
SPIRITUAL LEADERSHIP AND ITS IMPACT ON ESTABLISHING MORAL VALUES IN SOCIETY: AN APPLIED STUDY AT FUTURE UNIVERSITY

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the relationship between spiritual leadership and the entrenchment of ethical values among 150 students at Future University – Iraq using a descriptive analytical approach. Results revealed high levels of both spiritual leadership (77.5%) and ethical values (76.8%), with altruism being the weakest leadership dimension and societal stability the weakest ethical dimension. A strong positive correlation ($r = 0.724$) was found, and spiritual leadership explained 52.4% of the variance in ethical values. Significant differences favored students with higher qualifications and greater experience, while gender showed no effect. The study recommends enhancing altruism and societal stability, using experienced students as mentors, expanding research to other sectors, establishing a spiritual leadership unit, and for the university to revise curricula, train faculty, promote student activities, and create an annual award.

Keywords: Spiritual leadership, ethical values, entrenchment of moral values, higher education, Iraq, Future University.

1. INTRODUCTION

Spiritual leadership represents one of the modern approaches in leadership and management thought, as it emphasizes reviving human meanings and values within the workplace and employing the spiritual and ethical dimension in guiding both individual and collective behavior. In light of the growing challenges facing contemporary societies, there is an urgent need for leadership styles capable of balancing material objectives with moral values, thereby contributing to the construction of a cohesive society founded on ethics and virtues.

Establishing moral values is a fundamental pillar for achieving social stability and cultural integration, and it is considered one of the most important factors in strengthening institutional belonging and organizational effectiveness. Hence, the importance of studying the impact of spiritual leadership on consolidating these values, particularly within academic institutions, which serve as fertile environments for shaping value-based awareness among students and staff alike.

This applied study at Future University seeks to explore the nature of the relationship between spiritual leadership and its dimensions (vision, hope and faith, altruism, meaning, and membership) and the establishment of moral values within the university community. It aims to analyze the level of these variables, measure the strength of correlation and influence between them, and investigate relevant demographic differences. Furthermore, the study endeavors to provide practical recommendations that may contribute to the development of curricula and university programs, while enhancing the role of academic institutions in promoting the culture of

spiritual leadership and moral values within society.

1.1 Problem Statement

Despite the growing emphasis on technical and managerial competencies in modern organizations, many institutions still struggle to foster a culture rooted in moral values and ethical behavior. This gap has contributed to challenges such as weakened social cohesion, diminished trust, and limited organizational commitment. Spiritual leadership, with its focus on meaning, altruism, vision, hope, and membership, offers a promising framework for addressing these challenges. However, there is limited empirical evidence on how spiritual leadership directly influences the establishment of moral values within academic environments, particularly in developing societies. Therefore, this study seeks to address the problem of insufficient understanding of the relationship between spiritual leadership and the establishment of moral values in academic institutions, aiming to provide both theoretical insights and practical recommendations for universities and policymakers.

1.2 Research Objectives

1. To assess the level of spiritual leadership among faculty members and students at Future University, focusing on its core dimensions (vision, hope and faith, altruism, meaning, and membership).
2. To evaluate the extent of moral values establishment within the university community, including aspects such as cultural integration, social stability, ethical guidance, and psychological/social harmony.
3. To analyze the relationship between spiritual leadership and moral values, identifying the strength and direction of correlations between the two constructs.
4. To measure the impact of spiritual leadership on moral values, determining the degree to which spiritual leadership explains variations in ethical behavior and value consolidation.
5. To investigate demographic differences (academic qualification, years of experience, gender) in both spiritual leadership and moral values, and to identify which groups exhibit stronger tendencies.
6. To validate the theoretical framework that links spiritual leadership with the establishment of moral values, thereby contributing to the academic literature on leadership and ethics.
7. To provide practical recommendations for universities and policymakers on how to integrate spiritual leadership into academic and organizational practices to strengthen moral values in society.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This chapter reviews the theoretical and empirical literature on spiritual leadership and the entrenchment of ethical values. It begins by defining each variable and their dimensions, then examines the relationship between them, followed by the role of demographic variables, and finally identifies the research gap that this study addresses.

2.2 Spiritual Leadership

2.2.1 Definition and Concept

Spiritual leadership is a paradigm that emerged from workplace spirituality and positive organizational behavior. Fry (2003, p. 711) defined spiritual leadership as “the values, attitudes, and behaviors necessary to intrinsically motivate oneself and others so that they have a sense of spiritual survival through calling and membership.” Unlike transactional or transformational

leadership, spiritual leadership focuses on fulfilling followers' fundamental spiritual needs: meaning in work, sense of belonging, and making a difference.

According to Giacalone and Jurkiewicz (2003), spiritual leadership creates a work environment where individuals experience purpose, connection, and inner life. In educational settings, spiritual leadership among faculty and administrators influences students' moral development and ethical orientation (Houghton et al., 2016).

Spiritual leadership has also been defined as “a set of ethical behaviors and personal values possessed by an individual, through which he aims to motivate himself and others toward higher goals in life and work, by establishing a social and organizational culture based on altruism and future orientation, supported by a clear vision and hope” (Fry & Nisiewicz, 2013, p. 45).

2.2.2 Dimensions of Spiritual Leadership

Fry's (2003) model, widely adopted in empirical research, comprises five dimensions used in this study:

1. **Vision:** A clear, compelling picture of the organization's future that provides a sense of purpose. Vision inspires followers to exert extra effort (Fry & Slocum, 2008).
2. **Hope/Faith:** The belief that the vision can be achieved despite obstacles. Hope maintains motivation during difficulties (Avolio & Luthans, 2006).
3. **Altruism:** Selfless concern for others, expressed through acts of helping, sharing knowledge, and volunteering without expecting rewards. Altruistic love is the foundation of ethical behavior in organizations (Fry, 2005).
4. **Meaning:** The intrinsic value individuals perceive in their work – the sense that one's efforts matter and align with personal values. Meaning is the strongest predictor of spiritual survival (Chen & Li, 2013).
5. **Membership:** The feeling of being understood, appreciated, and accepted by the organization. Membership satisfies the need for belonging and fosters loyalty (Rego & Cunha, 2008).

2.2.3 Previous Studies on Spiritual Leadership

Empirical research has consistently shown positive outcomes of spiritual leadership. Fry et al. (2005) found that spiritual leadership increased organizational commitment and productivity in a manufacturing firm. Aydogmus et al. (2018) reported a significant positive relationship between spiritual leadership and work engagement among Turkish teachers. In higher education, Hosseini et al. (2017) demonstrated that spiritual leadership enhances students' academic engagement and ethical sensitivity. In the Arab context, Al-Hawary and Al-Menhaly (2019) studied Jordanian universities and found that spiritual leadership positively affected organizational citizenship behavior. However, studies specifically examining spiritual leadership among university students in Iraq remain scarce.

2.3 Entrenchment of Ethical Values

2.3.1 Definition and Concept

Ethical values are principles that guide human behavior toward what is right, just, and beneficial. The term “entrenchment” refers to the deep embedding of these values so they become stable, automatic, and resistant to change (Schwartz, 2012). Entrenched ethical values function as internal compasses that shape decisions and actions without conscious deliberation. In organizational and educational contexts, entrenchment means that values are not merely declared but practiced consistently, reinforced by culture, and internalized by members (Trevino & Nelson, 2016).

Moral values are also defined as “a set of standards and judgments derived from fundamental

perceptions of the universe, life, humanity, and God, formed within individuals and society through interaction with personal and social experiences, enabling them to choose life goals and orientations consistent with their abilities and potentials” (Al-Hashimi, 2016, p. 27).

2.3.2 Dimensions of Entrenchment of Ethical Values

This study adopts four dimensions based on the integration of several theoretical frameworks (Schein, 2010; Hofstede, 2001; Bandura, 1977):

1. **Cultural Integration:** The degree to which personal, organizational, and societal values are harmonized. High cultural integration reduces value conflicts and enhances coherence (Schwartz, 2012).
2. **Societal Stability:** The contribution of ethical values to social order, conflict reduction, and community cohesion. Stable societies are built on shared moral foundations (Haidt, 2012).
3. **Guidance:** The function of values in directing behavior and decision-making. Ethical guidance helps individuals choose right actions in ambiguous situations (Rest, 1986).
4. **Psychological and Social Harmony:** The internal peace and external relational satisfaction that result from acting in accordance with one’s values. Harmony reduces cognitive dissonance and enhances well-being (Greenberg & Baron, 2011).

2.3.3 Previous Studies on Ethical Values

Research has established that ethical values improve organizational trust, reduce misconduct, and enhance reputation (Trevino et al., 1999). In educational settings, teaching and modeling ethical values predict students’ prosocial behavior and academic integrity (Berkowitz & Bier, 2007). In Arab societies, ethical values such as hospitality, honor, and community solidarity are deeply rooted in culture (Al-Khatib, 2012). However, rapid modernization poses challenges to value entrenchment, making institutional reinforcement essential.

2.4 The Relationship between Spiritual Leadership and Ethical Values

2.4.1 Theoretical Framework

Social learning theory (Bandura, 1977) provides the primary lens: individuals learn ethical behavior by observing and imitating credible models. Spiritual leaders, who embody altruism, meaning, and hope, serve as such models. Followers internalize these behaviors, which become entrenched ethical values. Institutional theory (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983) adds that organizations can embed ethical values through formal mechanisms (codes, training) and informal ones (rituals, stories). Spiritual leadership activates both mechanisms by creating a culture where values are lived, not just written.

2.4.2 Empirical Evidence

Several studies support a positive link between spiritual leadership and ethical outcomes. Fry and Slocum (2008) found that spiritual leadership reduced unethical behavior and increased moral commitment. Aydogmus et al. (2018) reported a correlation of 0.68 between spiritual leadership and ethical climate in schools. Houghton et al. (2016) demonstrated that spiritual leadership positively predicted ethical decision-making among MBA students. In the Middle East, Al-Hawary and Al-Menhaly (2019) found a strong relationship ($r = 0.71$) between spiritual leadership and organizational ethics in Jordanian universities.

2.4.3 Research Gap

Despite these findings, three gaps exist: (1) most studies used employee samples, not university students; (2) few studies examined the entrenchment (deep embedding) rather than mere presence of ethical values; and (3) no known study has tested this relationship in Iraqi higher education

using a quantitative, dimension-level analysis. This research addresses these gaps.

2.5 Demographic Variables as Moderators

Gender: Findings on gender differences are mixed. Some studies report that females score higher on ethical sensitivity (Gilligan, 1982), while others find no difference (O’Fallon & Butterfield, 2005). **Educational Qualification:** Higher education is associated with increased moral reasoning ability (Rest, 1986). Students in later stages (fourth year) have more exposure to ethical discussions and leadership concepts. **Age/Experience:** Age and life experience correlate with spiritual maturity and ethical judgment (Kohlberg, 1981). This study tests whether students over 25 years differ from younger ones.

2.6 Conceptual Framework and Hypotheses

Based on the literature review, the conceptual framework posits that spiritual leadership (with five dimensions) directly influences the entrenchment of ethical values (with four dimensions), and that this relationship varies by gender, academic stage, and age. The following hypotheses were tested:

- **H₁:** There is a positive correlation between spiritual leadership and entrenchment of ethical values.
- **H₁₋₁ to H₁₋₅:** Each dimension of spiritual leadership correlates positively with entrenchment of ethical values.
- **H₂:** Spiritual leadership significantly influences entrenchment of ethical values.
- **H₃₋₁:** There is no significant difference in spiritual leadership by gender.
- **H₃₋₂:** There is a significant difference in spiritual leadership by educational qualification.

2.7 Summary of Literature Review

The literature confirms that spiritual leadership – comprising vision, hope/faith, altruism, meaning, and membership – satisfies intrinsic needs and fosters ethical behavior. Entrenchment of ethical values – across cultural integration, societal stability, guidance, and psychological-social harmony – is essential for individual and community well-being. Theoretical and empirical evidence supports a strong positive relationship between the two variables. Demographic factors (age, qualification) may moderate this relationship, while gender findings are inconclusive. A research gap exists in Iraqi higher education, justifying the current study.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

The study adopted a descriptive analytical approach, combining theoretical data collection from specialized Arabic and foreign sources with empirical testing using a questionnaire.

3.2 Population and Sample

The study population consisted of students at Future University – Iraq. A stratified random sample of 150 students was selected from the Faculty of Humanities. Incomplete or invalid questionnaires were excluded.

3.3 Measurement Instrument

A 45-item questionnaire was developed, distributed across two main variables:

- **Spiritual leadership** (25 items): five dimensions (vision, hope/faith, altruism, meaning, membership), each with 5 items.
- **Entrenchment of ethical values** (20 items): four dimensions (cultural integration, societal stability, guidance, psychological and social harmony), each with 5 items.

Responses were measured on a five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree).

3.4 Statistical Analysis

Data were analyzed using SPSS. The following statistical methods were employed:

- Means, standard deviations, and relative importance percentages.
- Pearson correlation coefficients.
- Simple linear regression (R^2 , B, t-test).
- T-test and ANOVA for demographic differences.
- Significance level set at $p < 0.05$.

3.5 Judgment Criteria for Relative Importance

Relative Importance	Level	Corresponding Mean
80% – 100%	Very High	4.00 – 5.00
60% – <80%	High	3.00 – <4.00
40% – <60%	Medium	2.00 – <3.00
20% – <40%	Low	1.00 – <2.00
<20%	Very Low	<1.00

4. RESULTS

4.1 Level of Spiritual Leadership

The overall mean score for spiritual leadership was **3.876** (relative importance = 77.52%), indicating a **high** level. Table 1 shows the dimension-level results.

Table 1: Mean Scores of Spiritual Leadership Dimensions

Dimension	Mean	Relative Importance	Level
Meaning	3.95	79.0%	High
Vision	3.92	78.4%	High
Membership	3.88	77.6%	High
Hope/Faith	3.85	77.0%	High
Altruism	3.78	75.6%	High
Overall	3.876	77.52%	High

The highest dimension was **Meaning** (3.95), and the lowest was **Altruism** (3.78).

4.2 Level of Entrenchment of Ethical Values

The overall mean score was **3.838** (relative importance = 76.75%), also **high**. Table 2 presents the

results.

Table 2: Mean Scores of Entrenchment of Ethical Values Dimensions

Dimension	Mean	Relative Importance	Level
Psychological & Social Harmony	3.90	78.0%	High
Guidance	3.85	77.0%	High
Cultural Integration	3.82	76.4%	High
Societal Stability	3.78	75.6%	High
Overall	3.838	76.75%	High

The highest dimension was **Psychological & Social Harmony** (3.90), and the lowest was **Societal Stability** (3.78).

4.3 Correlation between Spiritual Leadership and Ethical Values

Pearson correlation analysis revealed a **strong positive correlation** between the two variables ($r = 0.724$, $p < 0.01$). All five dimensions correlated significantly with ethical values (Table 3).

Table 3: Correlations between Spiritual Leadership Dimensions and Ethical Values

Dimension	Correlation (r) with Ethical Values
Meaning	0.738**
Vision	0.712**
Membership	0.694**
Hope/Faith	0.685**
Altruism	0.623**

** $p < 0.01$

4.4 Regression Analysis (Influence)

Simple linear regression showed that spiritual leadership explains **52.4%** of the variance in ethical values ($R^2 = 0.524$). The regression coefficient ($B = 0.687$) indicates that a one-unit increase in spiritual leadership leads to a 0.687-unit increase in ethical values. The model was significant ($p < 0.001$). Table 4 summarizes the results.

Table 4: Regression Model Summary

R^2	B	t-value	Sig.
0.524	0.687	12.845	0.000

4.5 Demographic Differences

Table 5: Summary of Demographic Differences

Variable	Test	Result	Significance
Gender	t-test	No differences	$p > 0.05$
Academic Stage	ANOVA	Differences favor fourth-year students	$p < 0.05$
Age (Experience)	ANOVA	Differences favor >25 years group	$p < 0.01$

4.6 Hypothesis Testing Results

Table 6: Hypothesis Acceptance/Rejection

Hypothesis	Result
H ₁ : Relationship exists	Accepted
H ₁₋₁ to H ₁₋₅ : Each dimension correlates	All accepted
H ₂ : Influence exists	Accepted
H ₃₋₁ : No gender difference	Accepted (null retained)
H ₃₋₂ : Differences by qualification	Accepted

5. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

5.1 High Levels of Both Variables

The high levels of spiritual leadership (77.5%) and ethical values (76.8%) indicate that students at Future University perceive a positive environment where spiritual leadership practices are present and ethical values are embedded. This aligns with Fry's (2003) assertion that spiritual leadership flourishes in educational settings that emphasize meaning and belonging. The high level of ethical values is consistent with Al-Khatib (2012), who noted that Arab societies traditionally value ethical principles such as honesty, respect, and community solidarity.

5.2 Highest and Lowest Dimensions

Meaning being the highest dimension of spiritual leadership (3.95) suggests that students strongly feel their academic work has value and purpose. This is expected in a university context where learning is inherently meaningful. Conversely, **Altruism** being the lowest (3.78) may indicate that while students find personal meaning, they are less motivated to voluntarily help others without expectation of reward. This could reflect individualistic tendencies or a lack of structured volunteer programs.

For ethical values, **Psychological & Social Harmony** scored highest (3.90), meaning students experience internal peace and good relationships when acting ethically. **Societal Stability** scored lowest (3.78), suggesting that while personal ethics are strong, students see less connection

between their values and broader community stability. This gap indicates a need for curricula that link individual ethics to societal outcomes.

5.3 Strong Positive Correlation ($r = 0.724$)

The correlation coefficient of 0.724 confirms a strong, positive relationship between spiritual leadership and ethical values. This supports social learning theory (Bandura, 1977): students observe spiritual leadership behaviors and internalize them as entrenched ethical values. The result is consistent with Houghton et al. (2016) who found similar correlations in educational settings. The strongest correlation was for **Meaning** (0.738), and the weakest was **Altruism** (0.623), perhaps because altruism requires active giving while other dimensions are more passive perceptions.

5.4 Influence of Spiritual Leadership ($R^2 = 0.524$)

Spiritual leadership explains more than half (52.4%) of the variance in ethical values. This is a substantial effect, leaving 47.6% attributable to other factors such as family upbringing, religious beliefs, peer influence, and media. The regression coefficient ($B = 0.687$) indicates a meaningful practical impact: improving spiritual leadership by one point raises ethical values by nearly 0.7 points.

5.5 Demographic Differences

Gender: No significant differences were found, contradicting some studies (Gilligan, 1982) that suggest females are more ethically sensitive. This may reflect the specific cultural context where both genders receive similar ethical socialization, or the relatively young age of the sample (most under 25).

Academic Stage: Fourth-year students scored higher than second- and third-year students. More years of university exposure, more leadership opportunities, and greater maturity contribute to deeper entrenchment of both spiritual and ethical concepts.

Age/Experience: Students over 25 years scored highest. Life experience, including work, family responsibilities, and facing real-world ethical dilemmas, strengthens both spiritual awareness and ethical commitment. This supports Kohlberg's (1981) theory that moral reasoning develops with age and experience.

6. CONCLUSION

This research investigated the relationship between spiritual leadership and the entrenchment of ethical values among 150 students at Future University – Iraq, using a descriptive analytical approach. The results lead to the following conclusions:

1. **Both spiritual leadership and ethical values are practiced at high levels** in the university context. Students perceive their academic environment as meaningful and value-driven, though there is room to enhance altruistic behaviors and the link between personal ethics and societal stability.
2. **A strong, positive, and statistically significant relationship exists** between spiritual leadership and entrenchment of ethical values ($r = 0.724$). All five dimensions of spiritual leadership – vision, hope/faith, altruism, meaning, and membership – correlate positively with ethical values, with “meaning” being the most influential.
3. **Spiritual leadership substantially influences ethical values**, explaining 52.4% of the variance. This confirms that fostering spiritual leadership practices is an effective strategy for deepening ethical values among students.

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4. **Demographic factors matter:** Academic stage and age/experience produce significant differences, with more advanced and older students showing higher levels. Gender does not produce differences, indicating that both male and female students respond similarly to spiritual leadership.
 5. **All research hypotheses were supported** except for gender differences (which were rejected, meaning no gender effect). The theoretical framework linking spiritual leadership to ethical values is empirically validated in the Iraqi higher education context.

In summary, the research successfully demonstrates that spiritual leadership is a powerful predictor of ethical value entrenchment. Universities seeking to graduate ethically responsible citizens should invest in developing spiritual leadership practices among faculty, administrators, and student leaders.

7. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings, the following policy recommendations are proposed for different stakeholders.

7.1 Recommendations for University Administration (Future University)

1. **Strengthen the Altruism Dimension:** Since altruism scored lowest, the university should establish mandatory volunteer hours for students each semester, create a recognition system for students who demonstrate exceptional altruistic behavior, and integrate altruism criteria into student leadership selection and performance evaluation.
2. **Enhance Societal Stability as an Ethical Value:** Introduce workshops and courses on conflict resolution, tolerance, and community cohesion; develop a student code of conduct explicitly linking personal ethics to community well-being; organize community engagement projects to connect ethics with social impact.
3. **Leverage the “Meaning” Dimension:** Regularly communicate how students’ academic work benefits society through success stories and alumni testimonials; incorporate service-learning components into curricula.
4. **Utilize Experienced Students as Mentors:** Establish a peer mentorship program where senior students mentor juniors on ethical leadership; create “Ethical Ambassadors” roles for experienced students.
5. **Develop Training for Younger Students:** Offer mandatory one-credit courses on spiritual leadership and ethical values for second- and third-year students; conduct semester-long leadership development workshops.

7.2 Recommendations for Curriculum Development

6. **Integrate Spiritual Leadership into Academic Programs:** Add modules on workplace spirituality, ethical decision-making, and altruistic leadership to management, psychology, and education courses; develop a standalone elective course: “Spiritual Leadership and Ethical Values.”
7. **Case-Based and Experiential Learning:** Use real-life ethical dilemmas from Iraqi society to teach value entrenchment; require students to complete a reflective portfolio on their personal ethical development.

7.3 Recommendations for Faculty and Staff Development

8. **Train Faculty in Spiritual Leadership Practices:** Organize annual training for professors on how to model vision, hope, altruism, meaning, and membership in the classroom; include

spiritual leadership competencies in faculty performance reviews.

9. **Establish a University Ethics Committee:** Composed of faculty, students, and administrators, this committee would oversee ethical climate, propose policies, and recognize ethical exemplars.

7.4 Recommendations for Future Research

10. **Expand Sample and Context:** Replicate the study across other colleges (Engineering, Medicine, Law) at Future University; include public and private universities in different Iraqi governorates; compare results across Arab countries.
11. **Add Mediating and Moderating Variables:** Test whether organizational culture, job satisfaction, or religious commitment mediate the relationship; examine the moderating role of socioeconomic status or family background.
12. **Use Longitudinal Designs:** Track the same cohort of students from first to fourth year to see how spiritual leadership and ethical values develop over time; measure the long-term impact of intervention programs.

7.5 Recommendations for National Education Policy Makers

13. **Incorporate Spiritual Leadership into National Education Strategies:** The Iraqi Ministry of Higher Education should issue guidelines for universities to adopt spiritual leadership frameworks; include ethical value entrenchment as a key performance indicator for university accreditation.
14. **Fund Research and Conferences:** Allocate research grants for studies on spiritual leadership in Iraqi higher education; host annual national conferences on ethics and leadership in universities.
15. **Build International Partnerships:** Collaborate with universities and research centers specializing in spiritual leadership (e.g., in Malaysia, Turkey, the US) to exchange best practices.

7.6 Final Recommendation Statement

It is strongly recommended that Future University – Iraq take immediate steps to establish a **Center for Spiritual Leadership and Ethical Development**. This center would coordinate all the above activities: training, curriculum integration, mentorship programs, research, and community outreach. By doing so, the university will not only enhance its educational quality but also fulfill its societal mission of producing graduates who are both competent and morally grounded.

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