



## THE ISLAMIC LEADERSHIP MODEL OF RA PRINCIPALS IN DEVELOPING EARLY CHILDHOOD CHARACTER

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### Abstract

The growing concern over moral decline underscores the strategic role of Islamic Religious Education (IRE) in public schools, particularly in the context of Society 5.0, characterized by technological integration and shifting social values. This study employs a literature review approach to analyze the Islamic leadership model of principals in developing early childhood character at RA Hidayatul Muhtadiin. A descriptive qualitative approach was used, with data collection techniques including observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation. Data analysis was conducted inductively through data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. The results show that the Islamic leadership model at RA Hidayatul Muhtadiin is based on four main values: *amanah* (trustworthiness), *‘adl* (justice), *uswah hasanah* (exemplary role model), and *shura* (consultation). The principal serves as a moral and spiritual role model who instills Islamic values through modeling, habituation, and institution-based management. This leadership model positively impacts the development of religious, responsible, and empathetic character in early childhood, while also enhancing teacher professionalism. The findings indicate that Islamic leadership is not merely a moral ideal but an effective managerial strategy for creating a character-based educational ecosystem. The RA Hidayatul Muhtadiin model can serve as a reference for other RA institutions in Indonesia aiming to integrate character education and Islamic spirituality.

**Keywords:** *Islamic Leadership, Principal, Early Childhood Character.*

### Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mendeskripsikan model kepemimpinan Islami kepala sekolah dalam mengembangkan karakter anak usia dini di RA Hidayatul Muhtadiin. Pendekatan kualitatif deskriptif digunakan dalam penelitian ini, dengan teknik pengumpulan data meliputi observasi, wawancara mendalam, dan dokumentasi. Analisis data dilakukan secara induktif melalui reduksi data, penyajian data, dan penarikan kesimpulan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa model kepemimpinan Islami di RA Hidayatul Muhtadiin didasarkan pada empat nilai utama: *amanah* (kepercayaan), *‘adl* (keadilan), *uswah hasanah* (teladan yang baik), dan *shura* (musyawarah). Kepala sekolah berperan sebagai teladan moral dan spiritual yang menanamkan nilai-nilai Islam melalui keteladanan, pembiasaan, dan manajemen berbasis lembaga. Model kepemimpinan ini berdampak positif terhadap pengembangan karakter religius, tanggung jawab, dan empati pada anak usia dini, sekaligus meningkatkan profesionalisme guru. Temuan penelitian menunjukkan bahwa kepemimpinan Islami bukan hanya ideal moral, tetapi juga strategi manajerial yang efektif untuk menciptakan ekosistem



pendidikan berbasis karakter. Model RA Hidayatul Muhtadiin ini dapat menjadi acuan bagi lembaga RA lainnya di Indonesia yang ingin mengintegrasikan pendidikan karakter dan spiritualitas Islam.

**Kata kunci:** *Kepemimpinan Islami, Kepala Sekolah, Karakter Anak Usia Dini*

## INTRODUCTION

Early Childhood Education (ECE) serves as the primary foundation for shaping individuals with holistic personalities those who are faithful, moral, and possess noble character.(Susetiyono and Fitri 2022) At an early age, children are in the *golden age* phase, during which all fundamental human potentials develop rapidly physically, emotionally, morally, and spiritually(Santrock, J. W. (2011). In the context of Islamic education, *Raudhatul Athfal* (RA) institutions function as the initial environment for instilling Islamic values through the habituation of worship, manners, and daily morality (Wakhidah et al. 2025) (Wakhidah et al. 2025) Therefore, the quality of leadership among RA principals becomes the key determinant of direction and success in developing children's character from an early age.

Leadership is a key element in the success of educational institutions,(Fijriyani et al. 2023) particularly in early childhood education (ECE) that focuses on character formation. School principals hold strategic responsibilities not only in administrative management but also in instilling moral and spiritual values in students through policies and personal example. In Islamic-based institutions such as *Raudhatul Athfal* (RA), Islamic leadership serves as a foundation that determines the direction, culture, and quality of education.(Maryam and Susetiyono 2025)

Early childhood is a critical period for developing a faithful, moral, and independent personality (Azimah et al. 2025). early childhood is a *golden age* in moral and spiritual development,(Susetiyono and Fitri 2022) where all aspects of personality can be guided through role modeling and habituation. Therefore, RA principals are expected to practice Islamic leadership that not only manages but also guides teachers and students toward the formation of Islamic character.(Kusmira and Simatupang 2025)

Previous studies, such as those by (Beekun and Badawi 1999) (Illah et al. 2022), emphasize that Islamic leadership is derived from the Qur'an and Sunnah, highlighting the values of *amanah*, *'adl*, *uswah hasanah*, and *shura*. However, the application of these values is often conceptual and less empirically tested in the context of Islamic ECE institutions. Mulyono (2020) found that many RA principals still focus more on administrative aspects than on child character development, indicating a gap between Islamic leadership theory and practice.



This study addresses this gap by focusing on the practical application of Islamic leadership by the principal of RA Hidayatul Muhtadiin, which is known for its strong reputation in character building and consistent religious habituation. The principal serves as the central figure, guiding all institutional components through a harmonious spiritual and managerial approach.

The study aims to describe the Islamic leadership model of the RA Hidayatul Muhtadiin principal in developing early childhood character and to identify practical strategies that can serve as a model for other RA institutions. Theoretically, this study enriches the literature on Islamic leadership in early childhood education, and practically, it provides guidance for principals on integrating Islamic values into management and character education.

## **METHOD**

This study employed a descriptive qualitative approach, chosen because it allows for an in-depth description of Islamic leadership phenomena based on the experiences, practices, and interpretations of research subjects (Creswell and Creswell 2017). The focus was to understand the actual practices of the RA Hidayatul Muhtadiin principal in developing early childhood character through Islamic leadership.

The descriptive qualitative approach is suitable because it explores spiritual and managerial values and examines how these values are implemented daily within the institution. This approach captures the dynamic interactions between principals, teachers, children, and parents holistically and contextually.

### **Research Subjects and Location**

The subjects of this study were the principal of RA Hidayatul Muhtadiin, teachers, and several parents as key informants. The research site was selected purposively because RA Hidayatul Muhtadiin has a strong reputation in character education based on Islamic values, with regular religious habituation programs, character strengthening, and active participation from teachers and parents.

### **Data Collection Techniques**

Data were collected using multiple techniques:

1. **Participatory observation:** Direct observation of daily activities, including interactions between the principal, teachers, and children, as well as religious habituation practices.



2. In-depth interviews: Semi-structured interviews with the principal, teachers, and parents to gain perspectives on Islamic leadership and its influence on child character (Moleong 2016)
3. Documentation: Institutional documents such as annual programs, religious habituation schedules, and teacher evaluation records.

### Data Analysis Techniques

Data were analyzed inductively in three main stages (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014):

1. Data reduction: Sorting, summarizing, and highlighting relevant data regarding Islamic leadership and child character development.
2. Data presentation: Presenting research findings in descriptive narratives, tables, and supporting interview quotes.
3. Conclusion drawing/verification: Drawing temporary and final conclusions based on patterns, themes, and interconnections between data, while performing triangulation to ensure validity.

### Data Validity

Data validity was ensured through:

Source triangulation: Using data from the principal, teachers, and parents.

Method triangulation: Combining observation, interviews, and documentation.

Peer review and member checking: Confirming interpretations with informants to ensure accuracy.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Implementation of Amanah (Trustworthiness) at RA Hidayatul Mubtadiin

*Amanah* is the cornerstone of Islamic leadership. At RA Hidayatul Mubtadiin, it represents the principal's spiritual and moral responsibility to Allah, the institution, teachers, students, and parents. The principal functions as both an administrative manager and a role model who maintains institutional trust. Practices include transparent management, honesty in reporting, and consistency in enforcing school rules.

The principal leads meetings, sets policies, and manages operational funds openly and honestly. Transparency fosters trust among teachers and parents, enhancing institutional synergy. According to Muslich (2018), a trustworthy leader views accountability as a form of



worship. At RA Hidayatul Muftadiin, activities begin with prayers and consultation, reflecting *amanah*.

Teachers and students also learn *amanah* through specific responsibilities, such as daily memorization (*tahfidz*) and morning prayers. Children are taught to keep promises, care for peers' belongings, and complete daily tasks responsibly. These repeated habits form *moral habits* (Lickona 1992), which serve as the foundation for character development.

The principal balances supervision and trust, allowing teachers to innovate while maintaining Islamic value-based oversight (Mulyasa 2019). Interaction with parents emphasizes two-way trust: the school cares for children responsibly, while parents reinforce Islamic habits at home, creating a consistent educational environment.

Thus, *amanah* at RA Hidayatul Muftadiin integrates spiritual accountability with managerial professionalism, forming the foundation for developing honest, disciplined, and responsible children.

## 2. Adl (Justice) in Islamic Leadership at RA Hidayatul Muftadiin

Justice (*'adl*) ensures that everyone receives their due rights proportionally. At RA Hidayatul Muftadiin, the principal treats teachers, staff, and children equitably. Decision-making regarding teaching assignments, performance assessment, and rewards is transparent and fair.

The principal considers teachers' workloads and family conditions when assigning schedules. Organizational justice fosters teacher loyalty and motivation (Alim & Wahyudi, 2023). In education, children are treated equally regardless of academic ability or family background, reflecting the Prophet's teachings on justice.

Fair treatment fosters a positive work climate. Teachers at RA Hidayatul Muftadiin feel appreciated, enhancing their commitment to educational innovation. Children learn fairness by observing adult behavior, such as taking turns and respecting peers (Bandura 2001). Parents' input is valued, strengthening school-family trust.

Justice balances individual rights with collective interests, consistent with QS. An-Nisa:58, which guides the institution's ethical culture. *Adl* is thus both a moral principle and a practical management strategy for a productive and harmonious learning environment.

## 3. Uswah Hasanah (Exemplary Role Model) at RA Hidayatul Muftadiin

*Uswah hasanah* is central to Islamic leadership. In ECE, children learn primarily through observation. The principal demonstrates discipline, patience, kindness, and simplicity daily, creating a positive spiritual climate (Lickona 1992).

The principal arrives early, greets teachers and students warmly, and models religious practices. Teachers and children emulate these behaviors, fostering moral and emotional development. Professional integrity is also modeled through responsible administration, enhancing teacher work ethic.

true leader guides through actions rather than words (Mahfudh 2022). At RA Hidayatul Muhtadiin, the principal participates directly in learning and religious activities, modeling moral and spiritual behavior.

Interaction with teachers and parents is empathetic, promoting *emotional leadership*. Children imitate moral behaviors such as greetings, prayers, and helping peers, consistent with Bandura's social cognitive theory (Bandura 1986). Religious routines strengthen spiritual bonding between teachers and

students.

*Uswah hasanah* internalizes Islamic values naturally; children learn through experience rather than dogma. Examples include sharing food, cleaning together, and assisting peers. The principal thus creates an integrated moral education ecosystem, serving as both spiritual educator and moral exemplar.

#### 4. Shura (Consultation) in Islamic Leadership at RA Hidayatul Muhtadiin

*Shura* emphasizes participation, dialogue, and collective decision-making. At RA Hidayatul Muhtadiin, it is practiced in institutional forums involving teachers, staff, and parent representatives. Consultation is embedded in organizational culture rather than being a mere administrative formality.





Decisions about Islamic curriculum, religious activities, and teaching strategies involve discussions with teachers. This participatory approach fosters trust and organizational commitment. Shura is also applied in problem-solving, task assignment, and evaluation, creating a democratic and open work environment. Parents participate in semester meetings to discuss child progress, enhancing home-school synergy. Children learn tolerance, patience, and respect for others' opinions by observing consultations, consistent with Kohlberg's moral development theory (1984).

Shura strengthens collective leadership, encourages innovation, and fosters a sense of brotherhood within the school community. It is thus integral to humane, collaborative, and visionary Islamic leadership.

### 5. Impact of Islamic Leadership on Child Character Development and Teacher Professionalism

Islamic leadership at RA Hidayatul Muftadiin positively impacts both child character and teacher professionalism. The principal, as a *murabbi*, integrates spiritual, moral, and social values through modeling, consultation, and religious habituation.

Children experience a loving and worship-oriented environment, engaging in prayers, *sholat dhuha*, and short surah memorization. This fosters spiritual awareness, responsibility, and empathy (Rahmawati et al. 2023)

Teachers are guided to view teaching as worship, enhancing motivation and sincerity (Mulyasa, 2019). Weekly educational reflection sessions (*halaqah tarbawiyah*) allow teachers to discuss integrating character education into learning.

Trust, justice, and consultation create solidarity and collaboration among teachers. The principal ensures a school culture that aligns academic and non-academic activities with contextual Islamic values.

The Islamic leadership model integrates spiritual and professional dimensions, shaping an educational system rooted in Islamic values and responsive to modern challenges.

## CONCLUSION

The Islamic leadership model of the RA Hidayatul Muftadiin principal integrates Islamic spiritual values with modern managerial approaches aimed at early childhood character formation. Leadership extends beyond administration to emphasize morality, ethics, and exemplary behavior. *Amanah* fosters responsibility and honesty. *Adl* ensures fairness and



equality. *Uswah hasanah* provides moral and spiritual role modeling. *Shura* enables collective decision-making and participation.

Impacts include natural development of children's religious, responsible, and empathetic character, and enhanced teacher professionalism as spiritual guidance aligns with pedagogical practice. The model proves effective in creating a character-centered, faith-based, and professional educational ecosystem, serving as a conceptual and practical reference for other RA institutions.

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