

Principal's Leadership in Integrated Islamic Early Childhood Education

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A B S T R A C T

The management and implementation of education in schools is very necessary for good coordination and cooperation between school personnel, principals, teachers, other education personnel, and with parents or school committees and school supervisors to realize the goals that have been set with the coordination of all parties to this school, so that the ideals of quality education can be achieved as they should be (Ikhsandi, 2021). In order for schools to achieve their goals effectively and efficiently, school principals must carry out managerial functions such as planning, organizing, directing, motivating, implementing, organizing, control, evaluation and innovation. A good principal is expected to shape the implementation of learning carried out by good teachers. If learning at school is good, it will certainly result in good achievements of children and teachers. With this in mind, a school principal is needed who is able to lead and exert influence effectively in carrying out his obligations. The growth of such quality Islamic schools is undoubtedly inspired by the Islamization of formal education. Among the Islamic schools that are massively spread in various regions in Indonesia are Integrated Islamic Schools (SIT). Quality schools are able to improve and create an effective and quality educational environment under the leadership of school principals who have expectations in improving the quality of learning, inspiring and motivating educators and educators, being able to increase partnerships, support resource management and be able to face educational challenges.

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INTRODUCTION

The importance of early childhood education from various expert sources and theories that recognize how essential Education is for early childhood. Solehuddin (1997) emphasized several points of importance of early childhood education seen from the position of preschool age for the development of the next child. Experts view this preschool age as a very fundamental phase for the development of a child's individual. Santorck (1992) this early age is the period of formation of children's basic personality, where important and unique events will occur in this phase they learn to understand the beginning of life and interact with various developments. Fernie (1988) said that the learning experience will never be replaced by the next experience, unless there is a new modification and a new experience. Goleman also explained that the early age period of the first year is a fertile period in the development of the human brain until it can reach approximately two-thirds the size of the adult brain. It can be interpreted that these experts agree on how important the preschool age phase is for the development of the next child. (Kristanto, 2011)

Preschool education is currently better known as early childhood education. Thus, early childhood education is one of the levels of education that is held before the basic education level, although it is not a prerequisite for participating in basic education. Early childhood education is a form of education that focuses on laying the foundation of knowledge towards the growth and physical development of fine and gross motor coordination, thinking

intelligence, creativity, emotional intelligence, spiritual intelligence, socio-emotional attitudes and behaviors as well as religion, language and communication, in accordance with the uniqueness and stages of development that early childhood go through. An education role and responsibility for policies that form the stages of social values, life skills and the initial foundation of the institution cannot be separated from the role of a management and policy of the principal who becomes a leader with various knowledge and experience possessed by a leader.

The leadership of the principal who also seeks to improve performance for the results achieved by the school principal in implementing school management to realize educational goals effectively and efficiently, productively, and accountably. The principal has high autonomy in advancing and developing his school.

The principal as a leader at the level of the educational unit must have a strong leadership foundation. So every school principal must understand the key to successful leadership that accommodates the importance of school leadership. As a school principal, he is a leader figure in the education unit who must have a strong leadership foundation. Therefore, every principal needs to understand the principles of success in leadership which include the essence of the importance of the principal's leadership role. (Mulyasa, 2022)

The progress of schools and the implementation of education are not based on the role of the community which is the main stakeholder in education, where the school needs support and concern from the community, whether it is from individuals, or an organization that has various roles in the community in the implementation of education. With this cooperation, the community can provide, implement and utilize the results of education. from regular participation to high and sustainable levels of partnership, such as simply using the services provided by the school to participating in decision-making (Supardi, 2023)

Since education is a shared property, it is the duty of the family, the state, and society to help children grow up through the educational process. According to Ki Hajar Dewantara, who is considered the "Father of Indonesian Education", there are three education implementers called the "tri education centers" who work together in the implementation of children's education in the school, family, and community environment where they live. To manage education effectively, the tricentral framework of education calls for reciprocity. The goal of school partnerships is to encourage greater community ownership, engagement, care, and support, especially financial and moral aid. The pattern of relationships between schools and communities must always be encouraged and improved. So it can be said that the purpose of partnerships in schools is to strengthen the sense of responsibility, participation, and support from the community, both financially and morally, so that the relationship between the school and the community needs to continue to be established and sustainable. (Sholihah, 2022)

Human resources (HR) are the main key to the success of development, therefore the quality of human resources must be improved in accordance with the progress of science and technology and develop national development. Therefore, the role of the school principal is a significant factor in increasing work effectiveness, so that if his role as a school principal is appropriate, progress in the scheme will be achieved. To create these conditions, it still requires a process so that the principal can increase the effectiveness of the work of teachers and employees. (Maduratna, 2013)

As a school principal leader, he also has an important role in improving optimal performance for the progress of the school institution, so that if the principal carries out his duties appropriately, the progress of the school will be achieved. To achieve this, a continuous process is needed so that school principals can improve and improve the effectiveness of the work of their teachers and staff.

According to Anthony and Robert, the effectiveness of leadership depends on a number of variables: 1) leaders, 2) followers, 3) situations, and 4) interpersonal relationships. The effectiveness of leadership is not determined by one or several leaders alone, but rather a shared result between the leader and the people he leads. The leader will not be able to do much without the participation of subordinates, and on the other hand, the subordinates will

not be effective in carrying out their duties and obligations, without control, direction, and cooperation with the leader.

METHOD

This research is a qualitative research. Qualitative is a research procedure that produces descriptive data in the form of written or spoken words from people and observable behaviors. Qualitative research methods used to research on the condition of natural objects. Where the researcher is the key instrument and the collection of inductive data and research results that are relevant to the whole situation. (Sugiono, 2009)

Qualitative research is a research and understanding process based on a methodology that investigates a social phenomenon and human problems. In this approach, the researcher makes a complex picture of how the leadership system in the AL'Firdaus Integrated Islamic Early Childhood School and the Sabilal Muhtadin Integrated Islamic Early Childhood Education School.

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

The leadership of school principals in ECE has a very strategic role in creating a conducive learning environment, managing resources optimally, and developing policies that support children's development as a whole. In the context of early childhood education, leadership challenges become more complex, because school principals not only have to manage pedagogic and administrative aspects, but also have to understand and utilize technology in learning. Mohrman (1994) stated that the most important value in developing an effective school is conducive leadership of the principal. This opinion emphasizes that leadership, in this case, the leadership of the school principal, gives the strongest role in developing/creating effective schools (Fadhli, 2016)

The leadership of school principals in ECE serves as the main driver in implementing technology-based education, as well as developing strategies that are able to improve the quality of education and parental involvement. Principals in ECE are expected to have the ability to design a curriculum that is relevant to the needs of the times, as well as facilitate the use of technology as a means of developing creative and innovative learning. The principal also not only increases the responsibility and authority in school programs, and personal decisions, but also has the responsibility to increase accountability for the success of the learning program. As a leader who is good at leading groups and managing tasks and authority.

Important and strategic efforts that are scheduled to optimize the performance of school principals are highly dependent on the willingness and determination of the principal to position himself as a successful leader with optimal performance. A leader who not only succeeds in reaching the top of leadership but can also lead schools and students to achieve achievements involving himself. In the organizational environment, leadership occurs through two forms, namely: formal leadership and informal leadership. Formal leadership occurs when within the organization, the position of formal authority in the organization is filled by people who are influential towards others because of special skills or various resources that they feel are able to solve organizational problems and meet the needs of the members of the organization concerned (Sudrajat, 2023)

The management and maintenance of education in schools is very necessary for good coordination and cooperation between school personnel, principals, teachers, other education personnel, and with parents or school committees and school supervisors to realize the goals that have been set with the coordination of all parties to this school, so that the ideals of quality education can be achieved as they should. In order for schools to achieve their goals effectively and efficiently, school principals must carry out managerial functions such as planning, organizing, directing, motivating, implementing, organizing, control, evaluation and innovation. A good principal is expected to shape the implementation of learning carried out by good teachers. If learning at school is good, it will certainly result in good achievements of

children and teachers. With this in mind, a school principal is needed who is able to lead and exert influence effectively in carrying out his obligations. (Ikhsandi, 2021)

The learning environment is a place for children to express and create as well as explore, so that they can develop new behaviors through various activities carried out. The learning environment can also be interpreted as a place for children to experiment and experiment with expressing themselves so that they can gain new concepts and information as a result of the learning process. In the implementation of early childhood education, it is important to create a quality environment because the environment is an important part of the available facilities and infrastructure. Dwiyoogo (2008) All learning resources are designed to encourage the learning process to be more effective, efficient and interesting so that children remain at home to continue learning. A learning environment that pays attention to the dimensions of comfort and beauty will directly affect the learning process and outcomes. (Rachman S. A., 2020)

According to the Ministry of Education and Culture (2022), a safe learning environment in ECE is an environment that provides a sense of security and comfort for children, educators, and staff, both physically, mentally, and socially. Rachman (2020) Realizing a safe learning environment for children is the same as fulfilling the rights and protection of children in the educational environment. states that the learning environment in ECE is not only a place to hone academic skills, but also to form character, foster social relationships, and instill important life values from an early age. The learning environment in ECE is a critical foundation for children's holistic development. Here, children can interact positively, develop skills, foster confidence, nurture curiosity and appreciate the environment (Kemendikbudristek, 2022)

This leadership with curriculum policies and provisions of various character values and religious values is also an important point of an education that makes the school have a uniqueness in the school. So that the institutions are now implementing schools with a type of education that integrates the educational curriculum with the values of the Islamic teaching fund of the concept of Integrated Islam Integrated Islam aims to educate children in a holistic manner covering the academic, character, and spiritual aspects of Islam. Because in addition to general learning, children are also given a strong understanding of religion such as learning the Quran, fiqh, morals of Islamic history. With the aim that children grow up to be individuals who are not only intellectually intelligent, but also have good morals and in accordance with Islamic teachings. The principles of teaching and learning are carried out with a balanced approach between scientific and spiritual learning, and make the school environment a place that supports religious values. (Yusuf, 2017)

Integrated Islamic schools are educational institutions that are responsive to modern developments among people who do not have strong religious bases. As is widely known, schools are modern educational institutions inherited from colonialism, compared to education that has developed before, schools have advantages in terms of scientific and technological development, while the word integrated is a concept used to build the image of an integrated Islamic school that in addition to the development of science and technology they also develop religious education that *excellent* That is an integration between the development of science and technology with Islamic science.(Suyatno, 2016)

Early Childhood Education (ECE) is the initial stage in character formation and the development of children's potential which is very important for their future. At this stage, children are not only equipped with basic knowledge, but also with social values, emotions, and life skills that will be the foundation in their subsequent development. Therefore, understanding, knowledge and application of behavior are not perfect, but little by little children will begin to understand that every time they get older, their understanding of the commands and guidance received will also increase. (Kartikowati, 2020)

Observations were made in the Integrated Islamic School (IT) in the city of Banjarmasin, there were two schools that were chosen because of the strong character of the school with various peculiarities in providing quality for the school and also the leadership in the school that was able to make the school superior in the context of the Integrated Islamic ECE school, namely the Al'Firdaus Integrated Islamic ECE and the Sabilal Muhradin Integrated Islamic

ECE where both of them provided an integrated Islamic concept based on religion and the process of knowledge and provision of a curriculum that is in accordance with the character of the school.

Quality schools are able to improve and create an effective and quality educational environment with the leadership of school principals who have expectations in improving the quality of learning, inspiring and motivating educators and educators, being able to increase partnerships, support resource management and be able to face educational challenges. At the beginning of the establishment of the Al Firdaus Integrated Islamic School in 2017, this school only had a total of 17 children along with the passage of time, the Al'Firdaus Integrated Islamic School has a number of children at this time in 2025 reaching 108 children with a total of 7 classrooms with a size of 9x6 and the number of teachers as many as 19 teachers including 4 ABK teachers. From the results of the interview for a preliminary study with the principal of Al'Firdaud, Mrs. Linda Hairati, M. Pd, she gave me the opportunity to delve deeper into how the concept of school and leadership that she applied in the school which I observed from several sources, both parents of students, teachers and foundations about her leadership in the school had a positive impact on the development of teacher competence and the progress of the school together. This means that with the leadership of Mrs. Linda Hariati since the establishment of the Al Firdaus ECE school, it has been proven that only around eight years of the establishment of the Al Firdaus Integrated Islamic ECE school has been able to compete with ECE schools that have been established for a long time, and can be taken into account with the many awards and her transparent leadership skills and experience in the previous school.

In addition to the school, the school that I also chose as the object of research is Sabibal Muhtadin Integrated Islamic ECE because this school has become one of the favorite Integrated Islamic schools since its establishment until now by providing the concept of Integrated Islam and by the head of the Sabibal Muhtadin Integrated Islamic ECE school Mrs. Rida Fitria, S. Pd provided data for this preliminary study, namely she provided data on the number of students in the school amounting to 235 children with classrooms 10 and 20 teaching staff or teachers as the successor to the leadership of the principal, he is responsible for the policies and every rule that has been observed in a sustainable manner since its establishment in 2007 has made the school a favorite in a sustainable manner. The leadership of the Sabibal Muhtadin integrated Islamic ECE school as a replacement from the previous principal for the leadership of the principal which he carried out continued and carried out the vision and mission as well as directing learning using the center method which has been since 2006 by referring to it as a center school or learning with this approach even though the national curriculum is different and changed to the Merdeka curriculum, this school still implements center learning That is, focusing on a more effective and participatory learning process. With various kinds of curriculum that have changed in recent years, the school remains on the stance to use the center in the learning approach to students.

The learning carried out in these two schools is not much different because the curriculum program used instills Islam and a separate curriculum with the ECE IT education system. In addition, the use of center-based learning models and appropriate methods in delivering materials also contributes to the success of learning implementation in instilling other developmental values.

The existence of integrated Islamic education in the field of early childhood education is increasingly in demand by the community because it is able to integrate academic education in general and help form Islamic character. The current challenge is how the principal's understanding of his leadership in providing a holistic Islamic concept and internalizing spiritual values in a leadership style that has an impact on the optimal implementation of the vision and mission of institutions that instill Islamic values from an early age. Looking at these aspects, in-depth research related to leadership in integrated Islamic ECE is expected to collect data on ideal leadership based on Islamic values and relevant according to the challenges of today's times so that it can be a concrete solution in improving the quality of Islamic-based early childhood education in the field of early childhood education.

The leadership of the principal of Alfirmadaus is a leader who focuses on the vision and mission made, which is to form a personality that is intelligent, creative, independent and behaves well based on religion. As a school principal, it is always in the form of providing encouragement and inspiring teachers in carrying out their duties and striving to improve the quality of education by empowering guidance and coaching as well as opportunities to deepen knowledge in the field of ECEan. Where the teachers at the school are given the opportunity to continue to improve their knowledge and insight as an educator by continuing their strata II studies for teachers who want to continue their education while continuing to teach and carry out their responsibilities as teachers and school employees under the guidance of the principal.

Under the leadership of the principal in two schools, namely ECE IT Alfirmadaus and ECE IT Sabilal Muhtadin, it provides a good example for all components of the school such as teachers, staff, parents and students. As a leader, they must be able to create a balanced learning atmosphere between intellectual development and the formation of good morals and inspire all members of educational institutions to apply Islamic values in their daily lives.

According to Rivai (2011), leadership includes the process of influencing in determining organizational goals, motivating the behavior of followers to achieve goals, influencing the interpretation of the events of their followers, organizing and activities to achieve goals, maintaining cooperative relationships and group work, gaining support and cooperation from people outside the group or organization. Leadership style according to Tampubolon (2007) is behavior and strategy, as a result of a combination of philosophy, skills, traits, attitudes, that a leader often applies when he tries to influence the performance of his subordinates. Likewise, Goleman (2006) defines leadership style as a behavioral norm used by a person when the person tries to influence the behavior of others as he sees it (Tolu, 2021)

Referring to the results of interviews and preliminary studies with the principals of the two schools, this study focuses on how the leadership of the principal in carrying out his duties as a leader in providing direction and responsibility to each related party.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on improving the quality of schools and principals who prioritize the best results for educators and education staff in schools and also cohesiveness of cooperation and kinship are the main strategies applied by school principals. More interestingly, the principal exerted great efforts in providing motivation and forms of encouragement for school residents. In addition, this school has binding regulations so that the principal in building a commitment is always guided by the agreed regulations.

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