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REVIEW

The Silent Script and Spoken Word: A Systematic Review of Tourist Managerial Policy and Guide Competency in Islamic Heritage Sites

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ABSTRACT

There has always been a struggle of balancing the sanctity of religious places with the growing need for tourism at Islamic heritage sites all over the world. This paper investigates how the phenomenon of a "silent script" of managerial policy and the "spoken word" of guide competency intersect to balance Islam and heritage tourism. Based on a PRISMA-informed search conducted in Scopus and Web of Science on research articles published between 2000 and 2025, the review synthesizes 58 empirical and conceptual contributions. Three interrelated themes are highlighted by the analysis: the central role of spiritually-informed stewardship in shaping management policy, the contribution of interpretive skill to expanding visitor engagement, and the critical function of feedback loops that link policy development to on-the-ground guiding practices. Based upon these understandings, the Integrated Spiritual–Stewardship Model is built, which combines spiritual leadership principles with heritage interpretation theory to explain how unilateral management-guide transmission and bidirectional exchanges between the two groups can support both sacred values maintenance and visitor experience quality. The results are of direct policy relevance to site managers and authorities: criteria for spiritual leadership should be introduced into management plans; guide training programmes organized around interpretive and spiritual facilitation skills should be developed; structured feedback mechanisms between front-line guides and decision-makers should be

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institutionalized to support sustainable, ethically-based governance of Islamic heritage destinations.

Keywords: Islamic Heritage Tourism; Spiritual Stewardship; Heritage Interpretation; Guide Competency; Site Management; Systematic Review; Sustainable Tourism

1. Introduction

Islamic landmarks such as the Great Mosque of Córdoba and the Dome of the Rock are testaments to ages of faith, culture and inspiring architectural prowess. Those hallowed precincts inspire reverence and contemplation, but are also becoming ever more a beacon to those seeking the ways of our time for cultural resonance, the illumination of knowledge. This duality generates a complex paradox: how can site owners maintain the spiritual sanctity of the sites while also capitalising on the benefits of the commercializing heritage tourism [1, 2]?

The problem focus is on this very tension of sacred versus commercial. "On one level, we need to care for heritage in a respectful manner that respects its religious value and significance; on the other hand, there are pressure from tourism that can turn sacred into arcade and superficial consumption of heritage or something to be commodified [3]; thus, destroying essential spiritual stimuli and degradation of ethical values." Policies, or "silent script", that regulate visitor behavior, conservation practices and community involvement are frequently devised by managers [4, 5]. A jack of all trades, guides promote the "spoken word," translating policy and giving meaning to visitors on the spot. However, these two roles often operate in isolation from each other, and as a result, there can be a disconnect between policy intention and what happens on the ground.

This lacuma in literature is apparent: while works have considered management frameworks [1, 4] and guide competencies (independently) [6, 7], little has approached the overlap between managerial policy and guide practice in Islamic heritage settings systematically. This disconnection detracts from genuine visitor experiences and our ability to experience the spiritual dimension of these places.

In order to meet this lack, the present review asks three research questions:

RQ1: How is the spiritual stewardship of Islamic heritage sites conceptualized to be managed?

RQ2: What are the competences of guides in effectively interpreting the spiritual and cultural dimension of Islamic heritage?

RQ3: What are the interactions between managerial policies and guide practices to enhance visitor experience and the sustainability of a site?

After this introduction, the paper is organized as follows. Theoretical foundations and framework Section 2 begins with a discussion of the theoretical underpinning, which combines Spiritual Leadership Theory—in which leaders act as stewards of vision, altruistic love and hope/faith [8, 9]—with Heritage Interpretation Theory [10, 11]—focusing on provocation, holistic engagement and first-hand experience. Methodology is explained in section 3, which presents a PRISMA-based systematic literature review over the Scopus and Web of Science sources with clear PICOS. Section 4 is the synthesis of themes and main findings, divided into (1) the manager as spiritual guardian, (2) the guide as spiritual translator and interpreter, and (3) the relationship between policy and practice. Section 5 presents the findings and introduces the Integrated Spiritual-Stewardship Model that illustrates a two-way flow of policy, resources, and feedback between managers and guides. Section 6 closes with implications, limitations and future research, such as empirical testing of the model, developing scales for spiritual stewardship and interpretation competence and cross–national comparative studies.

Islamic heritage also must be contextualized within the overall pantheon of religious and spiritual heritage loci across the globe, where experiences on such a long list of sites (cathedrals to temples and pilgrimage routes) face similar challenges with commodification, mass visitation and authenticity. Against this international background, heritage and religious tourism research has also tended to analyse sets of managerial policy structures either in isolation from face-to-face guiding activity on the ground or more narrowly tour guiding/interpretation without systematically embedding such skills within broader governance and leadership literatures. This work is also methodologically diverse, with many of the studies being narrative reviews or single-

context case studies without a systematic, PRISMA-based synthesis of how policy and guiding meet in sacred places. This is precisely the gap that the current study addresses by providing a systematically PRISMA-mapped systematic review of both managerial "silent scripts" and guide "spoken words" in Islamic heritage contexts, while simultaneously narrowing in on their converging points as well as those divergences. Drawing on this body of evidence, the article makes a further advancement by introducing the Integrated Spiritual–Stewardship Model—a different heritage and religious tourism framework than in previous research as it explicitly integrates Ledlie's (2004) Spiritual Leadership Theory with heritage interpretation and foregrounds bidirectional feedback loops between managers and guides as a facilitator to mediating the sacred–commercial tension, rather than stewardship and interpretation being separate but related areas. In this context, the study attempts, from a holistic perspective, to overcome siloed approaches and propose an integrated approach as well as a robust structure that effectively marries together sacred mission and sound management of Islamic heritage tourism through this systematic review.

2. Theoretical Foundation

This suggests that if ever there was a theoretical accomplishment, such a complex challenge as the management of Islamic heritage sites must surely be it. Needing to view theoretical lenses in isolation will not suffice for mapping out the interrelationship of multiple dynamic forces. The present review is therefore based on the dual application of two compatible theoretical paradigms in religious tourism, namely Spiritual Leadership Theory and Heritage Interpretation Theory. The dual framing presents a robust conceptual framework for enabling a differentiation of the lattice of relations that underlie the "speechless screenplay" of manager functioning and the "verbal form" of guide competence. First, they propose the essential but often disparate realms of responsibility within the organisational sphere and territory of responsibility that extends beyond the location itself, creating a conceptual framework through which to view the spiritual continuity of values in the emerging Islamic heritage tourism market. Together, these two theoretical strands comprise the Integrated Spiritual–Stewardship Model, and the model contributes to existing heritage, religious, and spiritual tourism frameworks in three primary ways: First, unlike traditional heritage interpretations that examine leadership and interpretation as existing but separate theoretical entities, the model intentionally merges Spiritual Leadership Theory with heritage interpretation.

Second, it reimagines the relationship between managers and guides as a mutual policy–practice loop. Third, the model foregrounds the sacred versus commercial tension by portraying how spiritually grounded policy and interpretive practice might cohesively insulate the sanctity of Islamic heritage sites from the visitors' Maslow, instead of assuming that stewardship and market alertness are intrinsically conflicting. Thus, the Integrated Spiritual–Stewardship Model not only describes longstanding relationships between managers and guides, but proffers a lively conceptual model of how values, narratives, and practices circulate amid them to preserve spiritual integrity and high-quality visitor experiences.

2.1. Spiritual Leadership Theory: The Bedrock of Stewardship and Ethical Governance

Spiritual Leadership Theory (SLT), developed by Fry, serves as the primary theoretical roots for the explanation of intrinsic motivation and ethics underpinning successful site management[12]. At its centre, SLT is a motivational model of being based on the co-creation of an ideal vision and altruistic love and hope/faith. This triad will give "calling" to organizational members that their work has meaning and purpose, of direction and "membership," so that a sense of mutual understanding, respect and appreciation is stimulated[12, 13]. These are not merely theoretical concepts; they have underpinned a substantial body of empirical research across diverse organizations—including elementary schools, military units, corporate settings, and hospitality contexts—demonstrating improvements in performance, commitment, and ethical behavior[3, 9].

In the specific context of Islamic heritage tourism, SLT transcends the conventional management theory to being central ideology for governance. The role of the site manager transforms from the administrator of the physical territory to that of a spiritual custodian, entrusted with a sacred responsibility. The discomfort of the underlying principles SLT is very much applicable to the responsibilities of this role. Cultivating a sense of calling is directly connected to the

obligation to keep the sacredness of this ground alive for generations to come. Indeed, the term (Fostering membership) evokes the essence of Ummah and collective responsibility on the part of Muslims around the principles of inclusive practices[14, 15] where the local community, staff members and pilgrims are considered as stakeholders in the upkeep of its welfare. And part of keeping the site a living site of worship and spiritual reflection—not simply a museum exhibit—is "inspiring hope and faith".

The application of SLT in tourism and hospitality has increasingly garnered academic attention, which attests to its suitability beyond traditional business contexts. As an example, we illustrate that with the study of Wang and coworkers. Wang et al. proved that spiritual leadership in hotels could directly impact their employees' harmonious passion, resulting in positive service climate construction and eventually leading to visitor experience[9]. Yet more relevant to this review, it provides an attractive fit with the underlying principles of the reality of Islamic leadership. As illustrated in the studies done on SLT, its basic elements also reflect on the traditional Islamic virtues of shiddiq (honesty and integrity), fathonah (cognitive and intellectual wisdom), tabligh (prophetic communication) and al-'adl (justice)[16]. But this convergence is more than coincidental; it provides a theologically sensible and culturally appropriate framework for building the administrative protocols. A SLT-informed policy is, however, much more than an operational protocol; it is also an outward expression of spiritually focussed leadership that harmonises the paradoxes represented by the competing interests embodied in an economic prudence as well as commitment to institutional mission[2, 17]. It is the "quiet script" for ensuring that the decision-making of the management is pervaded by idealism and ethical validity.

2.2. Heritage Interpretation Theory: The Art of Facilitating Meaningful Encounter

If Spiritual Leadership Theory is the soul of management, Heritage Interpretation Theory is the voice of public engagement. This philosophy, first articulated by Freeman Tilden in his seminal landmark book, Interpreting Our Heritage, is based on two key themes: (1) interpretation is not merely a matter of transmitting facts and figures, it is in fact a medium of insight, at a personal level, it connects[10]. Modern-day interpretation is based on the Tilden interpretive principles[18, 19]. At the heart of these principles is that effective interpretation: (1) ties back to the personality and background of the visitor; (2) reveals vs. a data dump; not just reading from a play book or blaring facts; (3) an art form that borrows from a number of fields; (4) seeks to evoke interest vs. the telling of this is what there is to know about something. (5) Focuses on the whole person, not just the parts. (6) is intended for varied target subjects: children versus adults[10].

It really is appropriate—if not critical—that we apply Tilden's model to Islamic heritage sites. The idea of provocation as opposed to didacticism, i.e., what the theory was grounded in, aligns nicely with the spiritual and contemplative nature of these places. Because for many visitors, pilgrims or cultural tourists, what they want is a moment of reflection, awe and personal significance—something that a dutifully dry chronology of dates and architectural styles will not provide[20, 21]. A guide that only tells visitors the dimensions of a mosque is fulfilling a function; one who prompts awe by articulating how architectural symmetry materializes cosmological principles within an Islamic perspective, or by allowing time for silent reflection on the countless souls praying there, is engaging in what has been identified as authentic interpretation[6, 22]. This makes the visit more than a tourist experience, possibly an epiphanic street corner.

Notwithstanding, Tilden's philosophy of holistic presentation was compatible too with Islamic cosmology, for which knowledge and experiences are pictured integratively. According to Islam, faith, science, arts, and history are all connected as different aspects of a single vital reality. Thus, an integrated interpretation strategy, which combines the spiritual meaning, historical background, architectural design and cultural behavior of an ancestral place in one web (rather than individualized as priests' absolutive realm), is more authentic and effective than interpretations that only deal with these education factors separately[11, 23–25]. For instance, the Alhambra Palace demands more than sketching its arches: it requires evoking the philosophical, poetic and spiritual climate of Al-Andalus that produced its inception. It was fortified by findings of modern research, which do nothing to weaken the merit of this complex reading. Cultural tourism interpretation has been shown to lead to visitor satisfaction and an increase in cultural awareness and intent to assist conservation[26–28], which are significant findings given that interpreter performance plays a

major role in visitor satisfaction. It is how the Guide, as "oral Word" enlivens the manager's "silent-script", internalizing policy into profound experience.

2.3. Theoretical Synthesis: Bridging the Spiritual and the Communicative

The real conceptual novum of this review is, therefore, the deliberate integration of these two theoretical spheres. Though they have different roots (SLT in organizational psychology and leadership studies, Heritage Interpretation in communication and museology), they come together to form a potent model for understanding how Islamic heritage tourism is managed. According to this synthesis, authentic and sustainable management can be found at the intersection between inspired internal leadership and professionalized external communication.

The Spiritual Leadership Theory is the motivating principle of leadership practice. It is about the "why" and the "how" of management."Why should a site be preserved in one way rather than another? Through a spiritual vision and a sense of divine call. How do you engage staff and communities? By means of disinterested love and a cultivation of benevolent membership. Don't be too seduced, however, this only guarantees that the "silent script" is written in spiritual and moral ink[8, 12].

In turn, the theory of Heritage Interpretation is the 'military manual' for guiding competencies. It addresses the "what" and "how" of involving visitors: What should we tell people? Not just facts but overarching narratives that provoke sense. How should it be communicated? Via creative/relatable/public-specific means that enable people to experience it firsthand. It ensures that the "spoken word" does not bring only information, but even 'trans-formation'[10, 18].

The relationship between the two models is reciprocal and dynamic. A spiritually based guidance (informed by SLT) would reasonably require interpreters proficient in Tilden's concepts. At the same time, feedback from interpreters using such strategies, such as visitors' questions, misunderstandings and aha moments, must be used to shape and refine policy at the management scale; there must be a continual conversation for adaptive management[29–31]. Implicit to this convergence, newer research has begun to increasingly recognize the crossover. Transformational leadership studies in (non-Western) Christianity also underscore the role of leaders in modelling operational excellence and solomonic integrity, thus creating an ethos conducive to reading[21] but with less overt mention of both ends to which these exegeticae might serve[22]. Likewise, sub studies of extraction-based tourism interpretation support this finding, that its enduring effectiveness is often dependent upon a management regime that acknowledges and supports depth[27, 28].

From this extensive theoretical formulation follows the proposition that the responsible management of Islamic heritage sites hinges both on spiritual custodianship and cultural representation. It demands principled and prescient leadership to craft policies that protect good principles. In other words, it is an interpretation that, at once, must be skilled and sensitive, and capable of transmuting those same values into real visitor experiences. In this section, we will elaborate on the systematic process through which theoretical cross-fertilization has been elaborated in both empirical as well as conceptual dimensions, through existing literature.

3. Methodology

To address the research questions about the interaction between management policy and guide competence in Islamic heritage tourism, a systematic literature review (SLR) approach was employed in this study. What sets systematic reviews apart from the usual narrative reviews is an explicit, rigorous and replicable protocol that minimizes bias and offers a reliable basis for its conclusions. Materials and Methods This study complied with the guidelines of the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA), an internationally accepted checklist to ensure transparent reporting on all required information. The aim was to integrate the field in this fashion, to map intellectual territory and become aware of areas where agreement could be said to prevail as well as issues that remain controversial.

3.1. A Priori Review Protocol

At the core of a full systematic review lies an a priori plan that anchors all the work. Developed a detailed protocol for the review prior to searching the literature. This protocol served as a guide, from the definition of primary research questions, through the definition of specific inclusion criteria to searching selected databases, describing the extraction of data and the preparation of data synthesis and

analysis. This protocol was registered with the Open Science Framework to enhance transparency and minimise publication bias. Third, public registration also provides evidence that the methods used by research teams are pre-specified and not contingent upon the findings that reviewers identify (validity, credibility).

3.2. Eligibility Criteria: Defining the Scope with PICOS

Explicit eligibility criteria were developed within a focused topic using the PICOS (Population, Intervention/Exposure, Comparator, Outcomes, Study Types) framework to ensure that studies of importance and quality were included. This schema is considered to be a useful guide to the construction of no ambiguous and no vague RQs in ESs.

Population: The population involved only studies about Islamic cultural heritage. This ranges from all types of properties such as mosques, madrasas, mausoleums, historical palaces and architectural sites that relate to the Islamic culture. It also included the managers of sites and technical personnel who managed them, as well as interpretive staff (easily 2–6 times the number) or tourist guides who ensure successful visitor experiences.

Intervention/Exposure: Acceptance of studies required that they explore managerial policies and/or guiding competences. Managerial frameworks were defined as formal and informal policies, plans and strategies that regulate the operation of a site. These include site plans, spiritual management models, conservation standards, visitor flow systems and social engagement protocols. Guides' competencies were related to what is needed in order to interpret effectively. This came to include technical skills, like understanding the history, but more importantly included softer skills such as spiritual facilitation and culturally sensitive storytelling, communicative power and triggering reflective thinking.

Comparator: Not applicable for qualitative or conceptual studies, the review encouraged comparisons. These included investigations that compared the success of alternative policy contexts, contrasted types of guide training models and compared outcomes pre- to post-a specific intervention or training program.

Results: Effects of intervention on validity. These were the main outcomes of interest, concerning the effectiveness of management and interpretation. These would consist of measures of both quantitative and qualitative visitor experience quality, levels of spiritual experience reported by visitors, evidence of site sustainability (both cultural and environmental), as well as metrics that describe the effectiveness for interpretation.

Types of Studies: Included were studies from the full range of academic work on this subject, and a broad approach was taken to study designs. We included empirical research using a quantitative, qualitative or mixed methods design. It also comprised of theoretical papers offering theoretical models and model-review articles giving critical reviews of the literature. This date range was selected to capture 25 years of developing thought in heritage tourism management and ensure that the review represented current practice and debate throughout the field.

3.3. Strategic Selection of Information Sources

A broad search for relevant literature was performed on several high-quality information databases to avoid missing key publications and achieve a maximum research coverage. The main electronic databases included were Scopus and Web of Science. Both platforms are known for their strict editorial policies and wide-ranging coverage of high-quality, peer-reviewed social sciences literature, including the fields of tourism, hospitality, and heritage management. They have advanced features in indexing and search, enabling accurate query generation with complexity.

The first search strategy identified 1289 records from all the databases overall outcomes at the identification stage (after removal of duplicates). Following automated and manual deduplication, the citations are imported into EndNote for screening (the numbers included at each stage of the process, i.e., titles/abstracts screened; full texts assessed; studies finally included, match those reported in the PRISMA flow diagram. After removal of duplicates, titles and abstracts were screened independently by two review authors according to pre-defined PICOS criteria, and full texts were assessed for eligibility; any disagreements were resolved through discussion or consultation with a third review author when necessary.

As important information often cannot be found within the covers of academic journals, the search strategy also included grey literature. This was largely discovered in focused Google Scholar searches and by checking the contents

of international tourism and heritage conference proceedings. A citation chaining strategy was used to include landmark works that may not have been identified by database searches. This entails the scrutiny on the reference list of all included studies in order to establish foundational or highly relevant articles, taking advantage of the expertise of scholars in knowing that a strong and complete final corpus results.

3.4. A Rigorous and Iterative Search Strategy

The search strategy was programmed to be both sensitive and specific, in that we decided to err on the side of caution to make sure we missed no relevant papers, while at the same time acknowledging that an overwhelming number of retrieved records would compromise proper screening quality. Both controlled vocabulary (including database-specific subject headings) and free-text terms were used in the searches. The search was performed by combining keywords in a string with Boolean operators. For example, a typical search combined context-related terms (e.g., "Islamic heritage" OR "Muslim tourism" OR "religious tourism"), management related terms (e.g., "management policy" OR "site stewardship" OR "governance framework") and guiding related terms (e.g.,"guide competency" OR "interpretation skill*" OR "tour guide training").

Filters were used to limit the search results to documents written in English and peer-reviewed, which would establish a minimum academic standard. The ultimate date for the systematic search was July 2025, which is intended to allow us to include the most recent research available at the time of concluding this review. This first unfiltered search for the entire range of nominated sources produced a final total of 1289 records submitted to screening."

3.5. Systematic Study Selection and PRISMA Flow

The selection of studies to include in the review was a multistage, team-based exercise with a view toward transparency and replicability. Results: The 1289 records retrieved in the search were imported into EndNote 20 (Clarivate Analytics, USA) reference manager software and a preliminary automated and manual de-duplication was undertaken.

The next phase—criteria screening was performed by 2 reviewers independently for reliability and minimisation of possible bias. In the first stage, both reviewers screened titles and abstracts of all unique papers for pre-established PICOS eligibility criteria. Discrepancies on a record's relevance at this point were then settled by discussion between the two reviewers to a consensus. This approach yielded 183 articles that were felt to meet the inclusion criteria and warranted full-text review.

In the second stage, whole text formats of these 183 articles were obtained and thoroughly reviewed. The two reviewers also independently assessed each of the full texts for inclusion, and exercised a final vote on eligibility based on the rigorous application of predefined criteria. Studies were eliminated for reasons such as being set in a non-Islamic setting, investigating an intervention other than management or guidance and not presenting any of the pre-specified outcomes. These are the 58 studies that eventually qualified for inclusion, fully met all the above criteria and constituted evidence core to the thematic synthesis. This entire process, starting with identification to inclusion, is visually depicted in a PRISMA flow diagram (**Figure 1**), thus providing an instant and transparent study selection trajectory.

The complete selection process is reported in the PRISMA flow (**Figure 1**) that describes the number of records selected and included or excluded during deduplication, title–abstract screening, full-text eligibility assessment and, finally, into the inclusion criteria (58 studies). Eligibility: At the eligibility stage, all 183 full-text records obtained were examined for eligibility based on the inclusion and exclusion criteria and 125 were excluded as they did not meet one or more of the eligibility requirements (e.g., wrong context, e.g., wrong population or insufficient focus on managerial policy or guide competence). The box "Reports excluded (n = 125)" in **Figure 1** is a direct offshoot of "Reports assessed for eligibility (n = 183)," implying that these exclusions occurred through the process of eligibility check rather than through retrieval. **Figure 1** presents the PRISMA flow diagram of study identification, screening, eligibility assessment, and inclusion.

Figure 1 is a flow diagram presenting visually the procedure for identifying, screening and assessing eligible studies for inclusion in the systematic review. The first step involved identifying 1289 potential records (from databases and non-database sources). From these 1289 records, 215 du-

plicates were removed, leaving 1074 unique records for title–abstract screening, after which 183 full texts were assessed and 58 studies ultimately included. After removing 215 duplicates, title and abstracts of 1074 records were screened and 891 records were excluded. The full texts of the other 183 articles were reviewed in detail. Of these, 125 were excluded for specific reasons (ie incorrect setting, intervention or outcome), leaving a total set of 58 high-quality studies for the thematic synthesis. It guarantees the comprehensiveness, transparency and reproducibility of the review.

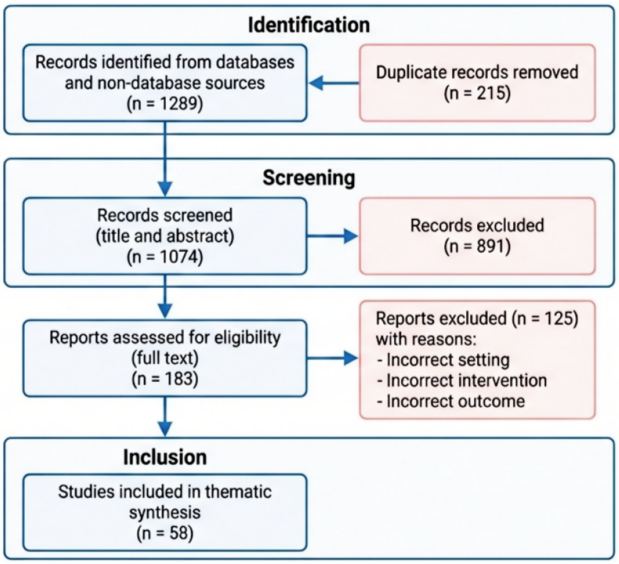


Figure 1. The Study PRISMA flow diagram.

In utilizing this systematic approach—based on established SLR procedures[32–34] and thematic synthesis methods—the review guarantees the exhaustive and rigorous confluence of evidence regarding managerial policy and guides competency in Islamic heritage tourism. After the stages of identification, screening, and eligibility in **Figure 1**, data extraction and quality assessment were carried out in the 58 final included studies. Then, a thematic synthesis and analytic integration of the data were performed as detailed below.

3.6. Meticulous Data Extraction and Quality Appraisal

A data extraction form was devised and piloted to aid with consistency and accuracy when extracting details from the 58 studies included. This form was developed to extract critical information from each study systematically, involving the bibliographical components (author(s), years of publication, country focus), methodological features (study design, data collection/analysis methods used), principles theorised to guide the study findings and conclusion, along with constructs for policy or competency and key findings/crucial statements made.

A crucial part of the process in a systematic review is assessing the quality associated with included studies according to their Worth of Evidence. Formal quality assessment was performed with quality assessment instruments evolved for the array of study designs. MMAT was used for the present study to assess empirical studies. The MMAT allows an evaluation of the methodological quality for five study types: qualitative, randomized controlled trial (RCT), non randomised studies, quantitative descriptive, and mixed methods research. Any grey literature included was assessed for quality using the AACODS checklist (Authoritatively, Accuracy, Coverage, Objectivity, Date and Significance). Such a stringent review process ensured that later synthesis is mostly underpinned by robust and high-quality evidence.

3.7. Thematic Synthesis and Analytical Data Analysis

Line-by-line coding. The first phase of analysis code by line started with a meticulous and detailed reading of all

the included studies' "Results" and "Findings". Relevant words, sentences or passages about the focus of the review were selected and coded into a brief code. This initial coding was inductive, meaning we let themes develop directly from the data. Examples of the initial codes were "Manager as moral guardian," "Policy-Community disconnect," "Storytelling as spiritual provocation, and "Training deficit in cultural sensitivity".

These initial codes were then reviewed in a second phase for themes and connections. Similar codes were then pooled to develop descriptive themes. These themes were in very close proximity to the results of the original studies but conceptually grouped into an overarching, higher-level structure. Descriptive themes that emerged were "The Manager as Spiritual Custodian," "Provocation in Interpretation," "Competency Training Models," and "The Policy-Practice Gap".

The third, most analytic stage was the creation of analytic themes. This necessitated extrapolation beyond primary findings of included studies to interpret and explain data. The descriptive themes were interrogated and synthesized to directly answer the review's research questions, resulting in the emergence of higher analytical themes which capture the underlying dynamics between managerial policy and guide practice. The software NVivo 12 was used to handle the large qualitative data and ensure rigor. It offered a robust mechanism for storing, organising and querying the coded data. Inter-coder reliability was also verified by Cohen's kappa statistic to strengthen the credibility of the coding process. This gave a score of 0.87, demonstrating an exceedingly high level of agreement between the independent reviewers and thus strong confidence in the integrity and reliability of the thematic outputs/ synthesis.

By means of this finely-attuned and multidimensional methodological strategy, the present systematic review has allowed it to establish that its outputs are not simply a précis of literature but a robust, transparent and replicable synthesis that can serve as an evidence platform for appreciating the crucial interplays between silent script and spoken word in Islamic heritage tourism.

4. Thematic Synthesis and Findings

The thematic synthesis of 58 selected studies identified three interconnected themes that clarify the dynamic relationship between managerial policy and guiding competencies in Islamic heritage tourism.

4.1. Spiritual Stewardship as a Basic Policy

Studies have shown that managerial strategies based on spiritual leadership concepts help both conservation integrity and tourist meaning-making in many different situations [8, 9]. Policies that stress calling and membership, like requiring rituals, guidelines for preserving buildings, and getting involved in the community, were demonstrated to improve the spiritual atmosphere and sustainability of the site. Fry and Cohen [12] posited that incorporating altruistic love and vision into policy frameworks fosters a sense of communal responsibility among stakeholders. In the same way, Mahardani and Taqwiem [17] showed how policies that reflect shiddiq (honesty) and fathonah (wisdom) make management more in line with Islamic moral rules, which makes custodial legitimacy stronger.

4.2. Interpretation Strength for Real Visitor Engagement

The second theme is ideal that guides may express in the policies that may spark meaning for the visitors. Instead of just providing information, studies underlined provocation and a fully contextualized presentation to inspire thought based on Tilden's six ideas [10, 18]. According to Parsons, tourists' spiritual engagement is enhanced through guides with training in spiritual facilitation, including active listening, reflective questioning, and culturally-informed storytelling. By developing four manifestations of these competences via the Spiritual Tourism Experience Scale, Şahin and Güzel [7] showed that guides who can both challenge visitors to think and connect their experiences to a larger context can enhance visitor joy and impressions of authentic experiences.

4.3. Feedback Loops—Aligning Policy and Practice

The final theme illustrates how feedback is provided and received between supervisors and their guides. Evidence suggests that policies developed in isolation often fail to align with the practical realities of implementation, leading to gaps in visitor experience [4, 6]. However, when managers employ

participatory policy design, such as guide workshops and visitor debriefings, to update policies to what actually takes place in the field, policies enacted change to achieve a more spiritually resonant alignment in the environment context where they operate. The alignment iterations are supported by theme synthesis findings demonstrating that an evolving frameworks allows for interdisciplinary interactions to occur, whereby policy informs the guide, which in turn informs policy refinement through insights gathered from the implementation of trainings [35].

Together, these themes form the basis for an Integrated Spiritual–Stewardship Model, which posits that the sustainability of Heritage Tourism in Islam results from a synergy of spirituality-based policies and practices, interpretive capability and feedback on policy and practices over time. This model closes the gap in existing literature by showing how the interweaving of silent scripture and spoken word can lead to higher site sustainability and the dissemination of visitor spiritual satisfaction.

5. Discussion

The results of this review demonstrate the interplay of managerial approaches that are grounded in spirituality and interpretative capabilities within cultural tourism in an Islamic setting. Under the theme of spiritual stewardship, we show that heritage policies, which are inspired by Spiritual Leadership Theory, protect the sacredness of heritage sites and nurture a collective sense of purpose among stakeholders [8, 9]. It highlights how site managers function as custodians who integrate Islamic ethical values—selfless love and justice—into governance frameworks to enhance both conservation and visitor meaning-making outcomes.

At the same time, the theme of interpretive competency illustrates that guides with an understanding of Heritage Interpretation Theory provide experiences that are more complete and engaging, rather than being purely a transmission of information [10, 18]. The competencies of active listening, cultural-sensitive storytelling, and reflective questioning help visitors engage well with spiritual stories, leading to increased satisfaction and authenticity perceptions [6, 7]. Collectively, these attributes allude to the real gel between Islamic heritage tourism—that policy purpose (the silent script) and its on-the-ground interpretation (the spoken word) are in concert.

Figure 2 captures this dynamic within the Integrated Spiritual–Stewardship Model. In this framework, spiritually grounded managerial policies guide strategic vision, resource allocation, and ethical standards, forming the silent script of governance. These policies are enacted by guides whose interpretive competencies—shaped by Tildenian principles—translate management intent into lived visitor experiences. To support adaptive management and iterative improvement [36, 37], these policies must in turn be recalibrated in light of guides' field experiences, visitor feedback, and community input, thereby closing the feedback loop between the silent script and the spoken word [34].

This synthesis has two sets of theoretical implications. This synthesis has two sets of theoretical implications. The study, therefore, offers two main contributions. First, by combining the domains of spiritual leadership and heritage interpretation, it expands the boundaries of both theoretical areas and demonstrates their integrative applicability in cultural–religious tourism contexts. Second, it highlights the need to treat interpretive enactment as an ongoing process in the operationalization of policy principles, thereby arguing that theoretical frameworks in tourism management must attend not only to strategic planning but also to the communicative practices through which spiritually grounded policies are translated into visitor experiences.

The Integrated Spiritual–Stewardship Model (**Figure 2**) shows the two interrelated domains of practice and their dynamic interplay, as well as the embodied core findings of the review. The model first depicts the domain of management policy or the spiritual–leadership-informed "silent script" that reflects the impact of spiritual leadership principles on the decisions made concerning site governance, codes of conduct, resource allocation, or the formal design of other guiding roles on site (see the left side of the diagram). Conversely, it depicts the guide competency domain, or "spoken word," of heritage interpretation where guides translate these policy intents into on-the-ground interpretive experiences that contextualize the sacred meanings related to the site for diverse visitors [38, 39]. The model highlights a series of bidirectional feedback loops: policy and training choices feed into guides' interpretive practice, while guides' experiences, visitor responses, and ethical dilemmas feedback through to managers and spiritual leaders for consideration, modification of policies and fine-tuning of stewardship ap-

proaches. In making these loops explicit, the model shows that the visitor experience quality and the longevity of Islamic heritage sites depend on the constant interplay between embracing spiritual stewardship and skilled interpretation (not one or the other in isolation) over time, calibrating these two essential activities against each other to create a dynamic equilibrium (i.e., helpful to each but not identifiable with each)[39, 40].

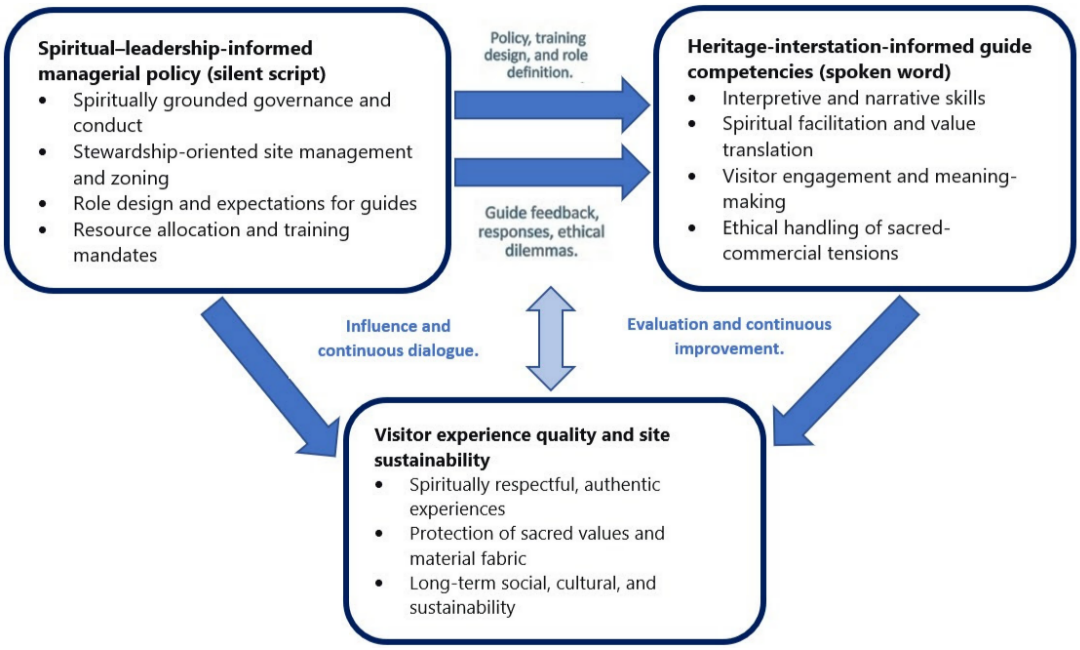


Figure 2. Integrated Spiritual-Stewardship Model.

Note: This model links spiritual-leadership-informed policy ("silent script") with heritage-interpretation-informed guide competences ("spoken words"), highlighting the bidirectional feedback and their joint influence on visitor experience quality and the sustainability of Islamic-heritage sites.

This model explicitly links spiritual leadership constructs with the professional competencies of heritage interpretation within the same triangle of governance-strategy-practice system, in contrast with the earlier frameworks in religious and heritage tourism that either foreground governance structures or concentrate on interpretive practices. It moves beyond more abstract representations of roles, instrumentalizing feedback as a formative process whereby spiritually oriented managerial decisions generate leading practice that in turn affects remade policy through narrative experiences of guides, visitor questions, and tensions at the sacred–commercial boundary. Recognizing tourism as an ongoing interaction between space and time, this bidirectionality makes the Integrated Spiritual–Stewardship Model particularly flexible within contexts that need to protect sacred values while CBD tourism markets develop, as it does not treat stewardship, interpretation, and sacred–commercial tensions as an annual balancing act.

In a nutshell, this study reveals the relationship between spiritual stewardship and interpretative competency not as isolated silos but as a part of a larger interrelated system, whereby one element supports the others to sustain spiritual integrity and financial sustainability of Islamic cultural tourism.

6. Conclusions

This systematic review has multiple important strengths. It draws together literature on policy frameworks and guide skills to formulate the Integrated Spiritual–Stewardship Model as a holistic framework for management of Islamic cultural sites. The study offers a novel theoretical synthesis by juxtaposing Spiritual Leadership Theory with Heritage Interpretation Theory to address the sacred—commercial paradox of heritage tourism. In addition, the thematic synthesis provides both empirical and conceptual insights into the convergence of spiritually informed policies and interpretive practices that enhance visitor experiences and contribute to site sustainability.

Several limitations require acknowledgement. The

study was limited to English-language papers; other key research written in Arabic or another local language may have been missed. Second, although sufficient flexibility in the PICOS requirements preserved scientific robustness, this also meant evidence was somewhat heterogeneous, which could limit its generalizability across studies and contexts. Third, our reliance on published literature may have created a publication bias, as studies that report non-significant or negative results are less likely to be indexed.

Moving forward, the research agenda should pursue four channels:

– Empirical Validation: There is a need for quantitative studies like structural equation modelling to test the Integrated Spiritual–Stewardship Model in different Islamic heritage contexts by determining the relationships between the variables of policy, guide competence and visitor outcomes.
– Scale Development: Based on Şahin and Güzel [7], Spiritual Tourism Experience Scale, researchers need to develop and validate scales for spiritual stewardship and interpretative ability so that studies can be compared/aggregated with safety.
– Cross-Cultural Comparisons: Comparative studies across different regions—like the Middle East, South Asia, and the countries of Southeast Asia—can shed light on how cultural factors influence the enactment of spiritual leadership and meaning-making practices.
– Digital Interpretation: With the increasing popularity of virtual tourism, further studies are needed on the mimicking or enhancement of spiritual and experiential qualities by digital tools (e.g., augmented reality, virtual guides) and their effects on perceptions of authenticity and engagement.

Through these orientations, scholarship can cultivate both theoretical rigor and practical efficacy with respect to Islamic heritage tourism management, thereby keeping policy and practice aligned in pursuit of sacred values as well as sustainable development.

Author Contributions

Conceptualization: H.A.M.A., M.A.M., and A.A.A.A.; Data curation: A.A.A.A., M.A.M., and H.A.M.A.; Formal analysis: M.A.M.; Funding acquisition: H.A.M.A.; Investigation: A.A.A.A., M.A.M., and H.A.M.A.; Methodology: A.A.A.A. and M.A.M.; Project administration: A.A.A.A. and M.A.M.; Resources: A.A.A.A. and M.A.M.; Software: M.A.M.; Supervision: M.A.M.; Validation: M.A.M.; Visualization: A.A.A.A.; Writing—original draft: A.A.A.A.; Writing—review & editing: A.A.A.A. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

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