

## ISLAM AND INCLUSIVE PRINCIPALS' LEADERSHIP STRATEGIES FOR INCLUSIVE TEACHERS

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**Abstract:** *Previous research on inclusive education in Indonesian primary schools has largely concentrated on policy execution and classroom-level practices, while the leadership dimension—particularly when viewed through Islamic and inclusive lenses—has not been explored extensively. This study seeks to analyze how school principals design and implement leadership strategies to strengthen teacher professionalism in educating students with special needs (ABK). A qualitative descriptive approach was employed, with data collected through observations, in-depth interviews, and documentation at SD Negeri Poris Pelawad 5, Tangerang City. The findings demonstrate that leadership characterized by inclusivity and ethical values substantially supports teacher development through structured coaching, continuous professional training, academic supervision, and collaborative practices. Key supporting factors include institutional commitment and policy alignment, whereas constraints involve limited infrastructure, insufficient special assistant teachers, and gaps in teacher understanding of inclusive education. This study contributes conceptually to Islamic educational leadership discourse and offers practical recommendations for improving inclusive education through sustainable professional development and institutional reinforcement.*

**Keywords:** *inclusive education, Islamic leadership, principal leadership strategy, teacher professionalism, children with special needs (ABK)*

### INTRODUCTION

Education is the right of every citizen without discriminatory treatment, including for children with special needs.<sup>1</sup> In Indonesia, this principle is formally protected through constitutional mandates and national education policies that emphasize equal access for all

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<sup>1</sup> UNESCO. (2017). A guide for ensuring inclusion and equity in education. UNESCO Publishing.

learners.<sup>2</sup> The government implements this policy through inclusive education that allows children with special needs to study with other students in regular schools. Inclusive education not only provides the opportunity to enter school, but also provides educational services that suit the needs of each student.<sup>3</sup> Islam views inclusive education as a form of justice and humanity values as well as respect for human differences.<sup>4</sup> These values affirm that differences are part of nature that must be respected.<sup>5</sup> One of the primary implementations of this mandate is inclusive education, which allows students with diverse needs to study within the same learning environment as their peers in regular schools.

Inclusive education extends beyond mere access; it requires the provision of learning services that are responsive to the unique characteristics and needs of each student.<sup>6</sup> From an Islamic standpoint, inclusivity reflects values of justice, humanity, and respect for diversity.<sup>7</sup> Differences among individuals are viewed as natural conditions that should be acknowledged and accommodated rather than excluded.<sup>8</sup> The school also experienced limited specialized training and a shortage of professional assistants.<sup>9</sup> This condition causes educational services for children with special needs to not run optimally.<sup>10</sup> This suboptimal service has an impact on the low academic and social development of students.<sup>11</sup> Therefore, educational institutions require leadership that integrates inclusivity with ethical and religious values in managing learning processes.

School principals have an important role in improving teacher professionalism in this context.<sup>12</sup> The principal functions not only as an administrator, but also as a learning leader, motivator, and agent of change in the school environment.<sup>13</sup> Effective principals are able to set a shared vision and build an inclusive school culture.<sup>14</sup> This leadership encourages teachers to

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<sup>2</sup> Republic of Indonesia. (1945). Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia in 1945.

<sup>3</sup> Florian, L. (2019). On the necessary co-existence of special and inclusive education. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 23(7–8), 691–704.

<sup>4</sup> Al-Attas, S. M. N. (1999). *The concept of education in Islam*. ISTAC.

<sup>5</sup> Bush, T. (2018). *Leadership and management development in education*. Sage.

<sup>6</sup> Ministry of Education and Culture. (2020). *Guidelines for the implementation of inclusive education*.

<sup>7</sup> Sharma, U., & Sokal, L. (2016). The impact of teacher training on attitudes and concerns about inclusive education. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 20(7), 719–735.

<sup>8</sup> Forlin, C. (2015). Educators' beliefs about inclusive education. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 19(2), 185–199.

<sup>9</sup> Loreman, T. (2017). *Pedagogy for inclusive education*. Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Education.

<sup>10</sup> Avramidis, E., & Norwich, B. (2018). Teachers' attitudes towards inclusion. *European Journal of Special Needs Education*, 33(4), 515–527.

<sup>11</sup> Booth, T., & Ainscow, M. (2016). *The index for inclusion*. CSIE.

<sup>12</sup> Hallinger, P. (2011). Leadership for learning. *Journal of Educational Administration*, 49(2), 125–148.

<sup>13</sup> Leithwood, K., & Jantzi, D. (2005). Transformational leadership. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 41(2), 177–208.

<sup>14</sup> Fullan, M. (2014). *The principal: Three keys to maximizing impact*. Jossey-Bass

continue to develop competencies in an ongoing manner. The perspective of Islamic leadership emphasizes the value of trust, example, deliberation, and justice in every decision-making.<sup>15</sup> These values are in line with the words of Allah SWT, "Indeed, Allah has commanded you to convey the trust to those who have the right to receive it" (QS. An-Nisa: 58)<sup>16</sup>. Therefore, the leadership of school principals based on Islamic values is very relevant in the management of inclusive education.<sup>17</sup>

The reality at SD Negeri Poris Pelawad 5 Tangerang City shows that there are real challenges in the implementation of inclusive education. Classroom teachers serve several students with special needs in one class with a large number of students.<sup>18</sup> This condition makes it difficult for teachers to give individual attention optimally. Teachers gain competence in handling children with special needs through socialization and internal school coaching. Teachers have not participated in much education or special training related to inclusive education. This condition causes learning services for children with special needs to not run effectively.<sup>19</sup> This situation emphasizes the importance of the role of school principals in managing resources and initiating teacher training.<sup>20</sup> Islam views leaders as servants of the ummah as the Prophet PBUH said, "The leaders of a people are their servants" (HR. Abu Nu'aim). Therefore, strong and targeted leadership is needed for inclusive education to achieve the expected goals.<sup>21</sup>

Principals have an important responsibility in creating a school environment that supports quality inclusive education.<sup>22</sup> The principal performs managerial, academic supervision, and transformational leadership functions to continuously improve teacher professionalism.<sup>23</sup> Inclusive leadership based on Islamic values fosters an attitude of empathy, cooperation, and social responsibility in teachers.<sup>24</sup> Islam teaches cooperation in goodness and piety as Allah SWT says, "And help you in virtue and piety" (QS. Al-Ma'idah: 2). In addition, school policies that are responsive to the needs of children and children are the main supporting

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<sup>15</sup> Beekun, R. I. (2012). Islamic leadership and ethics. IIIT.

<sup>16</sup> Rahman, F. (2017). Islam and modernity. University of Chicago Press.

<sup>17</sup> Mulyasa, E. (2017). Management and leadership of the principal. Bumi Aksara

<sup>18</sup> Creswell, J. W. (2018). Qualitative inquiry and research design. Sage.

<sup>19</sup> Friend, M., & Bursuck, W. (2019). Including students with special needs. Pearson.

<sup>20</sup> Sergiovanni, T. J. (2009). The principalship. Pearson

<sup>21</sup> Avolio, B. J., & Yammarino, F. J. (2013). Transformational leadership. Emerald.

<sup>22</sup> Bush, T., & Glover, D. (2014). School leadership models. *Management in Education*, 28(3), 96–101.

<sup>23</sup> Bass, B. M., & Riggio, R. E. (2006). Transformational leadership. Psychology Press.

<sup>24</sup> Sulaiman, A. (2018). Leadership of Islamic education. *Journal of Islamic Education*, 7(2), 123–138.

factors in the success of inclusive education.<sup>25</sup> . The principal collaborates with various parties to overcome the limitations of facilities and accompanying personnel.<sup>26</sup> Therefore, the quality of the principal's leadership is the main key in the management of an inclusive school that is fair.<sup>27</sup>

The situation at SD Negeri Poris Pelawad 5 in Tangerang illustrates these challenges clearly. Teachers are required to handle multiple students with special needs within large classrooms, limiting their ability to provide individualized attention. Most teachers acquire their competencies through internal coaching rather than formal training, resulting in suboptimal learning services. This reality underscores the importance of strong leadership in managing resources, facilitating professional development, and improving educational outcomes for students with special needs.

## **RESEARCH METHOD**

This study utilizes a qualitative descriptive design to explore the leadership strategies of school principals in enhancing teacher professionalism within inclusive education settings. The qualitative approach is particularly suitable as it allows for an in-depth understanding of processes, meanings, and contextual dynamics in school leadership practices.

The research was conducted at SD Negeri Poris Pelawad 5, an elementary school that implements inclusive education. Participants were selected purposively and included the school principal, classroom teachers, special assistant teachers, and supporting staff. These individuals were chosen based on their direct involvement in the implementation of inclusive Data collection was carried out using three primary techniques: semi-structured interviews, direct observation, and document analysis. Interviews were conducted to gather detailed information regarding leadership strategies, school policies, and efforts to enhance teacher professionalism. Observations focused on classroom interactions and school culture, while documentation analysis involved reviewing school programs, supervision records, and policy documents.

Data analysis followed the interactive model proposed by Miles and Huberman, which involves data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. This process was conducted continuously to ensure the credibility and validity of the findings education.

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<sup>25</sup> UNICEF. (2019). Inclusive education: Guidelines for policymakers.

<sup>26</sup> Epstein, J. L. (2018). School, family, and community partnerships. Routledge.

<sup>27</sup> Day, C., & Sammons, P. (2016). Successful school leadership. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 52(2), 221–258.

## RESULTS

Based on the research analysis results, Table 1 systematically presents various principal leadership strategies in the implementation of inclusive education.

**Table 1 Principal Leadership Strategies in Inclusive Education**

No	Strategy	Implementation	Impact
1	Academic Supervision	Classroom observation & feedback	Improved teaching methods
2	Training Programs	Workshops & In-House Training	Increased teacher competence
3	Collaboration	Teacher-parent coordination	Better student support
4	Motivation & Reward	Recognition & appreciation	Higher teacher motivation
5	Resource Management	Scheduling & task distribution	More efficient service

### Academic Supervision and Coaching

The study found that academic supervision conducted by the principal plays a significant role in improving the quality of inclusive teaching. Through regular classroom observations and feedback sessions, teachers receive guidance on how to adapt instructional strategies to meet the needs of diverse learners. Clinical supervision enables teachers to refine their teaching practices, particularly in implementing differentiated instruction. The principal acts as a facilitator who supports continuous professional growth, ensuring that supervision is both systematic and sustainable.

### Professional Training and Development

Professional development programs are essential in enhancing teachers' abilities to understand and support students with special needs. The school organizes training sessions that integrate theoretical knowledge with practical application, including simulations and the development of individualized learning programs. These activities help increase teachers' confidence and competence. The findings indicate that both internal training (In-House Training) and external workshops contribute positively to teacher development.

### Collaboration

Collaboration among teachers, assistant teachers, parents, and external stakeholders is a crucial component of effective inclusive education. Regular coordination meetings and peer mentoring practices facilitate knowledge sharing and improve the quality of learning services.

This collaborative approach reduces dependence on individual support staff and promotes collective responsibility within the school community.

### **Motivation and Reward**

Motivational strategies implemented by the principal, including recognition and appreciation, have a positive impact on teacher commitment. Non-material rewards such as acknowledgment and increased responsibility encourage teachers to innovate and improve their instructional practices. These strategies contribute to the development of a supportive and inclusive school culture.

### **Challenges in Implementation**

Despite these efforts, the school faces several challenges, particularly the imbalance between the number of special assistant teachers and students with special needs. This condition increases workload and reduces the effectiveness of individualized support. Limited facilities and insufficient training opportunities further hinder the implementation of inclusive education.

The study reveals a number of challenges that affect the implementation of inclusive education in schools. The school faces a disproportion between the availability of special assistant teachers and the number of students with special needs. This situation increases teachers' workload and limits the effectiveness of individualized instructional support. The school also encounters inadequate facilities that hinder the provision of optimal inclusive services. The teachers have limited opportunities to access specialized training that enhances inclusive teaching practices. The principal responds to these issues through effective resource management and internal coordination strategies. These limitations suggest that inclusive education requires stronger institutional backing and policy support.

The results indicate that implementation challenges influence the overall quality of inclusive education services. The principal formulates adaptive strategies to handle the limitations of human resources within the school. The teachers modify their instructional methods to meet diverse student needs despite existing constraints. The school enhances collaboration among stakeholders to address structural barriers. The leadership promotes continuous improvement to respond to ongoing challenges in inclusive education. The study emphasizes the importance of sustainable support systems in overcoming these issues. These findings demonstrate that effective leadership plays a vital role in reducing challenges and improving inclusive education outcomes.

## **DISCUSSION**

The findings highlight that teacher competence is a critical factor in the success of inclusive education. Teachers are required to possess not only pedagogical skills but also the ability to understand and respond to diverse student needs. In inclusive classrooms, flexibility and adaptability are essential for effective teaching.

Islamic educational values emphasize fairness, responsibility, and respect for human dignity, which are consistent with the principles of inclusive education. Leadership that integrates these values can foster a supportive environment for teacher development and student learning.

The study also demonstrates that transformational leadership practices—such as mentoring, supervision, and collaboration—are effective in enhancing teacher professionalism. By providing continuous support and encouragement, principals can motivate teachers to improve their competencies and adapt to the demands of inclusive education.

Furthermore, collaboration among stakeholders plays a vital role in overcoming resource limitations and improving service quality. Schools that promote teamwork and shared responsibility are better equipped to implement inclusive education successfully.

## **CONCLUSION**

The leadership of school principals has an important role in realizing inclusive Islamic education for teachers who serve children with special needs. The principal directs policies and drives changes in the school environment. The principal is also an example in building an inclusive school culture. The principal implements coaching strategies, professional training, academic supervision, and collaboration between educators. The strategy improves pedagogic competence and teachers' empathetic attitudes towards children with special needs. Islam places the principles of justice and equality as the basis for inclusive education services. This is in line with the words of Allah in the Qur'an which affirms that every human being is glorified without difference (QS. Al-Isra': 70). Inclusive leadership reflects the value of rahmatan lil 'alamin in educational practice. Thus, the leadership of school principals contributes significantly to improving the quality of inclusive education services.

This study concludes that school principals play a crucial role in advancing inclusive education through effective leadership strategies. By implementing coaching, training, supervision, and collaborative practices, principals can significantly improve teacher professionalism and the quality of educational services for students with special needs.

Leadership grounded in Islamic values strengthens ethical commitment and promotes a culture of inclusivity within schools. To ensure the sustainability of inclusive education, it is essential to enhance leadership capacity, provide adequate resources, and strengthen collaboration among stakeholders.

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