather than moral purpose or ethical responsibility. Recent critical scholarship in education highlights that such performative cultures tend to marginalize normative questions concerning the aims of education and the ethical formation of both teachers and learners (Biesta, 2020; Biesta et al., 2015).

Recent developments in global education further intensify this concern, as increasing institutional pressures, accountability regimes, and performance-based evaluation systems have contributed to what scholars describe as the “deprofessionalization” of teaching. Within such contexts, teachers are often positioned as implementers of externally defined standards rather than as reflective moral agents capable of exercising ethical judgment (Biesta, 2020). Empirical studies in teacher education have also shown that excessive reliance on standardized metrics may weaken teachers' sense of professional purpose, leading to moral disengagement, emotional exhaustion, and diminished commitment to educational values (Qamariah & Herch, 2026; Szyma ska, 2024). These trends suggest that the crisis of professionalism in contemporary education is not merely technical but fundamentally ethical, requiring a re-examination of the moral foundations upon which professional identity is constructed.

This reductionist tendency becomes particularly problematic in the context of Islamic education, where teaching has historically been conceptualized as a moral and spiritual vocation rather than merely a technical occupation. In the Islamic intellectual tradition, education is fundamentally oriented toward the formation of *al-insān al-ṣāliḥ* the ethically and spiritually integrated human being through the harmonious cultivation of knowledge (*‘ilm*), action (*‘amal*), and spiritual awareness (*taqwā*) (Al-Attas, 1999). From this perspective, teaching is inseparable from ethical responsibility (*mas’ūliyyah*) and spiritual accountability (*amānah*), positioning the teacher not only as a transmitter of knowledge but as

A moral agent entrusted with the formation of character. Consequently, competence-based models of professionalism, while necessary, remain insufficient for capturing the full ethical and ontological dimensions of teaching within Islamic educational thought (Szymanska, 2024).

Classical Islamic pedagogical texts consistently reinforce this ethical spiritual orientation. Burhān al-Dīn al-Zarnūjī, in *Ta'lim al-Muta'allim*, foregrounds *niyyah* (intention) as the foundational principle of all educational activity, arguing that knowledge pursued without proper spiritual orientation leads to ethical distortion and loss of meaning (Al-Zarnuji, 2004). Similarly, Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī conceptualizes knowledge as an act of inner devotion (*'ibādat al-qalb*), requiring continuous purification of the soul (*taẓkiyat al-nafs*) from pride, envy, and worldly attachment (Al-Ghazali, 1962). These classical insights suggest that the ethical identity of the teacher is rooted not merely in outward competence, but in inward moral and spiritual orientation a view that continues to find resonance in contemporary discussions on the moral and spiritual dimensions of teacher identity (Qamariah & Herch, 2026).

Despite this rich normative legacy, contemporary scholarship on teacher professionalism has struggled to systematically integrate spirituality into analytical frameworks of professional identity. While recent studies increasingly recognize the importance of ethical identity and teacher wellbeing, much of the literature remains grounded in secular paradigms that treat spirituality either as a private domain or as a psychological resource rather than as a constitutive ethical foundation. Recent open-access studies indicate that spirituality contributes significantly to teacher resilience, professional commitment, and moral decision-making, yet its role is often conceptualized instrumentally rather than normatively (Payot & Nebria, 2025; Szymanska, 2024). This indicates a persistent conceptual gap between spiritual orientation and professional ethics in educational discourse.

Based on these considerations, this study proposes a conceptual reconstruction of teacher professionalism grounded in Islamic ethical spiritual thought. The study examines spirituality not merely as a supplementary attribute accompanying professional competence but as the foundational orientation shaping ethical identity itself. Through a normative philosophical synthesis of classical Islamic educational texts and contemporary scholarship on professionalism, the analysis focuses on four interrelated dimensions

Constituting the ethical identity of Muslim teachers: spiritual intentionality (*niyyah*), moral exemplarity (*uswah*) grounded in adab, spiritual self regulation through *muḥāsabah* and *murāqabah*, and service-oriented professionalism based on *khidmah* and *rahmah*. Unlike previous studies that primarily position spirituality as a supporting factor for wellbeing or professional resilience, this study conceptualizes spirituality as the organizing principle underlying ethical professionalism itself. The novelty of this study lies in its attempt to construct an integrated framework connecting classical Islamic ethical concepts with contemporary discussions on teacher identity and professionalism. Through this framework, spirituality is understood as the ethical foundation shaping authority, responsibility, relational conduct, and professional meaning in educational practice (Coppe et al., 2024).

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative conceptual research design grounded in normative philosophical analysis to examine spirituality as a foundational dimension of the ethical identity of Muslim teachers. Conceptual research is appropriate for studies concerning ethical orientation, professional identity, and educational philosophy because it enables the systematic clarification and synthesis of concepts derived from both classical and contemporary intellectual traditions (Boylan et al., 2023; Coppe et al., 2024; Jia et al., 2025). The primary data sources consist of classical Islamic educational texts, particularly al-Zarnūjī's *Ta'lim al-Muta'allim Tarīq al-Ta'allum*, al-Ghazālī's *Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn*, and Al-Attas' writings on Islamic educational philosophy, complemented by contemporary peer-reviewed journal articles concerning teacher professionalism, spirituality, ethical identity, and reflective practice. These classical figures were selected because their works represent some of the most influential formulations of ethical and spiritual pedagogy within the Islamic intellectual tradition, particularly concerning intention, moral discipline, self-purification, and the ethical responsibilities of teachers and learners. The sources were selected based on thematic relevance, publication credibility, DOI accessibility, and direct relevance to ethical professionalism in education.

Data collection was conducted through systematic literature review and document analysis of the selected sources. The analysis employed thematic and conceptual synthesis through iterative close reading focused on identifying recurring ethical spiritual concepts related to teacher identity, professional responsibility, and moral formation. Key concepts such as *niyyah*, *uswah*, *adab*, *muḥāsabah*, *murāqabah*, *khidmah*, and *rahmah* were selected based on their normative centrality and analytical relevance across both classical Islamic texts

and contemporary educational scholarship. These concepts were subsequently classified, comparatively interpreted, and synthesized into a coherent analytical framework explaining the relationship between spirituality and ethical professionalism in Islamic education. The reinterpretation process was conducted by relating classical Islamic ethical constructs to contemporary discussions on professionalism, reflective practice, teacher identity, and moral agency within modern educational contexts. To ensure analytical rigor, the study applied conceptual validation through internal coherence, interpretive consistency, and theoretical integration between classical Islamic ethical thought and contemporary scholarship on teacher identity and professionalism (Boylan et al., 2023; Coppe et al., 2024; Emans et al., 2024; Kusters et al., 2026).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the conceptual findings derived from a systematic synthesis of classical Islamic educational texts and contemporary scholarship on teacher professionalism, ethics, and spirituality. As a conceptual inquiry, the “results” are not empirical generalizations but analytically grounded propositions that explain how spirituality operates as a formative foundation of the ethical identity of Muslim teachers. The discussion is organized around four interrelated dimensions: spiritual intentionality (*niyyah*), moral exemplarity (*uswah*) grounded in *adab*, spiritual self-regulation (*muḥāsabah* and *murāqabah*), and service-oriented professionalism (*khidmah* and *rahmah*). Together, these dimensions constitute an integrated ethical identity framework that transcends competence-based models of teacher professionalism.

Spiritual Intentionality (*Niyyah*) as the Ethical Core of Teaching

The first and most fundamental finding of this study is that spiritual intentionality (*niyyah*) constitutes the ethical core of Muslim teacher identity. In classical Islamic pedagogy, intention is not merely a private disposition but the decisive criterion that determines the moral value of action. Al-Zarnūjī places *niyyah* at the beginning of his pedagogical framework, asserting that knowledge pursued for status or worldly gain results in ethical distortion (Al-Zarnuji, 2004; Zuki et al., 2024).

Contemporary research increasingly affirms this insight by demonstrating that moral intentionality functions as a key determinant of ethical decision-making and professional

commitment. Studies on teacher identity show that internal value orientation significantly shapes how educators interpret their professional roles, particularly in contexts characterized by institutional pressure and performance metrics (Leijen et al., 2022). Similarly, recent research on spirituality in education indicates that spiritual orientation acts as an “internal compass” that guides meaning-making, perseverance, and ethical judgment beyond instrumental goals (Qamariah & Herch, 2026; Szymanska, 2024).

Conceptually, *niyyah* operates as a “first principle” that precedes and governs competence. It reframes professionalism from external compliance to internal moral accountability. This is particularly relevant in contemporary educational environments where performative cultures may encourage “teaching to the test” or prioritizing measurable outcomes over ethical integrity (Biesta, 2020). In such contexts, *niyyah* functions as a corrective mechanism that reorients professional action toward higher moral ends.

Moreover, *niyyah* bridges spirituality and practice by transforming ethical ideals into observable commitments: fair assessment, responsible authority, and sustained dedication to student development. Empirical studies in Islamic education contexts further confirm that sincerity (*ikhhlāṣ*) correlates with professional discipline and pedagogical effectiveness, suggesting that spiritual intentionality has tangible implications for educational outcomes (Samad et al., 2023).

Thus, *niyyah* is not merely a theological abstraction but a practical ethical driver that safeguards professional integrity in environments increasingly shaped by competition and performance metrics. In this sense, *niyyah* does not merely initiate ethical action but also provides the ontological grounding upon which professional identity is constructed, necessitating its embodiment in lived pedagogical practice.

From a broader philosophical perspective, *niyyah* also reconfigures the epistemological status of teaching by situating knowledge within a moral horizon of purpose. Rather than treating knowledge as value-neutral content to be transmitted, Islamic pedagogy frames knowledge as inherently ethical, requiring proper orientation toward truth, sincerity, and responsibility. In this sense, intention is not external to knowledge but constitutive of its meaning and legitimacy. Contemporary philosophy of education similarly emphasizes that educational practice cannot be divorced from normative commitments, as teaching always involves implicit judgments about what is valuable, meaningful, and worth pursuing.

(Biesta, 2009, 2020). The concept of *niyyah* thus provides a conceptual bridge between Islamic ethical thought and contemporary critiques of value-neutral professionalism.

Furthermore, the centrality of *niyyah* highlights the relational dimension of ethical responsibility in teaching. Intention not only shapes the teacher's inner disposition but also influences how authority is exercised in relation to students. A teacher guided by sincere intention is more likely to enact fairness, patience, and compassion, thereby fostering an environment conducive to trust and moral growth. Recent studies on teacher student relationships indicate that perceived authenticity and moral sincerity significantly enhance students' engagement and ethical sensitivity, suggesting that inward orientation has tangible relational consequences in educational settings (Qamariah & Herch, 2026; Szymanska, 2024). In this respect, *niyyah* functions not merely as an inward ethical state but as a generative force that shapes the moral ecology of the classroom.

At the same time, positioning *niyyah* as the ethical core of professionalism invites a critical reassessment of contemporary evaluation systems in education. Performance-based metrics, while useful for measuring certain aspects of teaching, often fail to capture the moral intentionality that underlies professional action. This creates a structural tension between measurable outcomes and ethical depth, where what is most important is often least visible. By foregrounding intention, Islamic educational ethics challenges this imbalance and calls for a more holistic understanding of professionalism one that recognizes inward accountability as integral to outward performance. In doing so, *niyyah* offers not only a normative ideal but also a critical lens for evaluating the limitations of technocratic approaches to teacher professionalism (Biesta, 2020).

Moral Exemplarity (*Uswah*) and *Adab* as Relational Ethics

While *niyyah* establishes inward ethical orientation, ethical identity becomes pedagogically meaningful only when embodied in conduct. This leads to the second dimension: moral exemplarity (*uswah*) grounded in *adab*.

Islamic educational thought consistently emphasizes that teaching is a morally embodied practice. Al-Ghazālī argues that learners are shaped more by the conduct of teachers than by their instruction, making ethical coherence between speech and action essential (Al-Ghazali, 2011; Al-Ghazali, 1962). This classical insight aligns with contemporary

research emphasizing that teacher identity is inherently relational and enacted through everyday interactions (Mockler & Groundwater-Smith, 2018).

Recent studies further demonstrate that teacher exemplarity significantly influences students' moral development, motivation, and ethical sensitivity. In Islamic education contexts, the perception of teachers as *uswah ḥasanah* has been shown to correlate strongly with students' moral internalization and behavioral orientation (Ruswandi, 2025). This suggests that ethical identity is not merely an internal moral possession but a socially enacted and relationally negotiated reality that gains legitimacy through embodied practice.

From a theoretical standpoint, *adab* functions as an integrative moral epistemic framework that unifies knowledge, action, and intention. Unlike modern competence-based models that separate skill from character, Islamic pedagogy treats ethical conduct as constitutive of knowledge itself. Sahin (2018) argues that Islamic education cannot be reduced to technical proficiency because its epistemological foundation is inherently moral.

Importantly, *uswah* and *adab* also shape the moral climate of educational institutions. When teachers embody fairness, humility, and emotional restraint, they cultivate environments characterized by trust, dignity, and ethical consistency. Conversely, ethical inconsistency undermines moral authority and fosters cynicism. Meta-analytical research confirms that teacher behavior significantly influences students' sense of justice, belonging, and moral engagement (Najafov, 2025). Thus, moral exemplarity transforms ethical identity from an internal disposition into a socially intelligible and pedagogically effective practice.

From a broader pedagogical perspective, *uswah* can be understood as a form of embodied moral communication through which ethical knowledge is transmitted non-discursively. Unlike propositional instruction, which operates through explanation and abstraction, exemplarity functions through lived demonstration, allowing learners to encounter ethical principles in concrete form. Contemporary educational theory increasingly recognizes that much of what is learned in classrooms occurs through tacit processes such as observation, imitation, and relational interaction, rather than through formal instruction alone (Szymanska, 2024). In this sense, *uswah* does not merely supplement teaching but constitutes a primary mode through which ethical dispositions are formed and internalized.

Moreover, the concept of *adab* provides a normative grammar that regulates not only individual conduct but also the structure of pedagogical relationships. As an integrative

ethical framework, *adab* governs how knowledge is sought, communicated, and applied within a moral order that prioritizes humility, respect, and responsibility. This positions teaching as a relational practice in which authority is exercised through moral credibility rather than institutional power alone. Recent scholarship on teacher student relationships suggests that ethical climates characterized by respect, care, and relational trust significantly enhance students' engagement, well-being, and moral development (Chaaban et al., 2023). Within this framework, *adab* functions as both a personal virtue and a social ethic that sustains the moral ecology of educational environments.

At the institutional level, moral exemplarity also carries structural implications for the formation of educational culture. When *uswah* and *adab* are consistently embodied by teachers and reinforced through leadership practices, they contribute to the development of ethically coherent learning environments in which values are not merely taught but collectively lived. Conversely, when institutional practices contradict professed ethical ideals, a disjunction emerges that can erode trust and weaken moral formation. Contemporary studies on school culture and values-based leadership indicate that ethical consistency across individual and institutional levels is crucial for sustaining meaningful educational practice and fostering a shared sense of purpose (Biesta, 2020; Leijen et al., 2022). In this regard, *uswah* extends beyond individual virtue to become a foundational element in the cultivation of morally responsive and socially grounded educational institutions.

Spiritual Self-Regulation and Ethical Sustainability

The third finding identifies spiritual self-regulation particularly *muḥāsabah* (self-reflection) and *murāqabah* (moral vigilance) as essential mechanisms for sustaining ethical identity over time.

Al-Ghazālī warns that moral failure often occurs gradually through unnoticed ethical erosion rather than sudden collapse. This insight resonates strongly with contemporary research, which shows that professional misconduct frequently results from cumulative compromises and lack of reflective awareness (Mukadimah, 2025). This further indicates that reliance on external regulation alone is structurally insufficient, as ethical failure in teaching often emerges precisely within domains where formal rules are either absent or indeterminate.

Recent studies on teacher resilience further support the importance of internal regulation. Spirituality has been shown to enhance emotional stability, self-control, and ethical consistency, particularly under conditions of stress and institutional pressure (Payot & Nebria, 2025). Similarly, research on *murāqabah* indicates that spiritual awareness strengthens self-regulation and reduces ethically risky behavior (Cholili et al., 2025).

Within this framework, spiritual self-regulation functions as an internal governance system that complements formal professional standards. While institutional rules provide external guidance, ethical consistency ultimately depends on internal discipline. This is especially critical in teaching, where many decisions such as fairness in assessment or disciplinary judgment occur in contexts that cannot be fully regulated by formal rules. Thus, ethical identity must be understood as a continuous practice rather than a fixed attribute. Sustained moral integrity requires ongoing reflection, vigilance, and ethical awareness, particularly in high-pressure educational environments.

From a theoretical perspective, *muḥāsabah* and *murāqabah* can be understood as structured forms of reflective practice that enable continuous ethical self-evaluation. In contemporary educational theory, reflective practice is widely recognized as a key component of professional development, allowing practitioners to critically examine their actions, assumptions, and moral commitments (Samad et al., 2023). Within the Islamic ethical framework, however, reflection is not merely a cognitive exercise but a spiritually grounded discipline that integrates awareness of the self with accountability before God. This dual orientation deepens the ethical significance of reflection by linking professional conduct to transcendent moral responsibility, thereby reinforcing consistency between inward intention and outward action.

In addition, spiritual self-regulation contributes to what may be described as ethical resilience the capacity to maintain moral integrity under conditions of pressure, ambiguity, and institutional constraint. Contemporary research on teacher resilience highlights that sustaining commitment in challenging environments requires not only psychological coping mechanisms but also a strong sense of moral purpose and identity (Chaaban et al., 2023). Within this context, practices such as *muḥāsabah* and *murāqabah* function as internal resources that help teachers process emotional strain, regulate impulses, and realign their

actions with ethical principles. This suggests that spirituality operates not only as a source of meaning but also as a practical mechanism for maintaining professional stability and ethical coherence over time.

At the institutional level, the sustainability of ethical identity depends not only on individual discipline but also on the presence of supportive structures that encourage reflective engagement. Educational environments that incorporate reflective dialogue, mentoring, and ethical supervision are more likely to sustain moral awareness and reduce the risk of gradual ethical erosion. Recent studies on professional learning communities and reflective teaching practices indicate that collective reflection enhances both individual accountability and organizational integrity (Leißen et al., 2022). In this regard, spiritual self-regulation can be extended beyond individual practice to become part of a broader institutional culture that systematically supports ethical vigilance and professional responsibility.

Service-Oriented Professionalism: *Khidmah and Rahmah*

The fourth dimension situates ethical identity within an overarching orientation toward service (*khidmah*) and compassion (*rahmah*). In Islamic ethics, teaching is understood as moral stewardship rather than a transactional profession.

Al-Ghazālī emphasizes that knowledge pursued for prestige or competition undermines its ethical purpose. Instead, teaching is framed as service directed toward the moral and intellectual flourishing of learners. This perspective is reinforced by contemporary scholarship, which highlights that service-oriented professionalism strengthens ethical responsibility, empathy, and commitment (Asiah et al., 2025).

This orientation redefines professionalism by displacing efficiency as the primary criterion and re-centering human dignity, moral responsibility, and relational care as the ultimate telos of educational practice. Competence becomes a means rather than an end, while ethical responsibility becomes the ultimate goal. Studies on Islamic educational leadership further demonstrate that integrating spiritual values into institutional culture enhances moral coherence, collective responsibility, and professional integrity (Juharyanto et al., 2024).

Importantly, *khidmah* and *rahmah* can be institutionalized through organizational practices such as mentoring, reflective supervision, and value-based leadership. This

transforms spirituality from an individual attribute into a shared ethical framework guiding institutional culture.

From a broader ethical perspective, *khidmah* reorients professionalism by grounding it in a logic of service rather than performance. In this view, teaching is not primarily an activity measured by efficiency or output, but a relational practice directed toward the well-being and flourishing of others. Contemporary discussions on ethics of care similarly emphasize that educational practice is fundamentally relational and morally responsive, requiring attentiveness, responsibility, and commitment to the needs of learners (Noddings, 2013). The concept of *khidmah* thus aligns with and extends these perspectives by embedding care within a spiritually grounded framework of accountability, where service is understood not only as a social obligation but also as an act of moral and spiritual significance.

Complementing this, the notion of *rahmah* (compassion) provides the affective and ethical orientation through which service is enacted. Compassion in teaching is not limited to emotional sensitivity but involves an active commitment to justice, dignity, and the holistic development of students. Research in educational psychology and teacher student relationships demonstrates that compassionate teaching practices are associated with higher levels of student engagement, trust, and socio-emotional development (Chaaban et al., 2023). Within an Islamic ethical framework, *rahmah* deepens this understanding by linking compassion to a moral vision that integrates empathy with responsibility, thereby shaping not only how teachers respond to students' needs but also how they interpret their role as moral agents within the educational process.

At the institutional level, a service-oriented model of professionalism requires alignment between individual ethical commitments and organizational structures. Educational institutions that prioritize *khidmah* and *rahmah* as guiding principles are more likely to cultivate cultures characterized by trust, inclusivity, and shared moral purpose. Contemporary research on values-based leadership and professional communities suggests that when organizational practices are grounded in ethical coherence, they enhance both professional integrity and institutional effectiveness (Biesta, 2020; Leijen et al., 2022). In this sense, service-oriented professionalism is not merely an individual disposition but a collective orientation that shapes the ethos of educational institutions, ensuring that technical competence remains consistently directed toward humane and morally meaningful ends.

Integrated Model and Educational Implications

Taken together, these four dimensions form an integrated model of ethical identity in which spirituality functions as a structuring principle rather than a supplementary attribute. Ethical identity emerges from the dynamic interaction between inward orientation (*niyyah*), embodied conduct (*uswah*), sustained reflection (*muḥāsabah*), and outward responsibility (*khidmah*).

This model offers a substantive critique of competence-based professionalism. While competence remains necessary, it is ethically insufficient without spiritual grounding. Contemporary debates in Islamic education confirm that professionalism must integrate pedagogical skill, moral character, and ethical accountability (Leijen et al., 2022). The implications for Islamic education are significant. Teacher education programs must move beyond technical training to incorporate spiritual and ethical formation. Institutional practices such as mentoring, reflective evaluation, and value integration are essential for sustaining ethical identity.

Conceptually, the model advances a reconfiguration of teacher professionalism from a competence-driven paradigm to an ethically grounded ontology of practice. Rather than positioning ethics as an external constraint upon professional action, this framework situates spirituality as the internal condition of possibility for ethical coherence, thereby transforming professionalism into a morally purposive and spiritually informed practice.

Building upon this conceptual foundation, the model also provides a framework for future empirical research examining how spirituality shapes teacher behavior, institutional culture, and student outcomes. At the same time, it offers a conceptual vocabulary for rethinking professionalism in Islamic education as a morally grounded, spiritually sustained, and existentially meaningful practice.

From a theoretical standpoint, the integrated model also invites a rethinking of the relationship between ethics and professional practice. Rather than viewing ethics as a set of external guidelines imposed upon professional action, this framework positions ethical identity as constitutive of professionalism itself. In this sense, professionalism is not merely something that teachers “apply” in practice, but something they continuously “become” through the cultivation of intention, conduct, reflection, and service. This perspective

resonates with contemporary discussions in philosophy of education that emphasize the formative and identity-shaping nature of professional practice, where teaching is understood as a morally embedded and reflexive activity rather than a neutral technical function (Biesta, 2020).

Furthermore, the model offers a basis for addressing one of the central tensions in modern education: the gap between measurable performance and ethical depth. While contemporary systems tend to privilege quantifiable outcomes, the integrated framework highlights that the most decisive aspects of teaching such as sincerity, moral consistency, and compassionate engagement are often not directly measurable. This suggests the need for expanded evaluative frameworks that incorporate qualitative and ethically oriented indicators of professional practice. Recent scholarship on teacher identity and professionalism similarly underscores the importance of recognizing moral and relational dimensions as integral to professional evaluation, rather than treating them as secondary or incidental (Leijen et al., 2022).

Finally, the integrated model carries broader implications for the future direction of Islamic education. By re-centering spirituality as the organizing principle of ethical identity, the model provides a foundation for developing pedagogical approaches that are not only effective but also morally meaningful and socially responsive. This includes the design of curricula that integrate ethical reflection, the cultivation of institutional cultures grounded in *adab* and *rahmah*, and the development of leadership practices that prioritize moral coherence over procedural efficiency. In this respect, the framework contributes not only to theoretical discourse but also to the practical reorientation of Islamic education toward a more holistic, humane, and spiritually grounded vision of teaching and learning.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that spirituality is a foundational dimension of Muslim teachers' ethical identity rather than merely a personal attribute. By synthesizing classical Islamic educational ethics with contemporary discussions on teacher professionalism, the study identifies four interconnected dimensions shaping ethical identity: spiritual intentionality (*niyyah*), moral exemplarity based on *adab*, spiritual self-regulation (*muḥāsabah* and *murāqabah*), and service-oriented professionalism (*khidmah* and *rahmah*). These

Dimensions form an integrated framework in which spirituality becomes the ethical basis of professional practice. The findings indicate that competence-based professionalism alone is insufficient without inward moral orientation, as teaching in the Islamic tradition is understood not only as a technical profession but also as a moral and spiritual vocation grounded in responsibility, integrity, and ethical conduct. Theoretically, this study contributes to Islamic education scholarship by bridging classical Islamic ethics with contemporary debates on teacher identity and professionalism. Practically, it highlights the importance of integrating spiritual ethical formation into teacher education, mentoring, and institutional culture to strengthen professional integrity and ethical resilience. Although limited as a conceptual inquiry, the study suggests the need for future empirical research on teachers' lived experiences and institutional conditions supporting ethical identity formation in Islamic education.

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