
THE MANAGERIAL ROLE OF AN OUTSTANDING PRINCIPAL IN THE ASPECT OF EDUCATIONAL QUALITY

Istikomah¹, Widya Kusumaningsih², Joko Sulianto³

¹²³Universitas PGRI Semarang; Indonesia

Correspondence Email; istilovtasya@gmail.com

Submitted: 19/02/2026

Revised: 03/03/2026

Accepted: 28/03/2026

Published: 20/04/2026

Abstract

This study aims to analyze the managerial role of an outstanding principal in improving the quality of early childhood education through the implementation of the management functions of planning, organizing, actuating, and controlling (POAC) at TK Islam Sultan Agung 1 Semarang, Indonesia. The study employed a qualitative approach with a case study design to gain an in-depth understanding of managerial practices within the natural context of the educational institution. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, observations, and document analysis involving the principal, teachers, the school committee, and parents. Data analysis was conducted interactively through the stages of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing, while the validity of the data was ensured through source and technique triangulation. The findings reveal that the principal implemented managerial functions in an integrated and systematic manner. Planning was carried out participatively by integrating Islamic values with national early childhood education standards. Organizing was conducted through competency-based task distribution and structured coordination among educators and staff. The implementation of programs was supported by collaborative leadership, continuous professional development, and a reflective culture that strengthened teachers' professionalism. Controlling was performed through academic supervision and ongoing evaluation aimed at improving educational quality. In addition, transparency in resource management contributed to strengthening accountability and building public trust. The study concludes that effective and value-based managerial leadership plays a crucial role in fostering a sustainable culture of quality in Islamic-based early childhood education institutions and in ensuring the long-term development of the institution.

Keywords

Early Childhood Education Quality, Educational Management, Outstanding Principal.



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INTRODUCTION

In the context of improving the quality of early childhood education in Indonesia, there are still academic problems related to the effectiveness of school principals' leadership in managing educational institutions based on Islamic values. Conceptually, outstanding principals are assumed to possess superior managerial competencies; however, not all studies have been able to explain in depth how these managerial functions are implemented systematically in accordance with the principles of Islamic educational management and measurable educational quality standards (Ghani & Budiyo, 2023). This issue is important because the quality of education is not only measured by temporary achievements but also by the sustainability of governance systems, the professionalism of educators, and institutional accountability (Wardhana, 2016). In addition, the integration of Islamic values into the managerial practices of school principals still requires conceptual and empirical strengthening so that it aligns with the principles of *amanah* (trustworthiness), responsibility, and continuous quality improvement (Utari, 2024). Within this framework, this study specifically examines how the managerial role of an outstanding principal is carried out through the functions of planning, organizing, implementation, and supervision in building holistic and sustainable educational quality.

In practice, based on the results of observations, interviews, and documentation conducted by the researcher, the findings indicate that the managerial role of the outstanding principal at TK Islam Sultan Agung 1 Semarang is implemented through annual program planning based on an Islamic vision, strengthening the integration of Islamic values in learning, and designing programs to improve basic literacy and numeracy for early childhood learners. Organizing is carried out through the distribution of tasks according to the competencies of teachers and educational staff, while program implementation is supported by participatory leadership, continuous professional development, and routine supervision. Supervision is conducted through periodic evaluations and reporting to the foundation as a form of institutional accountability.

The research data also show an increase in students' achievements in various city-level competitions during 2024–2025, as well as a high level of public trust reflected in the increasing number of registrations, even though the education costs are relatively higher than those of similar institutions. This indicates that the management of school programs and the principal's leadership strategies can positively influence the improvement of institutional quality and the school's image in society. However, this study also found that the quality measurement system remains

predominantly descriptive and has not yet been fully based on standardized quantitative indicators. In addition, there is still a relatively high dependence on the principal as the main driver of quality improvement. Various studies in educational management explain that school quality is strongly influenced by the leadership of the principal, who is able to mobilize school resources through effective planning, organizing, implementation, and supervision of programs (Ismaya et al., 2023). Furthermore, the leadership of the principal is often a key factor in the success of improving school quality because the principal has a strategic role in influencing teacher performance, learning programs, and the organizational culture of the school (Masduki, 2023).

The extent to which managerial leadership contributes to educational quality can be seen in the formation of a school quality culture that is religious, disciplined, and collaborative, as well as in the effectiveness of learning processes that support the cognitive, affective, and psychomotor development of students (Misi & Nuhasanah, 2023). The managerial practices of the principal have aligned with the objectives of Islamic education in building character, instilling faith-based values, and developing children's potential holistically (Minarwati & Basri, 2020). These contributions are reflected in the consistency of religious habituation programs, active partnerships with parents, and continuous instructional supervision, which have empirically been proven to improve the quality of early childhood education services (Fauziddin, 2018).

Moreover, the quality culture formed through collaborative leadership indicates that the involvement of all members of the school community strengthens organizational commitment and the effectiveness of program implementation. However, from the perspective of professionalism and accountability in Islamic educational institutions, it is still necessary to strengthen distributive leadership, document innovations as written best practices, and develop data-based quality evaluation systems so that success does not depend solely on individuals but becomes an institutionalized and sustainable system (Akbar, 2025).

Theoretically, effective educational management is implemented through the application of the POAC functions, namely planning, organizing, actuating, and controlling (Bala et al., 2025). Planning is the initial stage that determines the direction and strategy of the institution; organizing ensures the distribution of tasks according to competencies; actuating focuses on leadership, motivation, and coordination; while controlling is carried out through supervision and continuous evaluation (Kartini & Kristiawan, 2019). The implementation of these functions is consistent with research findings stating that the consistency of POAC implementation significantly affects the

effectiveness of school management and the improvement of learning quality (Syamsuddin, 2017). In addition, strengthening the actuating function through communicative and inspirational leadership has been proven to improve teacher performance and organizational commitment (Mulyasa, 2022). In the controlling aspect, monitoring and evaluation systems based on quality indicators become important instruments in ensuring the sustainability of quality improvement in educational institutions (Miranti et al., 2015).

Several studies have examined the relationship between the managerial role of school principals and educational quality, but with different focuses and variables. Research shows that the managerial competence of school principals significantly influences the improvement of learning quality through strengthening academic supervision and teacher professionalism; however, the study was conducted at the primary education level and did not specifically examine the context of Islamic-based early childhood education (Latifah, 2022). Research by Trispiyanti et al (2023) found that managerial leadership contributes to improving teacher performance, which impacts the quality of educational services, but the quality variables used emphasized job satisfaction and school administration rather than holistic educational quality that includes student development. Research by Sabila et al (2023) It was concluded that the role of the principal as a manager and supervisor influences the effectiveness of learning processes, but the study did not integrate the principles of Islamic educational management as an analytical framework. Furthermore, studies indicate that visionary and innovative school leadership can build a school quality culture, but they focus more on transformational leadership rather than systematic managerial functions (Lahitania et al., 2025). Research by Putri, N. H., & Wibowo (2018) revealed that outstanding principals act as motivators and drivers of a culture of achievement in schools, but it did not examine in depth the implementation of planning, organizing, implementation, and supervision functions in the context of the quality of Islamic-based early childhood education.

Based on the review of the five previous studies, several relevant research gaps can be identified. First, most studies were conducted at the primary and secondary education levels, so the context of Islamic-based early childhood education has not been widely studied specifically. Second, previous research tends to analyze leadership partially, limited to supervision, motivation, or quality culture, without examining managerial functions comprehensively within the framework of planning, organizing, implementation, and supervision (POAC). Third, the relationship between the managerial role of outstanding principals and educational quality standards, as well as the

principles of Islamic educational management, such as *amanah*, professionalism, and accountability, has not been explicitly analyzed. Fourth, educational quality indicators in previous studies focus more on teacher performance or learning effectiveness and have not included institutional governance, partnerships with parents, and holistic student development.

The novelty of this study lies in the integrative analysis of the managerial role of an outstanding principal in improving the quality of education in an Islamic-based early childhood education institution, namely TK Islam Sultan Agung 1 Semarang. This study examines the implementation of managerial functions comprehensively within the POAC framework and integrates the perspectives of Islamic educational management and educational quality standards. The conceptual contribution of this research is the formulation of managerial practices of Islamic-based early childhood education principals that emphasize professionalism, accountability, and the sustainability of institutional quality in a systemic manner.

Based on the above explanation, this study aims to analyze in depth the implementation of the managerial functions of an outstanding principal in improving the quality of early childhood education through the framework of planning, organizing, implementation, and supervision (POAC) at TK Islam Sultan Agung 1 Semarang. Theoretically, this research contributes to the development of Islamic educational management studies by integrating modern management concepts with the principles of professionalism, *amanah*, and accountability in the context of Islamic-based early childhood education. Practically, this study provides strategic references for school principals and managers of early childhood education institutions in designing systemic, quality-based, and sustainable governance to strengthen competitiveness and public trust in Islamic educational institutions.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative approach with a case study design to define and comprehensively examine the managerial functions of an outstanding principal in improving the quality of education at TK Islam Sultan Agung 1 Semarang. The qualitative approach was chosen because this study focuses on gaining an in-depth understanding of the processes, meanings, and dynamics of managerial practices that occur within the natural context of the educational institution. Qualitative research enables researchers to explore and understand the meanings that individuals or groups assign to social or human problems (Creswell, 2018).

The case study design was used because this research examines intensively a single case unit that has particular characteristics and specific advantages (Afifah & Arbarini, 2025). A case study allows researchers to examine phenomena holistically by considering the context, actors, and interactions that occur within the research setting (Kristiawan et al., 2017). Through this design, the managerial practices of the principal can be analyzed in depth based on the real experiences of educational practitioners.

The sampling technique used in this study was purposive sampling, which is a technique for selecting informants based on certain considerations and criteria relevant to the focus of the research. This technique was chosen so that the selected informants truly understand and directly experience the phenomenon being studied (Sugiyono, 2017). The research informants included the principal, teachers, members of the school committee, and parents of students. The diversity of informants aimed to obtain comprehensive data from various perspectives of educational stakeholders.

Data were collected through in-depth interviews, direct observations, and document analysis. In-depth interviews were used to explore the views, experiences, and managerial strategies of the principal in carrying out the functions of planning, organizing, actuating, and controlling. Observations were conducted to directly observe leadership and managerial activities within the school environment from December 11 to 13, 2025. Document analysis was used to review supporting documents such as school work programs, supervision reports, and records of achievements. In qualitative research, the use of various data collection techniques aims to obtain rich, in-depth, and meaningful data (Creswell & Clark, 2011).

Data analysis was conducted interactively and continuously from the beginning of data collection until the stage of drawing conclusions. The data analysis model used refers to the interactive model of Miles and Huberman, which includes data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification (Nafi'ah, 2019). Data reduction was carried out to select and focus the data in accordance with the research objectives; data display was organized in the form of descriptive narratives, while conclusions were drawn through the interpretation of findings that were continuously verified throughout the research process.

The validity of the data was ensured through source triangulation and technique triangulation. Source triangulation was conducted by comparing data obtained from the principal, teachers, the school committee, and parents. Meanwhile, technique triangulation was carried out by comparing the results of interviews, observations, and documentation. The application of

triangulation aims to increase the credibility and trustworthiness of the research findings (Carter et al., 2014).

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

The following presents a summary of the research findings regarding the Managerial Role of an Outstanding Principal in the Aspect of Educational Quality at TK Islam Sultan Agung 1 Semarang, based on the analysis of the POAC management functions. The presentation in the form of a table aims to illustrate the relationship between managerial functions, the main research findings, and their impact on improving educational quality.

Table 1. The Managerial Role of an Outstanding Principal in the Aspect of Educational Quality at TK Islam Sultan Agung 1 Semarang

No	Managerial Function	Key Findings	Impact on Quality Improvement
1.	Planning	Participatory planning based on reflection and educational report analysis; vision and mission grounded in Islamic values and ECE standards; flagship programs (PjBL, Islamic habituation, coding, and the "7 Habits of Great Indonesian Children")	Clear direction for school development, structured programs, and increased parental trust
2.	Organizing	Task distribution based on competencies; coordinator structure for each field; resource allocation based on priority scale	Optimal teacher performance and effective and efficient program implementation
3.	Actuating	Collaborative leadership; intensive communication; personal coaching; a culture of reflection and learning innovation	Increased teacher motivation, the growth of a quality culture, and the development of innovation
4.	Controlling	Structured academic supervision; periodic monitoring and reflection; follow-up-based evaluation	Continuous improvement in learning quality

Source: interviews, observations, and studies documentation

The table illustrates the implementation of the principal's managerial functions based on the POAC framework (Planning, Organizing, Actuating, and Controlling) in improving educational quality at TK Islam Sultan Agung 1 Semarang. In the planning aspect, planning is conducted participatively through reflection and the utilization of educational report data, with a vision and mission grounded in Islamic values and national early childhood education standards. This

planning is strengthened through flagship programs such as project-based learning (PjBL), Islamic habituation, coding activities, and character development programs. As a result, the direction of school development becomes clearer, programs are structured systematically, and parental trust increases.

In the organizing function, the principal distributes tasks according to the competencies of teachers and establishes a coordinator structure for various fields. This organization ensures that responsibilities are distributed proportionally and that resources are allocated based on priority scales. The implications can be seen in the increased effectiveness and efficiency of school program implementation. In the actuating function, the principal applies collaborative leadership through intensive communication, personal coaching, and a culture of reflection and learning innovation. This strategy encourages teacher motivation, strengthens a culture of quality, and creates a productive working environment.

In the controlling aspect, academic supervision is carried out in a structured manner through monitoring, periodic reflection, and follow-up-based evaluation. This developmental-oriented control process results in continuous improvement in the quality of learning. Overall, the table shows that the systematic integration of the four managerial functions becomes the main determinant in building a culture of quality and improving the quality of early childhood education services.

Planning for quality improvement at TK Islam Sultan Agung 1 Semarang is formulated based on two main foundations, namely Islamic values and national early childhood education standards. The formulation of the vision and mission is carried out through annual work meetings involving teachers, the foundation, supervisors, the school committee, and representatives of the community. This process is participatory and collaborative, while also adaptive to the institution's development needs, including preparation for accreditation and program innovation. Teachers are also involved in preparing annual and semester work programs that are systematically designed through collective reflection forums. The school committee and parents understand the direction of school policies because the vision and mission are socialized from the beginning of student admission. Based on source triangulation, the planning of quality improvement is implemented in an open and participatory manner and is collectively understood by all stakeholders.

Organizing is conducted by clearly defining roles and responsibilities according to the competencies and experiences of each teacher. The principal establishes a coordinator structure in

several areas, such as curriculum coordination, Islamic program coordination, and extracurricular activities, to ensure the effectiveness of program implementation. Task distribution is aligned with individual potential, thereby encouraging professional responsibility and optimal performance. Intensive communication between the principal, teachers, and the school committee strengthens coordination in implementing activities. Parents also perceive that the school's operations run in an orderly manner, from welcoming students to their dismissal. The triangulation results show that the organizational system operates effectively and contributes to improving the quality of educational services.

At the implementation stage, the principal emphasizes the importance of communication, teamwork, coaching, and reflection as key strategies in mobilizing all members of the school community. Program implementation is carried out collaboratively without fostering unhealthy competition, thereby creating a harmonious work culture. Routine reflection through teacher learning communities serves as a means of evaluation as well as strengthening shared commitment to quality. The involvement of parents in various school activities demonstrates an active partnership in supporting educational programs. Based on triangulation, program implementation is conducted collectively and strengthens a culture of quality oriented toward continuous improvement.

Resource management is carried out based on priority scales with a focus on improving teacher competencies, strengthening the quality of learning, and providing adequate facilities and infrastructure. The use of school funds, including government operational assistance, is directed toward supporting learning activities and teachers' professional development. Financial transparency is maintained through routine reporting to the school committee and open communication with parents regarding the allocation of activity budgets. Data triangulation shows that resource management is implemented efficiently, transparently, and accountably, thereby increasing public trust in the institution.

Academic supervision is conducted in a structured and continuous manner through classroom observations, individual and group coaching, and periodic reflections at the beginning, middle, and end of the semester. The school also organizes teacher learning communities as a forum for improving competencies and following up on evaluation results. The supervision process is oriented toward professional development rather than punishment, thereby creating a supportive working climate. Parents perceive that supervision of teachers and students is well implemented,

particularly in ensuring the comfort and safety of children. Triangulation results indicate that the control system is implemented comprehensively and contributes to continuous improvement in the quality of learning.

The principal is perceived as having strong, collaborative, and long-term-oriented managerial leadership. She demonstrates visionary and innovative characteristics and actively encourages participation in various activities and competitions. This leadership is built upon values of religiosity, perseverance, commitment, and teamwork. The level of trust from teachers, the school committee, and parents toward the principal's leadership is considered high, particularly due to open communication and attention to children's development. Based on triangulation from various sources, the principal's leadership plays a significant role in building a culture of quality and improving the quality of education in a sustainable manner.

Discussion

The results of the study indicate that the principal of TK Islam Sultan Agung 1 Semarang implements managerial functions comprehensively based on the POAC framework (planning, organizing, actuating, and controlling). The implementation of these functions is not merely administrative but has developed into integrated strategic leadership oriented toward the continuous improvement of educational quality. This finding is consistent with research showing that the effectiveness of school management is strongly influenced by the principal's ability to integrate the functions of planning, organizing, implementation, and supervision systematically in managing educational institutions (Anwar & Soleh, 2022). Other studies also emphasize that the leadership of school principals has a significant contribution to improving the quality of learning, school organizational culture, and teacher performance (Suhardiman, 2019).

In the planning aspect, the formulation of the vision and mission is carried out participatively by involving stakeholders and integrating Islamic values with national early childhood education standards. This practice reflects a strategic management approach that emphasizes long-term institutional development and the collective involvement of school members. Research shows that participatory educational planning can increase organizational commitment and strengthen the sustainable implementation of school programs (Andriani et al., 2018). In the context of early childhood education, planning that is based on values and the developmental needs of children is an important factor in ensuring the quality of early childhood education services (Suryana, 2016).

In the organizing function, competency-based task distribution through the establishment of field coordinators reflects the practice of collaborative leadership in managing educational institutions. Research indicates that clear task distribution within school organizations can improve team effectiveness and strengthen coordination among teachers in implementing learning programs (Arbarini et al., 2023). Furthermore, other studies emphasize that leadership that encourages professional collaboration among teachers can improve overall school organizational performance (Khalda et al., 2022).

In the actuating aspect, the principal acts as an instructional leader by building intensive communication, providing teacher coaching, and conducting regular reflections through discussions or teacher learning communities. This practice demonstrates that the principal's leadership is not only administrative but also pedagogical (Faizi & Wulandari, 2024). Research indicates that effective instructional leadership can improve the quality of teaching and learning processes, learning innovation, and teacher involvement in professional development (Kartini & Kristiawan, 2019). In the context of early childhood education, leadership that promotes active and creative learning is essential for optimally developing children's potential (Maufiroh et al., 2025).

In the controlling function, academic supervision is conducted systematically through classroom observation, professional teacher coaching, and periodic evaluation of educational programs. Supervision oriented toward professional development has been shown to improve teachers' pedagogical competence and the quality of classroom learning (Azizah & Hanur, 2024). Other studies also show that continuous academic supervision has a positive influence on improving teacher performance and educational quality in schools (Hafid et al., 2024).

In the context of early childhood education, the leadership of school principals has a strategic role in improving academic quality, which is not only oriented toward the development of children's cognitive abilities but also toward language development, socio-emotional skills, moral values, and creativity. Research indicates that the quality of leadership in early childhood education institutions influences the quality of educational services and the effectiveness of learning experienced by children (Putri & Suminar, 2015). In addition, principals' leadership that fosters collaboration among teachers, parents, and the community can create a more conducive educational environment for children's development (Artina, 2025).

The leadership of school principals in early childhood education institutions also plays an important role in improving teacher professionalism through mentoring, training, and continuous competency development (Yulianti & Maliki, 2025). Research indicates that leadership that supports teachers' professional development can improve the quality of learning and innovation in early childhood education (Lahitania et al., 2025). Thus, the principal not only acts as the manager of the educational institution but also as a facilitator of learning and a developer of teachers' capacity.

Conceptually, the integration between modern management principles and Islamic values forms an integrative value-based managerial leadership model that emphasizes *amanah* (trustworthiness), professionalism, and moral responsibility in managing educational institutions (Suhardi et al., 2019). This leadership model shows that improving the quality of Islamic-based early childhood education does not depend solely on administrative systems but also on strategic leadership that is collaborative, reflective, and oriented toward sustainable educational quality (Mujahid et al., 2025).

CONCLUSION

Based on the objectives and results of the study, it can be concluded that the managerial role of the principal of TK Islam Sultan Agung 1 Semarang has been implemented effectively and in an integrated manner through the application of the functions of planning, organizing, actuating, and controlling. Planning is carried out in a participatory and strategic manner, resulting in the alignment of vision and shared commitment. Competency-based organizing encourages professionalism and improves the effectiveness of teachers' work. The collaborative and reflective implementation of programs fosters a culture of continuous learning and strengthens partnerships with parents. Controlling through systematic supervision and constructive evaluation ensures continuous quality improvement. Transparency in resource management also strengthens accountability and public trust.

Overall, the managerial leadership of the outstanding principal becomes a key factor in improving the quality of early childhood education services and sustaining institutional quality. In addition, the principal's consistency in integrating the values of professionalism, exemplary conduct, and open communication further strengthens a harmonious and productive working climate. Support for teacher competency development through training and collective reflection becomes an important strategy in responding to the dynamic challenges of early childhood

education. The synergy between visionary leadership and systematic management not only contributes to improving the quality of learning but also fosters the development of an adaptive and innovative organizational culture. Thus, the managerial success of the principal of TK Islam Sultan Agung 1 Semarang is reflected not only in the achievement of programs but also in the sustainability of quality improvement that is planned, measurable, and oriented toward the needs of learners.

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