The Role of the Principal of Islamic Early Childhood Education (PAUD) in Integrating Islamic Values into the Learning Process at PAUD Insan Pertiwi

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Abstract

This study aims to describe the role of the principal of Islamic Early Childhood Education (PAUD) in integrating Islamic values into the learning process at PAUD Insan Pertiwi. The principal holds a strategic role not only as an educational manager but also as a spiritual leader who instills Islamic values throughout the learning activities. This research employs a qualitative descriptive approach. The subjects of the study consist of the principal, teachers, and educational staff at PAUD Insan Pertiwi. Data were collected through observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation, and analyzed using the interactive model of Miles and Huberman, which includes data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The results of the study indicate that the principal of PAUD Insan Pertiwi plays a vital role in three main aspects: (1) planning, by developing curricula and lesson plans that incorporate Islamic values such as honesty, discipline, and responsibility; (2) implementation, by guiding teachers to integrate Islamic teachings through routine practices, prayers before and after learning, and character-building activities; and (3) supervision, by conducting regular monitoring to ensure that the learning process aligns with the institution's Islamic vision and mission. Supporting factors include the principal's strong commitment and teacher collaboration, while challenges arise from the limited availability of Islamic learning resources and varying teacher competencies in applying Islamic values. This study concludes that the successful integration of Islamic values into the learning process at PAUD Insan Pertiwi is strongly influenced by the principal's Islamic leadership, effective communication, and consistency in applying value-based management principles.

***Keywords**:* Principal, Islamic Education Management, Islamic Values, Learning Process, Early Childhood Education

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2nd International Conference on Islamic Community Studies (ICICS)
Theme: History of Malay Civilisation and Islamic Human Capacity and Halal Hub in the Globalization Era
https://proceeding.pancabudi.ac.id/index.php/ICIE/index

Introduction

Early Childhood Education (ECE) represents a crucial stage in shaping children's personality, character, and spirituality. During this formative period, all aspects of development cognitive, social, emotional, moral, and spiritual are in a highly sensitive phase, making it the most strategic moment for instilling values and moral foundations. Education provided at this stage should therefore emphasize not only cognitive growth but also the development of attitudes, habits, and character consistent with religious and cultural values. In the context of Islamic education institutions, this responsibility becomes even more significant, as their mission extends beyond intellectual formation to include the nurturing of Islamic values that serve as the foundation of children's moral conduct throughout life.

Islamic education views meaningful learning as one that connects knowledge with spirituality and ethics. This idea aligns with the concept of integrated education, where Islamic values are not confined to religious subjects but are internalized across the entire learning process and school activities (Fijriyani, Arifin, & Juharyanto, 2023). Such integration requires strong and visionary leadership from the school principal, who acts not only as an administrative manager but also as a spiritual leader guiding the entire educational process. In Islamic early childhood education, the principal's role extends to fostering an environment that embodies Islamic values, ensuring that every aspect of teaching and learning reflects the school's moral and spiritual identity.

Several studies have highlighted that faith-based leadership among school principals significantly influences the quality of education and the moral development of students. According to Salas and Masluhah (2024), leadership that is participatory, inspirational, and rooted in Islamic values helps cultivate a school culture characterized by religiosity, harmony, and collective responsibility. Principals with spiritual vision tend to inspire teachers to incorporate Islamic values into their lessons, thereby transforming the school environment into a community that nurtures children's moral and social growth. This is particularly important in early childhood settings, where children learn primarily through imitation and habituation rather than explicit instruction. Consequently, the principal's example plays a vital role in shaping the school's Islamic culture and daily practices.

Research by Cinantya, Aslamiah, and Suriansyah (2024) further emphasizes that the school principal's leadership determines the direction and effectiveness of character education programs. A principal who actively designs habituation programs, strengthens worship activities, and implements Islamic-themed learning contributes significantly to the development of religious values among young children. Similarly, Dewi (2024) asserts that effective school management based on Islamic principles involves continuous planning, implementation, and evaluation. When the principal consistently performs managerial and spiritual functions, the learning environment not only supports academic achievement but also promotes the development of children's moral and spiritual character.

However, the integration of Islamic values into learning within early childhood institutions still faces various challenges. Fijriyani et al. (2023) found that despite efforts to instill values such as responsibility, discipline, and independence, several obstacles persist, including teachers' limited understanding of how to apply Islamic values in pedagogical practice, the lack of Islamic-based learning materials, and insufficient supervision in implementing value-based instruction. These findings indicate that the success of value integration largely depends on the principal's leadership in managing human resources, school culture, and learning environments conducive to Islamic education.

In the context of PAUD Insan Pertiwi, these challenges remain highly relevant. As an Islamic-based institution, PAUD Insan Pertiwi envisions nurturing children who are intelligent, well-mannered, and spiritually grounded. Nevertheless, the actual implementation of Islamic value integration often encounters difficulties related to human resources, instructional media, and consistency in applying values throughout the learning process. Therefore, it is essential to examine more deeply how the principal fulfills his or her role in integrating Islamic values into teaching and learning. Such an inquiry will help uncover effective leadership strategies that foster a holistic and contextually relevant Islamic education model for early childhood learners.

Thus, this study focuses on the role of the principal of an Islamic early childhood education institution in integrating Islamic values into the learning process at PAUD Insan Pertiwi. The findings are expected to contribute to the development of Islamic educational management theory and provide practical insights for school principals and teachers in implementing Islamic values effectively within early childhood education environments.

Theoretical Framework 2.1 Leadership and Educational Management in Islamic Early Childhood Institutions

Leadership is a central element in the management of educational institutions, including early childhood education (ECE). The principal of an ECE center holds responsibility not only for administrative affairs but also for building an organizational culture that supports learning and character formation. Jaelani and Sugito (2024) emphasize that participative and adaptive leadership positively influences organizational commitment and teacher productivity in early childhood education settings. A principal who adopts participatory leadership creates a democratic and collaborative environment in which teachers feel a shared responsibility for the institution's success.

In the broader context of educational management, Man (2023) highlights the importance of innovative leadership in early childhood institutions, encompassing systematic planning, implementation, and evaluation. Innovative leadership requires principals to go beyond administrative supervision by acting as catalysts for creative and relevant learning practices. Within Islamic ECE institutions, this role expands into value-based leadership— where principals guide the entire educational process according to Islamic principles and ethics, aligning institutional vision and educational practices with Islamic moral values.

2.2 Integration of Islamic Values in Early Childhood Education

The integration of Islamic values into early childhood education requires a holistic and contextual approach that connects spiritual dimensions with daily learning activities. Hidayat (2023) asserts that embedding Islamic educational values in character education can be achieved through thematic learning, daily routines, and habituation activities involving teachers and parents. This integration illustrates that Islamic education is not merely about teaching religion as a subject but about internalizing values such as *tawhid*, honesty, responsibility, and social empathy into children's everyday experiences.

Sholeh, Nur'azah, and Kurniawati (2024) demonstrate that an Islamic early childhood curriculum combined with local cultural values produces a more holistic educational approach. Such integration not only strengthens children's religiosity but also nurtures social and national identity through local wisdom, mutual cooperation, and tolerance. Hence, Islamic value-based education aims to cultivate children who are spiritually grounded and morally upright, balancing their spiritual and humanistic dimensions.

2.3 Character Education and Socio-Emotional Development from an Islamic Perspective

Early childhood education in Islam emphasizes the balance between cognitive, emotional, social, and spiritual development. Hikmah (2024) explains that from an Islamic educational

perspective, the social and emotional development of early childhood should be directed toward two core relationships: the relationship with Allah (spiritual dimension) and the relationship with fellow human beings (social dimension). This approach signifies that character education in Islam is integrative and inseparable from moral formation.

Aziz, Sahputra, and Siregar (2024) further point out that the use of learning media based on Qur'anic values can help children internalize moral and spiritual concepts in concrete ways. Through age-appropriate and engaging materials, children can absorb values such as honesty, patience, and compassion naturally within learning and play contexts. Thus, the principal's role becomes crucial in ensuring that all learning components—curriculum, methodology, and media—collectively support the development of children's Islamic character.

2.4 Integrative Framework of Leadership and Islamic Values in ECE

From the above theoretical perspectives, the role of the principal in integrating Islamic values within early childhood education encompasses three key dimensions. The first is leadership and management, where the principal acts as both a motivator and a guide in establishing an Islamic-based educational system. The second is curriculum and instruction, which involves the principal's ability to direct teachers in designing and implementing Islamic value-based learning activities. The third dimension concerns school culture and environment, where the principal fosters a religious atmosphere and models Islamic ethics through consistent behavior. The synergy of these dimensions determines the extent to which Islamic values are effectively internalized throughout the educational process at Islamic early childhood institutions.

Research Method

This study employed a qualitative descriptive approach to deeply understand the role of the principal in integrating Islamic values into the learning process at PAUD Insan Pertiwi. This approach was chosen because it allows the researcher to interpret the meaning behind behaviors, policies, and educational practices rooted in Islamic values (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The focus of the study is on how the principal functions as a value-based leader, institutional manager, and spiritual role model for teachers and students.

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, participant observation, and document analysis to obtain a comprehensive understanding of Islamic value integration practices. The participants consisted of the principal, three teachers, and two parents selected using purposive sampling, as they were considered knowledgeable and relevant to the research focus (Patton, 2015). Interviews and observations were conducted on-site, while documents such as the curriculum, lesson plans, and school policies were analyzed. The credibility of the data was strengthened through triangulation of sources and methods (Denzin, 2017).

Data analysis followed Miles and Huberman's interactive model, which includes data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2019).

Result and Discussion 4.1 The Principal as a Spiritual Leader and Role Model

The findings revealed that the principal of PAUD Insan Pertiwi plays a central role as a spiritual leader who not only manages administrative duties but also serves as a moral and religious role model for teachers and students. Daily routines such as morning prayers, Qur'an recitation, and short religious reflections (*tausiyah singkat*) are initiated and consistently supervised by the principal. Teachers and students noted that the principal's consistency in demonstrating Islamic behavior such as politeness, discipline, and humility serves as an implicit form of character education.

This finding aligns with the view of Sergiovanni (2015), who asserts that leadership in faith-based education involves both managerial competence and moral authority, where the

leader embodies the values promoted by the institution. Similarly, Nurdin (2021) emphasizes that principals in Islamic education institutions act as *uswah hasanah* (good examples), shaping the school's spiritual climate through modeling and consistent moral guidance. Thus, leadership in PAUD Insan Pertiwi is not merely administrative but deeply embedded in Islamic spiritual practice.

4.2 Integration of Islamic Values in Curriculum and Teaching Practices

The study found that Islamic values are integrated through curriculum design, learning activities, and classroom management. Lesson plans at PAUD Insan Pertiwi explicitly include spiritual objectives, such as instilling gratitude (*syukur*), respect (*ta'dzim*), and honesty (*amanah*). Teachers implement these values through storytelling, songs, and play-based learning that incorporate Islamic messages. Observations showed that teachers use daily themes—such as cleanliness, friendship, and love for nature framed within Qur'anic perspectives and prophetic traditions.

This practice supports the findings of Hidayat (2023), who argues that Islamic early childhood education must internalize values through *habituation* and contextual experiences rather than didactic instruction. The integration of Islamic values at PAUD Insan Pertiwi reflects a constructivist approach where children learn moral lessons through meaningful, joyful interactions (Nasir & Hamzah, 2022). Hence, curriculum implementation at this institution operationalizes Islamic values in ways that are developmentally appropriate and emotionally engaging for young learners.

4.3 Collaboration and School Culture as Supporting Systems

The research also indicated that the integration of Islamic values is strengthened by collaborative relationships among the principal, teachers, and parents. Regular meetings are held to align school programs with family religious education at home, ensuring consistency between school and family environments. Parents are involved in religious events, charity programs, and Qur'an memorization activities, fostering a shared sense of responsibility for children's moral development.

According to Bush and Middlewood (2019), effective school leadership builds communities of practice where values are shared through collaboration and reflection. The findings of this study affirm that Islamic value integration in early childhood education is most effective when leadership fosters a supportive culture of participation, openness, and shared religious vision. This synergy creates what Fullan (2016) calls a "learning culture of faith," where collective moral commitment drives institutional growth.

4.4 Challenges in Value Integration

Despite these achievements, the study identified several challenges. Teachers often struggle to maintain consistency in applying Islamic values due to variations in understanding and workload pressures. Limited training in Islamic pedagogy also affects the depth of integration. The principal addressed these issues through informal mentoring, peer discussions, and reflective meetings, although systematic professional development remains limited.

These challenges resonate with previous studies indicating that sustaining value-based education requires continuous leadership support and professional capacity building (Hallinger, 2020). Therefore, enhancing teachers' pedagogical competence in Islamic education remains essential to deepen value integration across all learning domains.

Discussion

Overall, the findings demonstrate that the principal of PAUD Insan Pertiwi effectively integrates Islamic values through a holistic approach that combines spiritual leadership, curriculum design, teacher mentoring, and community collaboration. This aligns with the

theoretical framework proposed by Man (2023) and Jaelani & Sugito (2024), emphasizing that leadership in Islamic early childhood institutions must simultaneously address managerial, pedagogical, and spiritual dimensions. The integration model practiced at PAUD Insan Pertiwi can thus serve as a prototype for Islamic value-based leadership in early childhood education contexts.

Conclusion

This study concludes that the principal of PAUD Insan Pertiwi plays a crucial role in integrating Islamic values into the learning process. Beyond administrative duties, the principal acts as a spiritual and moral leader who models Islamic behavior, fosters a religious school culture, and guides teachers in embedding values within daily teaching practices.

Islamic values such as honesty, responsibility, discipline, and compassion are integrated through curriculum design, thematic learning, and interactive activities that match children's developmental stages. This approach demonstrates that Islamic early childhood education promotes not only cognitive growth but also holistic moral and spiritual development.

The success of this integration relies on strong collaboration among the principal, teachers, and parents, creating a consistent value-based environment at school and home. Despite challenges such as limited teacher training and varying understandings of Islamic pedagogy, the principal's leadership reflects a firm commitment to nurturing an Islamic educational atmosphere. Ultimately, effective value-based leadership in early childhood institutions is essential for shaping children's character and Islamic identity from an early age.

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