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Teacher Retention in Nonformal Qur'anic Education: The Role of Spiritual Values and Communal Ties Amid Limited Honoraria

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Abstract

Existing explanations of teacher retention have largely emphasized financial compensation. However, this perspective provides limited insight into nonformal Islamic education, where honoraria are substantially below the minimum wage, yet many teachers continue serving for decades. This study aims to understand why teachers at a Qur'anic education center (TPQ) remain in their positions and how spiritual values and institutional management practices jointly contribute to their retention. Employing a qualitative single-case study design, data were collected through in-depth interviews with four informants, non-participant observations, and institutional documents. The data were analyzed using Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña's interactive model. The findings indicate that devotional intention and the understanding of teaching as *khidmah* (service) were consistently expressed by all four informants as central to their continued commitment. The interpretation of honoraria in terms of *barakah* (blessings) also emerged, although its meaning varied across informants. Family-like relationships, exemplary leadership, and deliberative practices provided communal support, while alternative income sources and residential proximity appeared to facilitate continued service. Economic pressures did not emerge as a dominant factor in the reported reasons for teacher departure. This study proposes a spiritual-communal retention pattern as a preliminary conceptual explanation grounded in a single case, offering analytical rather than statistical generalization.

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INTRODUCTION

Eight of the fourteen active teachers at Taman Pendidikan Al-Qur'an (TPQ) Al-Falah, Capang Village, Purwodadi District, Pasuruan Regency, have been teaching since the institution was established in 1995. Teachers receive monthly honoraria of IDR 150,000–200,000, referred to as *barokah* or *bisyaroh* (Laporan Bisyaroh, August 2026). Some teachers receive limited government incentives that are not provided throughout the year (HSM, interview, August 30, 2026). These honoraria are far below the 2026 Pasuruan Regency Minimum Wage of IDR 5,187,681 (Keputusan Gubernur Jawa Timur Nomor 100.3.3.1/937/013/2025 Tentang Upah Minimum Kabupaten/Kota Di Jawa Timur Tahun 2026, 2026). This comparison is illustrative because TPQ teachers generally do not have formal employment relationships.

TPQs foster children's ability to read and develop a love for the Qur'an from an early age (Wulandari et al., 2025). These nonformal Islamic religious education institutions teach

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students to read, write, memorize, and practice the teachings of the Qur'an. Regulations require organizers to have legal entity status, enroll at least 15 students, maintain a teacher-to-student ratio of 1:20, and provide evidence of teacher competence through diplomas, certificates, or other verifiable documentation (Keputusan Direktur Jenderal Pendidikan Islam No 90 Tahun 2020, 2020). In 2026, the Ministry of Religious Affairs recorded approximately 199,230 Qur'anic education institutions (Syafiuddin, 2026). As community-based institutions, TPQs depend on teachers' willingness to continue teaching (Herianto & Arifin, 2024).

Teacher loyalty and commitment support institutional sustainability and quality. Loyalty is associated with leadership, job satisfaction, the work climate (Hidayati & Hanif, 2025), and compensation (Rahman et al., 2023). Commitment is associated with performance (Syahminan et al., 2024), while workload and work-related stress are associated with turnover intentions (Dorahim et al., 2025). Social exchange theory explains organizational attachment through perceived balanced reciprocity (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). Within this framework, minimal honoraria may weaken teachers' attachment to their institutions.

In educational personnel management studies, teacher loyalty and commitment are regarded as determinants of institutional sustainability and quality (Hidayati & Hanif, 2025). Teacher loyalty is influenced by various factors, including leadership, job satisfaction, the work climate (Hidayati & Hanif, 2025), and compensation (Rahman et al., 2023). Work commitment is also associated with teacher performance (Syahminan et al., 2024), while workload and work-related stress are associated with turnover intentions among madrasah teachers (Dorahim et al., 2025). From a social exchange perspective, employees' attachment to an organization is based on reciprocal relationships perceived as balanced (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). Following this logic, extremely low compensation would be expected to weaken teachers' attachment and encourage them to leave.

However, the reality within TPQs does not entirely follow this logic. The issue of low wages among honorary teachers in Indonesia remains unresolved (Sutisna & Nastia, 2026), and TPQ teachers are in an even more vulnerable position because their honoraria depend on student contributions and local government incentives, which vary in amount. For example, the Tulungagung Regency Government provided an annual incentive of IDR 250,000 to TPQ teachers in 2026 (Sujarwoko & Habibah, 2026), while the Mojokerto Regency Government provided IDR 1.25 million per person annually in 2025 (DISKOMINFO, 2025). In Pasuruan Regency, where this study was conducted, the local government allocated IDR 3,575,500,000 in grant assistance in 2026 for 10,831 teachers working in early childhood education institutions (PAUD), Raudhatul Athfal (RA), TPQs, and madrasah diniyah, including 4,035 TPQ teachers (Warda, 2026). This amount is equivalent to an average of approximately IDR 330,000 per teacher for one fiscal year, less than one-tenth of the monthly minimum wage in Pasuruan Regency. Nevertheless, despite these limitations, many TPQs continue to operate with loyal teachers. At TPQ Al-Falah, eight of the fourteen teachers have been teaching for more than thirty years. This paradox forms the starting point of the present study: Why do teachers remain, and how do institutions sustain their retention?

Existing studies on teacher retention have largely focused on compensation, job satisfaction, and leadership. Leadership and working conditions have been shown to be closely associated with teachers' decisions to remain, although evidence regarding the influence of salary remains mixed (Shaoan et al., 2025). In Indonesia, job satisfaction and compensation fairness influence teacher retention in private schools (Prasetyo et al., 2024), while fair performance evaluations encourage madrasah teachers to remain longer (Setiawan et al., 2024). However, these studies assume the existence of salary structures and personnel

management systems, whereas honoraria in private Islamic educational institutions depend entirely on the financial capacity of their foundations (Budiman & Ramdhani, 2026). Therefore, the question of what keeps teachers in their positions when compensation mechanisms are almost nonexistent remains unanswered.

A second body of research highlights religiosity and Islamic Work Ethics (IWE). Religiosity is associated with teacher loyalty (Andika Setyobudi et al., 2025), TPQ teachers' motivation stems more from religious awareness than financial rewards (Akhadiyah & Dewi, 2026), and job satisfaction among Islamic education teachers has a transcendental dimension beyond material considerations (Setiawan et al., 2025). However, 96% of IWE studies employ quantitative surveys, and most treat IWE as a single construct (Olowookerea & Kareem, 2026). Consequently, it remains unclear how meanings associated with *niat*, *khidmah*, and *barakah* operate when material compensation is extremely limited, and whether these meanings may instead risk normalizing inadequate honoraria (Nurusya`bani & Rahmawati, 2026).

A third body of research explains retention through job embeddedness, encompassing value fit, social connections, and sacrifice. Job embeddedness is strongly associated with lower turnover intentions among honorary teachers (Salvina et al., 2024), while religious value congruence strengthens the embeddedness of teachers in private Islamic schools (Syapira et al., 2025). In Islamic education, spiritual bonds connect leadership with madrasah teacher loyalty (Syihabuddin & Kholqi, 2026), while in TPQs, proportional honoraria and deliberative decision-making enhance teacher motivation (Khaironi et al., 2025). However, these studies measure embeddedness without exploring its meaning, do not cover nonformal educational institutions, or examine policies solely from the administrators' perspectives. The relationship between spiritual meaning, communal bonds, and teachers' economic conditions has not yet been explained in an integrated manner.

Thus, understanding remains limited regarding how teachers interpret low honoraria and how spiritual values and social relationships work together in their decisions to remain. The novelty of this study lies in providing an integrated explanation of the relationship between the spiritual meaning of teaching, communal relationships, and teachers' economic conditions, rather than merely combining several theories. This study aims to (1) describe the manifestations of loyalty and commitment among teachers at TPQ Al-Falah, (2) analyze the factors that encourage teachers to remain, including the relationship between spiritual values and institutional management practices, and (3) analyze the practices employed by institutional administrators to sustain teacher retention. Conceptually, this study proposes a spiritual-communal retention pattern as a preliminary explanation. Practically, the study provides recommendations for TPQ administrators to ensure that teachers' sincerity and dedication are not used as justifications for neglecting their welfare.

METHOD

This qualitative single-case study examines teacher retention in the context of TPQ Al-Falah as a community-based institution. This design supports analytical generalization (Yin, 2018). The research was conducted in Capang Village, Purwodadi District, Pasuruan Regency, from August to September 2026. TPQ Al-Falah was selected because its minimal honoraria and teachers' long periods of service provided an opportunity to examine long-term retention patterns. Informants were purposively selected based on a minimum of ten years of teaching or management experience, direct involvement in teaching or institutional management, and willingness to participate in interviews. The head of the TPQ provided information on institutional policies, while three teachers shared their experiences and reasons for remaining at the institution (Table 1).

Data were collected through in-depth interviews, non-participant observation, and documentation. Semi-structured interviews explored teaching histories and motivations, perceptions of honoraria, workplace relationships, and considerations regarding whether to remain or leave. HSM was interviewed on August 26, 29, and 30, 2026; SM on August 30; SR on September 1; and NM on September 16. Each session lasted 60–90 minutes, was recorded with the informants' consent, and was supplemented by interview notes.

Table 1. Profiles of Research Informants

Code	Role	Other Source of Livelihood	Length of Service
HSM	Head of TPQ	Self-employed	Since 1995
SM	Senior ustazah and founding teacher	Permanent foundation-employed teacher (certified MI teacher)	Since 1995
SR	EMIS operator and teacher	Permanent foundation-employed teacher (certified MI teacher)	Since 2016
NM	Ustazah	Cake business	Since 1995

Non-participant observations conducted on September 7 and 10, 2026, focused on teacher attendance and dedication to teaching, interactions between administrators and teachers, and teachers' involvement beyond teaching hours. Field notes were prepared on the same day. The documents reviewed included the August 2026 *bisyaroh* report, honorarium and incentive records, and teachers' employment histories.

The researcher condensed and displayed the data, then drew and verified conclusions (Miles et al., 2014). Deductive coding employed the three components of commitment and the three dimensions of job embeddedness. Inductive coding generated the themes of *barakah* and *khidmah*. The themes were interpreted through the framework of Islamic Work Ethics (IWE) to formulate a retention pattern. To ensure credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln, 2018), the researcher compared information provided by administrators and teachers and triangulated interviews, observations, and documents. Findings were considered robust when supported by multiple sources or data collection techniques.

The first author is an alumnus of TPQ Al-Falah and previously worked in its administrative office and taught at the institution for approximately two years. This familiarity facilitated access and openness but could also lead informants to assume that their experiences were already understood and influence the researcher's interpretations (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009). The first author requested detailed explanations, compared interpretations across different sources and methods, and documented personal assumptions after each fieldwork activity. Codes and themes were jointly reviewed with the second author, who had no affiliation with the TPQ. Through WhatsApp and face-to-face meetings, all four informants confirmed summaries of their reasons for remaining, their understanding of *bisyaroh*, their relationships with administrators and fellow teachers, and their considerations regarding whether to stop or continue teaching.

This study, involving adult participants and posing minimal risk, was conducted without formal ethics review because the authors' institution did not have an ethics committee for social sciences and humanities research. The head of the TPQ granted verbal permission on August 22, 2026. Informants provided verbal informed consent after being informed of the study's objectives, the intended use of their data, and their right to refuse participation or withdraw. Participants' identities were anonymized using codes, and identifying details were removed. The first author retained the data for the purposes of this study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

TPQ Al-Falah was established in 1995 following an initiative by the district-level training program of the Indonesian Mosque Youth Communication Agency (BKPRMI). Classes are held from Monday to Friday, and the teaching method has transitioned from Iqra' to Bil Qolam, developed under the guidance of Pesantren Ilmu Al-Qur'an Singosari. The TPQ has fourteen teachers and one administrative staff member. Teachers' honoraria are funded through students' monthly tuition fees (Laporan Bisyaroh, August 2026).

Manifestations of Teacher Loyalty and Commitment

To compare experiences across informants, the commitment categories for each informant were mapped according to affective, normative, and continuance commitment (Meyer & Allen, 1997), as presented in Table 2. Drawing on Becker, the analysis of continuance commitment includes financial dependence and the potential loss of relationships, social status, and investments of time (Rohman et al., 2023).

Table 2. Matrix of Teacher Commitment Across Informants

Informant	Emotional Attachment (Affective)	Sense of Obligation (Normative)	Dependence on Honoraria	Nonfinancial Ties
HSM	Relationships with teachers are "already like family"	Teaching as worship and "continuing Islamic preaching"	Not evident: honoraria "cannot be measured in monetary terms"	Involved in establishing the TPQ in 1995
SM	Teaching as "devotion" and "a calling of the heart"	"Everything is intended as worship... if we are not the ones keeping the Qur'an alive in the village, who else will?"	Not evident: honoraria are "insufficient"	Strong: a founding teacher since 1995, met her husband (the head of the TPQ) at the institution, and her child is involved in training and assessing teachers
SR	"I enjoy teaching at the TPQ"; relationships with fellow teachers are "very harmonious"	When tired, "I return to my original intention of studying the Qur'an together with the students"	Not evident: *bisyaroh* is "small in amount"	Trusted by the community to lead *jamiyah tahlil* and *diba'* gatherings because of her teaching role at the TPQ
NM	"I enjoy spending time with the children"	"The original intention is worship"	Not evident: honoraria are "not enough"; earns a living through a cake business	Her house is directly opposite the TPQ
Observation	Teachers are punctual, dedicated, patient, and maintain close relationships with one another	Almost all teachers serve on committees for religious activities	–	–

All four informants demonstrated affective and normative commitment without depending on honoraria (Table 2). HSM, SM, and NM regarded teaching as worship and a responsibility to sustain Qur'anic learning in the village, particularly because of their concerns about the influence of technology on children (HSM and SM, interviews, August 30, 2026;

NM, interview, September 16, 2026). SR interpreted teaching as studying the Qur'an together with students, an activity that brings *barokah*.

However, continuance commitment was not entirely absent. In the form of nonfinancial ties, this commitment manifested differently among informants. For SM, these ties were strongest because she had helped establish the TPQ in 1995, met her husband, who is now the head of the TPQ, at the institution, and involved her child as an examiner of the Bil Qolam method for teachers (SM, interview, August 30, 2026). For SR, these ties were evident in the social status she had gained: because she taught at the TPQ, the community entrusted her with leading *jamiyah tahlil* and *diba'* gatherings (SR, written interview, September 1, 2026). For NM, these ties were reflected in the proximity of her home, located directly opposite the TPQ (NM, interview, September 16, 2026). Thus, the defensible finding is that teachers' commitment does not depend on financial reliance on honoraria, rather than that continuance commitment plays no role at all. The willingness to make sacrifices is most clearly illustrated in NM's following statement.

> "*What makes me happy is spending time with the children. Even when I have mouth ulcers or a toothache, as long as I am still able, I keep coming... after all, we are TPQ teachers, Qur'an teachers, so our original intention is indeed worship*." (NM, interview, September 16, 2026)

Enjoyment of being with students reflects affective commitment, while the intention to worship reflects normative commitment. SR also returns to her original intention when feeling tired because of her teaching schedule at the madrasah.

> "*I occasionally feel tired when teaching coincides with school activities or family or household events. But I return to my original intention of studying the Qur'an together with the students*." (SR, written interview, September 1, 2026)

SM interpreted teaching as devotion and a calling of the heart despite insufficient honoraria (SM, interview, August 30, 2026). Teachers arrived on time, patiently guided students, and almost all participated in organizing religious activities (Field notes, August 30, 2026). This willingness reflects social exchange based on trust (Blau, 2017).

Meyer and Allen, as discussed by Rohman, distinguish commitment based on wanting to, feeling obligated to, or needing to remain (Rohman et al., 2023). Affective commitment is evident in teachers' closeness to students and fellow teachers, consistent with dedication as an emotional attachment to the profession (Turk & Korkmaz, 2022). Normative commitment arises from moral beliefs (Rohman et al., 2023), which, for TPQ teachers, are manifested in the intention to worship and the responsibility to sustain Qur'anic learning in the village.

In Becker's typology, continuance commitment is associated with cost-benefit considerations, limited alternatives, and the risk of losing social identity (Rohman et al., 2023). The informants have sources of livelihood outside the TPQ. For SR and SM, leaving could reduce their socio-religious status or weaken their ties to the institution they helped establish. These potential losses reflect links and sacrifice within the institution and community (Lee et al., 2004). A sense of calling is also associated with career commitment and job embeddedness (Irina & Maranatha, 2022).

This case demonstrates that socio-religious recognition from the community also contributes to teacher embeddedness, as illustrated by SR. This finding complements studies on lower turnover intentions among honorary teachers (Salvina et al., 2024) and religious value congruence in private Islamic schools (Syapira et al., 2025). Within Islamic Work Ethics

(IWE), teachers' dedication reflects virtue and religious responsibility (Ali, 1988; George et al., 2025).

Niat, Khidmah, and Barakah as Value Congruence

All four informants considered their honoraria inadequate. HSM described them as "not comparable to monetary value," SM as "insufficient," SR as "small in amount," and NM as "not enough." Low compensation also does not necessarily cause honorary teachers to leave (Anugrah et al., 2022). In the pesantren tradition, *khidmah* is understood as a means of obtaining blessings and maintaining loyalty to the institution's vision (Riwanda et al., 2023). Table 3 compares the meanings of *niat*, *khidmah*, and honoraria among the four informants.

Table 3. Comparison of Spiritual Meanings Across Informants

Informant	Niat (Intention)	Teaching as Khidmah (Service)	Meaning of Honoraria
HSM (Head of TPQ)	No focus on monetary amounts; the institution's philosophy is "grounded in worship"	"Continuing Islamic preaching"	Compensation "cannot be measured in monetary terms"; interpreted within the framework of worship
SM (Senior ustazah)	"We are already committed; we have already made our intention (*nawaitu*)"	"Devotion," "a calling of the heart"; sustaining Qur'anic learning in the village	Acknowledged as "insufficient"; not used as a criterion for remaining
SR (Operator and teacher)	When tired, "returning to the original intention"	"Studying the Qur'an together with the students"	*Bisyaroh* is "small in amount"; *barokah* is associated with learning the Qur'an together with students
NM (Ustazah)	"Intended as worship and sharing knowledge," rather than earning money	Sharing knowledge; enjoying time with students	"Not enough," but experienced as "blessings" through concrete life experiences

Intention plays different roles for each informant. For HSM, the intention to worship serves as an institutional principle (HSM, interview, August 30, 2026). SM expressed it as a shared commitment: "If you ask whether it is enough, of course it is not; the amount is insufficient. But we are already committed; we have already made our intention (*nawaitu*)" (SM, interview, August 30, 2026). SR returns to the intention of studying the Qur'an together with students when feeling tired (SR, written interview, September 1, 2026). NM emphasized that teaching the Qur'an "should not be intended as a way to earn money, but as worship and a means of sharing knowledge, because mathematically, the amount would never be enough" (NM, interview, September 16, 2026). Observations of teacher attendance and dedication support this finding.

Khidmah encompasses expressions such as "devotion," "continuing Islamic preaching," and "sharing knowledge." The founding teachers interpret it as a communal responsibility. HSM continues the mission of Islamic preaching, while SM seeks to sustain Qur'anic learning in the village. SR emphasizes learning together with students, whereas NM shares knowledge and enjoys spending time with children.

The institution refers to honoraria as *bisyaroh* or *barokah*. HSM and SM interpret them within the framework of worship and intention. SR associates *barokah* with studying the Qur'an together with students. NM described a life experience that she interpreted as possibly reflecting blessings.

"The *barakah* from the TPQ is not enough to meet my needs, so I also sell cakes... but perhaps this is what blessings mean. Even I never expected that, with such limited money, I would be able to perform Umrah last year. I am grateful, and I consider this an act

of worship because I am putting my knowledge of the Qur'an into practice." (NM, interview, September 16, 2026)

Barakah has three layers of meaning. As a religious belief, *barakah* means that Allah increases goodness in one's deeds and sustenance. As a subjective experience, *barakah* is evident in NM's interpretation of her opportunity to perform Umrah. The word "perhaps" indicates her caution, and her cake business may also have helped finance the pilgrimage. As an analytical concept, *barakah* describes the reinterpretation of honoraria through the value of worship, which may help explain why the imbalance between effort and compensation does not encourage teachers to leave. The analysis is based on informants' statements and behaviors.

In the pesantren tradition, sincerity means serving without making material gain the sole objective. *Barakah* refers to the increase in benefits derived from work that pleases Allah (Sono, 2026). TPQ teachers also understand honoraria within the framework of worship and Islamic preaching.

This interpretation is consistent with integrated regulation, in which actions are grounded in values that have become integrated into one's identity (Ryan & Deci, 2020). The intention to share knowledge, sincerity, and gratitude also help explain the retention of honorary teachers and teachers in Islamic educational institutions(Anugrah et al., 2022; Ekowati & Sa'adah, 2025).

Islamic teachings on the purification of devotion (Qur'an, al-Bayyinah [98]: 5), purification of the soul (Qur'an, al-Syams [91]: 9–10) (Badan Litbang dan Diklat Kementerian Agama RI., 2019), the value of deeds according to intentions (Al-Bukhari, n.d.), the importance of the heart and deeds (Sahih Muslim, no. 2564), and the rewards of beneficial knowledge (Sahih Muslim, no. 1631) (Abu al Husayn Muslim, n.d.) provide a context for understanding teachers' interpretations. The empirical analysis remains grounded in interviews, observations, and documents. Transcendental meaning contributes to the dimension of value congruence. *Niat* and *khidmah* emerged among all four informants, while the role of *barakah* as a lived experience remains a preliminary proposition based on a single account.

Communal Ties and Institutional Management Practices

Institutional administrators maintain communal ties through recreational activities or educational excursions (*rihlah ilmiah*), thanksgiving gatherings, shared meals, and the provision of uniforms or headscarves (HSM, interview, August 29, 2026). SR described relationships among teachers as "very harmonious" (SR, written interview, September 1, 2026). Observations also documented warm communication accompanied by occasional humor (Field notes, September 10, 2026). Symbolic recognition conveys appreciation and fosters trust (Blau, 2017). Under limited budgetary conditions, psychological support can strengthen loyalty (Supadi & Setyaningsih, 2025).

The second practice involves deliberation and openness. HSM described his leadership style as follows.

> "*I am not the type of person who likes to be selfish. I try to involve everyone; we discuss whatever problems arise. If there are shortcomings, we should correct them together.*" (HSM, interview, August 26, 2026)

According to NM, HSM discusses parents' complaints about teaching methods in teachers' meetings without revealing the parents' identities and subsequently follows up on the issues to prevent misunderstandings (NM, interview, September 16, 2026). This practice reflects exemplary conduct (Qur'an, al-Ahzab [33]: 21) (Badan Litbang dan Diklat Kementerian Agama RI., 2019) and deliberation in overcoming challenges (Ali, 1988).

SR considered HSM to have a family-oriented approach, to be responsive to teachers' expectations and parents' complaints, and to strive to improve educational quality through the transition from Iqra' to Bil Qolam (SR, interview, September 3, 2026). NM described the atmosphere she experienced.

> "*Things are not rigid here, you know. The atmosphere already feels like family. Everything is always discussed together through deliberation.*" (NM, interview, September 16, 2026)

Spiritual leadership fosters commitment through the meaning of work (*calling*) and a sense of belonging to the institution (*membership*) (Rosa & Ancok, 2020). Among teachers in Islamic schools, leaders' care and convictions have a greater influence than their communicated vision (Pradesa & Tanjung, 2021). At TPQ Al-Falah, teachers interpret their work through the intention to worship, while administrators maintain a sense of belonging through family-like relationships, deliberation, and recognition. This role is consistent with findings on *shura* and justice (Ekowati & Sa'adah, 2025), exemplary leadership (Sunardi & Sihab, 2023), and spiritual bonds in leadership (Syihabuddin & Kholqi, 2026).

HSM prioritizes teachers who have not received professional allowances when proposing recipients for limited government incentives (HSM, interview, August 30, 2026). Nominations made in accordance with assistance regulations, along with transparency regarding recipients and the reasons for their selection, reflect needs-based justice (Ali, 2008). Transparency helps prevent jealousy when resources are limited.

According to NM, no teacher has yet been willing and considered capable of replacing HSM (NM, interview, September 16, 2026). Dependence on the head of the TPQ makes leadership succession important for sustaining communal ties. Teachers also maintain cleanliness without being asked and serve on committees organizing Islamic holiday celebrations (Field notes, September 7, 2026). These initiatives demonstrate a sense of ownership and reflect organizational citizenship behavior (Lee et al., 2004).

The Role of Economic Factors in Decisions to Remain

According to HSM, teachers leave for various reasons, including economic circumstances, the need for their husbands' permission, and the demands of formal employment (HSM, interview, August 29, 2026). NM provided an example of a teacher who struggled to balance factory work and teaching responsibilities (NM, interview, September 16, 2026). Teachers' employment records also documented departures due to death, transfers to the Office of Religious Affairs, and health, family, and age-related reasons (HSM, interview, August 30, 2026).

Economic pressures are particularly evident when teachers need to prioritize employment that supports their livelihoods. The proposition that low honoraria act as a selection mechanism among teachers remains tentative because information about reasons for leaving was obtained from administrators and active teachers. Former teachers were not interviewed, and some had passed away. These data do not reflect the religious experiences of teachers who left.

Secondary employment supports non-permanent teachers who remain because of intrinsic, social, and spiritual motivations (Zahrawi et al., 2025). A survey by IDEAS and Dompet Dhuafa found that more than half of Indonesian teachers had secondary employment (Yonatan, 2024). Self-reliance is consistent with IWE (Ali, 2008) and the hadith concerning the virtue of earning a living through one's own work (Sahih al-Bukhari, no. 2072) (Al-Bukhari, n.d.). The experiences of teachers who depend entirely on the TPQ for their livelihoods are not represented in this study.

All four informants live near the TPQ. SR's house is approximately 700 meters away, and NM stated that distance was rarely a concern. This is consistent with the role of off-the-

job ties in job embeddedness (Lee et al., 2004) and their association with lower turnover intentions (Amir, 2022; Anggerawati & Ariyanti, 2026; Salvina et al., 2024). If she stopped teaching, NM would feel "lonely" because she would lose the companionship of students, which sometimes helped alleviate her pain. According to NM, community members might simply ask why she had stopped teaching (NM, interview, September 16, 2026).

SM was recruited by the foundation's chairperson after graduating in 1995 and remains attached to the institution she helped develop (SM, interview, August 30, 2026). This attachment is consistent with findings that permanent foundation-employed teachers with more than 20 years of service demonstrate higher career commitment (Mulyana et al., 2023). All four informants have sources of livelihood outside the TPQ. The data indicate that alternative income sources support the continuity of their service, while economic pressures do not appear to be dominant in the institution's teacher turnover history.

1. **Job Embeddedness Rooted in a Religious Mission**

   In this case, alignment with the religious mission, social relationships, and residential proximity explain teachers' embeddedness (Mitchell et al., 2001). Alignment with the religious mission was supported by all four informants. Direct evidence of the sacrifices associated with leaving is more limited, primarily originating from NM's account of losing companionship with students. This case illustrates how the dimensions of embeddedness are manifested in religious service.

2. **Similarities and Differences with Social Exchange Theory and Self-Determination Theory**

   In social exchange, reciprocity may be delayed and take different forms (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). Teachers respond to administrators' care and recognition with loyalty and voluntary involvement. They also interpret their service as worship of Allah. Self-determination theory helps explain the role of values integrated into personal identity through integrated regulation (Ryan & Deci, 2020). The teachers express these values as obedience to Allah.

3. **Niat and Barakah in Dialogue with Islamic Work Ethics**

   IWE positions *niat* as a criterion for evaluating the value of work (Ali, 2008). Studies dominated by single-construct measurements in Arab business contexts have paid insufficient attention to the empirical function of intention (Olowookerea & Kareem, 2026). At this TPQ, all four informants regard intention as a guiding principle when material compensation is limited. Variations in the interpretation of *barakah* raise questions for future IWE research.

Workers who feel a sense of calling tend to work more while receiving the same pay, making them vulnerable to exploitation (Tosti-Kharas et al., 2024). IWE emphasizes justice, generosity, and the right to full wages (Yousef, 2001). Regulations allow TPQ funding to come from organizers, the central government, local governments, communities, and other lawful sources (Keputusan Direktur Jenderal Pendidikan Islam No 90 Tahun 2020, 2020). These opportunities are important to ensure that teachers' sincerity does not justify delaying improvements in their welfare (Nurusya`bani & Rahmawati, 2026). Justice and generosity form the foundations of IWE (Ali, 2008), consistent with the Prophet's teaching to pay workers their wages before their sweat dries. Teachers demonstrate an ethos of service, while the TPQ's capacity to provide adequate wages remains limited, and recognition is primarily symbolic. The institution, local government, and community continue to have a role in improving teacher welfare. Figure 1 summarizes the four elements of the spiritual-communal retention pattern.

Spiritual values encompass *niat*, *khidmah*, and *barakah*. All four informants associate the intention to worship and serve with their dedication. The role of *barakah* as an experience

supporting retention remains a proposition based on a single account. Interviews and observations support the findings concerning family-like relationships, leadership, and deliberation. Communal relationships are interpreted as a source of support that makes teachers feel appreciated. Their direct relationship with decisions to remain has not been explicitly stated.

All four informants have alternative sources of income and live near the TPQ. Both are interpreted as enabling conditions for retention. The strength of this interpretation remains limited because the study did not include teachers who live far from the institution or depend entirely on the TPQ for their livelihoods. Decisions to remain are reflected in long periods of service and voluntary involvement. The spiritual-communal retention pattern integrates the roles of religious intention, communal ties, and enabling economic and residential conditions within a single case. This pattern continues to position fair compensation as an institutional responsibility.

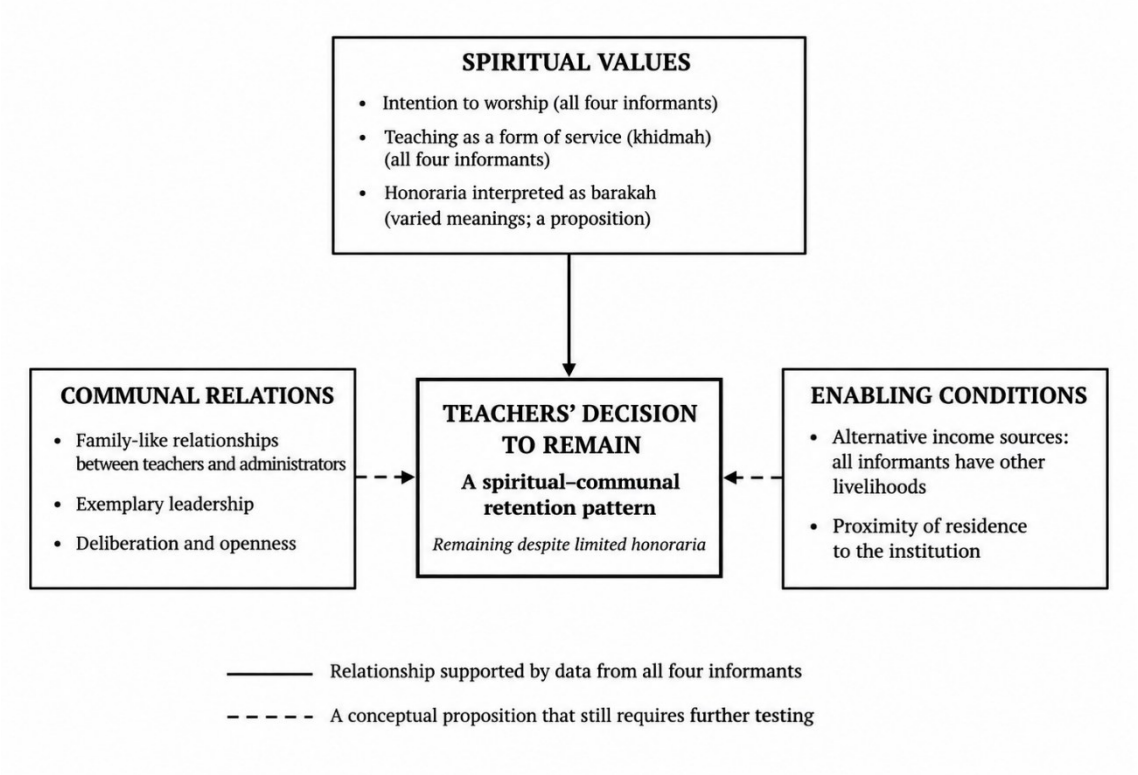


Figure 1. Spiritual-Communal Retention Pattern

CONCLUSION

Teacher retention at TPQ Al-Falah is primarily characterized by affective and normative commitment, as reflected in teachers' dedication to guiding students and their voluntary involvement. All four informants interpret teaching as an act of worship and *khidmah*, while their understandings of *barakah* vary. Alternative sources of income and residential proximity appear to facilitate teachers' continued service. Institutional administrators support retention through family-like relationships, exemplary leadership, deliberation, and symbolic recognition. The interplay between spiritual values, communal ties, and these enabling conditions constitutes a spiritual-communal retention pattern as a preliminary explanation derived from a single case.

The findings of this case study are limited to four informants who live near the TPQ and have alternative sources of income. Two of them are certified teachers. Information regarding reasons for leaving was obtained from administrators and active teachers. The sustainability of communal ties following a change in TPQ leadership remains unknown.

Institutional administrators can sustain teacher retention by strengthening the meaning of worship, exemplary leadership, deliberation, communal relationships, and leadership succession planning. The Ministry of Religious Affairs and local governments should expand financial incentives, while students' parents can support institutional funding through tuition fees according to their financial capacity. Future research could include teachers who depend financially on TPQ employment and former teachers, as well as examine this retention pattern across a larger number of TPQs and *madrasah diniyah* institutions.

DECLARATION OF AI AND AI ASSISTED TECHNOLOGIES IN THE WRITING PROCESS

During the preparation of this manuscript, the authors used Claude (Anthropic) to assist in reviewing the manuscript structure, providing feedback on the arguments, refining the language, and checking the consistency and metadata of references. All AI-assisted outputs were subsequently reviewed, verified against the original sources, and revised by the authors. The authors take full responsibility for the accuracy, originality, and integrity of the final published content.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION STATEMENT

The first author was responsible for conceptualization, methodology development, data collection through interviews, observations, and documentation, data analysis, preparation of the original manuscript draft, and subsequent revision and editing. The second author contributed to the visualization of findings (Figure 1), literature review, and manuscript review and editing.

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DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data supporting the findings of this study, including interview transcripts, field notes, and institutional documents, are not publicly available because they contain information that could identify the informants and the institution. Anonymized data may be obtained from the authors upon reasonable request, subject to the consent of the informants.

DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

The first author is an alumnus of TPQ Al-Falah and previously served as an administrative staff member and teacher at the institution. This prior affiliation was addressed through reflexive practices and triangulation of data sources and collection methods, as described in the Methods section. The authors declare that they have no financial interests related to this research.

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