

Strategic School Leadership in Religiously Based Teacher Development

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Abstract: Teachers represent the most critical element in education and are inseparable from knowledge transformation. Permata Bunda I and II Integrated Islamic Elementary Schools employ teachers and educators with diverse educational backgrounds, including graduates from both religious and secular universities. These institutions maintain a vision and mission emphasizing religious character development, making it essential for teachers and educators to possess strong religious character. This study examines the principal's role in managing human resources—specifically teachers and educators—to ensure each individual develops the religious character vital to the learning process. Employing a qualitative descriptive methodology, data collection involved observations, interviews, and documentation at Permata Bunda I and II Integrated Islamic Elementary Schools in Bandar Lampung, engaging principals, vice principals, administrative staff, and teachers identified as capable informants. The study's novelty lies in its examination of religious character development programs implemented by school principals as a consequence of fulfilling the educational institution's vision and mission. Efforts to enhance individual teacher capacity include Quranic memorization programs, improvements in Quranic recitation rules, and daily Sunnah practices.

Keywords: Principal Management, Human Resources, Teachers' Religious Character.

INTRODUCTION

In the 21st century, the demands on education have shifted beyond academic excellence: schools are now expected to cultivate graduates who are not only cognitively competent but also morally and spiritually grounded. Global challenges including technological disruption, social-value erosion, and ethical decline highlight the urgent need for religious character as a foundational pillar in human development, particularly among educators. Recent evidence suggests that teachers who internalize religious values tend to demonstrate greater moral integrity, discipline, responsibility, and strong work ethic qualities that significantly influence their capacity to serve as role models and shape the character of their students (Cahyanto, Indiana, Fiveronica, Salamah, & Garbacz, 2024; Muis, Eriyanto, & Readi, 2022)

Consequently, the role of the school principal extends well beyond administrative or academic oversight; principals must act as moral leaders who cultivate a religious and ethical school culture through thoughtful human-resource management. Effective school leadership that is adaptive and contextually grounded has been shown to significantly enhance teacher competence, autonomy, and innovativeness, which in turn supports sustained character development initiatives (Nadeem, 2024).

In Indonesia, national policy frameworks reinforce the importance of character education. For example, religious values remain a core element of lifelong moral education cherished by society, suggesting that school-based religious character cultivation should be both intentional and systemic. In faith-based institutions such as Islamic integrated primary schools (SDIT), there is a dual mandate: to deliver academic excellence and concurrently foster strong spiritual and moral identity. Yet, in practice, many teachers in these schools come from general education backgrounds rather than religious-education training. This discrepancy underscores the critical need for strategic leadership to build a coherent, values-oriented human-resource development model.

While prior studies have largely focused on student character building, the religious character of students, or general aspects of school leadership and teacher performance, there remains a noticeable gap: few have explicitly examined how principals manage human resources to nurture the religious character of teachers themselves. This research aims to fill that gap by studying the model of school leadership in shaping the religious character of teachers at SDIT Permata Bunda I and II, Bandar Lampung. The findings are expected to contribute both theoretically, to the scholarship in Islamic education management and practically, offering guidance to school leaders designing effective, context-sensitive, and sustainable strategies for teacher development.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a qualitative descriptive research design to explore in depth how school principals manage human resources in fostering the religious character of teachers at SDIT Permata Bunda I and II in Bandar Lampung. A qualitative approach was selected because it allows for a comprehensive understanding of complex social phenomena, particularly leadership practices, institutional culture, and value-based character development within natural educational settings (Poth & Searle, 2021). Data were collected through in-depth interviews, non-participant observations, and document analysis, enabling methodological triangulation to enhance the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings (Chand, 2025; Schlunegger, Zumstein-Shaha, & Palm, 2024). The primary informants consisted of school principals, vice principals, teachers, and educational staff who were directly involved in the implementation of religious character development programs.

Data analysis followed an interactive and iterative model, consisting of data

condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification, conducted simultaneously throughout the research process. Data condensation involved selecting, focusing, and simplifying the raw data obtained from the field. The reduced data were then organized and displayed in narrative and thematic formats to facilitate systematic interpretation. Finally, conclusions were drawn through continuous verification, pattern matching, and cross-checking between data sources to ensure analytical rigor and internal validity (Singh, Benmamoun, Meyr, & Arikan, 2021). This analytic strategy enabled the researchers to capture both the strategic and cultural dimensions of school leadership in shaping teachers' religious character in a sustainable and context-sensitive manner.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study demonstrate that the principals' management at SDIT Permata Bunda I and II Bandar Lampung plays a central role in shaping teachers' religious character through an integrated and systematic human resource management framework. This framework encompasses five interrelated managerial dimensions: (1) strategic human resource planning aligned with the Qur'anic vision of the school, (2) centralized recruitment and placement managed by the foundation, (3) continuous professional development through structured religious capacity-building programs, (4) systematic performance evaluation incorporating religious indicators, and (5) a reward and sanction system that reinforces both professional discipline and spiritual commitment. These dimensions function synergistically, indicating that religious character formation is institutionalized as a core component of school governance rather than treated as an incidental personal attribute.

In terms of planning and recruitment, this study reveals a structural dynamic in which teacher recruitment is conducted by the foundation, while the school leadership assumes responsibility for post-recruitment alignment with the institution's religious mission. This arrangement creates a duality of authority that limits the school's autonomy in initial teacher selection, particularly regarding religious competence. Nevertheless, rather than becoming an obstacle, this condition compels school principals to strengthen internal character formation programs through systematic coaching and cultural reinforcement. This finding reinforces previous research asserting that leadership effectiveness in faith-based institutions is largely determined by the principal's ability to harmonize organizational policy with value-based cultural transformation (Alao & Dairo, 2024; Rahman, 2025)

The professional development dimension emerges as the most dominant pillar in cultivating teachers' religious character. Programs such as *tahsin* and *tahfidz* training, weekly *Bina Pribadi Islam* mentoring, daily Qur'anic recitation targets, tahajjud call routines, and periodic Teacher Learning Days function not only as technical capacity-building mechanisms but also as instruments of moral internalization and spiritual habituation. Through consistent repetition and

collective participation, these activities foster self-discipline, spiritual awareness, and professional responsibility. This empirical pattern aligns with contemporary character education theory emphasizing that character formation is most effective when implemented through sustained habituation and cultural modeling rather than through cognitive instruction alone (Mangestuti & Aziz, 2023; Suyadi, 2022). The principal's continuous role as a moral role model further amplifies this internalization process, confirming that moral leadership significantly strengthens the effectiveness of religious character development initiatives (Siahaan et al., 2023).

The impact of religious character formation in this study is not limited to teachers' personal spirituality but extends directly to pedagogical performance and school climate. Teachers who consistently participate in religious coaching programs demonstrate stronger emotional regulation, increased patience in classroom management, higher instructional responsibility, and more ethical interaction with students and colleagues. These changes gradually shape a school environment characterized by discipline, mutual respect, and moral consciousness. This finding supports empirical research indicating that a strong value-based school climate positively correlates with teachers' professional commitment, organizational citizenship behavior, and pedagogical sensitivity (Kurt & Duyar, 2023; Yorulmaz, Püsküllüoğlu, Colak, & Altinkurt, 2021).

Regarding performance evaluation, SDIT Permata Bunda implements a structured teacher report system that integrates religious behavior indicators into monthly performance monitoring. Evaluation is conducted through documentation of participation in religious programs, consistency in worship routines, classroom ethics, and reflective coaching sessions. This evaluation model reflects the principles of data informed leadership, in which managerial decisions related to guidance, retention, and rewards are guided by documented evidence rather than subjective judgment (Al Hadi et al., 2025). Importantly, the operationalization of religiosity through observable professional behaviors contributes to a more ethical and accountable assessment system, reducing the risk of normative bias and moral discrimination.

The compensation and sanction system further strengthens the sustainability of religious character development. Teachers who demonstrate long-term consistency and high performance receive both financial incentives and non-financial rewards such as scholarships for higher education and opportunities for religious travel (*umrah*). Conversely, violations of institutional regulations are addressed progressively through coaching, warnings, and, where necessary, voluntary resignation under foundation authority. This balanced approach reflects contemporary human resource management principles that emphasize motivational equity, moral reinforcement, and corrective discipline as essential components of organizational sustainability (Abidin & Sirojuddin, 2024; Nurbani, Nurdin, & Dikdik, 2025)

Leadership consistency emerges as a decisive factor in sustaining the effectiveness of religious character programs. Continuous supervision, daily monitoring, and exemplary conduct by school principals significantly influence teachers' long-term adherence to institutional values. When leadership control weakens, religious routines show a tendency to shift toward symbolic compliance rather than genuine internalization. This finding aligns with broader leadership literature identifying inconsistency in supervision as a primary cause of the decline of character education effectiveness in schools (Al Hadi et al., 2025; Bloom, 2011)

From the perspective of organizational learning, SDIT Permata Bunda reflects key principles of a learning organization in which professional development and moral development are integrated into a continuous collective learning cycle. Teacher study groups, Qur'anic peer mentoring, reflective evaluation forums, and collaborative planning activities function as platforms for knowledge sharing and mutual reinforcement of pedagogical and spiritual competencies. This integration confirms that sustained religious character development requires institutional learning structures rather than reliance on individual motivation alone (Rukmana, Pasaribu, & Sofyan, 2024; Smith, 2003).

Despite its strengths, this model also faces structural challenges. The centralized recruitment mechanism under the foundation restricts the school's capacity to ensure religious alignment at the point of entry. Consequently, the school must invest substantial resources in post-recruitment character formation. While effective in the case of SDIT Permata Bunda, this approach may be difficult to replicate in institutions with weaker leadership capacity or limited human resource infrastructure. This condition underscores the urgency of strengthening governance synergy between foundations and school units within faith-based educational systems.

From an ethical standpoint, the findings highlight the importance of maintaining proportionality, transparency, and respect for professional dignity in evaluating teachers' religiosity. The use of measurable behavioral indicators—such as participation in mentoring programs, consistency in professional worship routines, and ethical conduct in teaching—helps prevent moral evaluation from becoming personal or coercive. This approach aligns with contemporary ethical frameworks in educational leadership which emphasize balancing institutional value commitment with respect for individual autonomy and human rights.

Theoretically, this study strengthens the argument that religious character development among teachers is most effective when embedded within an integrated leadership system rather than implemented through fragmented spiritual activities. The SDIT Permata Bunda model demonstrates a practical synthesis of transformational leadership, value-based human resource management, and institutionalized character education. This synthesis offers a transferable framework

for other Islamic schools seeking to develop teachers' religiosity in a sustainable, systematic, and ethically grounded manner.

Beyond its influence on teachers' professionalism, the integrated religious character management implemented at SDIT Permata Bunda also shows a measurable impact on student behavior and learning discipline. Teachers who demonstrate consistent religious conduct in daily routines function as living moral references for students. This modeling effect gradually fosters students' obedience, emotional regulation, respect for authority, and learning discipline. These findings support social learning theory which posits that behavioral imitation is shaped through sustained exposure to authoritative role models (Siahaan et al., 2023). Thus, religious character development among teachers indirectly contributes to the formation of students' moral dispositions and academic self-regulation.

In institutional terms, the strengthening of teachers' religious character also enhances the school's public trust and competitiveness. Parents' perceptions of school quality are influenced not only by academic outcomes but also by the moral integrity projected by teachers. At SDIT Permata Bunda, teachers' visible religiosity, discipline, and ethical interaction constitute a symbolic asset that strengthens the school's branding as a trustworthy Islamic educational institution. This aligns with contemporary educational marketing research suggesting that moral credibility and value consistency significantly influence parental school choice decisions in faith-based education (Abidin & Sirojuddin, 2024; Jonathan, Rantung, & Mandagi, 2023). Consequently, religious character management also operates as a strategic instrument of institutional sustainability.

From the perspective of educational policy, this model reflects the micro-level implementation of Indonesia's national character education agenda within Islamic schooling contexts. Government policies emphasize the integration of character education into every dimension of school management; however, many institutions struggle with operational translation at the school level. The SDIT Permata Bunda case demonstrates how policy ideals can be concretized through structured leadership, routine-based spiritual programs, and ethical performance evaluation. This finding strengthens previous research indicating that policy effectiveness depends primarily on leadership capacity at the institutional level rather than on regulatory formulation alone. (Al Hadi et al., 2025; Mangestuti & Aziz, 2023)

Psychologically, sustained religious routines function as mechanisms of emotional stabilization and burnout prevention for teachers. Continuous exposure to spiritual reflection, collective prayer, and Qur'anic recitation creates a coping system that helps teachers manage occupational stress, emotional fatigue, and role overload. Several teachers reported increased emotional endurance, inner calmness, and resilience in dealing with classroom challenges and institutional pressure. This aligns with recent studies showing that spiritual well-being is positively associated with

occupational resilience, emotional regulation, and job satisfaction among educators (Owen, Halford, & Ott, 2020; Paul & Jena, 2022). Therefore, religious character development also contributes to teachers' psychological sustainability.

The integration of religious character into human resource management also influences conflict management patterns within the school organization. Conflicts among teachers and between teachers and leadership are more likely to be resolved through deliberative dialogue, self-reflection, and ethical accountability rather than through confrontational mechanisms. The emphasis on moral responsibility fosters a conflict resolution culture grounded in mutual respect and spiritual awareness. This supports organizational behavior research asserting that value-based cultures reduce destructive conflict and enhance cooperative problem-solving.

Another important dimension revealed in this study concerns the adaptive capacity of religious character programs in the digital era. The school leadership has gradually integrated digital platforms into its coaching and monitoring systems, including online Qur'anic mentoring groups, digital attendance systems for religious routines, and virtual reflective forums. This digital adaptation ensures the continuity of character development despite time constraints and changing professional patterns. It confirms that religious character education is not inherently contradictory to educational digitalization; instead, it can be strengthened through strategic technological mediation when guided by strong value orientation (Al Hadi et al., 2025; Suyadi, 2022).

From a comparative perspective, the findings of this study differ from many previous models of character education that remain fragmented and extracurricular in nature. At SDIT Permata Bunda, religious character formation is fully embedded within core management functions: planning, organizing, actuating, and controlling. This integration eliminates the dichotomy between academic professionalism and religious commitment that often weakens character programs in schools. This supports the theoretical proposition that character education only becomes transformative when integrated into the organizational control system rather than positioned as a symbolic complement (Abidin & Sirojuddin, 2024)

Furthermore, the symbolic authority of principals as spiritual leaders significantly amplifies institutional legitimacy. Teachers' acceptance of religious programs is not merely driven by formal authority but also by trust in the moral integrity of school leaders. When principals consistently embody the values they promote, normative resistance among teachers decreases, and internal compliance strengthens. This finding aligns with transformational and spiritual leadership theories, which emphasize that moral credibility constitutes the foundation of sustainable influence.

The sustainability of this model is also supported by intergenerational leadership transmission within the institution. Senior teachers who have undergone

long-term religious character formation gradually function as informal mentors for newly recruited teachers. This peer-based transmission reduces dependence on direct top-down supervision and strengthens the internalization of institutional culture at the collegial level. Such a mechanism reflects the maturation of organizational culture in which core values are reproduced organically through socialization rather than through formal instruction alone (Abidin, 2025).

However, one latent risk identified in this system is the potential for value formalism if institutional rituals are not continuously revitalized through reflective meaning-making. When religious routines operate solely as administrative obligations without spiritual reflection, there is a possibility that teachers comply superficially while losing personal engagement. This emphasizes the importance of reflective leadership that constantly recontextualizes religious practices within teachers' lived professional experiences. This challenge is consistent with wider critiques of ritualization within institutionalized character education.

From the lens of human capital theory, the combination of pedagogical competence, spiritual discipline, and ethical consistency represents a form of integrative professional capital that increases teachers' long-term value within the organization. Teachers are not merely evaluated through instructional outputs but also through moral reliability and institutional loyalty. This multidimensional evaluation system strengthens institutional stability while creating a distinctive professional identity for Islamic school educators (Nurbani et al., 2025)

The implications of this model also extend to teacher recruitment policy reform. While centralized recruitment remains a structural constraint, the study suggests the strategic importance of incorporating minimum religious competence standards at the entry stage to reduce the long-term burden of post-recruitment character formation. This aligns with broader Islamic education governance models that advocate for value-based recruitment as a foundation for institutional sustainability.

In terms of educational equity, the ethical governance of religious evaluation prevents exclusionary practices based on personal religious expression styles. By emphasizing behavioral professionalism rather than private belief scrutiny, the school maintains inclusivity while reinforcing institutional identity. This balance is crucial for ensuring that religious character education does not violate professional rights or psychological safety within the workplace.

Finally, this study offers an empirical contribution to the broader discourse on Islamic educational leadership by demonstrating that religious character management at the teacher level can function as a systemic driver of school quality, institutional reputation, psychological resilience, and moral governance. Rather than being confined to symbolic religious branding, religious character becomes an operational force shaping everyday professional behavior, decision-making

processes, and organizational sustainability. This positions principals not merely as administrative managers but as architects of moral ecosystems within educational organizations

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that principals' management plays a decisive and strategic role in developing teachers' religious character at SDIT Permata Bunda I and II Bandar Lampung through an integrated human resource management system. The findings confirm that religious character formation is not merely the outcome of individual piety but is institutionally constructed through synergistic mechanisms of strategic planning, structured professional development, systematic performance evaluation, and balanced reward–sanction governance. Religious values are effectively transformed into professional standards when supported by consistent leadership modeling, organized mentoring systems, and ethically grounded assessment instruments.

The results further indicate that sustained religious character management generates multidimensional impacts, not only on teachers' spiritual discipline but also on their pedagogical performance, professional identity, emotional regulation, and ethical interaction within the school environment. These transformations gradually shape a disciplined, respectful, and morally conscious school climate that strengthens organizational commitment and instructional quality. The institutionalization of religious character through formal evaluation and incentive structures distinguishes this model from symbolic or ceremonial approaches commonly found in many faith-based schools.

Nevertheless, the study also identifies important structural and managerial challenges. The centralized recruitment system under foundation authority limits the school's autonomy in ensuring initial religious alignment among teachers, thereby shifting the burden of character formation to post-recruitment intervention. In addition, the growing demands of digital transformation and workload intensity pose potential risks of emotional fatigue if not accompanied by balanced workload design and psychological support. These findings underline the importance of governance synergy, leadership continuity, and humane management practices in sustaining religious character development.

From a theoretical perspective, this study contributes to the advancement of value-based transformational leadership and faith-based human resource management by demonstrating how spiritual values can be operationalized within modern managerial frameworks without compromising professional accountability or ethical integrity. Practically, the findings offer a transferable model for Islamic schools seeking to institutionalize teachers' religiosity through integrated leadership, cultural habituation, ethical evaluation, and sustainable incentive systems.

Future research is recommended to employ multi-site comparative designs and mixed-method approaches to further examine the longitudinal effects of religious character management on teacher performance, student outcomes, and institutional quality. Such studies are essential to strengthen empirical generalization and to refine governance models for faith-based education in increasingly complex educational landscapes

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