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## Unlocking Harmony: How Islamic Principles Revolutionize Safety and Inclusion for Special Needs Children

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**Abstract:** This research explores the role of Islamic leadership values in promoting inclusive education within a private junior high school in Yogyakarta, focusing on how these values influence the school's ability to provide a supportive and inclusive environment for students with special needs. The study is motivated by the growing recognition of inclusivity challenges in schools and the potential of Islamic leadership principles to address these challenges effectively. Using a qualitative case study approach, the investigation involved in-depth interviews and observations with key informants, including teachers, a school counselor, and the principal, to capture a multifaceted view of the implementation of *tabligh* (effective communication) and *fathonah* (intelligence) in fostering inclusivity. The findings reveal that the principal's application of Islamic leadership values, particularly through regular meetings, the buddy system, and Islamic speech sessions, significantly enhanced the school's inclusivity culture. These initiatives promoted better peer interactions, increased teacher and parental engagement, and offered a supportive network for students with special needs. However, challenges such as inconsistent implementation of inclusivity strategies and inadequate facilities were also identified. In conclusion, the study highlights the effectiveness of Islamic leadership values in enhancing inclusivity in education settings, underscoring the importance of tailored approaches to address the diverse needs of students. It suggests further research into adaptive inclusive practices and the impact of parental involvement, pointing towards a comprehensive approach to integrating cultural and religious values into educational leadership for fostering inclusivity.

**Keywords:** Islamic leadership in education, Inclusive education practices, Adaptive strategies for inclusivity

### 1. Introduction

Inclusive school should rightfully serve as a beacon of hope for children with special needs to attend public schools alongside their typical peers without experiencing any form of discrimination whatsoever (J. C. Pratiwi, 2015). Inclusion in the school environment means that students feel equality, whether they come from different cultural, economic, or racial backgrounds or have special needs, in receiving equal learning opportunities. In addition to learning opportunities, the right to receive fair treatment and be in a safe and comfortable environment is also a goal that inclusive schools must achieve. Of course, realising this requires contributions from various parties, such as parents, teachers, and school policies (Sab'na, 2020). However, the significant increase in the number of inclusive schools in Indonesia has not aligned with the promised quality. The lack of

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teachers who understand inclusive values (Napitupulu, 2023), inadequate facilities that are not disability-friendly (Ramadhana, 2020) and school policies that fail to accommodate the right of students with special needs to have a safe and comfortable learning environment also contribute to the low quality of inclusive schools in Indonesia.

Children with special needs continue to face discrimination within inclusive school environments (Hanifah et al., 2022). This issue demands collective action from the school community, with the principal playing a central role. Discrimination often manifests in verbal and non-verbal forms and symbolic violence (C. N. Pratiwi & Wahyudi, 2019). Furthermore, inadequate facilities and restricted access to learning exacerbate the exclusion of these students (Ramadhana, 2020). Discrimination through the failure to provide learning adapted to individual abilities is also a form often unintentionally practised by teachers (Little et al., 2023), which inevitably affects students' learning outcomes, particularly their academic achievements (Kyere et al., 2023). In Indonesia, parents of children with special needs still expect their children to achieve solid academic results comparable to their regular peers (Komarudin & Kaeni, 2023).

Leaders, particularly school principals, are responsible for providing and facilitating the realisation of such a safe environment (Sari & Hendriani, 2021). Efforts to achieve this can be realised by implementing values prioritising effective communication, intelligence in decision-making, fostering strong trust between school leaders and the community, and promising honesty in actions. These values, aligned with Islamic leadership values such as honesty (Siddiq), trustworthiness (Amanah), effective communication (Tabligh), and intelligence (Katonah), can be adopted by school principals to cultivate a safe learning environment. Additionally, these principles resonate with the tenets of inclusive education, advocating for equal learning opportunities for all, including children with special needs, thus promoting a non-discriminatory stance ((Arianto, 2022)). The sense of safety and comfort in the learning environment is crucial. It cannot be underestimated, as it is closely linked to student's self-confidence, learning motivation, and emotional well-being (Arianti, 2017).

A study conducted at SMAN 3 Kediri, an inclusive school, showed that the implementation of Islamic leadership values, such as Tabligh or effective communication, had a positive impact on fostering good communication between teachers and students, which in turn contributed to non-violent education, the elimination of discrimination, and increased student participation in the learning process (Dewi, 2023). This demonstrates that Islamic leadership values can contribute to creating a safe and comfortable learning environment in inclusive schools. School leaders, particularly principals, are pivotal in creating and maintaining a safe and inclusive learning environment (Sari & Hendriani, 2021). Additionally, the role of principals in realising an inclusive school environment is also reflected in Gowa Regency, South Sulawesi, through their decision-making and policies related to teacher training (Izzah et al., 2023). The principal demonstrated amanah by taking responsibility for educating and developing teachers. This reflects the trust placed in the principal to ensure that teachers possess the necessary competence and skills to create an inclusive and child-friendly learning environment.

Yogyakarta has long been known as a student city. Also, it holds the title of an inclusive city, equipped with the Disability Service Unit (ULD) that helps coordinate inclusivity in schools located in Yogyakarta. Schools registered with the ULD in Yogyakarta should be able to provide safe and comfortable learning access to all students without exception. However, how do private Islamic junior high school principals in Yogyakarta integrate Islamic leadership values to create a safe, comfortable, and enjoyable learning environment for students? Therefore, the researcher is interested in investigating further how Islamic leadership values can contribute to creating a safe and comfortable environment for all students, especially students with special needs, in private Islamic junior high schools in Yogyakarta.

## 2. Methods

This study uses a qualitative case study methodology to examine the intricacies of implementing Islamic leadership values within an inclusive education environment at a private junior high school in Yogyakarta, Indonesia—initially, the research aimed to include seven inclusive private junior high schools within the region. However, due to a lack of response, the study was conducted in one school that agreed to participate, providing a focused examination of the phenomena under study. The participants were selected using purposive sampling, with the inclusion criterion that they must have been employed at the school for a minimum duration of two years. This criterion was instrumental in ensuring that participants had sufficient

exposure to and experience with the school's inclusive practices and the integration of Islamic leadership values. The study encompassed five key informants: two homeroom teachers, one special education needs (SEN) teacher who had undergone specific inclusion training, one school counsellor (guru BK), and the school's principal. This selection aimed to capture a comprehensive perspective on the operationalisation of inclusion practices and the manifestation of Islamic leadership values within school settings.

Data were collected through two primary methods: in-depth interviews and direct observations. Semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted with each participant to gather detailed insights into implementing Islamic leadership values in the school's practices, particularly regarding inclusion. The interviews were conducted over a week using a pre-designed interview guide. Transcriptions were confirmed with participants to ensure data accuracy. After the interviews, data analysis began with data condensation, narrowing, simplification, transformation, summarisation, presentation, and conclusion drawing, followed by verification (Miles et al., 2014).

The researcher conducted data reduction and coding using NVivo software, identifying themes and incorporating the transcripts into codes. Coding was performed inductively, with the researcher reading the transcripts before identifying themes. After coding, an evaluation was conducted to prevent redundant data by merging similar themes. The thematic structure was then organised using the features of the parents and child nodes in NVivo. Coding is crucial as it forms the foundation for data interpretation, helping to organise raw data systematically and identify emerging patterns or trends. It also helps minimise bias by grounding conclusions in evidence rather than the researcher's assumptions. Observations were conducted using a pre-designed observation sheet, and the collected data were also coded using NVivo software. Data validation was ensured through source triangulation—combining interviews and observations to ensure that findings from various sources support and correlate, providing a more realistic, comprehensive, and accurate depiction.

The Islamic leadership value implementation assessment can be conducted using interview and observation methods. For example, when assessing the value of *Fathnah* (wisdom), questions should be specific, aiming to explore how the principal exercises wisdom in various situations using open-ended questions such as "How?" The next step is cross-checking indicators, such as whether the principal can explain their thought processes and make well-considered decisions for all stakeholders. The principal's actions in real situations involving students with special needs can be monitored and measured during observations. For instance, they are observing how the principal utilises available resources to accommodate the needs of students with special needs using indicators that assess their ability to demonstrate creative problem-solving skills in addressing the challenges faced by these students.

### 3. Findings and Discussion

#### 3.1 Findings

##### *Implementation of Islamic Leadership Values in the School*

In this study, effective communication, called *Tabligh*, emerges as a cornerstone of Islamic leadership values, shaping the inclusive education landscape in a private junior high school in Yogyakarta. The principal's commitment to *Tabligh* (effective communication) is demonstrated through regular meetings that bring together educators to discuss and collaboratively address classroom challenges.

"Yes, it helps, especially when I can speak privately with the principal. I highly value the students' privacy, so whenever there is an issue related to a student's internal matters that I cannot resolve, I consult with the principal to find a solution, particularly if the issue affects the student's learning in class." (FP as a seventh-grade teacher)

This also aligns with the research conducted by Setia et al. (2021), which revealed that four principal leadership behaviours internalise inclusive values at school. One promotes them through various programs. These meetings, both individual and group-based, serve as a platform for sharing experiences and strategies, thereby fostering a culture of open dialogue and continuous improvement. The proactive approach to resolving issues through deliberation with the guidance counsellor further exemplifies the school's dedication to effective communication.

"The program has been around since before the current principal took office, but it has become more routine and systematic under the current principal. We had such meetings in the past, but they were rare and usually held during the start-of-year meetings, which felt more formal than addressing our real issues. The discussions were more general, so the real benefits are only felt now" (R, a ninth-grade homeroom teacher).

In addition to strong communication skills, implementing the Islamic value of Amanah (trustworthiness) is reflected in the principal's role as a problem solver. This is in line with research highlighting that a principal's responsibilities in inclusive schools include effectively managing teachers, designing tailored programs for students with special needs, and ensuring the well-being of teachers. While problem-solving is essential to the role, the principal also focuses on strategic decision-making, program development, and fostering collaboration among stakeholders to achieve equitable and inclusive education, even in remote areas (Pasaribu et al., 2023).

### *Implementation of Islamic Leadership Values in the External Environment*

Moreover, Islamic speech sessions extend the realm of Tabligh beyond the immediate school staff to encompass the wider school community, including parents. These sessions are designed to enlighten and unite all stakeholders on the principles and practices of inclusive education, focusing on supporting students with special needs. By directly engaging parents through these informative sessions, the school principal ensures that understanding, empathy, and support are shared and reinforced, creating a cohesive community ethos that underpins the school's inclusive environment (Brito et al., 2023). The principal's efforts to maintain direct communication with parents and teachers highlight a strategic application of Tabligh that significantly contributes to the school's inclusive culture.

"Yes, there are religious study sessions for parents, though they are not as frequent as those for the students. This is because parents have their own schedules, but the meeting times are well organised, so attendance is relatively high, even though it is not 100%. The goal is for parents of non-special needs students to understand that there are students with special needs here, so they do not become jealous if teachers provide special treatment to those students." (R, seventh-grade teacher).

The religious study sessions aimed at parents are intended to provide them with insight into the presence of students with special needs in the school. Additionally, by increasing parents' understanding of equality for students with special needs, it is hoped that parents will contribute by offering advice, which can help prevent bullying at school (Chisala et al., 2023). This transparent and consistent communication strategy enhances teacher collaboration and parental engagement and establishes a strong foundation of trust and mutual respect (Schultz et al., 2016). Through these dedicated channels of communication, the school can navigate the complexities of inclusive education, ensuring that every student's needs are acknowledged and addressed in a supportive and collaborative manner.

### *Challenges and Adaptation in Inclusive Practices*

Navigating the challenges of inclusivity within an educational setting requires a nuanced understanding of the opportunities and obstacles that arise while implementing inclusive practices. One of the primary hurdles identified in this study is the inconsistent implementation of the "buddy system," a program designed by school principals to foster peer support and integration for students with special needs. While the system has shown promising results in enhancing peer interactions and reducing feelings of isolation among students with special needs, its effectiveness varies across grades. This inconsistency can be attributed to varying levels of teacher involvement, student readiness, and classroom dynamics, underscoring the need for tailored approaches to ensure the program's success across all levels of the school environment.

The application of Islamic leadership values in this program is evident through the principal's role in embodying Fathonah (wisdom), as demonstrated by their ability to assess the specific needs of various grade levels and make necessary adjustments to enhance the effectiveness of the peer support system. Moreover,

the value of Tabligh (effective communication) is also reflected in this program, as the principal successfully establishes strong communication with homeroom teachers to ensure the smooth implementation of the buddy system. The presence of these Islamic leadership values as a response to the challenges of inclusivity provides new insights. It highlights that applying these values is not limited to Islamic schools but can be adopted universally by any educational institution implementing inclusive practices (Wahyudin et al., 2024).

### *Social Support and Sense of Community*

The principal's active role in fostering camaraderie, promoting teacher collaboration, and enhancing parental engagement has been pivotal in building a supportive community within the school. By prioritising open communication and shared responsibilities, the leadership has cultivated an environment where educators and parents work together seamlessly, ensuring that every student feels valued and supported. This statement also aligns with the research conducted by Tindall (1996), which discusses the importance of the principal's leadership in facilitating collaboration among teachers, particularly in supporting students with special needs. This involves open communication and shared responsibilities among educators and parents, which are critical elements mentioned in the statement. This collective effort strengthens the bonds within the school community and lays a solid foundation for an inclusive educational atmosphere where diversity is celebrated and embraced.

Moreover, the impact of social support on student well-being cannot be overstated, especially for those with special needs. The intentional creation of a supportive network within the school has significantly reduced feelings of isolation among these students, simultaneously boosting their motivation and academic achievement. This nurturing environment, where students receive encouragement and recognition from peers and adults, underlines the critical importance of social support in fostering a sense of belonging and enabling all students to reach their full potential in both academic and personal spheres (Mtshweni, 2024).

### *The outcome of Leadership Values on School*

Integrating the Islamic leadership values of Tabligh (effective communication) and Katonah (intelligent decision-making) has significantly influenced the inclusivity of the educational environment within the school. Through Tabligh, the principal and teachers have fostered an open dialogue and mutual respect, directly contributing to improved peer interactions and more active participation in class activities. This enhanced communication bridges gaps between students with special needs and their peers and strengthens the collaboration between teachers and parents, ensuring that all members of the school community are aligned and committed to fostering an inclusive setting.

Moreover, the broader implications of implementing Islamic leadership values in education extend beyond the classroom walls. The practice of these values has resulted in strengthened interpersonal relationships among all stakeholders, fostering a cohesive school community that values empathy, understanding, and support. This has created a responsive learning environment where students' diverse needs are recognised and addressed proactively. By adhering to Islamic leadership principles, the school has cultivated an atmosphere where every student, regardless of their background or abilities, is allowed to thrive (Kusumaputri et al., 2023).

Furthermore, the application of Katonah (intelligence) in facing and overcoming educational challenges has prepared the school to navigate the complexities of inclusive education with optimism and innovation. Intelligent decision-making has enabled the school to implement practical solutions, such as the buddy system and accessibility adaptations, which have played a crucial role in promoting inclusivity. These actions underscore the critical role of Islamic leadership values in addressing immediate educational needs and laying a solid foundation for a future where inclusivity is ingrained in the fabric of educational institutions.

## **3.2 Discussion**

The findings of this study highlight the critical role of Islamic leadership values, particularly Tabligh (effective communication) and Fathonah (intelligence), in enhancing inclusivity in a private junior high school in Yogyakarta. By adopting these leadership principles, the school has developed a supportive environment for students with special needs, addressing a vital objective of this research. These efforts align with Islamic educational values and broader theories of educational leadership, such as transformational and distributed leadership, which emphasise communication, collaboration, and adaptive problem-solving.

Compared with existing research, this study provides a unique contribution by illustrating how Islamic leadership values can serve as a model for other educational settings. Previous studies have highlighted the importance of leadership in promoting inclusivity; however, this research emphasises the specific attributes of Islamic leadership, such as Tabligh and Fathonah, and how they are applied to create an inclusive school culture. The proactive leadership demonstrated by the principal, through tailored communication strategies and the intelligent adaptation of inclusive programs like the buddy system, further highlights how these values can serve as a blueprint for other schools aiming to implement inclusive education practices. The results of this study have significant implications for educational policy and practice, both within Islamic schools and in broader educational settings. One of the key takeaways is the potential for Islamic leadership values to serve as a model for inclusive education, particularly in environments that prioritise ethical and community-centred leadership.

One limitation of this article is the relatively short data collection period, which lasted only two weeks for interviews and observations. As a result, certain aspects could not be directly observed, and data collection relied heavily on interviews and source triangulation from these interviews. Extending the research period is expected to provide more accurate and comprehensive data.

#### 4. Conclusion

This study has systematically explored the influence of Islamic leadership values on the implementation of inclusive education in a private junior high school in Yogyakarta, demonstrating that the application of Tabligh (effective communication) and Katonah (intelligence) significantly enhances the inclusivity and supportiveness of the educational environment. Through initiatives like the buddy system, regular meetings, and Islamic speech sessions for teachers and parents, the school has fostered a community where students with special needs feel valued and integrated. Despite facing challenges such as the inconsistent application of the buddy system across grades and dealing with insufficiently inclusive facilities, the school's leadership has shown a proactive and adaptive approach to addressing these issues, reflecting the core Islamic values of empathy, respect, and community support.

The study's findings align with existing research that underscores the importance of social support and effective leadership in fostering an inclusive educational setting. However, it uniquely contributes to the academic discourse by highlighting how Islamic leadership principles can be operationalised within a school context to support inclusivity. This research has laid a foundation for future investigations into how religious and cultural values influence educational leadership and inclusivity practices.

Future research directions should focus on evaluating the long-term impacts of integrating Islamic leadership values into educational practices, exploring adaptive strategies for more consistent implementation of inclusive programs, and assessing the role of parental involvement facilitated through Islamic teachings in enhancing the educational environment's inclusivity. Comparative studies across different cultural and religious contexts could offer broader insights into the universal applicability of faith-based leadership values in education. As the landscape of inclusive education continues to evolve, understanding how leadership values influence these practices remains a vital area of scholarly inquiry.

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