



Faith-Inspired Educational Leadership for Character Formation in Indonesian Theological Higher Education: An Integrative Qualitative Study

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ABSTRACT

The increasing complexity of educational leadership in Indonesian theological higher education requires models that extend beyond managerial competence toward holistic character formation. Although previous scholarship has examined Christian virtue formation, faith-inspired praxis, humanistic leadership, servant leadership, and ethical or spiritual authority, these perspectives have rarely been integrated into a unified framework for theological higher education in Indonesia. This study develops the Faith-Inspired Educational Leadership (FIEL) Model through a purposive integrative qualitative synthesis of four recent peer-reviewed studies addressing Christian character formation, faith-inspired praxis, humanistic leadership, and ethical or spiritual authority. The study used directed content analysis to identify recurring concepts, compare their functions, and synthesise them into four interconnected dimensions. The findings indicate that virtue-centred character formation provides the moral foundation of leadership; faith-inspired praxis translates Christian convictions into institutional practice; humanistic relational leadership fosters trust, collaboration, and human flourishing; and ethical spiritual authority safeguards institutional integrity through accountability and shared stewardship. The model is interpreted within the Indonesian context of theological higher education, including relevant regulatory and governance requirements. The FIEL Model contributes conceptually by specifying how Christian faith integrates character, organisational practice, relational leadership, and ethical authority within a unified institutional framework. Its distinctiveness lies in defining the institutional relationships and functions of these dimensions rather than merely aggregating existing leadership perspectives. The study offers practical implications for leadership development, quality assurance, and governance in Indonesian theological colleges.

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Introduction

Higher education institutions are increasingly expected to develop graduates who possess not only academic competence but also ethical integrity, collaborative capacity, and responsible leadership. Within Indonesian theological higher education, these expectations become even more significant because theological institutions are entrusted with preparing future church leaders, educators, pastors, missionaries, and Christian

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scholars whose influence extends beyond classrooms into churches and wider society. Consequently, educational leadership within theological institutions cannot be understood merely as administrative management. Still, it must be viewed as a holistic process that integrates spiritual formation, ethical leadership, institutional governance, and character development.

Recent developments in higher education have demonstrated that institutional excellence is no longer determined solely by accreditation outcomes, research productivity, or technological advancement. Instead, attention has increasingly focused on institutional culture, organisational trust, ethical leadership, and character formation as essential components of educational quality. This global shift is particularly relevant for Christian higher education because its educational mission has historically emphasised forming the whole person rather than merely transmitting disciplinary knowledge. Character formation, spiritual maturity, and servant leadership therefore remain central educational objectives that distinguish theological education from many secular higher education institutions.

In Indonesia, theological colleges face additional challenges from rapid social transformation, digitalisation, globalisation, religious pluralism, and changing expectations of church leadership. The rapid expansion of digital technology and artificial intelligence has transformed educational delivery while simultaneously raising concerns regarding declining interpersonal relationships, weakened moral responsibility, and increasing individualism. These developments require educational leaders who possess not only managerial competencies but also spiritual wisdom, relational sensitivity, ethical discernment, and the ability to cultivate institutional cultures grounded in Christian values.

The Indonesian context also includes a distinctive regulatory and institutional environment. Higher education is expected to contribute not only to knowledge and professional competence but also to developing graduates who are cultured, tolerant, democratic, and characterised by integrity (Government of Indonesia, 2012). Religious higher education is further governed by a specific national framework for the organisation and administration of religious higher education (Government of Indonesia, 2019). For Christian theological institutions, this means that leadership operates at the intersection of academic quality, institutional governance, religious identity, and the formation of students for ministry and public service. Current institutional planning within the Directorate General of Christian Guidance also emphasises strengthening institutional quality, governance, and the contribution of Christian religious higher education to society (Directorate General of Christian Guidance, 2026a). Accordingly, a leadership framework for Indonesian theological higher education should connect institutional accountability with the formative and spiritual purposes of theological education rather than treating them as separate domains.

Although leadership has become one of the most extensively researched topics in educational studies, existing leadership theories often emphasise organisational effectiveness, instructional improvement, transformational change, or distributed governance without adequately integrating the theological foundations that shape leadership within Christian institutions. Transformational leadership, servant leadership, instructional leadership, and authentic leadership each offer valuable perspectives on organisational development. However, these approaches often fall short of explaining how Christian faith actively shapes institutional leadership, educational relationships, and character formation within theological higher education.

Similarly, scholarship on Christian higher education has increasingly emphasised virtue formation, institutional mission, and holistic education. Recent work has argued

that Christian institutions require systematic approaches to character education that intentionally integrate theological reflection, educational practice, psychological assessment, and institutional collaboration, rather than treating character development as an implicit outcome of religious instruction alone (Tausen, Erickson, Nienhuis, and Jalalian-Chursky, 2026). These developments indicate that effective educational leadership should not simply administer academic programs but should intentionally cultivate institutional environments that encourage virtue formation among students, faculty members, and institutional leaders.

Another emerging stream of scholarship highlights the importance of faith-inspired praxis. Rather than viewing faith as merely a private belief system, this perspective argues that faith motivates compassionate action, reciprocal relationships, hospitality, shared responsibility, and positive social transformation. Faith becomes visible through everyday organisational practices that embody love, justice, and relational commitment (Eaton, 2026). Such insights provide an important contribution for educational leadership because they reposition leadership as relational practice rather than hierarchical authority.

In parallel, studies grounded in humanistic perspectives emphasise that helping professions should prioritise empathy, human dignity, authenticity, and unconditional positive regard in professional practice. Humanistic leadership therefore encourages educational leaders to recognise students, educators, and institutional stakeholders as persons whose flourishing requires supportive relationships rather than bureaucratic control (Chigangaidze, 2026). Within theological education, these principles resonate strongly with biblical understandings of servant leadership and community formation.

Nevertheless, contemporary discussions concerning religious leadership have also exposed the potential misuse of spiritual authority. Research concerning spiritual abuse demonstrates that religious authority can become distorted when leadership relies upon manipulation, coercion, excessive control, or unquestionable authority rather than ethical accountability and pastoral care (Kalvari, 2026). These findings highlight the need to integrate ethical spiritual authority into educational leadership models so that theological institutions cultivate leaders who exercise influence through integrity, humility, and service rather than domination.

Despite these important developments, significant gaps remain within existing scholarship. First, previous studies generally investigate virtue formation, faith-inspired praxis, humanistic leadership, and ethical spiritual authority as separate theoretical domains. Second, scholars have paid limited attention to how these perspectives can be integrated into a comprehensive educational leadership framework designed for Indonesian theological higher education. Third, existing educational leadership literature has rarely proposed conceptual models that explicitly position Christian faith as the central integrative foundation connecting institutional governance, relational leadership, and character formation.

Importantly, this study's gap should be distinguished from an absence of empirical evidence. Existing scholarship provides substantial conceptual and empirical insights into Christian character formation, faith-inspired praxis, relational leadership, and ethical or spiritual authority. The more specific gap is the lack of an integrative conceptual framework explaining how these dimensions function together within the institutional setting of Indonesian theological higher education. Accordingly, this study does not claim that existing leadership approaches are empirically ineffective or that Indonesian theological institutions lack leadership practices. Rather, it addresses a conceptual gap by specifying the institutional relationships among these dimensions and proposing a framework that can subsequently be subjected to empirical validation.

However, the Indonesian grounding of existing leadership discussions remains underdeveloped. Indonesian scholarship has examined leadership in theological institutions and the management of Christian religious higher education, including the relevance of spiritually grounded and visionary leadership for managing Christian religious colleges (Giawa, 2019). Other research has identified governance, institutional management, human resources, academic development, and quality assurance as important challenges in improving the quality of Christian religious higher education in Indonesia (Karnawati, 2024). Recent Indonesian scholarship has also emphasised the importance of Christian leadership models for leaders in theological colleges, particularly the need to move beyond authoritarian patterns toward leadership grounded in Christian and biblical principles (Kalintabu & Kumowal, 2023). These studies provide an important contextual foundation, but they do not yet establish an integrative framework connecting character formation, faith-inspired praxis, relational leadership, and ethical spiritual authority within one institutional model.

The Indonesian context is therefore not simply an illustrative setting for the proposed framework. It represents a distinctive institutional environment in which academic governance, church or denominational authority, regulatory accountability, institutional quality, and the formative mission of theological education intersect. The present study responds to this context by developing a conceptual framework that connects these dimensions rather than treating them as separate domains.

Methods

Research Design. This study employed an integrative qualitative approach using directed content analysis to construct a conceptual framework for faith-inspired educational leadership in Indonesian theological higher education. The study is conceptual rather than empirical: it does not claim to measure leadership practices in Indonesian institutions. Instead, it uses qualitative synthesis to examine how established concepts can be integrated into a coherent leadership framework. Directed content analysis was selected because the analysis began with four theoretically relevant domains identified from the literature—Christian character formation, faith-inspired praxis, humanistic leadership, and ethical spiritual authority—while remaining open to relationships that emerged during synthesis.

Literature Selection and Analytical Corpus. The analytical corpus consisted of four recent peer-reviewed journal studies that were purposively selected because each represents one of the four complementary domains required for the proposed model. The inclusion criteria were: (1) the study had to address a clearly identifiable leadership, character-formation, faith-practice, humanistic-relational, or ethical-spiritual concept; (2) the concept had to apply to organizational, educational, or faith-based practice; (3) the publication had to provide sufficient conceptual or qualitative material for thematic analysis; and (4) the study had to contribute a distinct conceptual component rather than duplicate another source. The four selected studies were Chigangaidze (2026), Eaton (2026), Kalvari (2026), and Tausen et al. (2026). These four studies were considered sufficiently representative for this conceptual synthesis because they provided complementary rather than redundant conceptual domains corresponding to the four dimensions of the proposed FIEL Model. The selection was therefore theory-driven rather than intended to represent the entire body of literature on educational or Christian leadership. During the selection process, studies were screened for conceptual relevance, applicability to educational or faith-based organisational practice, and their ability to contribute a distinct analytical component. Studies that did not provide a sufficiently identifiable contribution to one of the four domains or substantially duplicated the

conceptual focus of another selected study were excluded from the analytical corpus. This purposive screening process was intended to maximise conceptual complementarity rather than statistical or bibliometric representativeness.

Because the study is an integrative conceptual synthesis rather than a systematic review, it does not claim an exhaustive database search or statistical representation of the literature.

Coding, Analysis, and Synthesis. Each article was read repeatedly and coded for concepts related to leadership identity, institutional culture, faith and practice, character formation, relational processes, authority, accountability, and organisational outcomes. First-cycle coding identified concepts most directly associated with each study. In the second cycle, conceptually similar codes were grouped into broader categories. These categories were then compared across the four sources to identify complementarity, overlap, and functional differences. The final synthesis mapped each domain to a primary function within educational leadership: moral formation, translation of faith into organisational action, relational integration, and ethical safeguarding. The four functions were then examined as mutually reinforcing rather than sequential components. This process generated the FIEL Model and provided the basis for interpreting its relevance to Indonesian theological higher education, including institutional governance, quality assurance, leadership development, and character formation.

Coding consistency was maintained through repeated reading of each study, comparison of codes across analytical cycles, and the use of a consistent coding framework based on the predefined domains of character formation, faith-inspired praxis, relational leadership, and ethical spiritual authority. Initial codes were reviewed against the original texts to ensure that interpretations remained grounded in the selected studies. Where concepts overlapped across domains, they were compared according to their primary function rather than assigned exclusively on the basis of terminology. This iterative comparison helped distinguish conceptual similarity from functional difference and supported the coherence of the final synthesis.

Results and Discussion

Virtue-Centered Character Formation: Establishing the Moral Foundation of Educational Leadership

The synthesis identified that character formation constitutes the foundational dimension of educational leadership within theological higher education. Across the analysed studies, leadership is consistently portrayed not merely as an administrative responsibility but as a formative process that intentionally shapes institutional values, personal integrity, and communal identity. In the context of Christian education, character formation cannot be separated from the theological and missional identity of education. Sirait and Windarti (2024) emphasise that Christian character formation involves more than moral and intellectual development; it is oriented toward transformation through the values of God's Kingdom and the formation of learners whose character reflects Christ and supports participation in Christian mission. This perspective reinforces the finding that character formation in theological higher education should not be understood merely as an individual leadership competency but as an institutional and formative process embedded within the broader theological and missional purpose of Christian education.

Rather than positioning virtue development as a secondary educational outcome, the studies collectively indicate that character formation functions as the organisational foundation upon which educational leadership is constructed. This finding challenges

conventional approaches to educational leadership that primarily emphasise organisational effectiveness, strategic planning, or instructional improvement. Although these perspectives remain important, they do not adequately explain the distinctive mission of theological higher education, where leadership is expected to nurture both academic excellence and spiritual maturity. Consequently, educational leadership should be understood as a process of cultivating institutional environments that consistently reinforce Christian virtues such as humility, wisdom, compassion, justice, integrity, and faithfulness. In this sense, the formation of Christ-reflecting character is not an additional outcome of theological education but an essential expression of its theological identity and participation in Christian mission.

The findings further indicate that virtue formation is not confined to classroom instruction or theological courses. Instead, character is cultivated through institutional culture, organisational policies, mentoring relationships, curriculum design, faculty interactions, and administrative decision-making. Educational leaders therefore become architects of institutional culture, shaping environments in which Christian virtues are repeatedly practised, embodied, and internalised throughout the academic community. Such an approach is consistent with the understanding of Christian education as transformative formation, in which educational processes contribute to the development of persons whose lives and practices reflect the values of the Kingdom of God and equip them for participation in Christian mission (Sirait & Windarti, 2024). Thus, the formative responsibility of educational leadership extends beyond what leaders teach to encompass the institutional environments they create and sustain.

Within the Indonesian context, this finding has significant implications. Many theological institutions continue to evaluate educational quality primarily through accreditation outcomes, publication productivity, faculty qualifications, and administrative compliance. While these indicators remain essential for institutional accountability, they do not fully capture the theological purpose of Christian higher education. The findings suggest that institutional excellence should also be evaluated according to the extent to which educational leadership intentionally cultivates Christian character among students, lecturers, and institutional leaders. Such evaluation requires attention not only to measurable academic outcomes but also to the extent to which institutional practices embody and reproduce the Christian virtues that constitute the identity and mission of theological education.

From a theoretical perspective, this finding extends servant leadership theory by shifting the locus of virtue formation from the individual leader to the institution as a whole. Servant leadership traditionally emphasises the leader's orientation toward serving, empowering, and developing followers (Greenleaf, 1977; van Dierendonck, 2011). While these commitments provide an important foundation for Christian leadership, they do not by themselves specify how virtue formation should be systematically embedded within institutional structures. The FIEL Model therefore adds an institutional dimension: Christian virtues are not treated only as qualities that individual leaders should possess, but as organisational values that should be intentionally reinforced through policies, mentoring systems, curriculum design, faculty practices, governance processes, and institutional culture. The distinctive contribution of the FIEL Model is consequently the institutionalisation of virtue formation as a leadership responsibility rather than merely the cultivation of virtuous individual leaders.

Character formation, therefore, is not simply a consequence of educational leadership; it is the moral and theological foundation from which educational leadership derives its legitimacy, institutional credibility, and long-term effectiveness. By locating character formation at the intersection of Christian education, institutional culture, and

educational leadership, the FIEL Model conceptualises theological higher education as a formative community in which leadership itself becomes an instrument of Christian formation and mission.

Faith-Inspired Praxis: Translating Christian Faith into Organisational Leadership

The second theme demonstrates that faith functions as the primary organisational force that transforms theological conviction into educational practice. Rather than understanding faith as a private spiritual belief, the analysis indicates that faith becomes meaningful only when expressed through institutional behaviours characterised by compassion, hospitality, collaboration, and shared responsibility.

This finding suggests that educational leadership within theological institutions cannot be separated from organisational practice. Institutional mission statements frequently articulate Christian values; however, those values become educationally meaningful only when reflected in daily interactions among institutional leaders, lecturers, administrative staff, and students. Leadership therefore becomes the practical embodiment of institutional theology.

The analysis identifies four organisational expressions of faith-inspired praxis.

First, educational leadership promotes hospitality, creating inclusive learning environments where students experience acceptance, dignity, and belonging.

Second, leaders cultivate collaboration, replacing hierarchical relationships with shared responsibility for institutional development.

Third, institutional leadership demonstrates compassion, ensuring that organisational decisions prioritise human well-being alongside academic performance.

Finally, leadership encourages service-oriented decision-making, recognising education as a ministry rather than merely an administrative enterprise.

Collectively, these practices establish organisational cultures in which Christian faith becomes visible through everyday institutional life rather than remaining confined to doctrinal instruction.

This finding is particularly relevant for Indonesian theological colleges operating within culturally diverse contexts. In theological education, institutional credibility may be experienced not only through formal theological statements but also through students' everyday encounters with institutional leaders, lecturers, administrative staff, and organisational practices. This interpretation is consistent with the broader literature on relational trust and organisational culture, which emphasises that institutional values become credible when they are consistently embodied in everyday relationships and practices (Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Schein & Schein, 2017).

Moreover, faith-inspired praxis contributes directly to organisational learning. Institutions characterised by collaboration, openness, and mutual respect encourage creativity, innovation, and collective problem-solving more effectively than organisations dominated by hierarchical control. Leadership therefore facilitates both spiritual formation and institutional effectiveness simultaneously.

Faith becomes educational leadership only when theological convictions are consistently translated into organisational practices that cultivate trust, collaboration, compassion, and institutional service.

Humanistic Relational Leadership: Creating Flourishing Learning Communities

The synthesis identified humanistic relational leadership as the third dimension of the proposed Faith-Inspired Educational Leadership (FIEL) Model. Unlike conventional leadership approaches that primarily emphasise authority, organisational efficiency, and managerial performance, the findings demonstrate that effective educational leadership

within theological higher education is fundamentally relational. Leadership effectiveness is therefore measured not only by institutional achievements but also by the quality of relationships cultivated among institutional leaders, faculty members, administrative staff, and students.

The analysed literature consistently emphasises that leadership should be grounded in the recognition of human dignity, compassion, empathy, and mutual care. In particular, the humanistic perspective presented through the Good Samaritan narrative demonstrates that authentic leadership begins with recognising the intrinsic worth of every individual regardless of social status, institutional position, or personal background. Leadership consequently becomes an expression of compassionate service that prioritises human flourishing over organisational control.

This finding is consistent with Rogers' (1961) person-centred theory, which argues that authentic relationships are established through empathy, genuineness, and unconditional positive regard. Rogers maintains that individuals develop most effectively when they experience supportive environments characterised by trust and acceptance. Similarly, Maslow's (1970) hierarchy of needs suggests that human growth occurs when organisations intentionally cultivate psychological safety, belongingness, and opportunities for self-actualisation. Applied to theological higher education, these perspectives indicate that educational leadership should create institutional environments where both academic excellence and spiritual development can flourish simultaneously.

The present findings also resonate with organisational leadership literature emphasising relational trust as a prerequisite for institutional improvement. Bryk and Schneider (2002) argue that schools characterised by high levels of relational trust consistently demonstrate stronger organisational performance because trust encourages collaboration, innovation, and collective responsibility. Likewise, Hargreaves and O'Connor (2018) introduce the concept of *collaborative professionalism*, emphasising that sustainable educational improvement depends upon relationships built on mutual respect, shared expertise, and collective learning rather than hierarchical supervision.

Within Indonesian theological higher education, these findings carry significant contextual implications. Many theological institutions continue to operate within organisational cultures influenced by hierarchical ecclesiastical traditions. While hierarchical leadership may provide administrative clarity, excessive dependence on centralised authority frequently limits institutional dialogue, discourages innovation, and reduces opportunities for collaborative decision-making. Consequently, educational leadership that prioritises organisational control rather than relational engagement risks creating institutional cultures characterised by dependency rather than empowerment.

Humanistic relational leadership offers an alternative paradigm. Rather than positioning institutional leaders as controllers of organisational processes, this perspective views leaders as facilitators of learning communities. Leaders intentionally cultivate environments where lecturers function not only as academic experts but also as mentors who accompany students through intellectual, spiritual, and personal development. Similarly, administrative staff become active partners in institutional mission rather than merely supporting academic operations.

This relational orientation is particularly important in theological education because leadership formation occurs primarily through observation and participation. Students often develop leadership habits not only through formal classroom instruction but also by observing how lecturers interact with colleagues, how administrators resolve conflict, and how institutional leaders exercise authority. Consequently, institutional

relationships themselves become powerful pedagogical instruments that shape future Christian leaders.

Furthermore, the findings indicate that compassionate leadership strengthens institutional resilience. Contemporary theological institutions increasingly face complex challenges, including declining student enrollment, technological disruption, financial uncertainty, denominational diversity, and changing expectations regarding educational quality. Institutions characterised by high levels of relational trust generally demonstrate greater adaptive capacity because organisational members willingly share responsibility, communicate openly, and collaboratively address institutional problems. This interpretation supports Fullan's (2014) argument that sustainable educational change depends primarily upon collaborative cultures rather than technical reforms alone.

Another important implication concerns faculty development. Educational leadership frequently focuses upon improving research productivity, curriculum quality, and accreditation performance. Although these objectives remain important, the present findings suggest that faculty development should also intentionally strengthen emotional intelligence, mentoring competencies, intercultural communication, and relational leadership. Such competencies directly influence students' experiences of theological education and contribute significantly to institutional culture.

The findings further extend servant leadership theory. Greenleaf (1977) originally argued that authentic leadership begins with the desire to serve others before exercising authority. Subsequent scholarship by van Dierendonck (2011) demonstrates that servant leadership enhances organisational commitment, trust, and employee well-being by emphasising empowerment and relational stewardship. The present study expands these perspectives by suggesting that relational leadership should not remain an individual leadership style but should instead become an institutional characteristic embedded throughout organisational structures, educational policies, and community practices.

This interpretation also contributes to discussions concerning organisational culture. Schein (2017) argues that organisational culture develops through shared assumptions learned by groups as they solve problems collectively. Within theological institutions, educational leaders therefore play a decisive role in shaping institutional culture through the values they consistently model, reinforce, and institutionalise. Humanistic relational leadership consequently becomes the social mechanism through which Christian virtues are translated into everyday institutional experiences.

Collectively, these findings demonstrate that institutional flourishing is inseparable from relational quality. Educational leadership succeeds not because leaders possess greater authority but because they cultivate communities characterised by empathy, collaboration, mutual respect, and shared responsibility. These relational qualities strengthen organisational trust, encourage innovation, and create educational environments in which holistic character formation can occur sustainably.

The present findings support previous studies emphasising servant leadership (Greenleaf, 1977; van Dierendonck, 2011) and collaborative professionalism (Hargreaves & O'Connor, 2018), while extending these perspectives by integrating humanistic leadership with Christian character formation and faith-inspired organisational practice. Unlike approaches that primarily examine interpersonal leadership behaviours, the FIEL Model conceptualises relational leadership as an institutional capability embedded in organisational culture, educational processes, and leadership formation. Humanistic relational leadership therefore functions as the organisational bridge through which Christian virtues are translated into everyday institutional relationships, strengthening trust, collaboration, and sustainable character formation.

Institutional flourishing emerges from relational trust rather than hierarchical control. Educational leadership becomes transformative when human dignity, empathy, collaboration, and mutual responsibility are intentionally embedded within institutional culture.

Ethical Spiritual Authority: Safeguarding Institutional Integrity through Faith-Inspired Leadership

The fourth theme identified through the synthesis concerns the role of ethical spiritual authority as the integrative dimension of educational leadership within Indonesian theological higher education. Unlike conventional leadership theories that primarily emphasise organisational power, positional authority, or administrative competence, the present findings demonstrate that spiritual authority should be exercised as a form of ethical stewardship rooted in humility, accountability, and service. Consequently, leadership legitimacy is derived not from institutional position but from moral credibility and relational integrity.

The analysed literature consistently indicates that spiritual authority possesses transformative potential when exercised responsibly, yet it may also become a source of institutional dysfunction when detached from ethical accountability. Studies concerning spiritual abuse reveal that leadership within faith-based organisations may unintentionally create environments characterised by excessive control, manipulation, fear, and unquestioned obedience when authority is not balanced by transparency and shared responsibility. Such practices weaken organisational trust, inhibit personal growth, and ultimately compromise the educational mission of theological institutions.

This finding is particularly relevant for theological higher education in Indonesia, where institutional leadership frequently intersects with ecclesiastical authority. In many theological colleges, institutional leaders simultaneously function as pastors, denominational representatives, or senior theological scholars. While this dual responsibility may strengthen institutional identity, it also increases the possibility that organisational decisions become excessively centralised. When theological authority is interpreted as unquestionable institutional authority, opportunities for dialogue, collaborative decision-making, and critical reflection become increasingly limited.

From the perspective of educational leadership, ethical authority should therefore be understood as shared stewardship rather than centralised control. Northouse (2022) argues that ethical leadership requires leaders to promote fairness, respect, honesty, and responsibility while ensuring that organisational decisions contribute to the well-being of all stakeholders. Similarly, Brown and Treviño (2006) define ethical leadership as the demonstration of normatively appropriate conduct through personal actions, interpersonal relationships, and decision-making processes that encourage ethical behaviour throughout organisations. These perspectives reinforce the present findings that educational leadership derives its effectiveness from moral legitimacy rather than institutional hierarchy.

The present findings further resonate with transformational leadership theory. Burns (1978) originally proposed that transformational leaders elevate followers' moral purpose rather than merely directing organisational performance. Bass and Riggio (2006) subsequently argued that transformational leadership encourages commitment through idealised influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualised consideration. However, the current analysis extends these theories by suggesting that within theological higher education, transformational influence should also be evaluated according to the ethical use of spiritual authority. Leadership becomes transformative not

simply because it inspires organisational change but because it cultivates institutional integrity grounded in Christian values.

The findings also support the concept of spiritual leadership developed by Fry (2003), who argues that leadership should integrate vision, hope, faith, and altruistic love to create intrinsically motivated organisational cultures. Nevertheless, this study proposes that spiritual leadership alone remains insufficient if not accompanied by institutional accountability mechanisms. Ethical governance, transparent decision-making, participatory leadership structures, and organisational oversight are essential safeguards ensuring that spiritual influence remains consistent with Christian principles of humility and servant leadership.

Within Indonesian theological institutions, this insight carries significant implications. Rapid changes in higher education require leaders who are capable of responding adaptively to accreditation standards, technological transformation, financial sustainability, and increasingly diverse student populations. These challenges cannot be addressed through authoritarian leadership models that rely upon centralised decision-making. Instead, educational leadership should encourage distributed responsibility, organisational learning, and collaborative governance. Leithwood et al. (2020) similarly argue that sustainable educational improvement depends upon leadership practices that empower organisational members rather than concentrating authority in a single individual.

Another important implication concerns institutional trust. Bryk and Schneider (2002) emphasise that relational trust is the social resource through which schools achieve continuous improvement. The present findings extend this argument by demonstrating that trust within theological institutions is closely associated with the ethical exercise of spiritual authority. Students, lecturers, and institutional staff are more likely to demonstrate organisational commitment when leadership consistently exhibits transparency, fairness, compassion, and accountability. Ethical authority therefore functions as the organisational mechanism that strengthens institutional legitimacy while simultaneously supporting character formation.

The synthesis further suggests that ethical authority protects institutions from what may be described as a fear-based organisational culture. Institutions characterised by excessive dependence on charismatic leadership often experience limited innovation, reduced critical thinking, and diminished collaborative engagement because organisational members hesitate to express alternative perspectives. By contrast, the proposed FIEL Model encourages a trust-based organisational culture, in which authority is exercised through dialogue, shared discernment, and mutual accountability. Such environments not only strengthen institutional governance but also cultivate future Christian leaders capable of exercising authority responsibly within churches, educational institutions, and broader society.

Consequently, ethical spiritual authority should no longer be interpreted merely as an individual leadership characteristic. Rather, it should become an institutional principle embedded within governance systems, faculty development, curriculum implementation, leadership succession, and quality assurance mechanisms. Through this institutionalisation, ethical leadership becomes sustainable rather than dependent upon individual personalities.

The present findings support previous scholarship on ethical leadership (Brown & Treviño, 2006; Northouse, 2022) and spiritual leadership (Fry, 2003), while extending these theories through their integration with Christian educational leadership. Unlike previous models that primarily focus on leadership behaviour or organisational effectiveness, the proposed Faith-Inspired Educational Leadership (FIEL) Model

conceptualises ethical spiritual authority as the institutional safeguard that maintains the coherence between Christian faith, organisational governance, and character formation. This integrative perspective represents a distinct contribution to educational leadership within theological higher education.

This study contributes to educational leadership scholarship by demonstrating that ethical spiritual authority serves as the institutional safeguard that preserves leadership integrity, organizational trust, and sustainable character formation. Rather than treating ethics as a supplementary leadership competency, the FIEL Model positions ethical authority as the central mechanism through which Christian educational leadership maintains institutional legitimacy and prevents the misuse of religious power.

Ethical spiritual authority transforms leadership from institutional control into institutional stewardship. Leadership becomes transformative when authority is exercised through humility, accountability, transparency, participation, and service rather than domination and coercion.

Proposed Faith-Inspired Educational Leadership (FIEL) Model

The synthesis of the four themes demonstrates that educational leadership in theological higher education should not be understood as a collection of independent leadership competencies. Rather, the analysis reveals that effective leadership emerges through the dynamic interaction of four interdependent dimensions that collectively shape institutional culture, character formation, and organisational transformation. Based on these findings, this study proposes the Faith-Inspired Educational Leadership (FIEL) Model as an integrated framework for educational leadership within Indonesian theological higher education.

Unlike conventional educational leadership models that primarily emphasise instructional improvement, managerial effectiveness, or organisational performance (Hallinger, 2011; Leithwood et al., 2020), the proposed FIEL Model positions Christian faith as the foundational source from which educational leadership derives its identity, ethical orientation, and institutional purpose. Consequently, leadership is understood not merely as an administrative function but as a theological vocation that integrates spiritual formation, organisational stewardship, relational engagement, and institutional transformation.

The first dimension of the model is virtue-centred character formation. The findings indicate that leadership begins with the cultivation of Christian virtues that shape leaders' moral identity before influencing organisational structures or educational practices. Character therefore functions as the moral infrastructure of leadership rather than as an outcome achieved after effective leadership has been exercised. This interpretation is consistent with the argument that sustainable leadership depends upon leaders whose decisions are guided by integrity, humility, justice, compassion, and wisdom rather than technical competence alone (Arthur, 2021; Lickona, 1991). Within theological higher education, virtue formation establishes the ethical foundation upon which institutional credibility is built.

The second dimension, faith-inspired praxis, translates theological convictions into observable organisational practices. The findings demonstrate that Christian faith becomes meaningful only when expressed through hospitality, collaboration, shared responsibility, and service-oriented leadership. This interpretation aligns with Freire's (1970) concept of praxis as the integration of reflection and action while extending it into the context of Christian educational leadership. Educational leaders therefore become interpreters of institutional mission who embody theological convictions through organisational culture, educational policy, and daily institutional relationships.

Consequently, faith no longer remains merely doctrinal but becomes operational within institutional life.

The third dimension concerns humanistic relational leadership, which functions as the relational mechanism connecting institutional values with educational practice. Drawing upon humanistic educational philosophy (Rogers, 1961; Maslow, 1970) and collaborative educational leadership (Hargreaves & O'Connor, 2018), the findings indicate that sustainable institutional development depends primarily upon the quality of interpersonal relationships rather than hierarchical authority. Educational leaders cultivate organisational trust by promoting empathy, dialogue, collaboration, and mutual respect. Such relational environments encourage innovation, strengthen institutional resilience, and facilitate holistic student formation.

The fourth dimension, ethical spiritual authority, integrates the preceding dimensions by ensuring that institutional influence remains accountable to Christian ethical principles. While spiritual authority is indispensable within theological education, the analysis indicates that its legitimacy depends upon humility, transparency, accountability, and participatory governance. This finding extends ethical leadership theory (Brown & Treviño, 2006; Northouse, 2022) by proposing that spiritual authority should function as institutional stewardship rather than centralised control. Ethical authority therefore protects theological institutions from authoritarian practices while simultaneously strengthening organisational trust and educational integrity.

Importantly, the four dimensions should not be interpreted as sequential stages that operate independently. Instead, they form a continuous and mutually reinforcing cycle of educational leadership. Virtue-centred character formation shapes the leader's identity, faith-inspired praxis translates that identity into organisational action, humanistic relational leadership strengthens institutional relationships, and ethical spiritual authority safeguards organisational integrity. The successful integration of these four dimensions produces an institutional culture that promotes holistic character formation, collaborative learning, ethical governance, and sustainable organisational transformation.

A critical comparison clarifies the specific contribution of the FIEL Model. Servant leadership provides a strong account of service, empowerment, and stewardship, but its primary analytical focus remains the leader's orientation toward followers rather than the institutional integration of Christian character, faith-informed organisational practice, and accountability structures. Spiritual leadership explicitly incorporates faith, hope, vision, and altruistic love, yet its emphasis on spiritual influence does not necessarily specify how such influence should be institutionally constrained through governance and accountability mechanisms. Humanistic leadership contributes a strong account of dignity, empathy, and flourishing, but these concepts are not inherently grounded in Christian theological identity. Ethical leadership, meanwhile, provides principles of fairness, responsibility, and appropriate conduct, but ethics can remain a general leadership competency rather than a form of explicitly Christian spiritual stewardship.

The FIEL Model addresses these differences by assigning each perspective a distinct institutional function and connecting them through Christian faith as the integrative foundation. Character formation establishes moral identity; faith-inspired praxis translates theological conviction into organizational practice; humanistic relational leadership provides the relational mechanism for trust and flourishing; and ethical spiritual authority provides the accountability mechanism that safeguards the responsible exercise of religious influence. The contribution of FIEL therefore lies not simply in combining four perspectives, but in specifying how their functions interact within the institutional ecology of theological higher education.

From a theoretical perspective, the FIEL Model extends several dominant leadership theories. Servant leadership emphasises service (Greenleaf, 1977; van Dierendonck, 2011), transformational leadership highlights organisational change (Bass & Riggio, 2006), instructional leadership focuses on teaching improvement (Hallinger, 2011), and spiritual leadership emphasises vision and intrinsic motivation (Fry, 2003). While each perspective contributes valuable insights, none sufficiently explains how Christian faith systematically shapes educational leadership within theological higher education. The FIEL Model addresses this gap by integrating theological anthropology, organisational leadership, character education, and educational governance into a unified conceptual framework.

The model also provides practical implications for theological institutions in Indonesia. Leadership development programs should integrate theological formation, ethical reasoning, emotional intelligence, organisational leadership, and collaborative governance rather than emphasising administrative competence alone. Likewise, institutional quality assurance should include indicators related to organisational trust, ethical leadership, character formation, mentoring relationships, and institutional culture in addition to traditional academic performance measures. Such an approach enables theological institutions to evaluate success not only through accreditation outcomes or research productivity but also through their effectiveness in forming graduates who embody Christian virtues and servant leadership.

Overall, the proposed FIEL Model offers a contextually relevant framework capable of strengthening educational leadership within Indonesian theological higher education while contributing to broader discussions concerning values-based leadership, faith-based educational governance, and character-centred organisational development.

Table. The Faith-Inspired Educational Leadership (FIEL) Model

Dimension	Primary Function	Organizational Process	Expected Outcome
Virtue-Centered Character Formation	Builds moral identity	Cultivation of Christian virtues	Character-based leadership
Faith-Inspired Praxis	Translates faith into practice	Hospitality, collaboration, service	Faith-driven institutional culture
Humanistic Relational Leadership	Strengthens organisational relationships	Trust, empathy, mentoring, collaboration	Flourishing learning community
Ethical Spiritual Authority	Safeguards institutional integrity	Accountability, transparency, stewardship	Sustainable educational leadership

The principal contribution of this study is the development of the Faith-Inspired Educational Leadership (FIEL) Model, which conceptualises educational leadership as the integration of virtue-centred character formation, faith-inspired praxis, humanistic relational leadership, and ethical spiritual authority. Unlike existing leadership frameworks that examine these dimensions separately, the FIEL Model demonstrates how they interact as a coherent system to shape institutional culture and leadership within theological higher education. This integrated framework provides both a theoretical contribution to educational leadership scholarship and a practical guide for

strengthening leadership development and institutional governance in Indonesian theological higher education.

It should be emphasised that the FIEL Model is conceptually derived from the selected literature and has not yet been empirically validated. Its proposed relationships among the four dimensions should therefore be understood as theoretically grounded propositions rather than empirically established causal relationships. The model provides a framework for subsequent empirical investigation rather than a validated measurement or predictive model.

Dimension	Institutional Function	Core Process	Expected Outcome
Virtue-Centered Character Formation	Establishes moral identity	Cultivating Christian virtues	Character-based leadership
Faith-Inspired Praxis	Translates faith into institutional practice	Hospitality, collaboration, service	Faith-shaped institutional culture
Humanistic Relational Leadership	Builds relational trust	Empathy, mentoring, dialogue, collaboration	Flourishing learning community
Ethical Spiritual Authority	Safeguards institutional integrity	Accountability, transparency, participation	Sustainable and trustworthy leadership

The four dimensions can therefore be expressed through four parallel institutional functions: character formation establishes moral identity; faith-inspired praxis translates conviction into institutional practice; relational leadership builds trust and human flourishing; and ethical spiritual authority safeguards institutional integrity. This functional parallelism clarifies that the dimensions are analytically distinct but institutionally interdependent.

The distinctiveness of the FIEL Model lies not in introducing four entirely new leadership concepts, but in specifying their institutional relationships and the function of Christian faith as their integrative foundation. Servant leadership emphasizes service and stewardship (Greenleaf, 1977; van Dierendonck, 2011); spiritual leadership emphasizes vision, hope, faith, and altruistic love (Fry, 2003); humanistic leadership foregrounds dignity, empathy, and human flourishing (Rogers, 1961; Maslow, 1970); and ethical leadership emphasizes fairness, responsibility, and normatively appropriate conduct (Brown & Treviño, 2006; Northouse, 2022). The FIEL Model brings these concerns into a theological higher-education framework by assigning each dimension a distinct institutional function. Virtue-centred character formation establishes the moral identity of leadership; faith-inspired praxis converts theological conviction into observable institutional practice; humanistic relational leadership provides the relational mechanism through which trust and collaboration are cultivated; and ethical spiritual authority provides the accountability mechanism that limits the misuse of religious power. The model therefore proposes a specific relationship among character, faith-informed action, relational culture, and ethical authority rather than merely placing four theories side by side. Distinctiveness of the FIEL Model

Conclusion

This study developed the Faith-Inspired Educational Leadership (FIEL) Model as an integrative conceptual framework for educational leadership in Indonesian theological higher education. The study does not claim to establish an empirically validated leadership model; rather, it develops a theoretically grounded framework through the purposive synthesis of four complementary domains in the selected literature. The synthesis demonstrates that leadership in theological higher education cannot be reduced to managerial competence or administrative effectiveness. Rather, it can be understood as a formative institutional process in which Christian virtues shape leadership identity, faith is translated into organisational practice, relationships cultivate human flourishing, and spiritual authority is exercised through accountability, transparency, participation, and service.

The FIEL Model consists of four mutually reinforcing dimensions: virtue-centred character formation, faith-inspired praxis, humanistic relational leadership, and ethical spiritual authority. Each dimension contributes a distinct but interconnected function. Character formation provides the moral foundation of leadership; faith-inspired praxis translates theological convictions into institutional action; relational leadership creates the social conditions for trust, collaboration, mentoring, and human flourishing; and ethical spiritual authority provides safeguards for the responsible exercise of influence. Together, these dimensions establish an institutional leadership logic in which Christian faith is not an additional leadership variable but an integrative foundation connecting identity, practice, relationships, governance, and character formation.

The model is particularly relevant to the Indonesian theological higher education context, where institutions are expected to strengthen educational quality, institutional governance, accountability, and public contribution while maintaining their distinctive theological and formative mission. The FIEL Model responds to this context by connecting institutional quality and governance with the spiritual and formative purposes of theological education. It provides a framework through which leadership development, faculty mentoring, student formation, organisational culture, ethical decision-making, and institutional governance can be understood as interconnected dimensions of institutional life rather than as separate functions.

The proposed model also has practical implications for theological higher education institutions. Leadership development programs should intentionally integrate theological formation, ethical leadership, emotional intelligence, relational competence, and organisational management rather than focusing primarily on administrative skills. Christian virtues should likewise be embedded across curriculum design, faculty mentoring, student services, governance systems, and community engagement so that character formation becomes an institutional responsibility rather than an isolated educational objective. Institutional governance should promote transparency, participatory decision-making, and shared accountability to strengthen organisational trust and reduce the potential misuse of spiritual authority. Faculty members should also be understood not only as academic instructors but as mentors whose relational engagement contributes significantly to students' spiritual, personal, and leadership formation. In this way, the FIEL Model can serve as a practical framework for leadership development, quality assurance, organisational reflection, and institutional self-evaluation in theological higher education.

Despite these contributions, several limitations should be acknowledged. First, this study is a conceptual synthesis based on four purposively selected international studies and therefore does not provide direct empirical evidence from Indonesian theological colleges. Second, the model's relevance to the Indonesian context is

theoretically argued rather than empirically tested. Third, although the selected literature represents complementary domains of leadership, it does not encompass the full breadth of scholarship on educational, Christian, and spiritual leadership. Consequently, the FIEL Model should be understood as a theoretically grounded conceptual framework that requires further empirical validation rather than as an established or validated measurement model. These limitations directly establish the agenda for future research. Because the FIEL Model has not yet been empirically validated, subsequent studies should test whether the four proposed dimensions are observable and distinguishable in actual theological higher education settings, whether the proposed institutional relationships are supported by empirical evidence, and which contextual factors influence their implementation. Qualitative case studies can first examine how the four dimensions are enacted in institutional practice, while quantitative research can subsequently operationalise and test their relationships through the development of a Faith-Inspired Educational Leadership Scale (FIELS).

Future research should therefore empirically examine the FIEL Model through qualitative, quantitative, and mixed-methods approaches. Multiple-case studies involving theological institutions across Indonesia could investigate how the four dimensions are enacted in institutional leadership practices and organisational cultures. Quantitative research could further operationalise the four dimensions and develop a Faith-Inspired Educational Leadership Scale (FIELS) to assess the model empirically. Longitudinal research would also be valuable for examining how the implementation of the FIEL Model influences organisational culture, institutional trust, faculty engagement, leadership succession, student character formation, and graduate outcomes over time. Comparative studies across Southeast Asia could further examine the model's applicability in different cultural and institutional contexts and contribute to the broader international discourse on Christian educational leadership in faith-based higher education.

Overall, the FIEL Model offers a conceptual foundation for understanding educational leadership as both an institutional and formative vocation. Its central contribution lies in bringing together character, faith, relationships, ethical authority, and institutional practice within a single leadership framework. Further empirical research is needed to test, refine, and potentially operationalise the model across diverse theological higher education contexts.

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