



How Islamic Values Shape Classroom Governance in a Child-Friendly School

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ABSTRACT

Classroom governance plays an important role in shaping student well-being, participation, and inclusive learning environments. Although values-based leadership has received increasing scholarly attention, limited studies have examined how religious educational values are operationalized as practical governance mechanisms within classroom settings, particularly in public schools. This study aimed to investigate how Islamic educational values are operationalized within classroom governance structures to support a child-friendly learning environment. This study employed a qualitative single-case study design conducted at SD Negeri 50 Prabumulih, Indonesia. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with school leaders, teachers, students, and parents, complemented by classroom observations and document analysis. Data were analyzed using reflexive thematic analysis. The findings revealed that Islamic educational values were systematically translated into classroom governance through five interrelated practices: participatory rule formation, relational authority structures, humanistic behavioral regulation, reflective monitoring, and collaborative accountability. Principles such as 'adl (justice), rahmah (compassion), amanah (responsibility), and la darar wa la dirar (non-harm) functioned as procedural governance mechanisms that guided classroom interaction, decision-making, and behavioral regulation. Rather than reducing teacher authority, these practices reconfigured authority into a more participatory and ethically grounded form. This study contributes to educational leadership scholarship by demonstrating how religious ethical values can function as operational governance mechanisms and strengthen values-based classroom governance within contemporary public education contexts.



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INTRODUCTION

In recent years, classroom governance has gained increasing attention in educational management scholarship due to its influence on student well-being and inclusive school climates (Liu & Hallinger, 2022). While educational reforms often emphasize institutional accountability at the organizational level, emerging evidence

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highlights the importance of classroom-level governance in shaping students' experiences of safety, participation, and social interaction (Mustikaati et al., 2025; Apriani et al., 2025). Classroom governance therefore encompasses not only instructional management but also rule-setting, authority negotiation, and participatory structures that shape everyday learning environments (Isnawati et al., 2025; Cheng et al., 2020).

Despite the expansion of global child protection initiatives, school-based violence and exclusion remain persistent concerns. The Child-Friendly School framework promotes safety, participation, and non-discrimination; however, how these principles are translated into everyday classroom governance remains insufficiently examined (Aziz et al., 2025; Fitriani & Qodariah, 2021; Arar & Oplatka, 2022).

Beyond structural reforms, values-based educational leadership emphasizes the role of ethical commitments in shaping school governance (Ganon-Shilon & Schechter, 2017; Freeman et al., 2005). However, this body of research has largely developed within secular contexts, offering limited insight into how religious educational values function as practical governance resources in public education systems (Sumarti & Sjahid, 2025; Bekerman & Zembylas, 2017).

Islamic educational philosophy provides a normative framework grounded in principles such as *rahmah* (compassion), *'adl* (justice), *uswah hasanah* (moral exemplarity), and *lā ḍarar wa lā ḍirār* (non-harm). In educational practice, *rahmah* implies a proactive and nurturing approach to teacher–student relationships, while *'adl* guides fairness and balance in classroom decision-making (Hakim et al., 2025). Although prior studies have explored Islamic values in curriculum and character education (Halstead, 2007; Farihin & Bahrani, 2025; Sahin, 2018), limited attention has been given to how these values function as procedural governance mechanisms shaping classroom interaction (Suprijanto & Nasution, 2025). However, existing studies have not sufficiently explained how Islamic educational values function as operational governance mechanisms at the classroom level, particularly within public school contexts.

Consequently, the field lacks empirical understanding of the institutional mechanisms through which Islamic educational values operate as practical governance tools in classroom settings. Specifically, little is known about how these values concretely shape rule formation, disciplinary practices, organizational arrangements, and monitoring

processes in classroom governance. Addressing this gap, the present study investigates how Islamic educational values are operationalized within classroom governance structures to support a child-friendly learning environment. The guiding research question is: How are Islamic educational values operationalized within classroom governance structures to support a child-friendly learning environment?

This study contributes to educational management scholarship by advancing the integration of values-based leadership and classroom governance perspectives, and by demonstrating how religious educational values function as operational governance mechanisms in practice.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative single-case study design to examine how Islamic educational values are operationalized within classroom governance practices in the context of a child-friendly school initiative in Indonesia (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Yin, 2018). Classroom governance is conceptualized as a socially constructed process shaped through interactions among teachers, students, and institutional actors, wherein ethical commitments inform rule formation, participation, and behavioral regulation.

The study focused on a single bounded case: SD Negeri 50 Prabumulih, Indonesia. Following Yin's typology (2018), this site was selected as revelatory and information-rich, as it explicitly integrates Child-Friendly School policy with Islamic educational values under institutional support. This integration renders visible the processes through which values are translated into everyday classroom governance, offering a strong analytical basis for examining how ethical principles function as operational governance mechanisms. The site was purposively selected to yield contextually rich insights (Palinkas et al., 2015).

Participants comprised ten individuals: one principal, three teachers (Grades III–V), two parents, and four students. Teachers were included for their central role in organizing classroom governance, while students and parents provided experiential and contextual perspectives on the enactment and reinforcement of these practices. The sample size was determined by information power, as the focused research aim, specific case context, and rich qualitative dialogue provided sufficient depth to address the

research question (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). All participants received coded identifiers to ensure confidentiality.

Data were collected over six weeks (March–April 2024) using three techniques: semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis. Multiple data sources enabled triangulation to strengthen interpretive validity (Flick, 2018). Semi-structured interviews (30–60 minutes) explored participants' experiences of classroom governance, including rule-setting, disciplinary practices, and enactment of Islamic values. The interview guide prompted participants to describe specific routines, decisions, and interactions in which values such as *rahmah* (compassion) and *'adl* (justice) were enacted, moving beyond abstract beliefs. Interviews were conducted in Indonesian, audio-recorded, and transcribed verbatim (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2018). Classroom observations occurred in three classes (Grades III–V) across eight sessions (60–90 minutes each), focusing on rule enforcement, teacher–student negotiation, participation structures, and disciplinary language. Field notes captured interaction patterns and classroom dynamics. Document analysis included fifteen institutional documents (lesson plans, classroom agreements, discipline guidelines, and policy documents) to examine formal articulations of ethical values and governance expectations (Morgan, 2022).

Data were analyzed using reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2021), involving familiarization, coding, categorization, and theme development. A constant comparative approach was applied across interviews, observations, and documents to enhance interpretive depth and consistency. Analytic memos and an audit trail supported transparency and reflexivity (Nowell et al., 2017). The analysis generated major themes explaining how Islamic educational values translate into classroom governance practices, presented in the following section.

Trustworthiness was ensured through data triangulation, an audit trail, and detailed contextual descriptions (Tracy, 2020). Prolonged engagement was essential to move beyond performative expressions of religious behavior and capture the routine, often subtle enactment of ethical values in teacher–student interactions.

Ethical approval was obtained prior to data collection. Participation was voluntary and based on informed consent; parents provided consent for student participation, and

students received age-appropriate explanations. All data were anonymized, and coded identifiers protected participant confidentiality (Tracy, 2020).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

The analysis generated five interrelated themes illustrating how Islamic educational values were operationalized within classroom governance practices. These themes collectively demonstrate how ethical principles were translated into institutional routines shaping everyday classroom interactions.

Institutionalizing Ethical Values Through Deliberate Classroom Governance Design

Findings indicate that Islamic educational values were systematically embedded within classroom governance structures through participatory rulemaking, instructional planning, and classroom organization. Rather than being presented as abstract moral discourse, these values were enacted through concrete routines that positioned students as active contributors to classroom norms. All teachers reported that classroom rules were developed collaboratively with students at the beginning of each semester. One teacher explained:

“At the beginning of the semester we sit together and talk about what kind of classroom we want. Students usually say that everyone should listen when someone is speaking and that we should help friends who are struggling with the lesson. When the ideas come from them, they feel responsible for keeping the rules.” (Teacher 1)

This practice illustrates the operationalization of shura (consultation), transforming collective deliberation into a procedural mechanism for establishing shared norms. Observations confirmed that students actively contributed to defining behavioral expectations through guided classroom discussions, where teachers employed value-oriented prompting to ensure alignment with ethical principles.

Document analysis further showed that lesson plans consistently integrated ethical values such as respect, cooperation, and responsibility into instructional objectives. As emphasized by the principal:

“Learning activities must not only focus on academic outcomes. Teachers must also ensure that students feel respected, protected, and treated fairly during the learning process.” (Principal)

Classroom arrangements also reflected this governance design, with group seating and visual displays reinforcing collaborative interaction and shared responsibility.

Participatory Authority and Relational Organizational Structures

Classroom governance was characterized by a balance between teacher authority and participatory student engagement. Authority was enacted through structured participation rather than hierarchical control. Students were regularly assigned rotating roles such as discussion facilitators and group coordinators. One student noted:

“Sometimes I help lead the group discussion or remind my friends about the class agreement. It makes me feel trusted by the teacher.” (Student 1)

This redistribution of responsibility reflects the principle of ‘adl (justice), where authority and participation are shared equitably. Observations showed that student facilitators guided discussions, encouraged peer participation, and supported collaborative learning. Conflict resolution practices further demonstrated relational authority. Instead of imposing immediate sanctions, teachers facilitated reflective dialogue:

“If we argue with a friend, the teacher usually asks both of us to explain what happened so we can understand each other.” (Student 2)

This dialogical approach reflects rahmah (compassion), where accountability is combined with empathy and mutual understanding.

Humanistic Behavioral Regulation and Ethical Activation

Islamic educational values were particularly evident in disciplinary practices, which emphasized dialogue and reflection rather than punishment. Teachers consistently highlighted the importance of protecting students’ dignity:

“When students make mistakes, we try to talk to them calmly so they understand the problem without feeling embarrassed in front of their classmates.” (Teacher 3)

Observations showed that teachers addressed behavioral issues through private, reflective conversations rather than public reprimand. Students were encouraged to consider the impact of their actions and propose improvements.

This approach demonstrates the principle of la darar wa la dirar (non-harm), where disciplinary practices are designed to avoid psychological harm while promoting moral awareness. Students also perceived discipline as constructive:

“Usually the teacher explains why something is wrong instead of just giving punishment.” (Student 3)

Preventive and Reflective Monitoring Mechanisms

Monitoring practices supported the sustainability of value-based classroom governance through continuous reflection and relational supervision. Teachers regularly concluded lessons with brief reflection sessions:

“Before finishing the lesson, we often ask students to reflect on whether they respected each other and completed their responsibilities during the activity.” (Teacher 1)

These routines functioned as internal monitoring mechanisms that encouraged self-regulation. This process aligns with muhasabah (self-reflection), where students engage in ongoing evaluation of their behavior.

At the institutional level, monitoring emphasized support rather than control. As the principal explained:

“Monitoring is intended to help teachers maintain a safe and supportive classroom atmosphere rather than to search for mistakes.” (Principal)

Collaborative Accountability and Governance Sustainability

The sustainability of classroom governance was reinforced through collaboration among teachers, school leaders, students, and parents. Parents reported alignment between school and home practices:

“Teachers often remind us that guiding children should be done with patience, not anger, and we try to follow the same approach at home.” (Parent 1)

This reflects the principle of amanah (responsibility), where moral development is shared across school and family contexts. Across classrooms, the consistent application of fairness, participation, dignity, and non-harm indicates that Islamic educational values functioned as an integrated governance system rather than isolated practices.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that ethical values were embedded across multiple dimensions of classroom governance, including rule formation, organizational structures, behavioral regulation, monitoring practices, and collaborative partnerships.

These findings suggest that the operationalization of Islamic educational values is not incidental but systematically embedded within the structural and relational dimensions of classroom governance. While the findings consistently indicate the

integration of Islamic educational values into classroom governance practices, it is important to acknowledge the potential influence of social desirability bias, as participants may have presented their practices in ways that reflect idealized norms. Accordingly, this potential bias should be taken into account when interpreting the alignment between participants' reported accounts and observed classroom practices.

Discussion

Institutionalizing Ethical Values Within Classroom Governance

The five themes identified in this study should not be understood as separate analytical categories but as an interconnected system forming a coherent model of value-based classroom governance. Institutional design (Theme 1) provides the structural foundation. Participatory authority (Theme 2) operationalizes relational engagement. Humanistic regulation (Theme 3) governs behavioral interaction. Reflective monitoring (Theme 4) sustains value internalization. Collaborative accountability (Theme 5) ensures the continuity of these practices across institutional and social contexts. The findings of this study demonstrate that Islamic educational values functioned not merely as moral rhetoric but as operational components of classroom governance. Rather than appearing only in symbolic discourse or moral instruction, ethical principles were embedded within planning routines, organizational structures, behavioral regulation practices, and monitoring mechanisms. This pattern suggests that value integration was institutionalized through everyday governance processes that shaped classroom interaction and decision-making.

This observation resonates with international research emphasizing that values-based leadership becomes effective when ethical principles are translated into routine institutional practices rather than remaining at the level of aspirational commitments (Berkovich & Eyal, 2021; Ganon-Shilon & Schechter, 2017; Freeman et al., 2005). However, the present findings extend this perspective by demonstrating that such institutionalization is grounded in specific Islamic ethical concepts. For instance, collaborative rule-setting and inclusive classroom interaction reflect the principle of 'adl (justice), particularly in its emphasis on equitable voice and procedural fairness in collective decision-making, where fairness is enacted through participatory decision-

making and equitable recognition of students' voices. In this sense, justice is not treated as an abstract moral ideal but as a procedural norm shaping how classroom order is constructed and maintained.

Furthermore, the integration of values within instructional planning and classroom routines reflects an implicit commitment to amanah (responsibility), where teachers perceive their pedagogical role not only as instructional delivery but also as ethical stewardship. Such mechanisms allowed moral principles to guide everyday interactions between teachers and students, thereby transforming Islamic ethical values into practical regulatory frameworks within classroom governance.

Participatory Authority and Ethical Classroom Leadership

Another important finding concerns the relational configuration of authority within the classroom. While teachers retained formal responsibility for instructional leadership, authority was exercised through participatory mechanisms that involved students in rule formulation and classroom responsibilities. Rotational leadership roles and collective rule-setting enabled students to participate in shaping the social norms governing classroom behavior (Ma et al., 2016; Rochmat et al., 2025).

These findings align with research suggesting that participatory governance enhances students' sense of belonging, fairness, and engagement in learning environments (Wang & Degol, 2016; Erdem & Kaya, 2024; Mifsud & Wilkins, 2025). However, the present study demonstrates that such participatory structures are normatively anchored in Islamic ethical traditions. The equitable distribution of classroom roles reflects the principle of 'adl (justice), ensuring that responsibility and opportunity are shared rather than concentrated. At the same time, the relational manner in which authority is exercised reflects elements of rahmah (compassion), as teachers facilitate dialogue in ways that respect students' dignity and encourage mutual understanding.

Previous research has often examined religious values primarily within curriculum content or identity formation (Halstead, 2007; Zahraini et al., 2025). In contrast, this study highlights how faith-informed principles shape the procedural organization of classroom governance. Ethical concepts such as justice and compassion

operate as guiding norms that structure interactional patterns, demonstrating that Islamic values can function as embedded governance logics within public school contexts without undermining inclusivity.

Preventive Discipline and the Ethics of Non-Harm

The findings also highlight a shift from punitive disciplinary approaches toward preventive and dialogical strategies of behavioral regulation. Teachers frequently used reflective dialogue and explanation rather than immediate sanctions when addressing behavioral issues. Such practices allowed students to understand the consequences of their actions while maintaining their psychological dignity.

International scholarship increasingly recognizes the importance of restorative and preventive approaches to discipline in fostering positive school climates (Klevan, 2021; Lodi et al., 2021; Gregory et al., 2016). The present study contributes to this literature by demonstrating that such approaches are grounded in specific Islamic ethical principles. In particular, the emphasis on non-punitive correction reflects the principle of *la darar wa la dirar* (the prohibition of harm), which discourages actions that may cause physical or psychological injury.

Additionally, the use of private, reflective conversations when addressing student behavior illustrates the enactment of *rahmah* (compassion) not only as an emotional disposition but as a structured pedagogical approach to corrective interaction. Teachers avoided public reprimand and instead engaged students in dialogue that preserved dignity while encouraging accountability. This approach aligns with the prophetic example of gentle correction (*uswah hasanah*), where guidance is delivered with empathy rather than coercion, emphasizing dignity-preserving interaction in the process of moral development.

Through this ethical framework, classroom management functioned not only as behavioral control but also as a process of ethical socialization. Students were encouraged to reflect on their actions, recognize the impact of their behavior on others, and develop responsibility for maintaining a respectful classroom environment.

Reflective Monitoring and Sustainability of Value-Based Governance

Another significant finding concerns the role of reflective monitoring in sustaining value-based classroom governance. Monitoring mechanisms such as end-of-lesson reflections and periodic classroom discussions created opportunities for collective evaluation of behavioral norms and interpersonal interactions.

Traditional models of school supervision often emphasize compliance and performance evaluation (Bush, 2020). In contrast, the monitoring processes observed in this study prioritized reflective dialogue and shared accountability. These practices can be interpreted through the lens of muhasabah (self-reflection), an important concept in Islamic ethical tradition that emphasizes continuous self-evaluation and moral awareness.

By engaging students in reflective discussions about their behavior and interactions, teachers facilitated the internalization of ethical norms rather than relying on external enforcement. At the same time, the consistent revisiting of classroom agreements reflects the principle of amanah (responsibility), reinforcing the idea that maintaining a respectful classroom environment is a shared moral obligation.

Research on school leadership suggests that sustainable governance systems depend on continuous relational feedback rather than purely hierarchical supervision structures (Bush, 2020; Castro, 2009). The present findings extend this perspective by demonstrating that reflective monitoring grounded in ethical principles enables Islamic educational values to function as internalized regulatory mechanisms guiding student behavior and classroom interaction.

Taken together, these findings demonstrate that Islamic educational values operate not merely as normative ideals but as procedural governance mechanisms embedded within everyday classroom practice. By translating principles such as rahmah (compassion), 'adl (justice), amanah (responsibility), and la darar wa la dirar (non-harm) into concrete routines of rule-making, disciplinary interaction, and reflective monitoring, the study advances a value-integrated model of classroom governance. This perspective challenges dominant secular frameworks that often separate ethical discourse from managerial practice, instead illustrating how religious moral traditions can inform inclusive, participatory, and relational forms of educational leadership. In doing so, the study contributes to a broader rethinking of the relationship between ethics, religion, and

school governance in contemporary education systems, where moral values are not peripheral but constitutive of effective and humane educational practice.

This perspective is also consistent with global frameworks emphasizing child-centered governance and inclusive educational environments (Mifsud & Wilkins, 2025). More importantly, it bridges the gap between religious ethics and educational governance by positioning faith-informed values as actionable frameworks for designing humane, participatory, and sustainable classroom systems in the 21st century.

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations that should be considered when interpreting the findings. First, the research focused on a single elementary school implementing a child-friendly school initiative. While this approach enabled in-depth exploration of classroom governance processes, the findings may not be directly generalizable to other educational contexts with different institutional cultures or policy environments.

Second, the study relied primarily on qualitative data collected through interviews, observations, and document analysis. Although triangulation strengthened the credibility of the findings, there remains the possibility of social desirability bias. Given the value-laden nature of the topic, participants, particularly teachers and the principal may have presented their practices in ways that reflect normative or idealized representations of ethical behavior. However, this potential bias was mitigated through the use of non-participant classroom observations, which enabled the researcher to examine naturally occurring interactions and to compare reported practices with observed behaviors. Nevertheless, the convergence between reported accounts and observed practices indicates a reasonable level of authenticity in participants' responses.

Third, the research was conducted within a specific socio-cultural context in Indonesia. Future comparative studies could investigate how faith-informed educational values are operationalized in different national contexts or within other religious educational traditions.

Further research may also explore the long-term impact of value-based classroom governance on student character development, social-emotional learning, and academic engagement. Such investigations would contribute to a deeper understanding of how ethical frameworks can support sustainable and inclusive learning environments.

CONCLUSION

This study asked: How are Islamic educational values operationalized within classroom governance structures to support a child-friendly learning environment? The findings reveal that such values are not enacted through abstract moral instruction alone, but through their systematic integration into everyday governance mechanisms, including collaborative rule-setting, participatory organizational structures, dialogical disciplinary practices, and reflective monitoring routines. Through these processes, principles such as ‘adl (justice), rahmah (compassion), amanah (responsibility), and la darar wa la dirar (non-harm) were translated into concrete practices shaping classroom interaction, decision-making, and behavioral regulation.

The study contributes to educational leadership scholarship by extending values-based leadership theory beyond its predominantly secular foundations. By demonstrating how religious ethical principles function as procedural governance mechanisms at the micro level of classroom practice, this study offers a conceptual refinement that positions faith-informed values not merely as normative ideals but as structuring logics embedded within everyday organizational routines. In doing so, it provides an empirically grounded model of how ethical and religious frameworks can inform inclusive, participatory, and relational forms of classroom governance within public education systems.

Beyond its theoretical contribution, the study carries important implications for educational practice and policy. For school leaders and teachers, the findings highlight that creating a child-friendly and inclusive classroom environment requires more than policy compliance; it requires the intentional embedding of ethical values into daily pedagogical and governance practices. For policymakers, the study suggests that teacher professional development programs should move beyond technical instructional competencies to include the cultivation of ethical and relational capacities, enabling teachers to operationalize values such as fairness, compassion, and responsibility within classroom interactions.

Practically, the findings suggest that teachers should move beyond viewing values as abstract moral content and instead embed them into everyday classroom governance practices, such as rule-setting, disciplinary interactions, and reflective dialogue. School leaders also play a crucial role in fostering institutional environments that support value-

based governance through professional development and collaborative culture. At the policy level, the study highlights the need to integrate ethical and relational competencies into teacher training programs, particularly in the context of child-friendly school initiatives.

Future research should explore the applicability of this value-based classroom governance model across different educational levels, cultural settings, and religious contexts. Comparative and longitudinal studies would be particularly valuable in examining how the operationalization of ethical values evolves over time and influences students' long-term social-emotional development and academic engagement. Overall, this study underscores that the integration of ethical and religious values into classroom governance is not only possible within contemporary public education systems but also essential for fostering humane, inclusive, and sustainable learning environments. By positioning values as lived governance practices rather than symbolic ideals, the study offers a new perspective on the role of ethics and religion in shaping educational leadership in the 21st century. At its core, the study suggests that the most effective classroom governance is not built on control alone, but on the consistent enactment of ethical values in everyday interactions.

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