

# Transformative Leadership in Islamic Religious Education At Raudhatul Athfal Nawa Kartika: Initiating Competitive Islamic Management in Probolinggo

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**Article History:**

Received:

October 4, 2024

Revised:

October 10, 2024

Accepted:

October 11, 2024

Published:

October 18, 2024

**Keywords:**

Transformative  
Leadership, Islamic  
Religious Education,  
Competitive Islamic  
Management

**Abstract:** *this study explores the transformational leadership strategies implemented by the principal of Raudhatul Athfal (RA) Nawa Kartika in Probolinggo, focusing on their impact on the quality of early childhood Islamic education. The method used is descriptive qualitative, examining the principal's approach to Islamic curriculum development, human resource management, facility improvement, and relationships with the community and parents. The results show that the principal's leadership, based on Islamic values and transformational leadership principles, has significantly improved the quality of education. The integration of Islamic values into the curriculum has shaped students' character and enhanced their cognitive development. Furthermore, continuous human resource management through teacher training and development has positively impacted the quality of teaching. Overall, the transformational leadership strategies applied by the principal of RA Nawa Kartika have proven effective in enhancing the quality of Islamic education. This study provides valuable insights for other educational institutions regarding the importance of visionary, inclusive leadership rooted in Islamic values in achieving educational goals, particularly in early childhood Islamic education*

**Abstrak:** Penelitian ini mengeksplorasi strategi kepemimpinan transformasional yang diterapkan oleh kepala sekolah Raudhatul Athfal (RA) Nawa Kartika di Probolinggo, dengan fokus pada dampaknya terhadap kualitas pendidikan agama Islam usia dini. Metode yang digunakan adalah deskriptif kualitatif, dengan mengkaji pendekatan kepala sekolah dalam pengembangan kurikulum Islami, pengelolaan sumber daya manusia, peningkatan fasilitas, dan hubungan dengan masyarakat serta orang tua. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa kepemimpinan kepala sekolah, yang berlandaskan pada nilai-nilai Islam dan prinsip kepemimpinan transformasional, mampu meningkatkan kualitas pendidikan. Integrasi nilai-nilai Islam dalam kurikulum secara signifikan membentuk karakter siswa dan mengembangkan aspek kognitif mereka. Selain itu, pengelolaan sumber daya manusia yang berkesinambungan melalui pelatihan dan pengembangan guru berdampak positif pada peningkatan kualitas pengajaran. Secara keseluruhan, strategi kepemimpinan transformasional yang diterapkan oleh kepala sekolah RA Nawa Kartika terbukti efektif dalam meningkatkan kualitas pendidikan agama Islam. Penelitian ini memberikan pandangan berharga bagi lembaga pendidikan lainnya tentang pentingnya kepemimpinan visioner, inklusif, dan berbasis nilai-nilai Islam dalam mencapai tujuan pendidikan, khususnya dalam pendidikan agama Islam usia dini.

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**Please cite this article in APA style as:**

Islamiyah, Devi Fitriah, and Benny Prasetya. (2024). Transformative Leadership in Islamic Religious Education at Raudhatul Athfal Nawa Kartika: Initiating Competitive Islamic Management in Probolinggo. *Journal of Islamic Education Research*, 5 (3), 211–224; doi: <https://doi.org/10.35719/jier.v5i3.438>



## INTRODUCTION

Education is one of the key pillars in the development of a nation. Basic education, which includes early childhood education at Kindergarten (TK) or Raudhatul Athfal (RA), plays a crucial role in shaping the character, intelligence, and morality of children from an early age. Early childhood education, especially in institutions like RA, serves as a platform for instilling Islamic values as a spiritual foundation for Muslim children (Hanushek & Woessmann, 2008). In this context, the leadership of the school principal holds a strategic role in determining the quality of education provided, particularly in integrating Islamic values into the curriculum and daily learning practices (Barro & Lee, 2013). School principals are expected to have strong managerial and leadership abilities to improve the quality of education and create a learning environment that is conducive not only academically but also spiritually and morally (Fauzan et al., 2023).

In preschool education, the leadership of the school principal significantly influences the quality of education and management within the institution. Research shows that the principal's leadership style can affect teacher effectiveness, especially in early childhood Islamic education, by enhancing teacher participation in applying religious values and creating an Islamic learning environment (Zhang et al., 2022; Wang & Xia, 2022). Effective leadership involves an inclusive style, empowering teachers to participate in leadership, and promoting the integration of Islamic values into the curriculum and school activities.

The school principal also plays a crucial role in educational management, including managing the facilities to support the teaching and learning process, which directly affects the effectiveness of learning (Rostini et al., 2022; Dewi et al., 2023). Educational facility management is essential to ensure quality educational activities, especially in creating an Islamic learning environment (Cape, 2023). Thus, school management that is oriented toward Islamic education requires leadership focused on forming students' religious character and embedding Islamic moral values in every aspect of education.

Raudhatul Athfal (RA) Nawa Kartika in Probolinggo is one such Islamic educational institution focused on early childhood education. Like other educational institutions, RA Nawa Kartika faces challenges in improving the quality of education and school management. Here, the school principal's leadership strategy plays a pivotal role in determining the direction of the institution's development. A'yuni & Rindaningsih (2024) highlight the importance of the school principal's role in guiding and motivating all school elements to achieve educational goals, particularly in instilling Islamic values in the learning process.

The principal of RA Nawa Kartika Probolinggo is responsible for developing an Islamic-based curriculum, managing human resources, improving school facilities, and strengthening relationships with the community and parents. Involving parents in activities focused on Islamic Education can positively impact improving the quality of education, while cooperation with the community helps strengthen the bond between the institution and its surrounding environment (Hardiansyah & Zainuddin, 2022; Tait et al., 2001).

This study aims to examine and analyze the leadership strategies of the school principal at RA Nawa Kartika Probolinggo, focusing on how these leadership strategies influence the implementation of Islamic Education. The research delves deeper into how the principal manages various aspects of education, including the development of a curriculum based on Islamic values, and strategies that contribute to improving the overall quality of education at RA Nawa Kartika. The challenges often faced by educational institutions, such as limited resources and the difficulties in implementing an Islamic curriculum, are a key focus of this research.

Understanding effective leadership strategies in the context of early childhood Islamic education is crucial to overcoming various obstacles and achieving desired educational goals. This research seeks to identify leadership strategies that align with Islamic principles, which can make a significant contribution to improving the quality of early childhood education at RA Nawa Kartika Probolinggo.

Several theoretical approaches will be used in this study, including transformational leadership theory, which emphasizes the importance of religious values in shaping an Islamic educational environment (Tohet & Hidayat, 2023). This theory underscores the importance of effective communication and the integration of Islamic values in all aspects of education. Additionally, organizational change theory proposed by Habibi (2024) will serve as a framework for examining how management changes at RA Nawa Kartika can affect the improvement of educational quality. Leadership strategies focused on transforming Islamic education, developing a relevant curriculum, and involving the community will be key components of this analysis.

Through synthesizing these various theories, this research will provide practical guidance for school principals in managing Islamic education at RA, creating a competitive and Islamic learning environment in the modern era.

## **METHOD**

This research employs a descriptive qualitative method to explore the leadership strategies of the principal at Raudhatul Athfal (RA) Nawa Kartika Probolinggo, focusing on early childhood Islamic education. This method was chosen because it allows the researcher to deeply uncover how the principal manages and leads this Islamic-based educational institution (Juharyanto et al., 2020). The focus of the study is on a specific educational institution, enabling the researcher to delve deeply into the phenomenon and gain a comprehensive understanding of the leadership strategies implemented in the context of Islamic education (Klevering & McNae, 2018).

The subjects of this research include the principal, teachers, parents, and students, all of whom play important roles in the RA Nawa Kartika educational environment. This approach provides a rich understanding of how the applied leadership strategies relate to the values and principles of Islamic education and their impact on the development of early childhood students in this institution.

Data collection techniques included in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and document studies. Semi-structured interviews were conducted

with the principal, teachers, parents, and students to explore their experiences and views on the principal's leadership strategies, particularly in the context of Islamic education. Participatory observation allowed the researcher to observe interactions and leadership processes in real situations, including how Islamic values are integrated into daily school activities. The document study involved collecting and analyzing relevant documents, such as annual reports, school policies, and meeting minutes, which reflect efforts to integrate Islamic education into the curriculum and school activities.

The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify key themes, triangulation to verify findings from various sources, and narrative analysis to understand the experiences and perspectives of the participants. In the context of Islamic education, emerging themes may include the application of moral values, character development based on Islamic principles, and the role of parents in supporting their children's education.

To ensure the validity and reliability of the research, data triangulation from various sources was used, along with participant involvement in the verification process of the findings. Consistent interview guides and detailed documentation were employed to ensure data reliability. This research also adheres to ethical research principles by providing full information to participants before they gave consent, maintaining confidentiality of identities and personal information, and respecting participants' rights to decline participation or withdraw from the study without consequences. This research method is expected to yield valid and reliable findings, providing a deep understanding of the principal's leadership strategies at RA Nawa Kartika within the context of early childhood Islamic education.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### Finding 1: Integration of Islamic Values into the Curriculum

The research shows that the principal at RA Nawa Kartika Probolinggo actively integrates Islamic values into the curriculum. This aligns with the principles of character education based on Islamic values, emphasizing the importance of moral and ethical development from an early age.

**Principal:** "We believe that character education must start early. By integrating Islamic values into every aspect of the curriculum, we can help students understand the importance of good ethics and behavior."

**Researcher:** "How do you see its impact on student behavior?"

**Principal:** "We have observed positive changes. Students are more aware of values like honesty and responsibility, and this is reflected in their daily behavior."

### Finding 2: Islamic-Based Human Resource Management

The research findings indicate that the principal provides continuous training for teachers to improve their teaching competencies, with a focus on Islamic principles.

**Teacher:** "The training we receive not only enhances our teaching skills but also reminds us of our responsibilities as educators within the Islamic context."

**Principal:** "We want to ensure that every teacher not only teaches academic material but also educates students about Islamic values that they can carry with them throughout their lives."

**Researcher:** "Do you think this approach helps in creating a conducive learning environment?"

**Teacher:** "Absolutely! We feel more collaboration and mutual support among teachers, which in turn positively impacts the students."

### **Finding 3: Parental Involvement in the Educational Process**

The principal at RA Nawa Kartika also involves parents in religious-based educational activities, which aligns with the theory of school-community collaboration.

**Parent:** "Our involvement in school activities, like religious study groups, makes us feel closer to the school. We can see our children's progress firsthand."

**Principal:** "We believe that parental support is essential. Your involvement helps create a better atmosphere for the students."

**Researcher:** "Do you feel this collaboration also strengthens the community around the school?"

**Parent:** "Yes, we feel more connected with other parents and the school. It also teaches the children the importance of working together in the community."

### **Finding 4: Islamic-Based Facility Development**

The research found that the principal is committed to improving school facilities that support education based on Islamic values.

**Principal:** "We strive to provide facilities that are not only functional but also reflect Islamic values, such as a comfortable prayer room for the students."

**Researcher:** "How do these facilities contribute to student learning?"

**Teacher:** "The prayer room helps students develop the habit of worship, which is an integral part of our education."

**Principal:** "By providing a supportive environment, we hope that students not only learn in the classroom but also grow in their faith."

Based on the observation conducted at RA Nawa Kartika Probolinggo, several key findings were found that provide an in-depth description of the dynamics of leadership, the role of teachers, and the involvement of parents in the early childhood Islamic religious education environment. The findings show that the principal's leadership in RA Nawa Kartika succeeded in creating a solid and sustainable educational ecosystem, which focused on improving the quality of Islamic religious education and student character building.

The principal at RA Nawa Kartika Probolinggo applies a strong leadership philosophy rooted in Ki Hajar Dewantara's educational principles. This philosophy is not only the foundation for every decision and action of the principal, but also the inspiration for the entire school community. The inclusive and participatory approach adopted by the principal has created a collaborative environment where every individual is motivated to contribute. The principal not only acts as a disciplined and ethical leader, but also as a role model who encourages the entire school community to follow his lead in creating a vibrant and focused learning environment.

Teachers at RA Nawa Kartika Probolinggo receive full support from the principal, especially in their efforts to improve teaching quality. The principal proactively provides relevant training and workshops and conducts observations followed by constructive feedback. This is done to ensure that teachers have the necessary skills to deliver quality education. In addition, teachers' involvement in the curriculum-related decision-making process shows that the principal values and listens to their opinions, so they feel they have an important role to play in the development of the school. This approach not only increases the sense of belonging among teachers but also strengthens the quality of teaching they provide.

The principal also manages to build strong and positive relationships with parents through open and responsive communication. The principal actively involves parents in school activities and deals with their feedback quickly and professionally. This approach further strengthens family support for children's education, which in turn creates a more conducive learning environment. Good communication between school and parents is the key to success in creating a synergy that supports holistic child development.

Overall, the principal's leadership at RA Nawa Kartika Probolinggo can be said to be very effective in building synergy between teachers and parents. This synergy has a significant impact on improving the quality of Islamic religious education and student character building, which is the main focus of the educational mission at RA Nawa Kartika. Through leadership based on a strong and inclusive educational philosophy, the principal has succeeded in creating an environment that supports optimal student growth and development.

Transformational leadership applied by the principal at RA Nawa Kartika Probolinggo is instrumental in creating sustainable improvements in the quality of education. Through an inspiring and value-based approach, the principal successfully integrates the principles of Islamic religious education in curriculum development, which not only shapes students' character and intelligence, but also instills exemplary values such as integrity, responsibility, cooperation and independence. This approach creates a learning environment that focuses not only on academic aspects, but also on building students' superior character and noble character, in accordance with the values of early childhood Islamic religious education.

Islamic values-based curriculum development is one of the main pillars in the principal's leadership strategy. With a focus on character education, the curriculum developed not only provides academic knowledge but also enriches students' learning experiences with universal values that are relevant to the context of their

daily lives. These rich learning experiences encourage students to internalize Islamic values and develop themselves into responsible, ethical and socially conscious individuals. This strategy is in line with research findings showing that the integration between character education and Islamic values-based curriculum can enrich students' learning experiences as well as increase their awareness of universal values (Kasmawati et al., 2023; Iqbal et al., 2022).

In addition, effective human resource management is the key to success in improving teacher competence at RA Nawa Kartika. The principal realizes that teachers are the main agents in the education process, so efforts to improve teacher competence through training and coaching are a priority. The training provided not only improves technical skills but is also constructive for teachers to become inspiring and innovative educators. Principals also ensure that teachers have access to the resources needed to improve the quality of learning, which has a direct impact on children's academic achievement and character development. This approach is in line with research showing that improving teachers' competencies through effective training can have a positive impact on learning quality (Afriana & Rokhimawan, 2022).

Improving school facilities is also one of the main focuses of the principal's leadership. Principals understand that a conducive physical environment and conditions are essential to support an effective teaching and learning process. Therefore, various efforts are made to improve and upgrade school facilities, such as comfortable classrooms, well-stocked libraries and safe play areas. Research has shown that adequate school facilities can significantly affect student learning outcomes, including academic achievement and student attendance rates (Afriana & Rokhimawan, 2022). Thus, improving these facilities not only supports quality learning, but also creates an environment that supports students' holistic development.

The transformational leadership strategy implemented by the principal also includes efforts to build a close relationship between the school and parents. The principal actively involves parents in various school activities, creating a strong synergy between home and school in supporting children's education. Through open and participatory communication, parents feel more involved and have a role in their children's education process, which in turn has a positive impact on teacher performance and student learning outcomes. Principals also motivate teachers and staff by setting clear goals, providing constructive feedback and recognizing and rewarding their achievements, which increases overall motivation and productivity.

Overall, the transformational leadership applied by the principal at RA Nawa Kartika Probolinggo has created an innovative and quality-oriented school culture. This leadership not only inspires, but also empowers teachers and staff to contribute optimally in achieving educational goals. With the strategies implemented, RA Nawa Kartika Probolinggo succeeded in improving the overall quality of education, thus providing a significant positive impact on the formation of character and intelligence of early childhood.

This study underscores the importance of visionary and inclusive leadership in achieving educational goals, especially in the context of early childhood Islamic religious education. The principal's implementation of visionary leadership involves

creating a clear and inspiring vision that directs the entire school community to achieve common goals. With the ability to formulate a compelling vision and transform it into concrete actions, principals are able to influence teachers and parents to work collaboratively to achieve higher educational goals. This finding can serve as a reference for other school principals in developing effective leadership strategies to improve the quality of education in their respective institutions, especially in the context of early childhood Islamic religious education (Maryati et al., 2024; Supriyadi et al., 2023).

### **Transformational Leadership in the Context of Islamic Education**

The leadership transformation implemented by the principal at RA Nawa Kartika Probolinggo not only focuses on improving the quality of education, but also emphasizes the internalization of Islamic values in all aspects of school life. The integration of Islamic values into the school curriculum, human resource management, facility improvement and community involvement support the academic goals and character development of students based on noble morals and Islamic ethics.

Research on transformational leadership has highlighted its significant impact on organizational motivation (Eyal & Roth, 2011) and continuous learning (Sipos et al., 2022) and school leadership effectiveness (Leithwood & Sun, 2012). Transformational leadership goes beyond transactional leadership by inspiring and motivating followers to achieve a shared vision, encouraging innovation, and driving positive change. (Shields, 2010). Transformational leadership has been linked to improved work attitudes and performance among educators (Gong et al., 2013). (Gong et al., 2013). In addition, the integration of moral and character education into leadership practices has been recognized as important for civic education (Eyal & Roth, 2011).

Research also shows a positive relationship between transformational leadership and organizational culture (Wezermes & Altahayneh, 2008) and promotion of academic research (Vu et al., 2020) and employee commitment (Ndlovu et al., 2018). Transformational leadership has been shown to be highly effective in managing change and driving organizational progress (Vinger & Cilliers, 2006). In addition, the incorporation of sustainability principles into strategic planning in educational institutions has been emphasized as critical for long-term success (Sanches et al., 2022). (Sanches et al., 2022). In the context of higher education, transformational leadership has been linked to improved educational outcomes, job satisfaction among teachers, and student progress (Howard, 2023). (Howard, 2023). Transformational leadership has also been associated with promoting character education among students (Jeynes, 2017) and fostering sustainable development initiatives (Kanyimba et al., 2015). The traits and characteristics of transformational leaders play an important role in shaping the learning environment and driving positive change in educational institutions. (Basham, 2012).

The application of transformational leadership in an educational environment, such as the principal at RA Nawa Kartika Probolinggo, not only improves academic performance but also contributes to the holistic development of students by



instilling moral values and ethical principles that are in line with the teachings or early childhood Islamic religious education.

### **Curriculum Development Based on Islamic Values**

The educational strategy of incorporating an Islamic values-focused curriculum in schools aims to provide academic knowledge while instilling universal moral values in students. This approach aims to shape students' characters to reflect Islamic principles in their daily lives. At RA Nawa Kartika, the curriculum not only includes traditional learning, but also includes extracurricular activities such as congregational prayers, Islamic studies, and Quran memorization to strengthen Islamic values and deepen the faith of the students.

Research has shown that integrating an Islamic character-based curriculum effectively promotes the internalization of Islamic values among students. (Kasmawati et al., 2023). Islamic education is considered important for instilling positive values in students through appropriate teaching methods. (Jasiah, 2024). The curriculum is designed to be adaptable and student-centered, so that teachers can customize learning experiences to meet the needs and developmental stages of diverse students. (Sirait, 2024).

In Islamic Religious Education, curriculum is often referred to as "manhaj," which symbolizes a clear path for educators and students to improve their knowledge, skills, and attitudes. (Halim, 2023). The process of curriculum development in Islamic education emphasizes the incorporation of basic principles such as Pancasila and the Philosophy of Islamic Education to guide the framework of education in madrasahs. (Choiri & Sidiq, 2023). In addition, the integration of general education with Islamic religious education in madrasahs is organized to ensure a comprehensive educational experience. (Rovi'i, 2023). The leadership strategy in implementing an Islamic values-centered curriculum in schools such as RA Nawa Kartika is essential to nurture students with strong personality and moral character. By combining academic knowledge with universal moral values, students are not only enriched academically but also prepared to live an ethical life guided by Islamic principles.

### **Effective Human Resource Management**

The principal's transformational leadership is also reflected in effective human resource management. The principal realizes that teachers are the spearhead of the education process, so efforts to improve their competence through continuous training, workshops and coaching are a top priority. In this context, the principal not only acts as a formal leader, but also as a mentor who guides the teachers to continue developing.

The training organized focuses not only on improving teaching skills but also on developing teachers' professionalism and spirituality. Through the holistic approach here, the principal ensures that teachers are not only competent in delivering subject matter, but are also able to be role models for students in terms of morals and ethics. This approach is in line with the principles of Islamic education, where educators not only act as conveyors of knowledge, but also as moral and spiritual guides for students. (Poniman et al., 2023).

### **Improvement of supporting facilities for school environmental studies**

One aspect that is often overlooked but very important in creating a conducive learning environment is school facilities. The principal of RA Nawa Kartika understands very well that adequate facilities can have a direct impact on the quality of education provided. Therefore, efforts to improve school facilities are one of the priorities in her leadership strategy. (Tamunoikuronibo Dawaye Ikiriko et al., 2024)

Facility improvements at RA Nawa Kartika include: classroom improvements, provision of modern learning tools, as well as additional supporting facilities such as libraries, laboratories and play areas. The principal ensures that every room in the school is designed and managed in such a way that it supports an effective and enjoyable teaching and learning process. With adequate facilities, students can learn in a safe, comfortable and inspiring environment, which in turn can increase their motivation to learn and achieve. (Hanim et al., 2020).

### **Building Close Relationships with Parents and Communities**

The principal's transformational leadership is also reflected in her efforts to build close relationships with parents and the surrounding community. The principal views parents as strategic partners in their children's education and therefore, creating open and supportive communication with them is an important part of her leadership strategy. (Nurlatifah et al., 2022)

The principal regularly holds meetings with parents to discuss student progress and school activities. Parents are invited to participate in various school activities, such as religious events, commemoration of Islamic holidays and social activities. This approach not only strengthens the bond between school and family but also increases parents' trust in the school. (Gilang Achmad Marzuki & Agung Setyawan, 2022) . By establishing a good relationship between the school and parents, the principal succeeds in creating a harmonious and supportive environment for student development, both at school and at home.

### **Create Innovation and Cultural Collaboration**

The transformational leadership applied by the principal also encourages the creation of a culture of innovation and collaboration at RA Nawa Kartika. The principal always encourages teachers and staff to innovate in teaching methods and school management. Innovation is not only seen as something that focuses on technology, but also includes new approaches in teaching, assessment, and interaction with students. (M. Fuad et al., 2023)

Collaboration between teachers, staff and parents is also strongly emphasized by the principal. Through close cooperation, all parties can share ideas, experiences and resources to achieve higher educational goals. The principal creates an environment where each individual feels valued and encouraged to contribute their best. This culture of collaboration not only improves efficiency and effectiveness in school management but also creates a sense of community and shared responsibility in achieving the school's vision. (Hernawati & Kurniasih, 2021)

## CONCLUSION

Through strategies that focus on developing an Islamic values-based curriculum, effective management of human resources, improving school facilities and developing close relationships with parents and the community, the principal has created a learning environment that is innovative, inclusive and oriented towards improving the quality of early childhood Islamic religious education.

Visionary and inclusive principal leadership not only inspires teachers and parents to contribute optimally, but also has a real positive impact on student development. This research confirms the importance of effective and transformative leadership in the context of early childhood Islamic education, while providing valuable guidance for other principals in developing leadership strategies that can improve the quality of education in their respective institutions. Thus, RA Nawa Kartika Probolinggo has become a model for other educational institutions in implementing impactful and sustainable leadership in early childhood Islamic education.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENT

With gratitude and respect, I would like to express my deepest gratitude to all those who have provided support, both directly and indirectly, in the process of completing this research. First of all, I would like to thank Prof. Benny Prasetya, M.Pd.i, who has provided meaningful guidance, input, and criticism during this research. Without your guidance and assistance, this research would not have been completed properly. Furthermore, I would like to thank the principal of RA Nawa Kartika Siti Suhaemi M.Pd, who gave permission and support during the data collection process at RA Nawa Kartika Probolinggo. I would also like to thank the teachers who participated in the interviews and discussions, as well as the parents and students who provided valuable information. I would also like to thank my co-researchers and friends who have motivated and encouraged me throughout this research process. Your support means a lot to me. Hopefully this research can provide benefits and positive contributions to the development of early childhood Islamic religious education and for other educational institutions.

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