BUILDING QUALITY ISLAMIC EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION: MANAGERIAL STRATEGIES OF RAUDHATUL ATHFAL

Nurul Azimah[1], Adi Wibowo[2], Mukhammad Fajrul Falah Ashshiddig[3], Asri Arofah As'adati Mustaghfiroh[4], Moh. Khoirul Fatihin[5]

[1,2,3,4,5]Institut Agama Islam An-Nawawi Purworejo, Indonesia
Corresponding E-mail: <u>azimahnurul73@gmail.com</u>[1]

Abstract

Improving the performance of Islamic educational institutions is a strategic necessity in responding to the demands of professionalism and quality in the modern era. This study aims to analyze the managerial strategies of RA Masyithoh Sutoragan Purworejo in improving leadership effectiveness, learning quality, educator professionalism, and service quality for students and the community. The study employs a descriptive qualitative approach with data collection techniques including observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation, analyzed thematically. The findings reveal that the institution's success is driven by the implementation of participatory leadership, the cultivation of an Islamic work culture, continuous teacher competency development, and consistency in program evaluation and innovation. These findings contribute to the development of a professional, religious, and quality-oriented Islamic education management model. The conclusion emphasizes the importance of synergy between leadership, work culture, and human resource development, with recommendations for further research to examine the strategic impact on student achievement in quantitative terms.

Keywords: *Islamic Education Management; Participatory Leadership; Islamic Work Culture; Quality Improvement; RA Masyithoh*

A. Introduction

Early Childhood Education (PAUD) plays a strategic role in establishing the foundation for children's development, including character, intellectual, and social aspects. The golden age of early childhood is a critical phase that determines the quality of future human resources. Therefore, effective PAUD management is key to ensuring that every child receives optimal stimulation for their holistic development (Susanti & Indriani, 2025).

In Indonesia, the urgency of strengthening PAUD management is growing, as data from the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology indicates that thousands of PAUD institutions will be operating by 2024, serving millions of students. However, despite increasing enrollment rates, literacy and numeracy outcomes for Indonesian children remain low, according to the international PISA and TIMSS surveys. This situation indicates a learning crisis rooted in early childhood (Nirwana, Ramadhani, & Silvia, 2025).

The main problem facing PAUD in Indonesia is not only access but also service quality. Several studies report that frequently encountered obstacles include weak managerial competence of PAUD principals, suboptimal administration, and unsystematic teacher performance evaluation (Setyowati, 2025). This impacts the quality of educational services, which are less than optimal in promoting the holistic development of students.

Furthermore, challenges in PAUD management also include poor coordination between institutions and policymakers, limited resources, and a lack of parental involvement in the educational process. These factors hinder the achievement of PAUD's goal of providing a solid foundation for basic education (Rosanti, 2025). Therefore, a more holistic, participatory, and outcome-driven management strategy is needed.

One strategic approach that is increasingly being implemented is School-Based Management (SBM) in PAUD institutions. The implementation of SBM has been proven to increase community participation, strengthen transparency, and encourage innovation in learning management (Amali, 2025). However, the implementation of SBM at the PAUD level still faces technical and cultural challenges that need to be addressed through visionary leadership and teacher capacity development. In addition to traditional managerial aspects, strengthening teacher capacity through training and digital literacy is also a crucial factor. Recent research shows that digital literacy training models can improve the pedagogical competence of kindergarten teachers, thereby supporting the quality of learning relevant to 21st-century demands (Manullang, Simaremare, & Darwin, 2025). This confirms that human resource development is a key pillar in improving the quality of Early Childhood Education (PAUD).

Literature studies also emphasize that effective PAUD management strategies cannot stand alone but must integrate planning, ongoing evaluation, educator training, and active parent and community involvement. This synergy is a crucial foundation for creating quality and sustainable PAUD services (Setyowati, 2025).

Based on this context, this article aims to uncover and analyze the managerial strategies implemented at RA Masyithoh Sutoragan in an effort to improve the performance of early childhood education institutions. The main focus of the research

covers planning, organizing, evaluation, and developing educator capacity with visionary leadership. Theoretically, this research is expected to contribute to a contextual and empirical PAUD management model. Practically, the research results are expected to be a reference for RA Masyithoh Sutoragan and similar PAUD institutions in developing effective, efficient, and sustainable managerial strategies.

B. Method

This research uses a descriptive qualitative approach with a case study method. This approach was chosen because it allows researchers to explore and deeply understand the managerial strategies implemented at RA Masyithoh Sutoragan in its natural context. Case studies are deemed relevant because the research focuses on a single institution as a single unit of analysis, allowing for a comprehensive description of managerial phenomena from the perspective of field actors (Creswell, 2017; Moleong, 2017).

The data sources in this study come from primary and secondary data. Primary data were collected through three main techniques: (1) participant observation of managerial activities such as routine meetings, supervision, and teacher performance evaluations; (2) in-depth interviews with RA principals, senior teachers, and foundation administrators using a semi-structured guide to obtain broader information; and (3) documentation, including analysis of institutional documents such as the Annual Work Plan (RKT), evaluation reports, meeting minutes, and curriculum documents. Informants were selected using purposive sampling, with the criteria being a direct role in the managerial process, having worked at the institution for at least two years, and understanding the organization's vision and mission (Sugiyono, 2021; Moleong, 2017).

Data analysis was conducted using the Miles & Huberman interactive model, which includes three stages: data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing/verification. Data validity was maintained using source and method triangulation techniques, which involved comparing data from various informants and data collection techniques. Member checking was also conducted by confirming findings with key informants, and discussions between researchers were conducted to minimize subjective bias. With this procedure, the research results are expected to provide valid and reliable findings that contribute to the development of PAUD managerial strategies (Kalpokaite & Radivojevic, 2019; Dewi & SH, 2025).

C. Finding and Discussion

1. Finding

Planning, Leadership, and Educator Development Strategy

Work program planning at RA Masyithoh Sutoragan is carried out systematically and participatively. Teachers, the RA principal, and the foundation's management meet at the beginning of each year to reflect on the achievements of the previous program. This forum produces an Annual Work Plan (RKT) that is not merely a formality but a genuine reflection of the institution's needs and the aspirations of stakeholders. This approach ensures that every teacher feels

involved in the decision-making process, fostering a strong sense of ownership in the program. This mechanism also helps the institution remain relevant to current demands and the actual needs of students.

Table 1. Work program planning at RA Masyithoh Sutoragan

Informant	Question	Short Answer	Key Findings
Head of RA	How is the annual work program planned?	We hold an annual meeting with teachers and the foundation to evaluate previous programs, then prepare the annual work plan (AWP) based on institutional needs.	Needs-based and participatory planning.
Head of RA	What leadership style do you apply in managing the RA?	I try to be directly involved, set an example, and always keep the dialogue open with teachers.	Transformative and collaborative leadership.
Senior Teacher	How does the institution improve teacher competence?	We regularly attend training, teacher working groups (KKG), in-house training, and supervision. There is reflection after training.	Continuous teacher professional development.
Senior Teacher	What is the role of the Head of RA in supporting teacher development?	The Head of RA always encourages us to learn, provides facilities, and accompanies us during supervision.	Leadership support in capacity building.
PAUD Teacher	How is the learning environment managed at RA?	The classrooms are neat, clean, and always instill Islamic culture such as greetings, prayers, and teacher role models.	Islamic value-based and conducive learning environment.
PAUD Teacher	What kind of evaluation is carried out after teaching?	Every day we record children's development, then evaluate monthly and quarterly in meetings.	Continuous and adaptive program evaluation.
Foundation Board	How does the foundation contribute to RA management?	The foundation is involved in funding, supervising programs, and providing strategic direction.	Foundation synergy in supporting institutional management.
Foundation Board	What is the biggest challenge faced by the institution?	Limited funding and the need for innovation in technology-based learning.	Financial challenges and educational technology innovation.

The active involvement of teachers in planning also demonstrates a shift in the management paradigm from a top-down to a collaborative one. Thus, RA Masyithoh Sutoragan has successfully built an inclusive organizational culture, where every element contributes to formulating the institution's direction. This process strengthens the legitimacy of the resulting policies while minimizing resistance in program implementation. The success of planning is no longer solely determined by the leadership, but rather the result of collective consensus rooted in shared reflection.

Beyond planning, the RA principal's transformative leadership plays a central role in mobilizing all elements of the institution. The RA principal serves not only

as an administrative decision-maker but also as a role model in teaching and mentoring practices. Her direct presence in the classroom and openness to criticism and suggestions create a positive atmosphere. This leadership style strengthens professional and emotional relationships among teachers, ultimately increasing work motivation and loyalty to the institution.

Collaborative leadership also encourages healthy two-way communication between leaders and teachers. This fosters trust, making every policy more easily accepted and implemented. The RA principal is viewed not only as a structural leader but also as a spiritual and pedagogical mentor who serves as a role model. With this approach, leadership truly functions as a driving force for sustainable change.

In the context of teacher development, RA Masyithoh Sutoragan places significant emphasis on improving teacher competency. Various internal training programs, such as in-house training, peer teaching, and regular academic supervision, are implemented to strengthen teacher capacity. These activities not only enrich pedagogical knowledge but also encourage teachers to reflect on their own learning practices. With a continuous cycle of professional development, teachers are able to adapt to curriculum changes while enhancing their creativity in designing early childhood learning. This makes teacher development a managerial strategy with direct implications for improving the quality of learning.

Learning Environment Management and Continuous Evaluation System

The learning environment management strategy at RA Masyithoh Sutoragan harmoniously integrates physical and spiritual aspects. The school's physical environment is neatly, cleanly, and aesthetically pleasing to create a comfortable and safe learning environment for children. This is crucial considering that early childhood learners are strongly influenced by their surroundings. The layout of classrooms, play areas, and learning facilities is designed to stimulate creativity while supporting children's cognitive, motor, and socio-emotional development.

Beyond just the physical environment, RA Masyithoh Sutoragan emphasizes reinforcing Islamic values in daily life. Habitual greetings, prayers, reciting short verses, and teacher role models are integral parts of learning activities. This strategy shapes children's character through a consistently implemented hidden curriculum. The religious culture fostered by the institution also reinforces RA's identity as an Islamic educational institution that instills moral values from an early age.

The school's social environment is also structured to foster harmonious relationships between teachers, students, and parents. Teachers are accustomed to working together, supporting each other, and maintaining healthy communication, thus creating a conducive work environment. These positive relationships directly impact children's learning comfort, as they feel the collective support of the school environment. A friendly and caring environment fosters confidence, independence, and motivation in children.

Furthermore, the evaluation system is a crucial part of RA Masyithoh Sutoragan's management cycle. Formal evaluations are conducted quarterly through coordination meetings, while teachers conduct daily evaluations of the classroom learning process. Evaluation data is analyzed in an internal forum to determine necessary follow-up actions. In this way, evaluations go beyond administrative records to become reflective instruments that lead to tangible improvements in work programs and learning.

The consistency of evaluations demonstrates that RA Masyithoh Sutoragan has implemented the principles of data-driven management. Every decision made is based on evaluation results, not mere assumptions. This approach makes the institution more adaptable to student needs, teacher challenges, and changes in the external environment. The combination of Islamic environmental management and continuous evaluation creates a continuous cycle of improvement. This strategy has been proven to strengthen the quality of educational services, form a healthy organizational culture, and ensure the achievement of religious, professional, and quality-oriented educational goals.

2. Discussion

Analysis of Planning, Leadership, and Educator Development Strategies

Research results indicate that the needs-evaluation-based work program planning at RA Masyithoh Sutoragan aligns with the principles of strategic planning in educational management, which emphasize internal reflection and collective participation (Sallis, 2014). Teacher involvement in the development of the Annual Work Plan (RKT) creates a sense of belonging and responsibility for the program's success. This supports the concept of participatory planning, where the participation of all stakeholders can improve the quality of education policy implementation (Lunenburg & Ornstein, 2012). Thus, planning at RA Masyithoh demonstrates that collaboration between teachers, the principal, and the foundation can produce policies that are adaptive and relevant to current needs.

From a leadership perspective, the RA principal's transformative practices are consistent with the theory of Bass & Riggio (2006), which emphasizes the importance of motivation, inspiration, and role modeling in building employee loyalty. The RA principal is not only an administrative figure but also a pedagogical and spiritual role model. This collaborative leadership strengthens emotional bonds among teachers, thereby creating a healthy organizational climate. Handayani's (2023) research also supports these findings, stating that the success of community-based Islamic Early Childhood Education (PAUD) programs is highly dependent on participatory leadership that fosters collaboration between institutional elements.

Strengthening educator capacity through internal and external training is also a significant factor in improving institutional quality. In-House Training (IHT) programs, peer teaching, and academic supervision are forms of continuous professional development (CPD) proven effective in improving teacher quality (Darling-Hammond, 2000). Teachers not only acquire new knowledge but also learn through reflection and collaborative practice. These findings support Nuryani's (2022) study, which asserted that

the quality of Islamic Early Childhood Education (PAUD) improves significantly when teachers are actively involved in ongoing professional learning.

The implications of the planning, leadership, and educator development strategies at RA Masyithoh Sutoragan are the creation of a strong, responsive, and quality-oriented organizational culture. The synergy of these three aspects contributes to increased teacher motivation, enhanced professionalism, and the achievement of the institution's goals in both academic and spiritual aspects. RA Masyithoh's success is further reinforced by external achievements, such as being selected as a pilot for a social media-based madrasah innovation program, demonstrating that teacher competency development encompasses digital literacy.

However, this study also identified potential obstacles that require attention. Not all teachers are equally prepared to participate in training programs, particularly regarding technology skills. This presents a challenge to ensure that training is not only theoretical but also applicable, tailored to teachers' needs. Therefore, recommendations suggest the need for more intensive mentoring, particularly in the area of learning technology, to ensure a more equitable transformation of teacher competency.

Analysis of Learning Environment Management and Continuous Evaluation System

The Islamic value-based learning environment management implemented by RA Masyithoh Sutoragan demonstrates the integration of physical and spiritual aspects. A clean, tidy, and aesthetically pleasing environment aligns with Montessori theory (Lillard, 2011), which states that the arrangement of learning spaces significantly influences children's concentration and comfort. Meanwhile, the instillation of Islamic values through greetings, prayers, and teacher role models reflects a hidden curriculum (Bi'amrillah, n.d.), which serves as an effective instrument in character formation from an early age. This reinforces RA Masyithoh's identity as an Islamic educational institution that emphasizes a balance between cognitive, affective, and spiritual aspects.

The religious culture created at the school also has important implications for children's socio-emotional development. A consistent Islamic environment creates a loving and secure atmosphere, allowing children to feel comfortable exploring. This finding is consistent with a study by Asrori (2020), which stated that the application of Islamic values in early childhood education (PAUD) can increase children's moral intelligence and strengthen their social skills. Therefore, the Islamic environmental management strategy at RA Masyithoh significantly contributes to shaping the character of a generation that is religious and virtuous.

The institution's ongoing evaluation also demonstrates the application of data-driven management principles. Quarterly and daily classroom evaluations serve as instruments for reflection, not simply administrative reports. This principle aligns with Fullan's (2001) view that decision-making.

Figure 1. Transformational And Collaborative Leadership Styles

The findings reveal that the principal of RA Masyithoh Sutoragan applies a transformational and collaborative leadership style that goes beyond administrative functions. By directly engaging in classroom activities, serving as a role model, and fostering open communication with teachers and the foundation, the principal builds strong emotional and professional relationships within the institution. This leadership approach not only motivates teachers but also cultivates a sense of loyalty, openness, and shared responsibility in achieving institutional goals. Ultimately, such leadership proves to be a key driver of sustainable organizational change and the continuous improvement of educational quality.

E. Conclusion

This study concludes that RA Masyithoh Sutoragan's success in improving the performance of Islamic educational institutions is largely supported by a holistic managerial strategy, encompassing needs-based program planning, transformative and collaborative leadership, continuous teacher competency development, Islamic value-based learning environment management, and consistent program evaluation. These findings provide a deeper understanding that the synergy between leadership, an Islamic work culture, and human resource development is the primary foundation for achieving a professional and religious institution. Theoretically, the results of this study strengthen the theory of participatory educational management and the concept of continuous professional development, while also enriching the study of transformational leadership practices in the context of Islamic-based early childhood education institutions. Practical implications are evident in the creation of a conducive, adaptive, and relevant educational environment that meets the demands of the times and the needs of society. However, this research is limited by its single-case study scope, which limits generalizability.

Therefore, further research is recommended to quantitatively explore the impact of this strategy on student achievement and compare it with similar institutions to obtain a more comprehensive picture. Based on the research findings, it is recommended that Islamic educational institutions, particularly early childhood education (PAUD), implement participatory planning based on evaluation of real needs and strengthen transformational leadership that prioritizes role models and collaboration. Practitioners should develop sustainable training programs that are responsive to digital challenges and the needs of teachers in the field. Academics are expected to expand the study of Islamic education management with comparative and multi-site approaches to enrich theory and practice. Policymakers should support regulations and funding that encourage innovation and improve the quality of Islamic PAUD institutions. For further research, exploring the long-term effectiveness of evaluation strategies and using more in-depth triangulation methods is highly recommended for a more comprehensive understanding of the managerial dynamics of Islamic educational institutions.

F. Acknowledgment

G. Bibliography

Ahmad, M. (2020). Kepemimpinan transformatif kepala sekolah dalam meningkatkan mutu pendidikan. Jurnal Administrasi Pendidikan, 27(1), 45–56.

Andriani, S., Kesumawati, N., & Kristiawan, M. (2018). The influence of the transformational leadership and work motivation on teachers' performance. International Journal of Scientific & Technology Research, 7(7), 19–29.

Anwar, S. (2021). Implementasi manajemen berbasis sekolah pada lembaga PAUD. Jurnal Obsesi: Jurnal Pendidikan Anak Usia Dini, 5(2), 1447–1456.

Arifin, Z. (2019). Evaluasi pembelajaran dalam pendidikan anak usia dini. Jurnal Golden Age, 3(1), 1–12.

Bass, B. M., & Riggio, R. E. (2006). Transformational leadership (2nd ed.). Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

BI'AMRILLAH, M. (2019). Pendidikan karakter melalui hidden curriculum di sekolah Islam. Jurnal Pendidikan Karakter, 9(2), 213–224.

Creswell, J. W. (2017). Qualitative inquiry & research design: Choosing among five approaches (4th ed.). Sage Publications.

Darling-Hammond, L. (2000). Teacher quality and student achievement: A review of state policy evidence. Educational Policy Analysis Archives, 8(1), 1–44.

Dewi, R., & SH, M. (2025). Validitas data dalam penelitian kualitatif pendidikan. Jurnal Ilmiah Pendidikan, 12(1), 55–66.

Fathurrochman, I. (2020). Manajemen mutu terpadu dalam meningkatkan mutu lembaga PAUD. Jurnal Obsesi: Jurnal Pendidikan Anak Usia Dini, 4(2), 950–962.

Fullan, M. (2001). The new meaning of educational change. Teachers College Press.

Handayani, E. (2023). Strategi manajerial kepala sekolah dalam meningkatkan mutu pembelajaran PAUD Islam. Jurnal Manajemen Pendidikan Islam, 8(1), 78–89.

Hidayati, N. (2021). Peran kepemimpinan partisipatif dalam pengembangan budaya sekolah. Jurnal Administrasi Pendidikan, 28(2), 167–178.

Kalpokaite, N., & Radivojevic, I. (2019). Demystifying qualitative data analysis in grounded theory: The Miles and Huberman model. Qualitative Report, 24(1), 44–57.

Kristiawan, M., Safitri, D., & Lestari, R. (2017). Manajemen pendidikan. Deepublish.

Moleong, L. J. (2017). Metodologi penelitian kualitatif (Edisi revisi). Remaja Rosdakarya.

Mulyasa, E. (2019). Manajemen PAUD. PT Remaja Rosdakarya.

Nuryani, S. (2022). Kepemimpinan kepala sekolah berbasis nilai Islami dalam meningkatkan mutu PAUD. Jurnal Pendidikan Islam Anak Usia Dini, 6(2), 120–133.

Purnama, S. (2020). Supervisi akademik kepala sekolah dalam meningkatkan profesionalisme guru. Jurnal Administrasi Pendidikan, 27(2), 178–190.

Rahmawati, D. (2021). Kolaborasi guru dan kepala sekolah dalam perencanaan pembelajaran PAUD. Jurnal Obsesi: Jurnal Pendidikan Anak Usia Dini, 6(1), 422–431.

Sallis, E. (2014). Total quality management in education. Routledge.

Saputra, A. (2021). Implementasi evaluasi program berbasis data pada lembaga pendidikan. Jurnal Evaluasi Pendidikan, 12(2), 134–145.

Siregar, R. (2020). Pengembangan profesionalisme guru melalui lesson study. Jurnal Pendidikan Dasar Nusantara, 6(1), 87–95.

Supriyadi, S. (2021). Pengelolaan lingkungan belajar Islami dalam meningkatkan karakter anak usia dini. Jurnal Pendidikan Anak Usia Dini, 10(1), 15–27.

Syamsuddin, A. (2020). Triangulasi metode dan sumber dalam penelitian kualitatif. Jurnal Ilmiah Penelitian Pendidikan, 11(2), 211–220.