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Interpreting *Khalifah Fi Al-Ardh* Through Leadership Experience: A Phenomenological Study Of Student Organization Leaders At MAN Kota Magelang

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Abstract

Human beings are designated as khalifah on Earth; however, this term is often narrowly interpreted merely as "leader," thereby overlooking the ethical and ecological dimensions inherent within it. This study aims to explore how students interpret the concept of khalifah fi al-ardh through their leadership experiences within school organizations, and how these interpretations are shaped through social interaction, utilizing George Herbert Mead's theory of symbolic interactionism as a theoretical framework. The study employs a qualitative approach with a phenomenological design, specifically the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) method conducted at MAN Kota Magelang in September 2026. Six informants participated in the study, consisting of three student organization leaders (from the Student Council, the Scout movement, and an Islamic spiritual organization/Rohis) and three general members. The findings indicate that, initially, these leaders understood khalifah strictly as "leader." However, their organizational experiences broadened this understanding to encompass concepts such as amanah (trust), responsibility, self-control, setting an example, justice, musyawarah

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(deliberation), and concern for the surrounding environment. These results suggest that student organizations can serve as experiential spaces where religious concepts are understood through concrete practice, while simultaneously providing a contextual foundation for Islamic Religious Education to bridge conceptual understanding with the students' lived experiences.

Keywords: Khalifah, Student Organization Leadership, Islamic Religious Education, Phenomenology, Symbolic Interactionism

INTRODUCTION

Human beings are positioned as *khalifah* on Earth, endowed by God with the advantages of intellect, knowledge, and free will. This status not only signifies human dignity but also entails ethical and spiritual responsibilities regarding the management of life (Fatkhullah & Mahmud, 2025). The concept of *khalifah* conveys the role of humans as guardians, caretakers, and trustees of God's trust (Fakhruddin, 2026). Furthermore, humans are responsible for protecting the environment and preventing destruction on Earth (Syauqi et al., 2025). Consequently, the concept of *khalifah* holds significant relevance within Islamic education, particularly in shaping students' understanding of their responsibilities as human beings.

In the Quran, human beings are endowed with faculties, such as sight, hearing, conscience, intellect, and will to fulfill their responsibilities both as individuals and as social beings (Marpaung, 2023). However, the teaching of Islamic Religious Education still faces challenges in integrating the dimension of ecological ethics into its curriculum and instructional practices. This situation risks narrowing the understanding of the term *khalifah* to merely that of a "leader" (Muflihin, 2026). In reality, the responsibility of a *khalifah* encompasses the management and preservation of the natural world, ensuring a balanced existence for future generations (Hasibuan, 2021). Therefore, students need to grasp a broader understanding of the concept of *khalifah* as articulated in the Quran, for instance, in Surah Al-Baqarah, verse 30.

وَاِذْ قَالَ رَبُّكَ لِلْمَلٰۤىِٕكَةِ اِنِّيْ جَاعِلٌ فِى الْاَرْضِ خَلِيْفَةً ۗقَالُوْٓا اَتَجْعَلُ فِيْهَا مَنْ يُّفْسِدُ فِيْهَا وَيَسْفِكُ الدِّمَاۤءَۚ وَنَحْنُ نُسَبِّحُ بِحَمْدِكَ وَنُقَدِّسُ لَكَ ۗقَالَ اِنِّيْٓ اَعْلَمُ مَا لَا تَعْلَمُوْنَ ٣٠

A student's understanding of the concept of *khalifah* should not be limited to the definitions typically found in textbooks. Religious concepts such as *khalifah* can take on more contextual meaning when linked to real-life situations experienced by students (Yolanda et al., 2024). One relevant sphere of experience is student organizations, particularly for those who hold

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leadership roles. Within these organizations, students encounter various scenarios—such as decision-making, conflict resolution, collaboration, maintaining discipline, and navigating the successes or failures of their initiatives. Such experiences offer students an opportunity to reflect on their responsibilities toward themselves, others, and the environment around them.

Leadership experience within student organizations can serve as a context for understanding how the concept of *khalifah* is interpreted in real-life situations. However, organizational leadership does not necessarily encompass the full meaning of *khalifah*. Such experiences are better viewed as a space for reflection, enabling students to connect the responsibilities they undertake with the concept of human beings as *khalifah* on Earth. In this process, each student develops unique experiences and interpretations, shaped by the situations they encounter, their interactions with others, and their reflections on their own actions. Therefore, research is needed to explore how students themselves interpret this connection based on their personal experiences.

Students' interpretation of the concept of *khalifah* through organizational experience does not take shape in a vacuum, isolated from social life. Rather, this interpretation evolves through interactions with fellow members, organizational mentors, and the surrounding environment. To understand this process, George Herbert Mead's theory of symbolic interactionism can serve as a theoretical perspective. According to this view, social experience and interaction play a role in the formation of meaning, as well as in an individual's understanding of themselves and others. Thus, Mead's theory assists in examining how students interpret their leadership experiences and connect them to their responsibilities as human beings—without the theory itself predetermining the meaning of *khalifah.*

Islamic education aims to ensure that students not only understand religious teachings but are also capable of putting them into practice within their social interactions and daily lives (Romli & Sofa, 2025). One topic relevant to this objective is the concept of human beings as *khalifah* on Earth, which pertains to the responsibilities inherent in human life. However, a true grasp of this concept extends beyond a student's ability to define it or recall relevant scriptural evidence; it is equally important to understand how students interpret this concept when faced with concrete, real-world experiences. In this context, the experience of organizational leadership can serve as a space for reflection, allowing for an exploration of the connection between religious knowledge and its practical application in life.

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Previous research has explored the concept of *khalifah* from various perspectives. Aini (2025) examines the evolution of the term *khalifah*, from the Qur'anic era to the post-Qur'anic period, and its relevance across different contexts. Meanwhile, (Isnaini, 2025) discusses the application of *khalifah*-related values within Islamic educational leadership, aiming to cultivate leaders who are visionary, trustworthy, and just, while serving as moral and spiritual role models. Furthermore, Putrawansyah et al., (2026) highlight the role of student organizations in fostering responsibility, discipline, communication, collaboration, and decision-making skills. While these studies demonstrate that the concepts of *khalifah* and leadership have been examined from diverse angles, the interpretation of the *khalifah* concept, specifically in the context of students' own leadership experiences within organizations, has not yet been a primary focus. Consequently, this study centers on how students themselves interpret the concept of *khalifah* based on the leadership experiences they have undergone.

MAN Kota Magelang has various student organizations that provide leadership experience for students, including the head of the class This condition is a relevant context for studying the relationship between religious understanding and student leadership experiences. This research is important to understand how the concept of caliph is interpreted in real experience, considering that human responsibility as caliph is not limited to leadership towards other people. Therefore, this research aims to explore students' leadership experiences, understand their meaning of the concept of caliphate on earth based on these experiences, and examine the process of meaning formation through social interaction using the perspective of George Herbert Mead's symbolic interactionism.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative approach with a phenomenological design. A qualitative approach was chosen to gain a comprehensive understanding of how students in organizational leadership roles interpret the concept of *khalifah* on earth. A phenomenological design was utilized because the research focuses on the lived experiences of the informants as they themselves experienced and interpreted them following the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) framework developed by Smith et al. (2009). The study was conducted at MAN Kota Magelang over six days, from September 21 to 26, 2026, involving six informants: three organizational leaders and three organizational members. The leaders included the heads of the Student Council (KO), the Scout Troop (KA), and the Islamic Student Association *Rohis* (KR), while

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the members included representatives from the Student Council (AO), the Scout Troop (AA), and the Islamic Student Association (AR). The informants were selected based on their active participation in these organizations and their prior study of the concept of *khalifah* on earth within the *Al-Qur'an Hadis* curriculum; thus, all informants possessed the relevant conceptual foundation to interpret their own leadership experiences. The selection was based on the premise that the leaders experienced the leadership role firsthand, while the members through their intensive interaction with these leaders could provide complementary perspectives on those leadership experiences. Data were collected through interviews designed to explore the informants' experiences, understandings, and interpretations of the *khalifah* concept as it relates to their leadership practice.

Data analysis followed the idiographic method proposed by Smith et al. (2022), which involves an in-depth analysis of each informant individually before proceeding to the next, followed by a comparison of patterns across all informants. The analysis process begins with repeated readings of the interview transcripts to immerse the researcher in the data, followed by "initial noting", a process involving descriptive, linguistic, and conceptual annotations. These notes are then developed into emergent themes, and the connections between them are explored to construct superordinate themes and their corresponding subthemes. This procedure is repeated for each informant, with the researcher setting aside findings from previous interviews to ensure that the unique characteristics of each individual case are preserved. The final stage involves identifying patterns across informants to generate overarching group themes that capture both the commonalities and the differences in the participants' experiences. Throughout this process, the researcher seeks to interpret how the informants make sense of their own experiences, resulting in a "double hermeneutic", a situation where the researcher attempts to understand the informants, who are themselves attempting to understand their own experiences. Data validity is established through source triangulation, which entails comparing the accounts provided by an organization's leader with those provided by members of the same organization.

RESEARCH RESULTS

Organizational Experience

The three chairpersons view the positions they hold as an *amanah* (a sacred trust), though each places a different emphasis on this concept. KO interprets it as a form of trust that must be

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upheld so as not to disappoint those who bestowed it; as he stated, "When we are entrusted with a responsibility, it means there is trust involved; therefore, we must not betray that trust." Meanwhile, KA views the role of chairperson as a responsibility to guide members, maintain cohesion, and be accountable for every decision made. In contrast, KR places greater emphasis on setting an example, arguing that a chairperson should not merely issue orders, but must also embody the values they communicate. The focus of their accountability also differs: KR and KA feel accountable to themselves, their members, and their advisors, whereas KO directs his accountability toward the members and the progress of the organization. This sense of responsibility is also interpreted through a religious lens; KO feels he must not break his oath before God, while KA views his position as a trust granted by God's permission—a form of *ibadah* (worship).

Exercising leadership as an *amanah* is not always easy, especially when these chairpersons are confronted with various problems and demands. For KO, the most difficult moment arose when a committee member violated competition participation rules, ultimately leading to the member's departure from the organization. This event left KO feeling a sense of personal responsibility for what had transpired. He remarked, "I felt at fault, as I sensed I had fallen short in some way," though he remained committed to fulfilling his duties until the end of his term. Unlike KO, KR's challenge stemmed from balancing multiple roles as class president, head of the *Rohis* (Islamic student organization), participant in *Popda* (regional student sports competition) preparations, and *santri* (Islamic boarding school student), which he managed through careful time allocation. As for KA, he found himself leading alone after his co-leader *(pradana)* left the organization; his challenges were further compounded when he encountered disagreements with his advisor.

When faced with various issues, these chairpersons do not always make decisions on their own. They engage in discussions with other committee members, the general membership, and their advisors. When faced with differing opinions, all three leaders tend to seek a middle ground by considering or synthesizing the various viewpoints an approach they also apply when interacting with their advisors. KO emphasizes that showing respect for an advisor does not mean one must abandon one's own perspective. The members themselves have observed this practice; AO notes that their leader is capable of accommodating multiple viewpoints, while AR observes that their leader involves the entire membership, not just the core committee. AA also feels that their opinions are valued and well-received, even when there are differences in perspective, as

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evidenced by their remark: “My opinion was well-received it wasn’t outright rejected, even though there were differences.” Consequently, members feel that there is a meaningful space for them to express their views and participate in the organization’s dynamics without being sidelined.

The ability to navigate differences is also evident in how these leaders handle internal conflicts. All three prioritize maintaining a calm atmosphere when resolving issues, though their specific methods vary. KO views composure as essential to decision-making and uses evaluation sessions as a forum for members to voice grievances. KA prefers to speak directly with any member involved in an issue before seeking a solution, an approach appreciated by AA, who notes that their leader prioritizes communication when addressing problems. Meanwhile, KR places a greater emphasis on patience, believing that mistakes often stem from acting too hastily.

The leaders’ involvement also extends to the care of their environment and facilities, though the specific approach differs across each organization. In the Student Council (OSIS), while there is no formal environmental cleanliness program, the leader personally ensures that activity spaces are tidied up both before and after events. The Islamic Student Organization (Rohis) employs a more structured system, including a Friday duty roster and mosque cleaning sessions following mid-semester assessments (ASTS), with sanctions for those who fail to participate. Meanwhile, the Scout Council (Dewan Ambalan) leads the "Scout Care" (Pramuka Peduli) initiative at the end of each semester, as well as the "Scout Contribution Box" (Bumbung Pramuka) program every Saturday. In all three organizations, members observe that their leaders take an active, hands-on role rather than merely issuing directives. Various experiences gained through organizational involvement have brought about changes in the leaders themselves. KO has noted personal growth in time management, sense of responsibility, and leadership abilities. KR has become increasingly aware of the importance of maintaining an appropriate demeanor as a leader, while KA finds it easier to interact and blend in with others. These changes have been accompanied by feedback from other members; AO hopes that the leaders can become firmer without losing their gentleness, while AR suggests that communication with all members should be more intensive.

Interpreting the Concept of *Khalifah*

When asked to interpret the concept of *khalifah*, all three leaders began their definitions of the term *khalifah* (steward/leader) by identifying it simply as "leader." However, their

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organizational experience caused this interpretation to evolve, with each placing a different emphasis on its meaning. After assuming his role, KO came to understand that a leader does not merely direct others; a leader must also be responsible, adaptable, and capable of making decisions. Although he believes his core understanding remained consistent before and after taking office, his explanation reveals that the experience of leadership enriched his grasp of a leader's responsibilities.

KR interprets the concept of *khalifah* by first reflecting on his own capacity to lead. He questions his ability to exercise self-control, noting, "I look inward; sometimes I wonder, in my role as leader, am I actually capable of controlling myself?" He then draws a parallel between the human duty to care for the environment and a leader's responsibility to nurture the organization and sustain a positive culture within it. For him, a leader's responsibility is comprehensive—even when tasks are delegated, various issues ultimately fall back on the leader. Meanwhile, KA places greater emphasis on the importance of setting an example. In his view, it is not enough for a leader to simply issue orders, give instructions, or offer reprimands; a leader must also model the desired behavior. He asserts that "a leader is not a boss," illustrating this with the example of a leader who does not just demand that an area be cleaned, but actively participates by showing how it should be done.

Despite their differing emphases, all three leaders share a common perspective: they view leadership as a responsibility that demands both the ability to set an example and the capacity for self-control. This is also reflected in the advice they offer to other students. KO highlights the importance of leading oneself before attempting to lead others, while KR advises that one should not be drawn merely to the position itself, but must also be prepared to fulfill the responsibilities that come with it. He states, "Be prepared within yourself first; don't focus on how others perceive you." Both messages underscore the idea that the ability to lead others must stem from one's own readiness and capacity for self-management. This interpretation is also evident in how members perceive the behavior of their leader. AR observes that his leader understands the role of a *khalifah* (steward/leader) by developing the organization, acting with integrity (*amanah)* and fairness, and demonstrating the ability to keep his ego in check. He distinguishes between a "leader" and a "ruler," noting that "he shows that he is a leader, not a ruler." Similar assessments are reflected in the experiences of AO and AA. AO views his leader as a calm individual who is willing to be directly involved in activities, while AA describes his leader as someone who provides guidance, embraces all members, delegates tasks equitably, and encourages members to

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perform prayers in congregation. Although not explicitly asked about the concept of *khalifah*, the experiences of AO and AA indicate that these values are reflected in the leader's daily conduct.

The Process of Interpreting the Concept of *Khalifah*

The meaning of *khalifah* does not emerge spontaneously; rather, it is formed gradually through learning, experience, and reflection. This process begins with religious education. KO first encountered the term *khalifah* during his time in MTs (Islamic junior high school), while KA associates it with material from the eleventh grade, which defined a *khalifah* as a leader. KR also points to lessons from his teacher as the starting point for his awareness of leadership—specifically, the idea that "a good leader is one who loves their members, and in turn, the members also love their leader." He notes that his background in a religious studies track encouraged him to take on the role of leader. These experiences suggest that a foundational understanding of the *khalifah* concept was established before the individuals assumed their positions, while subsequent organizational experience further enriched their interpretation.

This interpretation became tangible when the leaders took their oath of office. From the moment he recited the oath, KO felt the weight of the leadership trust (*amanah*) placed upon him, viewing it as a commitment that must not be broken. KR also experienced moments of doubt while taking the oath, recounting, "As I read the oath, I wondered whether I was capable or not. I had to be brave; if I were afraid even to recite the oath, how could I possibly handle the reality of being a leader?" Once in office, various organizational challenges served to further test their understanding of responsibility. This experience encouraged them not merely to carry out their duties, but also to learn from their mistakes and the criticism they received. KA, for instance, worked with peers to promptly correct any erroneous answers, while KR sought to turn negative feedback into a learning opportunity, ensuring that similar issues would not recur.

The experience also prompted the leaders to engage in self-reflection. KR compared his behavior before and after taking on his leadership role. He realized that his habit of skipping classes—back when he first joined the organization—had been detrimental to both his teachers and himself, and he felt that this bad habit had diminished. During their tenure as leaders, the individuals in question adopted specific approaches: KO sought to cultivate composure to ensure that decisions were not driven by emotion, while KA chose to set aside their mobile phone during organizational activities to maintain better focus. These experiences illustrate that the

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responsibility of a *khalifah* (leader/steward) is not directed solely toward others; it also demands the capacity for self-regulation and self-improvement.

Beyond personal experience, the interpretation of the role of *khalifah* is shaped by the demands of the position and the organizational environment. KO recognized that the role required setting an example for other members, noting, "Being the student council president means I have to be a role model, so I must be mindful of my conduct." Similarly, KR understood that their position as leader meant their behavior was subject to greater scrutiny by the members. Organizational mentors and established norms also serve as guiding frameworks for leadership, manifested through practices such as consultation, deliberation, tolerance, and collaboration.

Thus, the understanding of the *khalifah* role is forged through an ongoing process. Religious education provides an initial conceptualization of the *khalifah* as a leader, while the oath of office and organizational experience reinforce the awareness of one's responsibilities. This process is further deepened through self-reflection and the perspectives of others; consequently, the *khalifah* is understood not merely as a leader, but as an individual who is trustworthy, fair, composed, capable of self-control, and serves as an exemplary model for others.

DISCUSSION

The findings indicate that the three student organization leaders initially understood *khalifah* primarily as a leader. However, their organizational experiences broadened this understanding to include responsibility, trustworthiness, exemplary conduct, justice, and self-control. This development suggests that leadership experience provides opportunities for students to connect religious knowledge with practical responsibilities. Such an interpretation is consistent with the view that human responsibility as *khalifah* extends beyond leading others to include accountability toward oneself and the surrounding environment (Wahyudi et al., 2026). Thus, student organizations can become spaces in which religious concepts are understood through experience, social interaction, and reflection.

The findings also demonstrate that Islamic leadership values are expressed through practices based on *amanah* (trust), responsibility, and exemplary conduct. Leadership is not understood merely as the authority to direct members but also as the willingness to listen, consider different opinions, and involve others in decision-making (Haliza et al., 2026). These practices align with principles of Islamic educational leadership, such as *Amanah* (trust),

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consultation (shura), justice, and exemplary conduct (Assai'di et al., 2021; Nofermidos et al., 2026). They also complement findings that student organizations activities in madrasah shape leadership character, including discipline, responsibility, communication skills, teamwork, and decision making, through habituation and role modeling (Zuhudi & Ulum, 2026). This study extends these perspectives by showing that students interpret such organizational competencies as part of their broader responsibility as *khalifah*.

Another dimension of this responsibility concerns environmental care. The leaders' involvement in maintaining the cleanliness of organizational spaces, school facilities, and activity locations indicates that they associate leadership with caring for their surroundings. These practices illustrate one practical expression of the ecological dimension of the *khalifah* concept: the responsibility to maintain the Earth and prevent environmental degradation (Arsyad & Hasanah, 2025). This understanding is also consistent with studies showing that *khalifah* values can be translated into environmentally responsible behavior, such as habitual cleanliness and waste sorting (Amelia et al., 2025). Nevertheless, these organizational activities should be understood as specific manifestations of environmental responsibility, rather than as a complete representation of the meaning of *khalifah*.

To explain how students construct this meaning, this study draws on George Herbert Mead's symbolic interactionism, particularly the interconnected concepts of mind, self, and society. This perspective helps explain how individuals interpret experiences, develop an understanding of themselves, and construct meaning through social interaction. In this study, Mead's theory is used to analyze how participants interpret the concept of *khalifah*, rather than to determine its theological meaning.

The concept of mind explains how individuals interpret meaningful symbols through experience and social interaction (Ramadhani et al., 2025). The participants had encountered the concept of *khalifah* through religious education before becoming organizational leaders. Their initial understanding, which emphasized leadership, subsequently developed as they faced organizational responsibilities, made decisions, and interacted with members. From Mead's perspective, mind is not simply the accumulation of knowledge; it involves the ability to interpret symbols and meanings in relation to social situations. Similar processes have been reported among Muslim students, who interpret the religious symbols present in their school environment and gradually develop religious awareness from them (Hamidah & Hanif, 2026). Accordingly, the concept of *khalifah*, initially learned through religious instruction, was reinterpreted through

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leadership experience. The participants began to associate it not only with the position of a leader but also with fulfilling responsibilities, setting an example, and making decisions. Organizational experience therefore provided a context in which previously acquired religious knowledge gained more practical and personal meaning.

The concept of self helps explain how participants developed an understanding of themselves as leaders. Their experiences of accepting responsibility, facing challenges, receiving criticism, and reflecting on their conduct encouraged them to evaluate and regulate their behavior. Mead (1934) explains that the self develops when individuals become objects of their own reflection by considering the perspectives and expectations of others. This process involves the relationship between the Me, which represents internalized social expectations, and the I, which refers to an individual's response to those expectations. In this study, expectations that leaders should be responsible, composed, fair, and exemplary became standards through which participants evaluated themselves. Their efforts to control emotions, correct mistakes, and improve their conduct illustrate how leadership identity develops through reflection and responses to social expectations. Research in educational settings likewise shows that identity develops through the interplay between the I and the Me, as individuals reflect on their own actions from the perspective of others (Nortvig, 2017). Thus, becoming a leader involves not only occupying a formal position but also developing awareness of one's responsibilities and continuously improving oneself.

The concept of society highlights the role of social relationships and shared expectations in shaping the meaning of *khalifah* (Thabrani et al., 2025). Interactions with members, mentors, and the organizational environment exposed the participants to different perspectives and expectations concerning leadership. Organizational practices such as deliberation, consultation, collaboration, and task delegation provided shared standards for carrying out responsibilities. In Mead's theory, society refers to patterns of social relationships and shared attitudes that influence individual conduct. This is related to the concept of the generalized other, through which individuals understand and internalize the expectations of their social group (Mead, 1934). This is consistent with findings that students' religious meanings are negotiated through interaction with peers, mentors, and the school community, and that discussion and mentoring support deeper internalization of values than one-way instruction (Hamidah & Hanif, 2026). In this context, organizational norms and the expectations of members and mentors became points of reference for participants in evaluating their leadership behavior. The meaning of *khalifah* was

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therefore shaped not only by individual understanding but also by participation in a social environment that emphasized collective responsibility.

The relationship between mind, self, and society demonstrates that the construction of meaning is an interconnected process. Religious knowledge provides initial symbols for interpretation; leadership experience and reflection contribute to the development of self-understanding; and social interaction reinforces or reshapes these meanings through shared expectations. The study therefore shows that students' understanding of *khalifah* develops through the interaction between religious knowledge and lived organizational experience. This offers a contextual perspective on the concept by illustrating how its values are interpreted and practiced in students' everyday leadership activities.

These findings have implications for Islamic Religious Education, particularly in teaching the concept of human beings as *khalifah fi al-ardh*. Learning should move beyond memorizing definitions and scriptural evidence by providing opportunities for students to connect religious concepts with their responsibilities in daily life. Organizational activities can serve as contextual learning experiences, but they require guidance and reflection to help students recognize the religious values underlying their actions. Teachers and organizational mentors can facilitate this process through reflective activities, case-based discussions, and collaborative projects concerning responsibility toward oneself, others, and the environment. Such an approach supports the integration of religious understanding with its practical application in everyday life, because reflective discussion and real-life experience help students internalize religious values (Hamidah & Hanif, 2026).

CONCLUSION

This study aims to explore students' leadership experiences, understand their meaning of the concept of caliphate on earth based on these experiences, and examine the process of meaning formation through social interaction using the perspective of George Herbert Mead's symbolic interactionism. The leadership experiences of student organization leaders at MAN Kota Magelang show that they view their positions as an *amanah* (trust) that demands accountability to themselves, members, mentors, and God. They face challenges such as member violations, multiple roles, and disagreements with mentors, and they respond through consultation, composure, and seeking a middle ground among differing views. Their involvement in

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maintaining the cleanliness of organizational spaces and school facilities also shows that they associate leadership with caring for the surrounding environment.

The leaders initially interpreted *khalifah* mainly as a "leader." Through organizational experience, this meaning broadened to include responsibility, *amanah*, exemplary conduct, justice, composure, and self-control. These findings indicate that the responsibility of a *khalifah* is directed not only toward others but also toward oneself and the environment, although organizational activities represent only one expression of the concept rather than its full meaning. From the perspective of George Herbert Mead's symbolic interactionism, the meaning of *khalifah* is formed gradually through the interplay of mind, self, and society. Religious education provides the initial symbols, the oath of office and organizational challenges strengthen the awareness of responsibility, self-reflection shapes leadership identity, and interaction with members and mentors provides shared expectations that reinforce these meanings. Accordingly, student organizations can serve as a reflective space that connects religious knowledge with everyday responsibilities, which implies that Islamic Religious Education should provide guided reflection, case-based discussion, and collaborative projects to help students recognize the religious values underlying their actions.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Islamic Religious Education teachers are advised to move beyond memorizing definitions and scriptural evidence when teaching the concept of *khalifah fi al-ardh.* Learning should connect the concept with students' responsibilities toward themselves, others, and the environment through reflective activities, case-based discussions, and collaborative projects. Teachers are also encouraged to integrate the ecological dimension of *khalifah* into instruction so that the concept is not narrowed to merely "leader." Organizational mentors and madrasah administrators are encouraged to treat student organizations as contextual learning spaces. Because organizational experience alone does not automatically lead students to recognize the religious values underlying their actions, mentors need to provide guidance and regular reflection, such as evaluation sessions and discussions on responsibility, *amanah*, and exemplary conduct. Future researchers are advised to involve more informants from a wider range of schools, organizations, and educational levels, since this study was limited to six informants at a single madrasah. Further studies may use complementary methods, such as participant observation or longitudinal designs, to examine how the meaning of *khalifah* changes over time. Researchers may also

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explore the ecological dimension of *khalifah* in greater depth, as well as how mentors and teachers facilitate students' reflection on their leadership experiences.

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