

The Role of Spiritual Leadership in Enhancing Organizational Commitment in Islamic Universities

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the role of spiritual leadership in enhancing organizational commitment within Islamic higher education, with particular reference to the University of Zawia, Libya. Grounded in value-based leadership theory and Islamic educational principles, the study investigates how dimensions of spiritual leadership-vision, hope/faith, altruistic love, meaning/calling, and membership-influence employees' organizational commitment. A quantitative correlational research design was employed, and data were collected from 150 academic and administrative staff using a structured questionnaire based on a five-point Likert scale. Descriptive and inferential statistical analyses were conducted using SPSS. The findings reveal that both spiritual leadership and organizational commitment are perceived at high levels. Among the leadership dimensions, vision and meaning/calling recorded the highest mean scores, indicating the importance of purpose-driven leadership in Islamic institutions. In terms of organizational commitment, affective and normative commitment was stronger than continuance commitment, suggesting that employees are primarily motivated by emotional attachment and moral responsibility rather than material considerations. Correlation and regression analyses further demonstrate a strong and significant relationship between spiritual leadership and organizational commitment. The study concludes that leadership grounded in Islamic values and spiritual principles plays a critical role in strengthening employee commitment and institutional cohesion. The findings offer practical implications for educational leaders, emphasizing the need to enhance trust, shared vision, and value-based management practices in Islamic universities.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Higher education institutions in Libya are undergoing significant transformation as they respond to contemporary challenges related to quality, sustainability, and relevance in a rapidly changing global context. Universities are increasingly expected not only to deliver academic knowledge but also to contribute to social development, ethical formation, and national stability. Within this landscape, Islamic higher education occupies a distinctive position, as it integrates religious values with modern educational practices. Recent studies conducted in Libyan universities highlight the growing emphasis on aligning educational processes with Islamic principles, sustainability goals, and technological advancements, reflecting a shift toward more holistic and value-based educational models (Abdullaha et al., 2026; Yahya et al., 2025). This transformation underscores the need for leadership approaches that can effectively bridge tradition and modernity while addressing institutional and societal expectations.

In this context, spiritual leadership has emerged as a relevant framework for understanding leadership practices in Islamic educational institutions. Spiritual leadership emphasizes vision, meaning, ethical behavior, and a sense of belonging, all of which are deeply rooted in Islamic teachings. Unlike conventional leadership models that focus primarily on performance and efficiency, spiritual leadership integrates moral purpose, emotional engagement, and collective identity, making it particularly suitable for Islamic universities (Susilo et al., 2026; Taufikin et al., 2025). In Libya, where educational institutions often operate within complex social and political environments, leadership grounded in spiritual and ethical values can play a crucial role in fostering resilience, trust, and institutional cohesion (Hmouma, 2025; Masoud et al., 2025; Alriteemi et al., 2025).

At the same time, the effectiveness of leadership in higher education is closely linked to organizational commitment, which reflects the degree to which employees identify with and are willing to contribute to their institution. Organizational commitment is widely recognized as a key determinant of employee performance, retention, and institutional success. In Islamic educational settings, commitment is not only influenced by professional factors but also by religious values, moral obligations, and shared identity, which shape individuals' attitudes toward their work and organization (Maati et al., 2025; Primarni et al., 2025). This suggests that leadership approaches that resonate with these values are more likely to enhance commitment among academic and administrative staff.

Recent research in Libyan higher education has highlighted several factors that influence employee attitudes and institutional performance, including well-being, resilience, work environment, and the integration of ethical and spiritual values into educational practices (Alkarkhi & Hmouma, 2025; Ayad et al., 2026). Moreover, the increasing role of digital technologies and artificial intelligence in education has introduced new opportunities and challenges for university leadership. Studies conducted at the University of Zawia indicate that faculty members are actively engaging with technological innovations while also expressing concerns about maintaining cultural and ethical integrity (Baroud et al., 2025; Alsayd et al., 2025; Omran et al., 2025). These developments highlight the importance of leadership models that can balance innovation with ethical responsibility, ensuring that institutional progress remains aligned with Islamic values.

Another important dimension of the current educational landscape is the integration of Islamic educational philosophy and sustainability frameworks, particularly in relation to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Research has shown that Islamic principles such as justice, responsibility, and stewardship are closely aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals, especially SDG 4 (Quality Education) (Hasan et al., 2025; Alsaeh et al., 2026; Abdullaha et al., 2026). In this regard, Islamic universities are uniquely positioned to contribute to sustainable development by promoting ethical leadership, social responsibility, and inclusive education. Spiritual leadership, with its emphasis

on vision and moral purpose, can serve as a key mechanism for advancing these goals within higher education institutions (Hasibuan et al., 2024; Achmadin et al., 2025; Aladi & Barkah, 2026).

Despite the growing body of research on Islamic education and leadership, there remains a need for empirical studies that specifically examine the relationship between spiritual leadership and organizational commitment in the Libyan context. Much of the existing literature has focused on theoretical models or studies conducted in other regions, with limited attention to the unique socio-cultural and institutional conditions of Libyan universities (Masuwd, 2025; Abdulghani et al., 2025; Alouzi et al., 2026a). Given the ongoing challenges faced by the higher education sector in Libya, including resource constraints, governance issues, and the need for institutional reform, understanding the role of leadership in shaping employee commitment is particularly important (Abraham & Baroud, 2025; Kasheem et al., 2025). Therefore, this study aims to investigate the role of spiritual leadership in enhancing organizational commitment at the University of Zawia. By examining employees' perceptions of leadership practices and their levels of commitment, the study seeks to provide insights into how value-based leadership can contribute to institutional effectiveness in Islamic higher education. The findings are expected to contribute to both theory and practice by offering a contextually grounded understanding of leadership in Libyan universities and by providing practical recommendations for strengthening organizational commitment through spiritually informed management approaches.

2. METHODS

This study employed a quantitative correlation research design to examine the role of spiritual leadership in enhancing organizational commitment at the University of Zawia, Libya. The quantitative approach was selected because it enables the systematic investigation of relationships between measurable variables, particularly leadership practices and employee attitudes. The target population consisted of academic and administrative staff working across different faculties and administrative units within the university. To ensure representation of various job categories, the study utilized stratified random sampling. A total of 150 participants were selected, including 70 academic staff members, 50 administrative employees, and 30 academic leaders and department coordinators, reflecting a diverse institutional structure.

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire divided into two main sections. The first section measured spiritual leadership, including dimensions such as vision, hope/faith, altruistic love, meaning/calling, and membership, while the second section assessed organizational commitment through affective, continuance, and normative commitment. The instrument consisted of 30 items rated on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The collected data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations, were used to summarize respondents' perceptions of spiritual leadership and organizational commitment.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Respondents' Perceptions of Spiritual Leadership at the University of Zawia

The findings presented in Table 1 Figure 1 and summarized in Table 3 indicate that spiritual leadership at the University of Zawia is perceived at a high level (M = 3.98, SD = 1.02). This result reflects the growing emphasis on value-based and spiritually grounded leadership in Islamic higher education, particularly within Libyan universities where ethical, religious, and educational dimensions are closely interconnected (Solihah et al., 2025; Mohamed et al., 2026).

Table 1. Spiritual Leadership (Item-Level Results, n = 150)

Dimension	Code	Item	Mean	SD
Vision	SL1	Clear and inspiring vision	4.11	0.98

	SL2	Goals linked to Islamic values	4.05	0.96
	SL3	Long-term direction is clear	3.94	1.04
Hope/Faith	SL4	Leaders encourage hope	3.97	1.07
	SL5	Leadership motivates collective confidence	3.97	0.98
	SL6	Leaders remain optimistic	3.90	1.07
Altruistic Love	SL7	Leaders show respect and compassion	4.07	0.95
	SL8	Fairness and concern for welfare	4.01	1.00
	SL9	I feel valued as a person	3.90	1.10
Meaning/Calling	SL10	Work gives meaning and purpose	4.00	0.99
	SL11	Work contributes to society and Islamic education	4.04	0.97
	SL12	Environment encourages sincerity and commitment	3.95	1.03
Membership	SL13	Strong sense of belonging	3.93	1.07
	SL14	Mutual trust between leadership and staff	3.91	1.13
	SL15	Teamwork and unity are encouraged	3.96	1.03

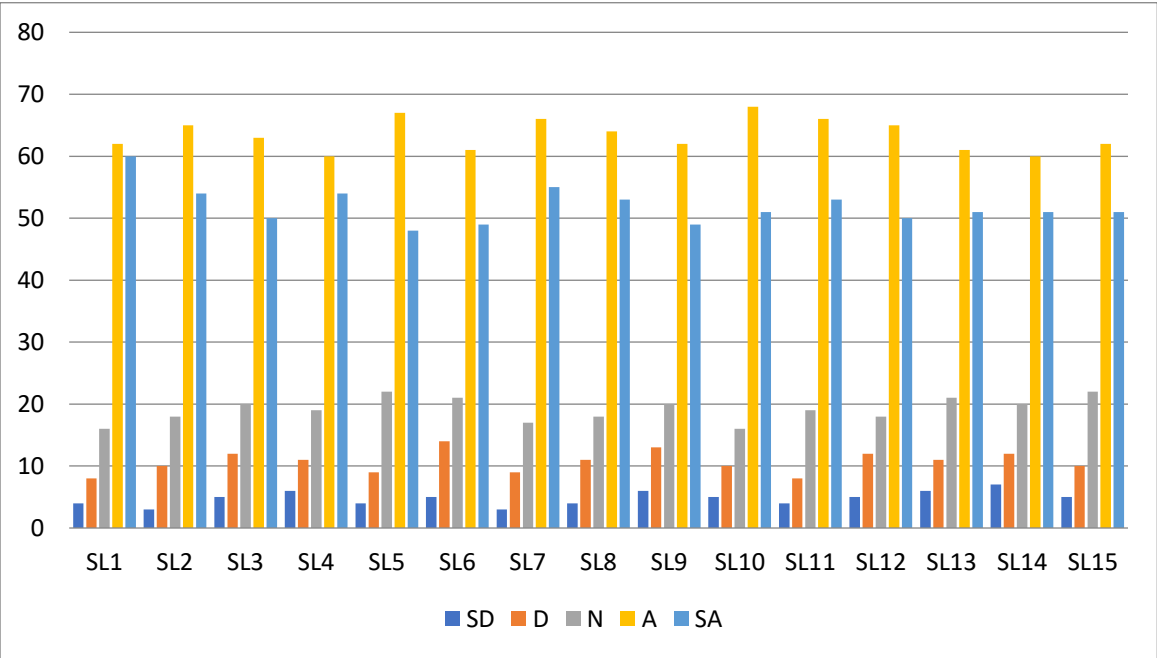


Figure 1. Spiritual Leadership (Item-Level Results, n = 150)

The vision dimension (M = 4.03) emerged as the highest, indicating that leadership effectively communicates institutional goals aligned with Islamic values. This aligns with recent findings emphasizing that Islamic educational leadership must integrate purpose-driven vision with ethical and spiritual orientation (Albshkar et al., 2025; Riyadi et al., 2024; Ritanti et al., 2025). The high score for SL1 suggests that leaders successfully articulate a shared institutional direction, which strengthens organizational coherence.

Similarly, meaning/calling (M = 4.00) reflects that employees perceive their roles as contributing to broader educational and religious objectives. This is consistent with studies highlighting the importance of tazkiya al-nafs and moral purpose in shaping academic engagement in Islamic institutions (Ichwan et al., 2024; Abdulghani et al., 2025; Alouzi et al., 2026b). Employees are not merely performing tasks but engaging in meaningful work linked to societal and spiritual development. The dimension of altruistic love (M = 3.99) further reinforces the presence of ethical leadership, characterized by care, fairness, and interpersonal respect. These findings resonate with research on

Islamic psychology and educational leadership, which emphasizes compassion and emotional intelligence as central to effective leadership (Almajri et al., 2025; Kasheem et al., 2025).

However, membership ($M = 3.93$) recorded the lowest score, suggesting relatively weaker perceptions of belonging and trust. This may reflect broader institutional challenges in fostering participatory culture and inclusive governance, which have been noted in Libyan higher education contexts (Abouzied et al., 2025; Abraham et al., 2025; Hmouma & Benarose, 2026). Strengthening this dimension is essential for enhancing collective identity and institutional cohesion.

Respondents' Perceptions of Organizational Commitment

The results in Table 2 and Figure 2 indicate that organizational commitment is also perceived at a high level ($M = 3.87$, $SD = 1.09$), confirming that employees demonstrate strong attachment to the university.

Table 2. Organizational Commitment (Item-Level Results, $n = 150$)

Dimension	Code	Item	Mean	SD
Affective	OC1	Emotionally attached to the university	4.00	1.01
	OC2	Proud to tell others I work here	4.01	0.99
	OC3	Strong sense of loyalty	4.00	1.00
Continuance	OC4	Difficult to leave the university	3.71	1.20
	OC5	Leaving would disrupt my life	3.69	1.23
	OC6	Leaving would involve sacrifice	3.67	1.21
Normative	OC7	Moral obligation to remain	3.86	1.08
	OC8	Remaining is the right thing to do	3.91	1.03
	OC9	Would feel guilty if I left	3.77	1.16
	OC10	Willing to exert extra effort	3.84	1.12
	OC11	Intend to continue in future	3.89	1.08
	OC12	Support the university in difficult times	3.87	1.11
	OC13	Responsible for university reputation	3.96	1.02
	OC14	Accept additional responsibilities	3.91	1.08
	OC15	Commitment strengthened by mission and values	3.97	1.01

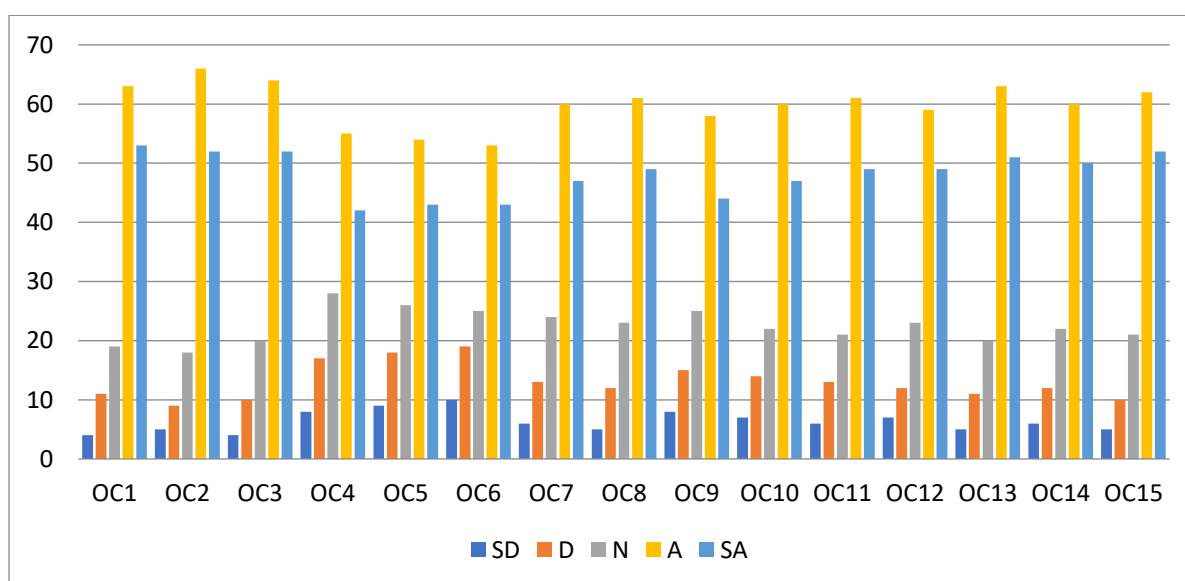


Figure 2. Organizational Commitment (Item-Level Results, $n = 150$)

The highest dimension, affective commitment ($M = 4.00$), indicates strong emotional attachment. This aligns with research showing that value-driven educational environments enhance emotional identification with institutions (Paisun et al., 2024; Ibrahim et al., 2025; Baroud & Aljarmi, 2025). Normative commitment ($M = 3.89$) also scored highly, reflecting a moral obligation to remain in the institution. This is consistent with Islamic educational frameworks that emphasize responsibility, trust, and ethical duty (Shalghoum et al., 2025; Alrumayh et al., 2025). In contrast, continuance commitment ($M = 3.69$) was the lowest, suggesting that employees are less motivated by economic or structural constraints. This supports findings that in Islamic educational settings, commitment is primarily driven by values rather than material incentives (Kasheem & Rusmana, 2025; Hilman et al., 2024).

Dimension-Level Comparison of the Two Main Variables

Table 3. Dimension-Level Summary

Variable / Dimension	Items	Mean	SD	Interpretation
Vision	3	4.03	1.00	High
Hope/Faith	3	3.95	1.04	High
Altruistic Love	3	3.99	1.01	High
Meaning/Calling	3	4.00	1.00	High
Membership	3	3.93	1.06	High
Spiritual Leadership (overall)	15	3.98	1.02	High
Affective Commitment	3	4.00	1.00	High
Continuance Commitment	3	3.69	1.18	Moderate–High
Normative Commitment	9	3.89	1.08	High
Organizational Commitment (overall)	15	3.87	1.09	High
Grand Total	30	3.93	1.06	High

A comprehensive comparison of the two main variables—spiritual leadership and organizational commitment—is presented in Table 3, which provides aggregated results across all dimensions, including frequencies, means, and standard deviations. The overall findings indicate that both constructs are perceived at a high level, with spiritual leadership ($M = 3.98$, $SD = 1.02$) slightly higher than organizational commitment ($M = 3.87$, $SD = 1.09$). The grand mean of 3.93 ($SD = 1.06$) further confirms a generally positive perception among respondents toward both leadership practices and their commitment to the institution. This pattern suggests a strong alignment between leadership approaches and employee attitudes within the University of Zawia.

At the level of spiritual leadership dimensions, vision ($M = 4.03$, $SD = 1.00$) emerged as the highest-rated dimension, supported by a high concentration of responses in the “agree” (190) and “strongly agree” (164) categories. This indicates that respondents widely acknowledge the presence of a clear and inspiring institutional direction. Similarly, meaning/calling ($M = 4.00$, $SD = 1.00$) and altruistic love ($M = 3.99$, $SD = 1.01$) also recorded high scores, reflecting that employees perceive their work as meaningful and experience ethical, respectful interactions within the university environment. The relatively balanced distribution across agreement categories in these dimensions suggests a consistent perception among respondents rather than polarization. The dimension of hope/faith ($M = 3.95$, $SD = 1.04$), while slightly lower, still falls within the high range, with a strong number of responses in the “agree” (188) and “strongly agree” (151) categories. This indicates that leadership is generally effective in fostering optimism and confidence among staff. In contrast, membership ($M = 3.93$, $SD = 1.06$) recorded the lowest mean among the leadership dimensions, with comparatively higher frequencies in neutral (63) and disagree-related responses (18 strongly disagree and 33 disagree). This suggests that although

employees generally feel part of the institution, their sense of belonging and mutual trust is somewhat less robust than other leadership aspects, indicating a potential area for improvement.

Regarding organizational commitment, affective commitment ($M = 4.00$, $SD = 1.00$) was the strongest dimension, with high frequencies in agreement categories (193 agree and 157 strongly agree). This demonstrates that employees are emotionally attached to the university and identify with its values. Normative commitment ($M = 3.89$, $SD = 1.08$) also showed a high level, supported by substantial agreement responses (544 agree and 438 strongly agree), indicating a strong sense of moral obligation and responsibility toward the institution. In contrast, continuance commitment ($M = 3.69$, $SD = 1.18$) was the lowest among all dimensions across both variables. It also exhibited the highest variability, as indicated by the larger standard deviation. The relatively higher frequencies in neutral (79) and disagree categories (27 strongly disagree and 54 disagree) suggest that employees are less motivated by the perceived costs of leaving the organization. This pattern implies that their commitment is less dependent on external or material factors and more influenced by intrinsic and value-based considerations.

A cross-variable comparison reveals a meaningful pattern: dimensions related to purpose and emotional engagement (vision, meaning/calling, and affective commitment) consistently scored higher than those related to structural attachment or institutional belonging (membership and continuance commitment). This indicates that employees at the University of Zawia are more strongly connected to the university through shared values, purpose, and emotional identification rather than through obligation or necessity. Overall, the results suggest that the university environment is characterized by a value-driven organizational culture, where leadership practices emphasizing vision, ethics, and meaning are closely associated with higher levels of emotional and moral commitment. However, the comparatively lower scores in membership and continuance commitment highlight the importance of strengthening institutional trust, participation, and long-term engagement mechanisms to ensure a more balanced and sustainable organizational climate.

Discussion of the Overall Findings in the Context of Islamic Higher Education

The overall findings of this study provide strong empirical support for the argument that spiritual leadership constitutes a foundational dimension of effective management in Islamic higher education, particularly within the Libyan context. The high levels of both spiritual leadership and organizational commitment observed among respondents suggest that leadership practices grounded in Islamic values are not only symbolically important but also functionally effective in shaping positive institutional outcomes. This aligns with recent scholarship emphasizing that Islamic education systems are increasingly moving toward value-integrated management models, where ethical, spiritual, and academic dimensions are interconnected rather than treated as separate domains (Alrumayh, 2025; Alouzi, 2024; Aljarmi et al., 2025). In this regard, the University of Zawia appears to reflect a broader trend in Islamic higher education toward embedding *maqasid al-shari'ah*-oriented leadership practices that prioritize human development, moral responsibility, and social contribution (Masuwd, 2024; Lestari et al., 2025; Husayn et al., 2025).

One of the most significant insights emerging from the findings is the central role of meaning, purpose, and moral orientation in shaping employees' commitment. The high scores in the dimensions of vision and meaning/calling indicate that staff members perceive their work as aligned with broader educational and societal goals. This is consistent with contemporary research on Islamic pedagogy, which emphasizes that education should not merely transmit knowledge but also cultivate spiritual awareness, ethical consciousness, and a sense of responsibility toward society (Masuwd et al., 2026; Iskandar et al., 2025). The integration of these elements into leadership practices contributes to what has been described as a transformative educational environment, where individuals are motivated not only by institutional requirements but also by internalized values and beliefs.

Furthermore, the strong presence of affective and normative commitment among respondents reinforces the importance of intrinsic and moral motivation in Islamic institutional contexts. Unlike purely instrumental organizational settings, where employee commitment is often driven by economic incentives or job security, Islamic universities tend to foster a deeper sense of attachment rooted in ethical obligation (*amanah*) and collective identity. This finding is supported by studies on Islamic psychology and educational environments, which highlight the role of spiritual well-being, emotional intelligence, and value alignment in enhancing workplace engagement (Almajri et al., 2025; Hidayatullah et al., 2025). In such contexts, commitment becomes a reflection of personal conviction and institutional culture, rather than a purely transactional relationship.

At the same time, the relatively lower scores observed in the dimensions of membership and continuance commitment provide important insights into the structural and relational challenges facing Islamic higher education institutions in Libya. While employees generally feel connected to the university's mission, their sense of belonging and trust within the organizational environment appears less pronounced. This finding resonates with previous research on Libyan higher education, which points to ongoing challenges related to institutional governance, participation, and organizational communication (Yahya et al., 2025; Ritonga et al., 2024; Husin et al., 2025). Addressing these issues requires a more deliberate effort to foster inclusive leadership practices, strengthen interpersonal relationships, and promote a culture of shared responsibility.

In addition, the moderate level of continuance commitment suggests that employees are not strongly tied to the institution through external constraints such as financial dependency or lack of alternatives. While this may initially appear as a limitation, it can also be interpreted as a positive indicator of a value-driven organizational culture, where commitment is sustained by belief rather than necessity. This interpretation is supported by studies on Islamic economic and organizational ethics, which emphasize that human behavior in Islamic contexts is ideally guided by ethical principles rather than material considerations alone (Ayad et al., 2025; Kasheem & Rusmana, 2025). However, it remains important for institutions to balance intrinsic motivation with adequate structural support, including professional development opportunities, fair compensation, and career stability.

Another important dimension of the discussion relates to the role of contemporary challenges and technological transformations in shaping leadership and commitment in Islamic universities. Recent studies conducted at the University of Zawia highlight the increasing influence of artificial intelligence, digital learning environments, and technological integration on educational practices and institutional management (Alsayd et al., 2025). In this evolving context, spiritual leadership must adapt by incorporating digital competencies while maintaining its ethical and human-centered orientation. This balance between technology and spirituality has been identified as a key challenge for modern Islamic education systems, particularly in ensuring that innovation does not undermine core values (Alouzi et al., 2026a; Samsuddin et al., 2025; Mukarromah et al., 2024).

Moreover, the findings of this study can be interpreted within the broader framework of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) and its integration into Islamic education. Several recent studies have emphasized the compatibility between Islamic educational principles and the goals of sustainability, particularly in areas such as social justice, environmental responsibility, and ethical governance (Hasan et al., 2025; Maati et al., 2025). Spiritual leadership, as reflected in this study, contributes to these goals by promoting values such as responsibility, cooperation, and long-term vision. In this sense, it serves not only as a managerial approach but also as a strategic tool for achieving sustainable institutional development.

The findings also reinforce the importance of integrating holistic educational models that combine intellectual, emotional, and spiritual dimensions. Research on Islamic education has increasingly highlighted the need for approaches that move beyond fragmented curricula toward more integrated systems that address the whole person (*al-insan al-kamil*) (Primarni et al., 2025; Taufikin et al., 2025;

Masduki et al., 2026). In this regard, spiritual leadership plays a crucial role in shaping institutional culture and guiding educational practices toward holistic development. By fostering an environment that values both academic excellence and moral integrity, leaders can contribute to the formation of graduates who are not only knowledgeable but also ethically grounded.

Finally, the findings of this study underscore the importance of contextualizing leadership models within local realities. While many leadership theories are developed in Western contexts, their application in Islamic and Libyan settings requires adaptation to cultural, religious, and socio-political conditions. Studies on Libyan education have emphasized the need for locally grounded approaches that reflect the unique challenges and opportunities of the region, including post-conflict recovery, institutional reform, and capacity building (Masuwd, 2025; Mohamed et al., 2026). The present study contributes to this effort by demonstrating how spiritual leadership can serve as a culturally relevant and contextually appropriate framework for enhancing organizational commitment.

In conclusion, the expanded discussion confirms that spiritual leadership is a multidimensional and context-sensitive approach that significantly enhances organizational commitment in Islamic higher education. By integrating ethical values, spiritual purpose, and modern management practices, institutions such as the University of Zawia can foster a more engaged, resilient, and value-driven workforce. At the same time, the findings highlight the need for continuous development in areas such as institutional trust, participatory governance, and structural support. Addressing these dimensions will not only strengthen organizational commitment but also contribute to the broader transformation of Islamic higher education in Libya and beyond.

4. CONCLUSION

This study set out to examine the role of spiritual leadership in enhancing organizational commitment within the context of Islamic higher education, focusing on the University of Zawia in Libya. The findings demonstrate that both spiritual leadership and organizational commitment are perceived at high levels among academic and administrative staff, highlighting the importance of value-based leadership in shaping positive organizational outcomes. In particular, the dimensions of vision and meaning/calling emerged as key strengths, indicating that leadership practices that emphasize purpose, direction, and alignment with Islamic values are effective in motivating employees and fostering institutional engagement.

The results further show that affective and normative commitment are stronger than continuance commitment, suggesting that employees' attachment to the university is primarily driven by emotional identification and moral responsibility rather than external constraints. This reflects the distinctive nature of Islamic educational institutions, where shared beliefs, ethical values, and collective identity play a central role in influencing organizational behavior. The strong relationship identified between spiritual leadership and organizational commitment confirms that leadership practices rooted in spirituality and ethics can significantly enhance employees' sense of belonging, loyalty, and willingness to contribute to institutional goals.

From a practical perspective, the study underscores the need for university leaders to strengthen aspects of membership, trust, and participatory engagement, which were relatively lower compared to other dimensions. Enhancing these areas can further improve organizational cohesion and long-term commitment. Additionally, leadership strategies should continue to integrate Islamic principles with contemporary management practices, particularly in addressing emerging challenges related to digital transformation and sustainability in higher education. In conclusion, the study contributes to the growing body of literature on Islamic educational management by providing empirical evidence from the Libyan context. It highlights the critical role of spiritual leadership as a culturally relevant and effective approach for enhancing organizational commitment and supporting the development of resilient, value-driven academic institutions.

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