

Transformative Leadership in Islamic Religious Education at Raudhatul Athfal: Advancing Competitive Islamic Management in Probolinggo, Indonesia

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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) 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 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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INTRODUCTION

Leadership is a key determinant in shaping the quality of education, particularly in Early Childhood Education (ECE) institutions. However, the existing literature predominantly focuses on general leadership practices in education, with limited studies exploring leadership strategies tailored to Islamic educational settings (Zhang et al., 2022; Wang & Xia, 2022). Moreover, the integration of Islamic values into curriculum development and daily learning activities remains underexplored, especially in rural settings like Probolinggo. This study addresses this gap by investigating the leadership strategies of principals in Islamic preschools, focusing on their role in curriculum design, resource management, and community engagement.

Previous research has demonstrated that leadership significantly impacts the effectiveness of teacher performance and overall educational outcomes. Zhang et al. (2022) identified the role of transformational leadership in enhancing teacher collaboration, while Rostini et al. (2022) emphasized the importance of facility management in supporting learning processes. However, these studies lack a specific focus on the context of Islamic education. Recent studies (e.g., Dewi et al., 2023) have begun to explore the integration of moral and religious values in education but fall short of providing actionable leadership strategies for principals in Islamic settings. This research builds on these findings by offering practical insights into leadership within the unique cultural and religious framework of Raudhatul Athfal.

Islamic educational institutions like RA Nawa Kartika face unique challenges, including limited resources, underdeveloped facilities, and the need for community involvement in educational activities (Rindaningrum & A'yuni, 2024). The principal's leadership plays a pivotal role in addressing these challenges by aligning educational practices with Islamic values and ensuring that students develop both intellectually and morally. This study explores the strategies used by the principal at RA Nawa Kartika to overcome these obstacles and enhance educational quality.

The leadership of a school principal in early childhood education is crucial for fostering a positive learning environment. According to Wang & Xia (2022), an inclusive leadership style can empower teachers and foster collaboration, which is essential for implementing a values-based curriculum. In the context of Islamic education, effective leadership also involves instilling religious principles into daily learning activities, thus shaping the moral character of students from an early age (Hanushek & Woessmann, 2008).

Facility management is another critical area where leadership can make a significant impact. As Cape (2023) notes, the quality of facilities directly affects students' learning experiences. In Islamic schools, this includes creating an environment conducive to both academic and spiritual growth. The principal at RA Nawa Kartika has implemented strategies to optimize the use of limited resources, ensuring that the physical environment supports the institution's Islamic educational objectives.

Community and parental involvement are vital for the success of Islamic education. Hardiansyah & Zainuddin (2022) argue that collaboration with parents and local communities strengthens the educational process by aligning home and school values. At RA Nawa Kartika, the principal has fostered partnerships with parents and community leaders, engaging them in activities that support the integration of Islamic values into the students' daily lives.

This study employs transformational leadership theory, which emphasizes vision, motivation, and the alignment of organizational goals with values, as proposed by Bass (1990). Additionally, organizational change theory (Habibi, 2024) provides a framework for understanding how leadership can drive systemic improvements in educational quality. By synthesizing these theories, the research examines the principal's strategies in creating an Islamic educational environment that is both competitive and values-driven.

The aim of this study is to analyze the leadership strategies employed by the school principal at RA Nawa Kartika in enhancing Islamic education quality. The findings contribute to the growing body of literature on Islamic educational leadership and provide practical recommendations for principals in similar settings. By highlighting effective strategies for curriculum development, resource management, and stakeholder engagement, this research supports the broader goal of improving Islamic education in Indonesia and beyond.

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. The 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 participants' experiences and perspectives. In the context of Islamic education, emerging themes may include applying 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 give consent, maintaining the 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

RESULT

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." (Interview, 9 Sep 2024).

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."*

(Interview, 11 Sep 2024).

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."*

(Interview, 23 Sep 2024).

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."*

(Interview, 26 Sep 2024).

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.

Tabel 1. Findings on Transformative Leadership in Islamic Religious Education at Raudhatul Athfal

| No | Finding | Description |
|----|---------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1 | Integration of Islamic Values into the Curriculum | The principal actively integrates Islamic values into the curriculum, emphasizing moral and ethical development from an early age as part of character education. |
| 2 | Islamic-Based Human Resource Management | The principal provides continuous training for teachers to enhance teaching competencies with a focus on Islamic principles, fostering a supportive teaching environment. |
| 3 | Parental Involvement in the Educational Process | Parents are actively involved in religious-based school activities, fostering stronger collaboration between the school and the community. |
| 4 | Islamic-Based Facility Development | The principal is committed to improving school facilities to support Islamic education, including providing functional and spiritually reflective environments. |

DISCUSSION

Principal's Leadership and Educational Philosophy

The principal of RA Nawa Kartika Probolinggo applies a transformative leadership philosophy rooted in Ki Hajar Dewantara's educational principles, emphasizing inclusivity and collaboration. This approach inspires the entire school community to contribute actively while promoting discipline and ethical behavior. By serving as a role model, the principal creates a vibrant and focused learning environment, fostering shared responsibility and motivation.

Teachers at RA Nawa Kartika benefit from strong support to enhance teaching quality. The principal provides relevant training, workshops, and constructive feedback, ensuring teachers possess the skills to deliver quality education. Teachers are also involved in curriculum decisions, fostering a sense of belonging and shared ownership, which significantly improves teaching standards and outcomes.

The principal prioritizes building positive relationships with parents through open communication and active engagement. Parents participate in school activities and feel valued, strengthening their support for children's education. This synergy between school and home creates a conducive environment for holistic child development, emphasizing collaboration in achieving educational goals.

The principal's leadership integrates Islamic values into the curriculum, focusing on character education alongside academics. This approach encourages students to internalize universal values such as integrity and cooperation. Activities like congregational prayers and Quran memorization reinforce these principles, shaping responsible, ethical, and socially aware individuals (Kasmawati et al., 2023; Iqbal et al., 2022).

Effective human resource management is another key aspect of the principal's leadership. Teachers receive training that enhances both technical and moral competencies, enabling them to serve as inspiring educators. This holistic approach aligns with findings that improving teacher competencies through structured training positively impacts learning quality and student outcomes (Afriana & Rokhimawan, 2022).

The principal also prioritizes facility improvement to support effective teaching and learning. Upgraded classrooms, libraries, and play areas contribute to a comfortable and safe learning environment, directly impacting academic achievements and student well-being. Research highlights the importance of adequate facilities in fostering motivation and holistic development (Afriana & Rokhimawan, 2022).

Overall, the transformational leadership at RA Nawa Kartika emphasizes innovation, collaboration, and Islamic values. This leadership inspires and empowers all stakeholders, achieving significant progress in educational quality and character development. The findings offer valuable insights for other principals aiming to implement visionary strategies in 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) 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) the promotion of academic research (Vu et al., 2020), and employee commitment (Ndlovu et al., 2018). Transformational leadership is 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 (Sanchez et al., 2022). (Sanchez 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 of 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, the 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 personalities 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 spearheads 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, the 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 (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

The principal of RA Nawa Kartika Probolinggo has successfully fostered an innovative and inclusive learning environment through strategies that emphasize the development of an Islamic values-based curriculum, effective management of human resources, improved school facilities, and the strengthening of relationships with parents and the community. By focusing on these key areas, the principal has created a school atmosphere that encourages growth, collaboration, and a holistic approach to education.

This approach has proven effective in inspiring teachers and parents to contribute optimally to the educational process. The leadership style adopted by the principal not only motivates staff and parents but also has a real and positive impact on student development. The school's commitment to integrating Islamic values into its curriculum has been pivotal in shaping the students' moral and spiritual growth alongside their academic achievements.

Furthermore, the research confirms the critical role of visionary and inclusive leadership in the context of early childhood Islamic education. By fostering a collaborative environment where all stakeholders are engaged, the principal has demonstrated how leadership can drive educational excellence. This approach emphasizes the importance of leading with a clear vision, one that aligns with the institution's values and goals.

The success of RA Nawa Kartika Probolinggo serves as a model for other educational institutions, offering valuable guidance for principals seeking to implement transformative leadership strategies. This research highlights how such leadership can improve the quality of education and create a lasting, positive impact on early childhood Islamic education, setting a standard for sustainability and long-term success.

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