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## Validation of a Spirituality-Based School Counseling Model: Evidence from a Counselor Survey

*Validacija na duhovnosti temelječega modela šolskega svetovanja: ugotovitve raziskave med svetovalnimi delavci*

**Abstract:** The integration of spirituality into school counseling has received increasing attention within educational psychology; however, empirical evidence regarding its professional acceptance and implementation readiness remains limited. This study investigated school counselors' professional evaluations of a spirituality-based counseling model using a quantitative descriptive-evaluative methodology. A total of 114 counselors from various educational levels participated in the survey. The assessment instrument evaluated conceptual clarity, relevance to students' mental health needs, ease of implementation, practical utility as a counseling guide, and structural coherence. Data analysis employed descriptive statistics and Kendall's coefficient of concordance to determine the degree of agreement among counselors. Results demonstrated high mean scores across all dimensions, with the highest ratings for relevance to students' needs, and indicated a very strong level of professional consensus. These findings provide evidence of substantial professional legitimacy and a high degree of implementation readiness for school-based mental health services. The study positions spirituality as an ethical and evidence-based dimension that supports holistic student development and offers implications for counselor education, practice, and institutional policy.

**Keywords:** school-based mental health, school counseling, spirituality-based counseling, spiritual intelligence, professional consensus

**Izleček:** Vključevanje duhovnosti v šolsko svetovanje je v okviru izobraževalne psihologije deležno vse večje pozornosti, vendar so empirični dokazi glede njegovega strokovnega sprejemanja in pripravljenosti za izvajanje še vedno omejeni. Ta študija je z uporabo kvantitativne deskriptivno-evalvativne metodologije preučevala strokovne ocene šolskih svetovalcev glede svetovalnega modela, ki temelji na duhovnosti. V raziskavi je sodelovalo skupno 114 svetovalcev z različnih izobraževalnih ravni. Ocenjevalni instrument je meril konceptualno jasnost, ustreznost potrebam učencev na področju duševnega zdravja, enostavnost izvajanja, praktično uporabnost kot vodilo za svetovanje ter strukturno koherenco. Pri analizi podatkov so bile uporabljene deskriptivne statistike in Kendallov koeficient skladnosti za določitev stopnje soglasja med svetovalci. Rezultati so pokazali visoke povprečne ocene na vseh področjih – pri čemer so bile najvišje ocene podeljene za ustreznost potrebam učencev – ter nakazali zelo močno raven strokovnega soglasja. Ti izsledki dokazujejo znatno strokovno

*legitimnost in visoko stopnjo pripravljenosti za izvajanje storitev duševnega zdravja v šolah. Študija duhovnost umešča kot etično in na dokazih temelječo dimenzijo, ki podpira celostni razvoj učencev, ter ponuja implikacije za izobraževanje svetovalcev, prakso in institucionalno politiko.*

**Ključne besede:** duševno zdravje v šoli, šolsko svetovanje, svetovanje, ki temelji na duhovnosti, duhovna inteligentnost, strokovno soglasje

## Introduction

Over the past two decades, the fields of school guidance, counseling, and educational psychology have undergone a notable shift from primarily cognitive and emotional approaches to more holistic, integrative frameworks. This transformation situates school-based psychological services within a health services psychology model, emphasizing not only academic performance but also mental well-being, prevention of psychological disorders, and comprehensive individual development (Hughes and Minke 2015; Ajuwon et al. 2024). In this context, student mental health is conceptualized as a multidimensional construct that includes psychological, social, moral, and existential components (Chen 2025; Wong 2022).

Contemporary educational discourse increasingly emphasizes holistic and contemplative approaches that integrate intellectual, emotional, and spiritual dimensions into both learning processes and student support services. The contemplative educational framework underscores reflective awareness, the pursuit of meaning, and the integration of values as essential components for psychological well-being and character development (Wagle and Panta 2025; Kabat-Zinn 2003). Within this framework, spirituality is defined as the pursuit of meaning, life purpose, and core values that inform behavior and decision-making (Pargament et al. 2013; Webb et al. 2014). In the Indonesian context, spirituality is frequently closely associated with individuals' religious beliefs and values.

A clear distinction exists between spirituality and religiosity. Religiosity refers to systems of beliefs, practices, symbols, and affiliations associated with specific religious traditions. In contrast, spirituality is defined as an individual's capacity to seek meaning, establish a life purpose, internalize values, and develop deeper connections with oneself, others, nature, or a transcendent reality. The concept of meaning in life encompasses understanding one's existence, direction, and the values that inform



decision-making. Existential orientation addresses fundamental human concerns such as freedom, responsibility, suffering, limitations, choice, and hope (Frankl 1969; Längle 2003; Wong 2022). Counselors are advised to recognize this distinction to avoid rigid doctrinal approaches and instead support clients in discovering meaning, life purpose, and values consistent with their religious beliefs. In this context, doctrine can reinforce the client's sense of meaning in life, facilitating the development of a healthy mentality, positive character, and religious qualities. As Webb (2014) observes, spiritual experiences may be linked to religiosity. Therefore, the implementation of spiritual counseling in Indonesia should be connected to individuals' religious values, reflecting the noble values, regulations, and cultural context of Indonesian society, which are closely intertwined with religion. Recent literature in psychology and counseling consistently demonstrates a relationship between spirituality and mental health, resilience, and psychological well-being, particularly among adolescents and young adults. Correlational and meta-analytic studies indicate that spiritual orientation is negatively associated with depression, anxiety, stress, and burnout, and positively associated with psychological well-being and adaptive coping (King and DeCicco 2009; Smith et al. 2023; Fathi et al. 2022). These findings support the argument that spirituality is a relevant psychological resource that should be professionally integrated into counseling services, including in school settings. Within the traditions of logotherapy and existential psychology, logotherapy posits that the search for meaning is a fundamental human motivation, especially when individuals encounter suffering, stress, or a crisis of values (Frankl 1969; Lukas 1985). In the school context, this perspective is pertinent because many student problems extend beyond emotional or behavioral issues to include loss of direction, crises of purpose, value conflicts, and challenges in attributing meaning to learning experiences. Existential and meaning-centered counseling positions the counselor as a facilitator who assists students in reflecting on values, responsibilities, choices, and the meaning of life (Längle 2003; Wong 2022). Consequently, spirituality-based counseling is conceptually aligned with logotherapy, logopedagogy, and meaning-centered approaches, as these frameworks emphasize values, life purpose, responsibility, and holistic personal development.

In the realm of school counseling, recognizing the relevance of spirituality has direct implications for counselors' professional competency



requirements. Some researchers assert that religious and spiritual competencies should be an integral part of a school counselor's professional identity, not simply optional skills (Cashwell et al. 2021; Vieten et al. 2022). However, research also indicates a persistent gap between the theoretical recognition of spirituality's importance and counselors' practical readiness to integrate it. Niles and Gutiérrez (2024) and Sami et al. (2021) report that school counselor education and training still do not consistently include religious and spiritual competencies as core components of the curriculum, leaving many practitioners feeling less confident in addressing clients' spiritual concerns.

These limitations become even more problematic when combined with the complexity of the psychological issues students face in the contemporary era. Global evidence shows a significant increase in the prevalence of anxiety, depression, academic stress, and emotional disorders among adolescents and young adults, positioning schools as a strategic arena for mental health interventions (Chen 2025; Liu et al. 2023). Furthermore, several studies emphasize that students' psychological problems are often not isolated but are closely intertwined with social, value, and identity issues, necessitating a more comprehensive and contextualized counseling approach (Ajuwon et al. 2024; Hayes et al. 2021).

Several researchers have criticized the dominance of secular psychological approaches in education and counseling, which can potentially lead to spiritual reductionism. Sami et al. (2021) stated that ignoring the spiritual dimension can result in counseling services failing to capture clients' existential aspects and values that are meaningful to them. In the Indonesian context, similar findings were reported by Johan et al. (2025) and Wahyuni and Supriyanto (2023), who showed that guidance and counseling practices in schools are still dominated by modern secular psychological models with limited integration of spirituality, even though spirituality is normatively included in national education goals.

Empirical evidence suggests that counseling interventions that integrate spirituality can have a significant positive impact on psychological problems in educational settings. Meta-analyses of spirituality- and religiosity-based therapies show moderate to strong effects on reducing psychological symptoms and improving adaptive functioning (Captari et al.



2018; Liu et al. 2023). In educational contexts, non-sectarian spiritual interventions such as mindfulness, reflective meditation, and meaning-based counseling have also been shown to improve students' emotion regulation, empathy, and psychological well-being (Kabat-Zinn 2003; Widodo and Yuliana 2022). Studies based on religious contexts in Indonesia and other countries have also demonstrated the effectiveness of spiritual counseling in reducing academic anxiety and strengthening resilience (Fadheela and Fakhriya 2024; Yunita 2023).

Despite growing theoretical and empirical support for spirituality counseling, significant research gaps remain, particularly regarding implementation and professional acceptance. Most previous research has focused on the effectiveness of interventions for students as service recipients, while the perspectives of school counselors as professional users have received relatively little attention (Putri and Hidayat 2024; Lau and Ng 2023). However, the educational innovation literature confirms that the successful adoption of new approaches is largely determined by practitioners' perceptions of conceptual clarity, relevance to real-world problems, and ease of implementation (Fullan 2023; Jones and Cline 2024).

In this context, research systematically evaluating how school counselors perceive the spirituality counseling approach as a professional framework remains limited. This lack of evaluation based on counselor perceptions potentially hinders the widespread and sustained adoption of this approach, despite its conceptual and empirical promise. Furthermore, few studies have examined the consistency of counselors' collective judgments using statistically robust approaches, such as multi-rater consensus, to assess the professional legitimacy of an approach (Legendre 2021; Sheskin 2023).

The primary research gap addressed in this study concerns the limited number of studies that treat school counselors as the primary subjects of evaluation in spirituality-based counseling. Previous studies have generally focused on the effectiveness of spiritual interventions for clients or students, while counselors' understanding, readiness, experience, ethical orientation, and professional acceptance as implementers have been less systematically examined. The successful implementation of any school counseling innovation depends on whether counselors understand the



concept, feel prepared to use it, have relevant practical experience, adhere to clear ethical principles, and perceive the approach as relevant to students' needs (Fullan 2023; Jones and Cline 2024). Therefore, the novelty of this study lies in the analysis of counselors' professional assessments using a 15-item instrument that captures their understanding, readiness, experience, ethical orientation, and general perceptions of spirituality-based counseling.

Accordingly, this study addresses the following research questions: (1) To what extent do school counselors understand spirituality-based counseling? (2) How professionally prepared are counselors to integrate spirituality into counseling services? (3) What experiences do counselors report in addressing students' spiritual concerns? (4) How do counselors interpret the ethical principles required for spiritual counseling that is both religiously informed and sensitive to diversity? (5) What are counselors' overall perceptions regarding the relevance and necessity of integrating spirituality-based counseling into school guidance and counseling services? The study hypothesizes that school counselors will provide positive evaluations of spirituality-based counseling, particularly regarding ethical orientation and general perceptions, while technical readiness and formal training experience may receive comparatively lower ratings.

This study contributes to the literature by positioning school counselors as the primary evaluators of a spirituality-based counseling approach. The analysis focuses on counselors' assessments of conceptual clarity, relevance, ease of implementation, and practical usefulness, and evaluates the degree of professional consensus as an indicator of implementation readiness. The findings provide an empirical foundation for the development and integration of spirituality-based counseling within Indonesian school guidance and counseling services, while also informing the international literature on professional acceptance of value- and meaning-based counseling innovation. Given the prominence of social, religious, and cultural values in the Indonesian educational context, these findings should be interpreted within this framework. The results pertain specifically to the practice of spirituality-based counseling in Indonesia, which is characterized by sensitivity to religious and cultural diversity. In practice, spiritual counseling assists clients in finding meaning in their challenges in alignment with their religious values. Although this approach may



be applicable in other countries, its effectiveness depends on grounding its values in clients' beliefs.

## **1 Method**

### **1.1 Research Design**

This study used a quantitative descriptive-evaluative design to examine school counselors' professional assessments of a spirituality-based counseling approach. This design was chosen because it aligns with the orientation of school psychology research, which emphasizes evaluating the acceptability, feasibility, and readiness for implementation of school-based mental health service approaches from a practitioner perspective. The study focused not on testing intervention effectiveness or causal relationships, but rather on assessing the conceptual quality and practical relevance of the counseling framework as perceived by counselors practicing directly in school settings. This evaluative approach aligns with trends in contemporary school psychology research that view practitioners' professional judgment as a critical component in the development and adoption of school-based service innovations, particularly for conceptually and culturally sensitive approaches.

### **1.2 Participant**

The study included 114 school counselors from various levels of formal education, including elementary, junior high, senior high, vocational high, and Islamic religious schools. This cross-level representation enhances the ecological validity of the findings and supports interpretation within the context of diverse school-based mental health services. Participants' work experience ranged from 1 to 30 years, with an average of approximately 12 years, indicating that most were counselors with intermediate to advanced practice experience. These assessments are likely to reflect a mature professional understanding of student needs and school counseling practice. Recruitment was conducted using a simple random sampling (convenience sampling) method, which is commonly used in descriptive-evaluative research to identify trends in professional perceptions. However, the findings should not be directly generalized



to all school counselors. It is possible that counselors who chose to participate had a greater interest in spirituality, school counseling innovation, or professional development, which may have contributed to the relatively positive evaluations. Consequently, these results should be interpreted as a preliminary description of professional acceptance rather than a definitive representation of the national school counselor population (Creswell and Creswell 2018).

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire developed to evaluate five key dimensions of a spirituality-based counseling approach: (1) conceptual clarity, (2) relevance to students' mental health needs, (3) ease of implementation in the school context, (4) practical usefulness as a guide for counseling services, and (5) coherence in the presentation structure of the approach. These dimensions were selected because they represent key criteria commonly used in the school psychology literature to assess readiness for implementation of a service approach. Each dimension was measured using a five-point Likert scale, with responses ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Content validity of the instrument was established through an expert review involving senior school counselors and academics in the field of guidance and counseling, to ensure the appropriateness of the indicators to the context of school psychology practice and the clarity of the wording of the statements.

To address the broader dimensions of counselor perceptions, this study also used a 15-item questionnaire with a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). These 15 items were developed to describe five aspects of counselor acceptance of spirituality-based counseling: conceptual understanding, professional readiness, counseling experience or practice, ethical orientation, and general perceptions of the relevance of implementation. Conceptual understanding included items on the distinction between spirituality and religiosity, the role of spirituality in student character formation, and the ability to identify students' spiritual needs. Professional readiness included competencies in integrating spiritual values, in presenting the spiritual dimension without violating professional boundaries, and in training or academic reading. Practical experience included items on exploring the meaning of life, values, life purpose, reflective decision-making, and counseling techniques aimed at spiritual self-awareness. Ethical orientation included items on avoiding



the imposition of particular religious beliefs, respecting spiritual diversity, and emphasizing compassion, empathy, and forgiveness as counseling values. General perceptions include views on the role of spirituality in fostering students' inner peace, the relevance of spirituality-based counseling across educational levels, and the need to integrate this approach into school guidance and counseling curricula.

Operationally, conceptual understanding refers to the counselor's ability to differentiate between and integrate spirituality and religiosity, and to identify spiritual needs in student problems. Professional readiness is defined as the counselor's perceived competencies, strategies, and academic preparation for integrating spiritual values into counseling. Practical experience encompasses the counselor's involvement in exploring meaning, values, life purpose, reflection, and spiritual self-awareness during counseling. Ethical orientation is defined as the counselor's commitment to implementing spirituality-based counseling inclusively, without imposing specific beliefs, and with respect for students' spiritual diversity. General perception refers to the counselor's views on the benefits, relevance, and necessity of integrating spirituality-based counseling into school guidance and counseling services.

In addition to the 15-item instrument, five evaluative items were used to assess the quality of the spirituality-based counseling model or book as an academic-practical product. These five evaluative items covered conceptual clarity, relevance to students' real-life problems, ease of implementation, practical usefulness as a service guide, and coherence of presentation structure. Thus, this study combined two layers of evaluation: the 15-item instrument described counselors' understanding, readiness, experience, ethical orientation, and general perceptions, while the five evaluative items assessed the quality of the model or book as a product. This distinction is important so that product evaluation is not equated with counselors' overall professional preparedness.

Content validity was established through expert review by academics and practitioners in guidance and counseling, ensuring that each item was suitable to the construct, clear in wording, and relevant to school counseling practice. Following data collection, internal reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha. Corrected item-total correlations and alpha values



for removed items were also analyzed to determine whether each item adequately contributed to the overall scale (Creswell and Creswell 2018; Sheskin 2023).

### **1.3 Procedure**

Data collection was conducted online for one month using a digital questionnaire platform. The questionnaire link was distributed through a professional network of school counselors to reach participants from various regions. All participants received written information about the study's purpose, the voluntary nature of participation, and assurances of anonymity and confidentiality. Consent to participate was implicitly obtained through participants' continued completion of the questionnaire.

### **1.4 Data analysis**

Data analysis was conducted in two stages. First, descriptive statistics were calculated to describe the general trends in counselors' ratings of each evaluation dimension, including mean scores and standard deviations. This analysis was used to identify the level of ratings and variation in responses among participants. Second, Kendall's Coefficient of Concordance (Kendall's  $W$ ) was used to examine the level of professional agreement among counselors in assessing spirituality-based counseling approaches. Kendall's  $W$  is a nonparametric statistical test suitable for ordinal-scale data and involves multiple raters evaluating the same set of criteria. The coefficient ranges from 0 to 1, with higher values indicating stronger agreement. The statistical significance of the coefficient was tested using the chi-square ( $\chi^2$ ) test to ensure that the level of agreement obtained was not due to chance. The use of Kendall's  $W$  allows for a more comprehensive assessment of the consistency of counselors' professional perceptions, thus providing a strong empirical basis for assessing readiness to implement spirituality-based counseling approaches in school mental health services.

Data analysis was conducted in several additional steps. First, descriptive statistics were calculated for each of the 15 items across the following aspects: conceptual understanding, professional readiness, practice experience, ethical orientation, and general perception. Second, internal consistency was examined using Cronbach's alpha, and the contribution



of each item was evaluated using corrected item-total correlations and alphas after deleting each item. Third, work experience was analyzed descriptively and grouped into professional stages to examine whether acceptance patterns differed across experience levels. Fourth, non-parametric analyses were used to compare acceptance scores across experience groups because the data were ordinal and not intended for causal inference. These analyses were used to strengthen the interpretation of counselor professional acceptance without overstating the study as an effectiveness test.

2 Results

2.1 Descriptive statistics of counselor assessments

Descriptive statistical analysis was conducted to describe trends in school counselors' assessments of the spirituality-based counseling approach across five evaluation dimensions. Table 1 presents the mean scores and standard deviations for each dimension.

| Evaluation dimensions               | Means | Standard deviation |
|-------------------------------------|-------|--------------------|
| Conceptual clarity                  | 4.42  | 0.53               |
| Relevance to student needs          | 4.56  | 0.49               |
| Ease of implementation in schools   | 4.31  | 0.58               |
| Practical use as a counseling guide | 4.47  | 0.51               |
| Coherence of presentation structure | 4.39  | 0.55               |

**Table 1:** Descriptive statistics of counselors’ assessments of spirituality-based counseling approaches (N = 114)

The results in Table 1 show that all dimensions had mean scores above 4.00 on a five-point Likert scale. The dimension of relevance to student needs showed the highest mean score (M = 4.56; SD = 0.49), followed by practical usefulness as a counseling guide (M = 4.47; SD = 0.51) and conceptual clarity (M = 4.42; SD = 0.53). The relatively low standard



deviation across dimensions indicates that counselors' assessments were homogeneous and did not exhibit extreme variation among respondents.

## **2.2 Additional analysis of the 15-item counselor perception instrument**

Analysis of the 15-item instrument showed a high overall mean score ( $M = 3.82$ ). At the aspect level, ethical orientation scored highest ( $M = 4.18$ ;  $S = 0.84$ ), followed by general perception of implementation relevance ( $M = 4.14$ ;  $SD = 0.85$ ), practical experience in spiritual exploration ( $M = 3.85$ ;  $SD = 0.91$ ), conceptual understanding ( $M = 3.79$ ;  $SD = 0.75$ ), and professional readiness ( $M = 3.15$ ;  $SD = 0.92$ ). This pattern suggests that counselors have strong ethical acceptance and positive general perceptions of spirituality-based counseling, but technical readiness and training experience remain areas requiring further development.

The highest-scoring item indicated that spirituality is considered an important aspect in shaping students' character ( $M = 4.39$ ;  $SD = 0.83$ ). The lowest-scoring item pertained to experiences attending training or reading academic references on spirituality-based counseling ( $M = 2.59$ ;  $SD = 1.28$ ). These findings reveal a gap between normative-conceptual acceptance and training-based professional readiness. While counselors generally view spirituality as important and ethically relevant, not all possess sufficient formal preparation to systematically integrate it into counseling practice.

Reliability analysis indicated that the 15-item instrument had excellent internal consistency (Cronbach's  $\alpha = 0.933$ ). Corrected item-total correlations ranged from 0.461 to 0.788, indicating that all items made an acceptable contribution to the overall construct. Alpha values when items were removed ranged from 0.925 to 0.937, indicating that no item substantially reduced the instrument's internal consistency. These results support the use of the 15-item instrument as a consistent measure of counselors' understanding, readiness, experience, ethical orientation, and general perceptions of spirituality-based counseling.



2.3 Professional agreement between counselors

To assess the consistency of professional judgment among school counselors, a Kendall’s Coefficient of Concordance (Kendall’s W) analysis was conducted. This analysis aimed to examine the extent to which counselors had a uniform level of agreement in assessing the quality of spirituality-based counseling approaches.

| Parameter   | Sign    |
|-------------|---------|
| Kendall's W | 0.842   |
| $\chi^2$    | 382.17  |
| df          | 4       |
| p-value     | < 0.001 |

**Table 2:** Kendall’s Concordance Coefficient (W) for counselor ratings (N = 114)

The analysis results showed a Kendall’s W value of 0.842 with a statistically significant chi-square value ( $\chi^2(4) = 382.17, p < 0.001$ ). This value indicates a very strong level of agreement among school counselors in their assessment of the five dimensions of the spirituality-based counseling approach.

2.4 School counselor work experience analysis

As an important context for interpreting professional judgment regarding spirituality-based counseling approaches, a descriptive analysis of school counselors’ work experience was conducted. Of the 114 participants, valid data on work experience length were obtained for 113. The participants’ work experience ranged from 1 to 30 years, with a mean of 11.90 years (SD = 6.83) and a median of 11 years. This median value indicates that half of the counselors had more than a decade of work experience, indicating a relatively high level of professional maturity in this study sample.

The distribution of work experience spans a broad range, from novice counselors to senior counselors with decades of experience. The most common age groups were 10–14 and 15–19 years, which together



accounted for nearly half of the participants. Counselors with  $\geq 20$  years of experience were also well-represented, albeit in smaller numbers.

| Range of experience (years) | Number of counselors (n) | Percentage (%) | Average (year) | Standard deviation (year) | Professional category               |
|-----------------------------|--------------------------|----------------|----------------|---------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| 1–4 years                   | 17                       | 15.04          | 2.47           | 1.07                      | Beginner counselor                  |
| 5–9 years                   | 24                       | 21.24          | 6.88           | 1.32                      | Early-intermediate level counselors |
| 10–14 years                 | 28                       | 24.78          | 12.14          | 1.35                      | Mid-level counselor                 |
| 15–19 years                 | 26                       | 23.01          | 16.65          | 1.41                      | Senior high school counselor        |
| $\geq 20$ years             | 18                       | 15.93          | 22.94          | 3.64                      | Senior counselor                    |
| Total                       | 113                      | 100.00         | 11.90          | 6.83                      | —                                   |

**Table 3:** Distribution of school counselors’ work experience by year range (N = 113)

The data in Table 3 indicate that counselors’ work experience is relatively evenly distributed across career development stages. The novice counselor group (1–4 years) showed low experience variation (SD = 1.07), whereas the senior counselor group ( $\geq 20$  years) showed greater variation (SD = 3.64), reflecting the heterogeneity of career trajectories in later professional phases. Overall, this composition of work experience suggests that assessments of spirituality-based counseling approaches are based on a heterogeneous yet mature group of professionals, thereby strengthening the empirical context of the study’s main findings.

Further analysis based on work experience showed that the average acceptance score increased from the 1–4 years experience group to the 15–19 years experience group. The difference between experience groups was not statistically significant (Kruskal-Wallis  $H = 5.34$ ;  $p = 0.255$ ). Spearman’s correlation indicated a weak but significant positive



relationship between work experience length and total acceptance score ( $\rho = 0.191$ ;  $p = 0.042$ ). These findings suggest that work experience may contribute to more mature professional judgment, but it is not the sole factor determining counselors' acceptance of spirituality-based counseling. Other factors, such as training, theoretical orientation, case management experience, and school culture, warrant further investigation in future studies.

### 3 Discussion

#### 3.1 Spirituality counseling in the contemporary school psychology landscape

The findings of this study should be read in the context of developments in school psychology and guidance and counseling over the past two decades, which have marked a shift from a predominantly secular psychological paradigm to a more holistic, contextual approach. Recent literature confirms that school-based mental health services are no longer understood solely as interventions for psychological disorders, but rather as developmental support systems encompassing students' cognitive, emotional, social, and existential aspects (Hughes and Minke 2015; Ajuwon et al. 2024; Chen 2025).

In this context, spirituality is increasingly positioned as a valid and relevant psychological dimension, particularly in efforts to strengthen students' resilience, meaning in life, and psychological well-being. The framework of contemplative education and psycho-spiritual resilience emphasizes that the integration of the spiritual dimension is not intended to replace evidence-based psychological approaches, but rather to complement them with internal resources that are often the primary resource for students in dealing with academic stress, value conflicts, and identity confusion (Wagle and Panta 2025; Sumaiya et al. 2025).

The results of this study indicate high, consistent ratings from school counselors for a spirituality-based counseling approach, providing empirical support for its acceptance as an integral component of modern school psychology practice. This finding aligns with international recommendations



that religious and spiritual competencies should be considered core professional competencies for school counselors, rather than optional additions (Niles and Gutiérrez 2024; Sami et al. 2021). However, these high scores require critical interpretation. Positive evaluations may reflect the perceived relevance of spirituality-based counseling to students' values, character development, and psychological needs, but may also be influenced by social and professional norms that position spirituality as a morally desirable dimension. The possibility of social desirability bias cannot be excluded. These findings should not be interpreted as evidence of the effectiveness of spirituality-based counseling in improving student mental health outcomes. Instead, they provide preliminary evidence of professional acceptance, readiness for implementation, and perceived legitimacy among counselors.

### **3.2 Professional consensus as legitimization of practice**

One of the major contributions of this study lies in the discovery of a very strong level of professional consensus among school counselors, as indicated by high Kendall's W scores. In the school psychology and counseling literature, professional consensus has a meaning that goes beyond simply the reliability of assessments. Consensus reflects the practical legitimacy of an approach and serves as an early indicator of readiness for implementation in educational service systems (Fullan 2016; Jones and Cline 2024).

Counseling approaches that are theoretically compelling but lack collective acceptance among practitioners, risk being adopted only sporadically or not at all. In contrast, the strong consensus findings in this study indicate that the spirituality counseling approach is not perceived as a marginal or controversial framework, but rather as one that aligns with the realities of school counseling practice. This is important given that prior literature often reports practitioner ambivalence or even resistance to integrating spirituality due to concerns about religious bias, ethical constraints, and lack of formal training (Sami et al. 2021; Oxhandler and Pargament 2018).

In the context of International School Psychology, findings of professional consensus, such as this, have strategic value because they demonstrate that integrating spirituality is not merely a normative or cultural issue but has gained empirical ground as a widely accepted practice within the



professional community. Thus, this study contributes to the international literature by providing evidence that a spirituality-based counseling approach has professional legitimacy in multicultural school settings.

From a cross-cultural perspective, the professional acceptance of spirituality-based counseling in this study must be understood in the context of the Indonesian educational system. This approach may be meaningful in contexts where spiritual and moral values are integrated into educational goals, but its application to other systems requires careful adaptation. In secular or highly pluralistic contexts, this model must be explicitly framed as meaning-centered, value-sensitive, non-coercive, and respectful of students' diverse beliefs. Thus, spirituality-based counseling should be understood as a culturally responsive psychological approach rather than a universal technique that can be applied identically across settings.

### **3.3 Work experience and validity of professional assessment**

The diversity of counselors' work experience, from novice to senior counselors with over two decades of experience, strengthens the credibility of this study's findings. Counseling literature indicates that professional experience influences clinical judgment, sensitivity to context, and attitudes toward practice innovation (Canda and Furman 2019; Fullan 2016). Counselors with extensive experience tend to be more selective and critical in adopting new approaches, having been exposed to a variety of emerging and disappearing models throughout their careers.

Therefore, the finding that senior counselors also expressed positive evaluations and high approval of the spirituality counseling approach has important implications. This suggests that acceptance of this approach is driven not only by novice counselors' enthusiasm but also by experienced counselors' thoughtful professional judgment. This finding aligns with research showing that approaches that successfully cross professional generational boundaries are more likely to be institutionalized within school service systems (Jones and Cline 2024).

Furthermore, the relatively even distribution of work experience across career development stages reduces the likelihood of extreme assessment bias. In other words, the consensus found in this study can be understood



as a reflection of assessment across career stages, rather than a predominance of any particular group. Within the framework of international school psychology, this strengthens the claim that a spirituality counseling approach has the potential to be relevant across contexts and across generations of professionals.

### **3.4 Spiritual intelligence as a psychological mechanism in school counseling**

One theoretical framework supporting this study's findings is the concept of Spiritual Intelligence (SI). SI is understood as an individual's capacity to make sense of life experiences, integrate transcendent values into decision-making, and maintain reflective awareness in the face of stress and uncertainty (King and DeCicco 2009; King 2008). In the context of school psychology, SI provides a psychological mechanism that bridges the cognitive, emotional, and existential dimensions, which are often fragmented in conventional counseling approaches.

The literature shows that spirituality has a consistent negative relationship with depression, anxiety, stress, and burnout, as well as a positive relationship with resilience, psychological well-being, and self-regulation (King and DeCicco 2009; Smith et al. 2023; Fathi et al. 2022). This finding is relevant, as school counselors rated spirituality-based counseling approaches as both relevant and beneficial for addressing students' needs. These positive assessments can be understood as reflecting counselors' professional awareness of the importance of meaning and value dimensions in supporting students' mental health.

Furthermore, SI dimensions such as critical existential thinking and the production of personal meaning are conceptually aligned with modern educational goals that emphasize character development, self-reflection, and readiness to face life's challenges (Vaughan 2002; Zohar and Marshall 2004). In the school context, strengthening SI through counseling can help students interpret academic and social experiences more adaptively, thereby reducing the risk of long-term psychological distress.



### **3.5 Synthesis of empirical evidence: meta-analysis and experimental studies**

The findings of this study also align with growing empirical evidence supporting the effectiveness of spirituality-based interventions. A meta-analysis by Captari et al. (2018) of 23 randomized controlled trials showed that therapies integrating religious and spiritual dimensions had moderate to strong effects in reducing psychological symptoms and improving clients' adaptive functioning. These effects were found to persist through a six-month follow-up period, particularly in clients with depression.

Another more recent meta-analysis also confirmed similar findings. Liu et al. (2023) reported that spiritually integrated psychotherapy significantly improved psychological well-being compared with purely secular approaches, particularly among adolescents and young adults. In educational contexts, non-sectarian spiritual interventions such as mindfulness-based interventions, reflective meditation, and self-awareness training have been shown to improve emotion regulation, empathy, and prosocial behavior in school settings (Kabat-Zinn 2003; Felver et al. 2016; Zenner et al. 2014).

Experimental studies across various cultural contexts have also shown that spirituality-based counseling approaches can be safely and effectively adapted. For example, Fadheela and Fakhriya (2024) demonstrated that dhikr-based Islamic counseling significantly reduced academic anxiety in college students, while Jong and Visser (2023) found that spirituality can mediate the negative impact of scrupulosity on mental health. These findings suggest that spirituality serves as a more adaptive coping mechanism.

In relation to this research, such empirical evidence provides a strong context for understanding why school counselors highly value spiritual counseling approaches. This evaluation aligns with a growing international literature that increasingly recognizes the effectiveness of scientifically designed spiritual approaches.



### **3.6 Implications for school psychology practice and educational policy**

The findings of this study have important implications for school psychology practice, particularly in the development of school-based mental health services. First, the results suggest that a spirituality counseling approach can be integrated into preventive and promotional services rather than used simply as an add-on intervention for isolated cases. This aligns with the multilevel systems of support (MTSS) model, which emphasizes both universal and selective interventions to broadly improve student well-being (Sugai and Horner 2020).

Second, high professional acceptance indicates the need to strengthen religious and spiritual competencies in school counselor education and training. Several international professional organizations have emphasized the importance of these competencies for ethical practice and for responsiveness to client diversity (Vieten et al. 2022; Cashwell et al. 2021). In this context, the findings of this study support the argument that counselor education curriculum development should explicitly include evidence-based training on integrating spirituality and professional ethics.

Third, in the context of educational policy, integrating a spirituality counseling approach can support the goals of character education and student personality development. In many educational systems, including Indonesia, educational goals encompass not only academic achievement but also the formation of values, morals, and social responsibility (Johan et al. 2025; Wahyuni and Supriyanto 2023). A counseling approach that scientifically integrates the spiritual dimension has the potential to bridge these policy goals with the practice of school psychology services.

These findings imply that counselor education and professional development programs should move beyond introducing spirituality as a general value and instead provide concrete competencies for its ethical implementation. Training should address conceptual distinctions between spirituality and religiosity, assessment of students' spiritual needs, ethical boundaries in spiritual counseling, reflective techniques for exploring meaning in life, and strategies for respecting religious diversity. At the policy level, spirituality-based counseling can be integrated into curative,



preventive, and developmental guidance services. This integration aligns with the goal of school counseling to support students' holistic development while maintaining professional ethics and respecting diversity.

#### **4 Limitations and further research agenda**

Despite its significant empirical and theoretical contributions, this study has limitations that warrant consideration. First, its descriptive-evaluative design does not allow for testing causal relationships between the use of a spirituality counseling approach and student mental health outcomes. Future research should employ longitudinal or experimental designs to examine the long-term impact of this approach. Second, although there is strong professional consensus regarding readiness for implementation, this study did not examine individual factors influencing counselors' judgments, such as theoretical orientation, spiritual training background, or the school's cultural context. Further research combining quantitative and qualitative approaches could provide a deeper understanding of these dynamics (Creswell and Plano Clark 2018). Third, cross-national research is needed to examine whether similar patterns of professional acceptance emerge across different cultural contexts and educational systems.

Several additional methodological limitations need to be acknowledged. First, the descriptive-evaluative design does not allow for causal conclusions regarding the effectiveness of spirituality-based counseling on student learning outcomes, mental health, or behavior change. Second, the use of self-report questionnaire data makes the findings susceptible to subjectivity and social desirability bias. Third, although the internal reliability of the 15-item instrument was high, construct validity should be further examined through exploratory or confirmatory factor analysis using a larger, more diverse sample. Fourth, convenience sampling limits the generalizability of the findings. Consequently, the conclusions should be understood as preliminary evidence of professional acceptance and readiness rather than as definitive proof of the intervention's effectiveness.



## Conclusion

This study demonstrates that a spirituality-based counseling approach received high and consistent professional ratings from school counselors across all evaluation dimensions, including conceptual clarity, relevance to student needs, ease of implementation, practical usefulness, and coherence of the approach's structure. The very strong level of professional agreement among school counselors, as indicated by Kendall's Coefficient of Concordance, suggests that positive perceptions of this approach are collective and cross-disciplinary across diverse work experience backgrounds. These findings provide a strong empirical basis for professional legitimacy and implementation readiness in school-based mental health services. Both theoretically and practically, the findings support the position of spirituality as a valid and relevant psychological dimension in contemporary school psychology practice, particularly when formulated in an ethical and evidence-based manner. A spirituality-based counseling approach has the potential to broaden the scope of school counseling interventions by addressing increasingly important aspects, such as meaning, values, and resilience, to address the complexity of student problems. Although this study is evaluative and has methodological limitations, the results provide a strong starting point for further research and for developing school counselor policies and training that are more responsive to students' mental health needs and holistic development.

Analysis of the 15-item instrument indicates that school counselors demonstrate relatively high acceptance of spirituality-based counseling, particularly regarding ethical orientation and general perception. Counselors regard spirituality as important for character formation, inner peace, value reflection, and the development of school counseling services. However, lower scores on training experience and technical readiness suggest that further professional preparation is required. Thus, spirituality-based counseling demonstrates initial professional legitimacy in Indonesian school guidance and counseling, provided it is implemented ethically, inclusively, in alignment with religious values, and supported by evidence-based training.



## Data Availability Statement

The research data on which this article is based are available in Zenodo under DOI number 10.5281/zenodo.21453293 (Novitasari and Susanto 2026).

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