

Transformative Leadership of The Raudatul Athfal (Ra) Principal in Developing Social Competence

Wahyu Khafidah^{1*}, Musfira², Fitrah Nabila Dista³, Fisa
Lifia⁴, Wildayan Rahmati⁵, Muhammad Afif Syakir⁶

^{1,2,3,4,5,6,7} Universitas Serambi Mekkah, Aceh, Indonesia

*Corresponding Author: wahyukhafidah@serambimekkah.ac.id

Abstract. *Principal Raudatul Athfal's (RA) transformative leadership is highly effective by motivating and inspiring. The problems inherent in transformational leadership occur in a lack of focus on operational tasks, the potential risks of being overly optimistic, and a high emotional workload for leaders and team members. Problems with social competence lie in the difficulty or lack of ability to interact effectively in the social environment. These competencies include various aspects such as communication, empathy, cooperation, and conflict resolution skills. Research question: What is the role of the principal of Raudatul Athfal (RA) in fostering early childhood social competence? The purpose of this research is to find out the role of the principal of raudhatul athfal (RA) in fostering early childhood social competence. Transformational leaders focus on developing individuals, building strong relationships, and creating a vision to foster social competence. The urgency of transformative leadership research lies in its ability to drive positive change and improve the performance of schools and individuals and its impact on the quality of principal Raudatul Athfal (RA). Social competence, which includes the ability to interact, communicate, and work together, is essential for teachers to create a conducive learning environment and facilitate optimal student development. This research method uses qualitative research methods with observation, interviews, and documentation of the principal and the school environment and then analyzes the results of the field findings and describes them in the research results.*

Keywords: *Transformative Leadership, Social Competence*

1. Introduction

Early childhood education is the main foundation in building the quality of human resources in the future. It is in this phase that children's values, attitudes, habits, and basic abilities begin to be formed systematically. In the context of Islamic education in Indonesia, Raudatul Athfal (RA) as a preschool educational institution under the auspices of the Ministry of Religion has a strategic role in instilling Islamic values while developing aspects of child development holistically. Not only the cognitive aspect, but also the social, emotional, moral, and spiritual aspects. In the midst of the dynamics of social change, curriculum demands, and the development of the characteristics of today's generation, the leadership of RA principals is a key factor in ensuring the achievement of these educational goals (Dr. Suprihatin, M.Pd.I., M. Hambali, S.Pd.I., M.Pd., Nurlinda, M.Pd., Rita Zubaidah, M.Pd.I., Dr. Heru Setiawan, M.Pd.I., Dr. Wahyu Khafidah, S.Pd.I., M.A., Anisah, S.Pt., M.Pd., Hj. Pit Arzuna, MM., Dr. Sukatin, M.Pd.I., Miftah Hur Rahman Zh, S.Pd., M.Pd, n.d.) .

RA principals are not just administrators who manage documents and work programs but also central figures who determine the direction, culture, and quality of

learning in their institution (Farihin, 2022). He plays a role as a learning leader and a driver of change as well as an example of Islamic values for teachers, students, and parents (Darmawan & Zakka, 2022). In practice, the leadership style applied by school principals greatly affects the organizational climate, teacher morale, learning innovation, and the development of children's social competence (Harsoyo, 2022). Therefore, a leadership model is needed that is not only oriented to administrative tasks, but capable of transforming individuals and organizations towards change for the better. One model that is relevant in this context is transformative leadership.

Transformative leadership emphasizes the leader's ability to inspire, motivate, and empower organizational members so that they are able to transcend personal interests for the sake of a common goal (Harsoyo, 2022). Transformative leaders build a clear vision, create a collaborative culture, and encourage innovation and sustainable reflection (Anwar et al., 2022). In the context of RA, school principals who implement transformative leadership will seek to build collective awareness of the importance of developing children's social competence as an integral part of Islamic character education (Mardizal et al., 2023). He not only directs teachers to teach according to the curriculum but also invites them to understand the deep meaning of every social interaction that occurs in the classroom as a valuable learning process (Harsoyo, 2022) (Laba-laba et al., 2024).

Social competence in early childhood includes the ability to interact with peers and adults, to work together, to share, to appreciate differences, to manage emotions, and to show empathy and care (Moore et al., 2010). This competence is an important provision for children to adapt to the primary school environment and wider social life (Education & Dan, 2025). In the perspective of Islamic education, social competence is also related to the formation of noble morals, such as helpfulness, honesty, responsibility, and *ukhuwah* (Afifah & Julia, 2024). Thus, fostering social competence is not only fulfilling development indicators but also part of the mission of forming people with character.

However, efforts to foster children's social competence in RA cannot run optimally without the support of a strong system and leadership. Teachers need direction, motivation, and space to innovate in designing learning activities that encourage positive social interaction (Rismayana, 2021). They also need continuous coaching to be able to become good models of social behavior for children. This is where the role of the principal as a transformative leader becomes very important (Nurrochman et al., 2023). Through a clear vision, effective communication, and exemplary attitude, school principals can build a school culture that supports the growth of social competence.

The transformative leadership of RA principals can be realized through several dimensions (Yaminah et al., 2023). First, idealized influence, namely the ability of school principals to be exemplary in integrity, commitment, and Islamic values. This example will affect teachers' behavior and interactions with children. Second, inspirational motivation, which is the ability to arouse teachers' enthusiasm and optimism to continue to improve the quality of social-emotional learning. Third, intellectual stimulation, which is an encouragement for teachers to think creatively and reflectively and be open to new approaches in fostering children's social competence. Fourth, individualized consideration, namely the principal's concern for the needs and potential of each teacher so as to create a supportive work environment.

RA principals in practice apply transformative leadership, not only focusing on the final results in the form of achievement of child development indicators but also on the meaningful learning process (Damayanti et al., 2024). He invited teachers to design group

play activities, simple discussions, collaborative projects, and daily habits that encourage children to learn to work together and empathize. School principals also establish partnerships with parents to align parenting at home with social values instilled in schools (Suryana & Iskandar, 2022). Thus, efforts to foster social competence are a shared responsibility between schools and families.

In addition, the transformative leadership of the RA principal also plays a role in creating an inclusive school culture that respects diversity. Children who come from different family backgrounds need to have positive social experiences without discrimination (Education et al., 2025). Principals need to ensure that every teacher understands the importance of respecting differences and instilling the value of tolerance from an early age. Through fair policies and practices, school principals can build a safe and comfortable environment for children's social development (Khafidah & Damayanti, 2022).

The challenges faced by RA principals in implementing transformative leadership are not light. Limited infrastructure facilities, variations in teacher competencies, and administrative demands often take up attention and energy (Sukma, 2018). On the other hand, changes in education policies and technological developments demand rapid adaptation. In situations like this, principals are required to remain visionary, flexible, and able to manage change effectively. Transformative leadership offers a framework that allows the principal not only to survive but also to bring his institution to develop sustainably (Masruroh et al., 2022).

The relevance of transformative leadership in the context of RA is even stronger when it is associated with national education goals that emphasize 21st-century character and competency development. Social competencies such as communication, collaboration, and empathy are part of the skills that will be needed in the future (Mallala & Warsihna, 2025). Fostering these competencies must begin from an early age through a systematic and consistent approach. The principal as a leader has a strategic responsibility to ensure that all components of the school move in harmony towards this goal (Yusron et al., 2025).

Thus, it is important to study the transformative leadership of RA principals in fostering social competence. This study not only provides a theoretical understanding of the concepts of leadership and social development of children but also provides a practical overview of how principals can implement transformative principles in real-world contexts. It is hoped that through inspirational and positive change-oriented leadership, RA will be able to become an environment that not only educates children to be academically intelligent but also socially mature and noble.

In the end, the success of RA in fostering children's social competence depends on the synergy between leadership vision, teacher professionalism, parental support, and a conducive school culture. The principal as a transformative leader plays a central role in orchestrating all of these elements. He is a driver of change that ignites enthusiasm, builds commitment, and instills social values that will be inherent in children throughout their lives. Therefore, a deep understanding of the transformative leadership of RA principals in fostering social competence is not only academically relevant, but also practical urgency in an effort to improve the quality of early childhood education based on Islamic values.

2. Method

This study used a qualitative approach with a case study design to examine in depth

the transformative leadership of the head of Raudatul Athfal (RA) in fostering children's social competence (Sugiyono, 2016). The qualitative approach was chosen because this research focuses on understanding the process, meaning, experience, and dynamics of interactions that occur naturally in the educational environment (Pupu, 2009). This study did not aim to test hypotheses statistically but to explore and describe leadership phenomena in a contextual and comprehensive manner (Safrudin et al., 2023). Meanwhile, the case study design was used so that researchers could explore in depth leadership practices within a particular RA institution as a whole system (Author et al., n.d.).

This study was designed as a qualitative descriptive case study (Author et al., n.d.). The focus of the research was to describe and analyze the forms of transformative leadership applied by the head of RA, the strategies used in fostering children's social competence, and their impact on teachers and the school environment. The case study allowed researchers to comprehensively understand the phenomenon in a real context, including the social, cultural, and Islamic values that surround the RA institution.

The selection of the research location was carried out purposively, taking into account several criteria, namely, (1) the head of RA had served for at least three years so that he had adequate leadership experience; (2) the institution had a structured program related to the social-emotional development of children; and (3) the school was willing to cooperate in the implementation of the research. With these criteria, it is hoped that the data obtained were relevant and in-depth in accordance with the research objectives.

The main subject in this study is the head of RA as the leader of the institution. In addition, supporting informants include teachers and parents of students. The Head of RA is a key informant because he has a central role in designing policies, building visions, and driving all school components. Teachers are chosen as informants because they are the direct implementers of policies and programs designed by the principal, as well as interacting directly with children in the learning process. Parents are involved to gain additional perspectives on the development of children's social competence and forms of cooperation between schools and families.

To obtain comprehensive and in-depth data, this study used three main techniques, namely in-depth interviews, observations, and documentation studies (Laba-Laba et al., 2024).



Figure 1. Research roadmap.

1. In-Depth Interviews

Interviews are conducted using interview guidelines that have been prepared. The guidelines contain questions related to transformative leadership and efforts to foster children's social competence but still provide space for informants to develop answers freely. The interview with the head of RA covers aspects of the vision and mission of leadership, teacher empowerment strategies, forms of motivation provided, policies related to social competency development, and challenges faced. Interviews with teachers focused on their experiences of receiving and implementing the principal's directions, as well as the impact of that leadership on social-emotional learning practices in the classroom. All interviews were recorded with the consent of the informant and transcribed verbatim for data analysis purposes.

2. Observation

Observations were made to see firsthand leadership practices and learning activities related to the development of children's social competence. The researcher uses nonparticipant observation, meaning that the researcher is not directly involved in the activity but observes situations and interactions that occur naturally. The focus of observation includes the following: (1) interaction between the head of RA and teachers and students, (2) learning practices that encourage cooperation, empathy, and communication between children, (3) the atmosphere and culture of the school, and (4) routine activities that support positive social habits. The results of observations were recorded in the form of field notes systematically.

3. Documentation Studies.

4. The documentation study was conducted to complement and strengthen the data from interviews and observations. The documents analyzed included the school's vision and mission, annual work program, learning implementation plan (RPP), meeting minutes, activity reports, and photo documentation of school activities. The documents were analyzed to see the consistency between the planning and implementation of social competency development programs and the leadership style applied.

Data analysis in this study uses an interactive model consisting of three stages, namely data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions/verification of research results.

Table 1. Interactive Model Data Analysis in Research.

Tahap	Deskripsi	Tujuan
Reduksi Data	Menyeleksi, memfokuskan, dan menyederhanakan data dari lapangan. Membaca transkrip wawancara dan catatan observasi, melakukan pengkodean, mengelompokkan data berdasarkan kategori seperti kepemimpinan transformatif dan kompetensi sosial anak.	Mengidentifikasi tema-tema yang relevan.
Penyajian Data	Menyajikan data yang telah direduksi dalam bentuk naratif, tabel, atau matriks tematik. Melihat pola, hubungan, dan kecenderungan yang muncul.	Memahami pola dan hubungan data.
Penarikan Kesimpulan/Verifikasi	Menarik kesimpulan dan melakukan verifikasi temuan. Mengecek ulang dan membandingkan data antar sumber secara terus-menerus.	Memastikan konsistensi dan keabsahan hasil.

1. Data Reduction

Data reduction was carried out by selecting, focusing, and simplifying raw data obtained from the field. The researcher read and reviewed the entire interview transcript as well as observational notes to identify relevant themes. The coding process was carried out to group data based on specific categories, such as transformative leadership dimensions and indicators of children's social competence.

2. Data Presentation

The reduced data was then presented in the form of a narrative description, table, or thematic matrix. The presentation of this data aimed to make it easier for researchers to see patterns, relationships, and trends. For example, the leadership practices of the head of RA can be analyzed based on the four main dimensions of transformative leadership, then associated with social competency development strategies.

3. Conclusion drawing and verification

The final stage is the drawing of conclusions based on the patterns and themes that have been identified. The conclusions drawn are not final before the verification process is carried out continuously during the study. The researcher double-checked the data and compared it between sources to ensure the consistency and validity of the findings.

To ensure the validity and credibility of the data, this study uses several techniques, including:

1. Triangulation is comparing data from various sources (head of RA and teachers) and various techniques (interviews, observations, and documentation) (Sugiyono, 2016).
2. Member checking is confirming the results of findings or interpretation to informants so that there are no misunderstandings (Rachmawati, 2007).
3. Adequate involvement in the field, so that researchers understand the context more deeply. Discussion with peers to obtain input and reduce the potential for subjective bias.

The findings of this study are expected to provide an in-depth understanding and become a reference for other institutions with similar characteristics. Another limitation is the potential subjectivity of researchers in interpreting the data, although various validation measures have been taken to minimize bias. Overall, this research method is designed to provide a comprehensive overview of the transformative leadership of RA heads in fostering children's social competence. With a qualitative approach and a systematic analysis strategy, this research is expected to be able to produce meaningful and relevant findings for the development of early childhood education based on Islamic values.

3. Results and Discussion

Early childhood education is a very important stage in the formation of a person's character and personality. During this time, children not only learn to recognize letters, numbers, and various basic knowledge but also learn how to interact with others, understand feelings, work together, and appreciate differences. This ability is known as social competence. Social competence is an important foundation for children to live life

in the family, school, and wider community.

In the context of early childhood education, especially in institutions such as Raudatul Athfal (RA), the development of social competence is not only the responsibility of teachers in the classroom but also requires strong leadership support from school principals. School principals have a strategic role in creating an educational environment conducive to the growth of positive social interaction among children. Through the policies, programs, and examples provided, school principals can be the main driver in fostering early childhood social competence.

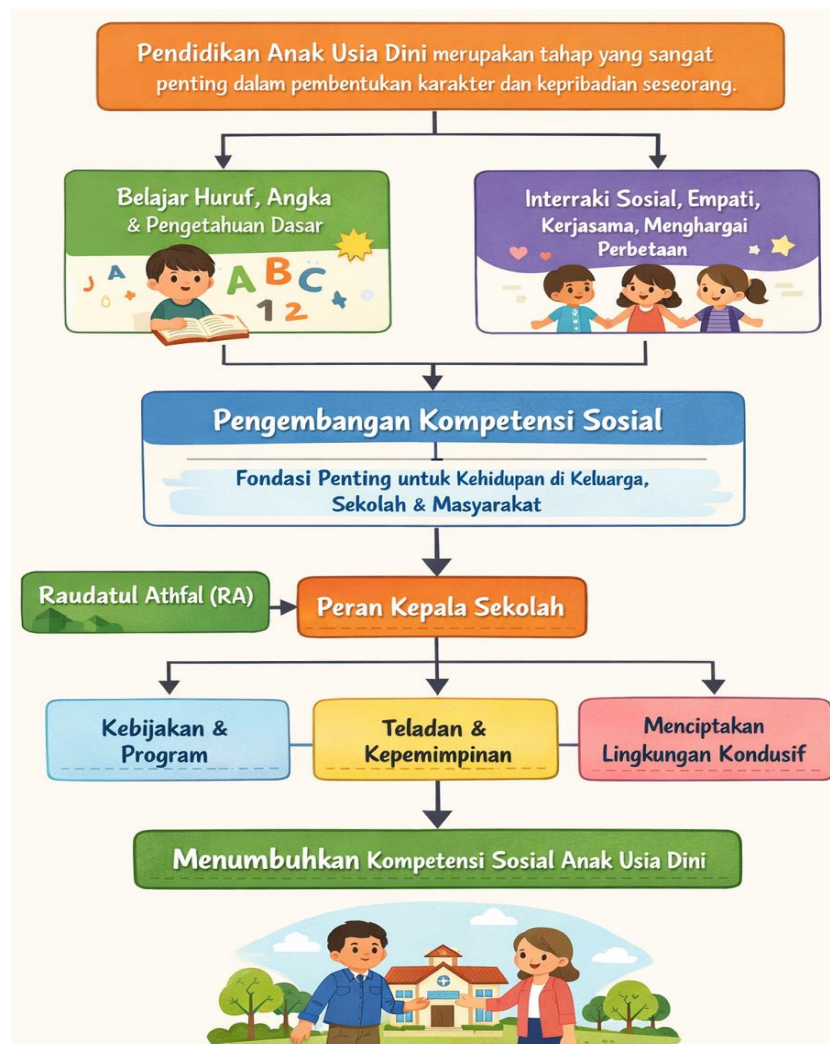


Figure 2. Social Competency Development.

One way that school principals can do this is to build an educational vision that places social development as an important part of the learning process. This vision needs to be socialized to all teachers and educators so that they have the same understanding of the importance of growing children's social skills. With a clear vision, all educational activities in schools can be directed not only to the achievement of cognitive aspects but also to the development of mutual respect, cooperation, and care for others.

In addition to building a vision, school principals also need to create a school culture that is positive and full of social values. School culture is a habit that is continuously carried out by all school residents. Principals can foster a culture of greeting, sharing,

helping, and respecting differences as part of daily life at school. Children who are in this kind of environment will get used to seeing and imitating good social behavior. The example of the principal and teacher is an important factor because early childhood learns through observation and direct experience.

The role of the principal is also very important in providing direction and guidance to teachers. Teachers are parties who interact directly with children every day in the classroom. Therefore, school principals need to ensure that teachers have the ability to develop children's social competence through various learning activities. School principals can hold training, discussions, and supervision aimed at improving teachers' ability to design activities that encourage children's social interaction.

Learning activities that support children's social development can be carried out through various fun methods. For example, group play activities, role plays, simple discussions, and collaborative projects. In group play activities, children learn to work together with their friends to achieve common goals. They also learn to wait for their turn, share game tools, and resolve conflicts simply. This kind of activity is very effective in fostering empathy, tolerance, and responsibility.

In addition, school principals can also encourage teachers to get used to activities that instill social values in daily life. For example, getting children used to greeting each other when they come to school, helping friends who are struggling, and apologizing when they make mistakes. These simple habits, if done consistently, will shape the child's social character slowly but strongly.

The principal also has a role in establishing cooperation with parents. The family environment is the first place for children to learn to socialize. Therefore, the social values taught in schools need to be supported by a parenting style that is in line at home. School principals can hold meetings with parents, parenting seminars, or regular communication to provide an understanding of the importance of fostering children's social competence from an early age. With cooperation between schools and families, children's social development will be more optimal.

In addition to working with parents, school principals also need to ensure that the school environment is inclusive and respects diversity. Children in school often come from different family backgrounds, culturally, economically, and customarily. School principals need to instill the value of tolerance and mutual respect to all school residents. Teachers also need to be given an understanding to treat every child fairly without discrimination. A safe and accepting environment will make children feel comfortable interacting with their friends.

School principals also need to periodically evaluate the programs that have been implemented. This evaluation aims to find out the extent to which the activities carried out are able to foster children's social competence. Through evaluation, the principal can see the strengths and weaknesses of the existing program, then make the necessary improvements or developments. Evaluation can be done through observation of children's behavior, discussions with teachers, and input from parents.

In carrying out their roles, school principals certainly face various challenges. Limited facilities, differences in teachers' abilities, and administrative demands are often obstacles in the implementation of educational programs. However, school principals who have a strong commitment to child development will try to find the best solution to overcome these obstacles. Creativity, good communication, and the ability to work with various parties are the keys to success in facing these challenges.

Strategi Kepala Sekolah untuk Pengembangan Sosial Anak

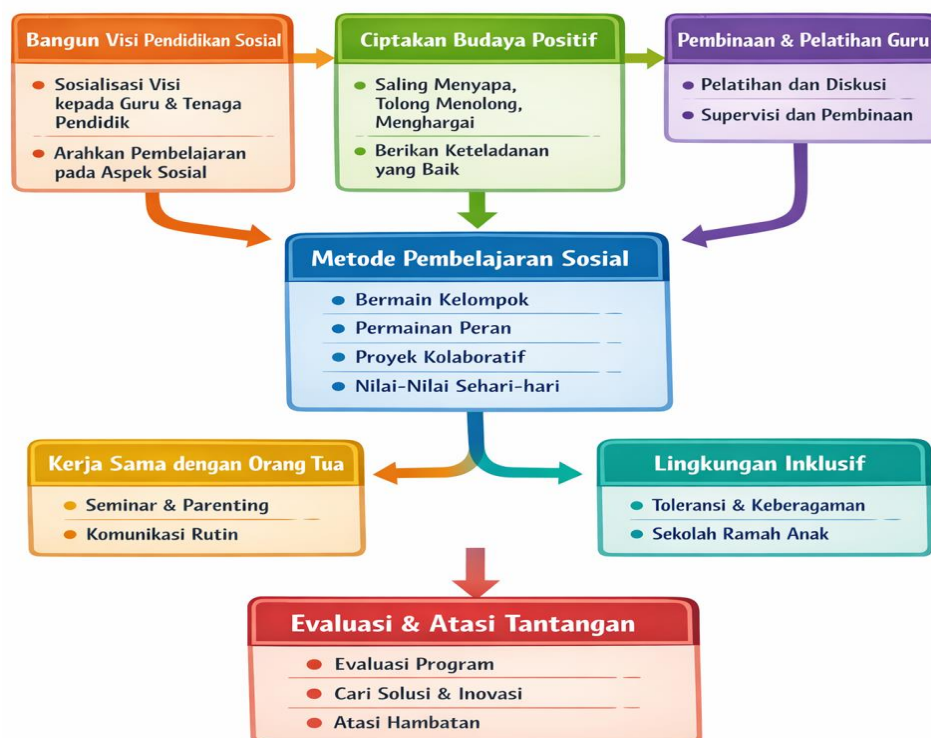


Figure 3. School Principal's Strategy for Children's Social Development.

In the end, success in fostering early childhood social competence is highly dependent on the synergy between principals, teachers, parents, and the school environment. The principal as a leader has an important role in directing, inspiring, and moving all components of the school to work together to achieve educational goals. With visionary and exemplary leadership, schools can be places that not only develop children's intelligence but also form individuals who are able to interact positively with others.

Thus, the role of school principals in fostering early childhood social competence cannot be seen as an additional task alone, but rather as a core part of educational leadership. Through a clear vision, a positive school culture, teacher coaching, cooperation with parents, and continuous evaluation, school principals can create an educational environment that supports children's social development optimally. Children who have good social competence will grow up to be individuals who are able to work together, respect others, and contribute positively to the life of society in the future.

4. Conclusions

Based on the analysis of the Role of School Principals in Fostering Early Childhood Social Competence, it can be concluded that school principals have a very strategic role in supporting children's social development in early childhood education institutions. Through visionary leadership, the principal is able to direct all components of the school to place the development of social competence as an important part of the educational process. This role is realized through several main steps, namely building an educational vision that emphasizes the importance of children's social development, creating a

positive school culture, providing guidance and direction to teachers, and encouraging the implementation of learning activities that encourage social interaction such as group play, cooperation, and habituation of social values. In addition, school principals also play a role in establishing cooperation with parents and creating an inclusive school environment that respects diversity. With the leadership of an active, communicative, and exemplary school principal, the process of forming children's social competence can run more optimally. Therefore, success in fostering early childhood social competence does not only depend on learning activities in the classroom but also on the ability of the principal to manage, direct, and mobilize all elements of the school to create an educational environment that supports the overall social development of children.

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