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ROFA' ALIF SIGN AS A SYMBOL OF POLICY AND FIRMNESS IN LEADERSHIP

Nailah Kaltsum, Leoni Wilyam

State Islamic University of North Sumatera, Indonesia

Corresponding E-mail: nailahkaltsum81@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

The rofa' alif sign in Arabic grammar not only has a grammatical function, but also contains symbolic meaning that is relevant to leadership values. This research aims to analyze the correlation between the symbolism of Rofa' Alif and the principles of policy and firmness in Islamic leadership. The method used is a descriptive qualitative study with a semiotic approach, including analysis of the text of the Nahwu book, interpretation, as well as interviews with Arabic language experts and Islamic leadership figures. The research results show that the rofa' alif sign represents firmness of principles, which is reflected in the straight and upright form of the alif, as well as justice because its use is limited to certain grammatical structures. Apart from that, this symbol also depicts wisdom through contextual flexibility in its application. These findings indicate that rofa' alif can be used as a symbol to frame an ideal leadership model that integrates firmness and wisdom, in accordance with leadership values in Islam. This research contributes to a new understanding of the relationship between Arabic linguistics and leadership concepts, and offers a unique perspective for the development of cultural and linguistic values-based leadership theories.

Keywords: *Rofa' Alif, Symbolism, Islamic Leadership*



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Introduction

Arabic is known as one of the oldest languages still in active use today. In addition to being a means of communication, this language contains many symbols and deep meanings in each letter and punctuation mark. One interesting symbol to study is the rofa' alif, which is used in Arabic grammar to indicate dual nouns (isim mutsanna) in the marfu' state (Ariffaturakhman & Zulfah, 2021). The upright form of the alif may appear simple, but symbolically it reflects steadfastness, consistency, and a clear direction. These values are particularly important in leadership, especially from an Islamic perspective. Language is not merely a technical matter but can also serve as a bridge to understanding the values of life. Therefore, studying linguistic signs can be a new way to understand leadership (Fauzi, 2022).

In Islam, leadership is strongly emphasized on character and exemplary behavior, not just power. This can be seen in QS. Al-Qalam verse 4, which describes Prophet Muhammad SAW as a figure of noble character. The Prophet's leadership reflects a balance between firm principles and flexible approaches. One example is the Hudaibiyah Treaty, which demonstrates leadership full of strategy and patience. Firmness in stance and flexibility in action were the keys to the success of his leadership. These values align with the symbolic meaning of the straight and strong shape of the alif. Therefore, linking Arabic linguistic signs with leadership can be an interesting and beneficial approach.

Although there have been many studies on symbols in Arabic and the concept of Islamic leadership, none have specifically linked rofa' alif with leadership values. Yet, such a small sign can represent great meaning if analyzed in depth. This study attempts to fill this gap with an approach that combines linguistic and Islamic leadership studies. The main question in this study is: how can rofa' alif be interpreted as a symbol of policy and decisiveness in Islamic leadership? The objective of this study is to understand its grammatical and symbolic meanings, analyze its relationship with leadership values, and develop an analogical model between the two. This opens up new avenues for language and value studies (Fitria et al., 2024).

The contributions of this research are twofold: theoretical and practical. Theoretically, this research expands the study of semiotics in Arabic by linking linguistic signs to social values. Practically, the results of this study can be used as material for leadership training, particularly in Islamic educational settings. By combining traditional values in classical texts and modern leadership needs, this approach offers a new and creative perspective. It can serve as a bridge between classical language studies and contemporary character development. Symbols in language not only enrich knowledge but can also touch on moral and spiritual aspects. It is hoped that this research will make a tangible contribution to education and value development.

Research Method

This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach with content analysis and thematic interpretation methods. This approach is used to explore the symbolic meaning of the rofa' alif sign in Arabic and relate it to leadership values in Islam. Content analysis is used to understand how rofa' alif is used in classical nahwu texts, while thematic interpretation is used to find values such as steadfastness, clarity of direction, and consistency that emerge from the symbol. This study seeks to view language not only from a grammatical perspective but also as a medium that preserves moral and leadership values. In this way, the approach used becomes more flexible, relevant, and easy to apply in Islamic studies.

The research data sources consist of primary and secondary data. Primary data includes the Alfiyah Ibn Malik book as the main reference for nahwu, Tafsir Al-Misbah by Quraish Shihab, and relevant pesantren manuscripts. Meanwhile, secondary data is taken from scientific journals on Arabic linguistics and Islamic leadership literature such as Al-Ahkam As-Sulthaniyah. Data collection was conducted through literature review and semi-structured interviews with Arabic language experts and Islamic education figures. The collected data was analyzed through a thematic process to identify the relationship between the rofa' alif symbol and leadership values. The results of the texts and interviews were then compared to strengthen the conclusions, resulting in a comprehensive and in-depth understanding.

Results and Discussion

A. Results

a. Alif Form as an Icon of Steadfastness

Based on the results of content analysis of the grammatical structure in the Alfiyah Ibn Malik book, it was found that the rofa' sign in the form of alif is exclusively used in isim mutsanna (dual nouns). This specific usage indicates a symbolic meaning that can be interpreted thematically. The straight vertical form of the alif letter represents steadfastness, clarity of direction, and stability of values, which aligns with the principle of istiqamah in Islam. This steadfastness is also a key characteristic that a leader must possess. This finding is reinforced through a thematic interpretation of the visual form of the alif as a symbol of two poles of leadership: first, qawwam (firmness in principle), and second, layyin (flexibility in application). Both are seen as important components in carrying out the mandate of leadership in a balanced manner.

In a semi-structured interview, a nahwu lecturer explained that "alif rofa' teaches steadfastness that remains subject to rules," indicating that an ideal leader must not only be strong in conviction but also obedient to rules and values. Textually, this symbol also finds its basis in Q.S. Fussilat [41]: 30, which emphasizes the importance of istiqamah as a form of consistency in faith and action. Ibn Jinni in Al-Khasha'is refers to the letter alif as the pillar of language, metaphorically describing that alif has a structurally robust function in forming the integrity of Arabic grammar. This parallels the position of a leader as a pillar of a stable social structure oriented toward values. Through content analysis and

thematic interpretation, the alif in the rofa' position is not only understood as part of the grammatical structure but also as a symbolic representation of the ideal leadership values in Islam—firm in principle yet adaptable in practice.

b. Function of *Rofa'* as a Symbol of Justice

Content analysis of grammatical rules in the Alfiyah Ibn Malik text shows that the rofa' alif sign is only used in specific structures, such as in isim mutsanna and fi'il mudhari' in the condition of i'rab marfu'. This strict and limited use reflects the principles of justice ('adl) and accuracy (mizān) in the Arabic language system, which are parallel to the basic values of leadership in Islam. Thematically, the rofa' sign does not appear randomly, but depends on the fulfillment of objective and measurable nahwu requirements. This can be interpreted as a symbol that a leader's decisions should not be based on personal whims or subjective factors, but rather follow fair and transparent criteria. In this context, the rofa' serves as a reminder that authority is only valid if it conforms to legitimate rules, just as grammatical rules only apply the rofa' to the appropriate structures.

This interpretation is reinforced by Al-Mawardi's (2006) view in Al-Ahkam As-Sulthaniyah, which emphasizes that a leader must uphold law and justice based on sharia principles and measurable rational considerations. In semi-structured interviews, academic sources also emphasized that "rofa' only appears in appropriate positions, just as a leader's decisions must be issued in the right position and based on sound reasoning." Thus, through a thematic interpretation approach, rofa' alif can be understood not merely as a linguistic phenomenon, but also as a symbol of a value system that prioritizes justice, objectivity, and accountability in leadership.

c. Philosophical Meaning in Leadership

The symbolic meaning of the rofa' alif sign can be interpreted not only grammatically and structurally, but also contains a deeper philosophical dimension. A semi-structured interview with a professor of nahwu from UIN Jakarta revealed that, "Alif rofa' reminds leaders to be steadfast like alif, but also to be 'submissive' to the rules like the letter that is rofa'ed." This statement shows an understanding that the letter alif, although upright in form and reflecting steadfastness, must still be within an orderly system and submit to the rules of nahwu. This describes the ideal leadership character in Islam, namely a leader who has a strong stance but still adheres to the rules and values that frame his power.

A thematic interpretation of the interview data was also conducted on five respondents from Islamic boarding schools. They provided a rich philosophical meaning to this symbol, stating that, "Rofa' is high, but alif is simple. So a leader must have authority, but remain humble." This finding indicates an awareness that ideal leadership is not only about position or authority (symbolically represented by rofa' as a sign of grammatical height), but must also be accompanied by humility, as exemplified by the simplicity of the straight, unadorned form of alif. This contrast creates a balance that lies at the core of

leadership values in Islam: between grandeur and humility, between power and service. Thus, from the thematic interpretation of the interview data, it can be concluded that the rofa' alif sign not only carries a linguistic message but also holds profound philosophical meaning. It represents the dialectic between authority and ethics, between strength and humility—two essential qualities in forming complete leadership.

B. Discussion

a. Wisdom (Hikmah) in the Symbol of Rofa' Alif

The concept of wisdom (hikmah) in Islamic leadership plays a very important role, as stated in the Qur'an, one of which is in Q.S. Luqman [31]: 12, which states: "And indeed, We have given wisdom to Luqman, namely: 'Be grateful to Allah.'" This verse emphasizes that wisdom is a gift from Allah that guides a person to act with deep thought and based on careful consideration. A wise leader does not act solely based on power but also considers the context and surrounding conditions with careful thought, ensuring that decisions made are appropriate and fair.

In the context of the Arabic language, especially in the science of nahwu, the concept of wisdom can be found in the rofa' alif symbol, which appears only under certain conditions, namely in isim mutsanna (dual nouns) and fi'il mudhari' (verbs that are ongoing or future) that meet the requirements of i'rab marfu'. The rofa' alif symbol, which is only used in certain grammatical structures, illustrates the principle of selectivity in the application of laws or rules. This reflects the value of wisdom in choosing and placing an action only in the appropriate conditions, in accordance with the existing context. Just as in language, where rofa' only applies to words that meet certain rules, a wise leader will choose the right time and way to act based on existing conditions, not based on forcing or rigidly adhering to a single rule (Arifin, 2023).

In a thematic analysis of the use of rofa' alif, it can be seen that this symbol represents the principle of wisdom in leadership decision-making. The rofa' sign does not appear randomly but must meet certain objective criteria. Similarly, a leader's decisions must be selective; not all situations can be handled in the same way. Every condition and every individual or group has different needs and characteristics, which require different approaches. Additionally, this principle is closely related to the concept of contextual leadership proposed by Abbas (2018). Contextual leadership emphasizes the importance of leaders understanding and adapting their leadership style to the existing social and structural context. A wise leader is one who can read the situation and determine the appropriate action based on the conditions they face. Just as in nahwu structure, rofa' is only used in certain situations, leaders must also be able to determine when to act decisively and when to be flexible, adapting to the needs at hand.

In interviews with respondents from Islamic boarding schools, the symbolic meaning of rofa' alif as a sign of wisdom became increasingly clear. Respondents mentioned that rofa'

alif symbolizes not only strength or authority but also the understanding that such strength must be accompanied by wisdom in its application. Just as in language, where rofa' is not used carelessly, so too in leadership, wisdom teaches a leader to make decisions wisely, carefully balancing rights and obligations, individual interests and group interests. This concept also teaches that wisdom in leadership does not mean remaining silent or indecisive. On the contrary, wisdom lies in the ability to lead decisively yet remain flexible and sensitive to the existing context. A wise leader will be able to manage their authority wisely, not using power arbitrarily, but always considering the balance between personal interests and the interests of the people (Yusuf et al., 2022).

Thus, the symbol of rofa' alif in the context of Islamic leadership can be understood as a representation of selective and timely wisdom. Just as rofa' only applies in certain situations in Arabic, leadership wisdom also teaches us not to be rigid or to generalize all conditions, but to adapt to the existing context. This is one of the important aspects of effective and wise leadership.

b. Firmness as a Core Value in the Alif Symbol

In nahwu, the rofa' alif sign only applies to certain grammatical structures such as isim mutsanna. This provision shows that alif does not appear randomly, but follows strict rules. This symbol reflects the principle of firmness in leadership that decisions are not made randomly, but based on clear rules. The straight, uncurved shape of the alif symbolizes the steadfast nature of a leader. Firmness here does not mean harshness, but rather the ability to uphold principles in various situations. Such leaders are needed in dynamic social systems. They are not easily swayed by trends or pressures that conflict with their values (Iqbaluddin & Agustina, 2021).

In a hadith narrated by Muslim, a leader is likened to "the shadow of Allah" on earth, indicating that leadership is an extension of divine values. A leader must be able to uphold justice and social order, which can only be achieved with a firm and clear attitude. Like the upright alif, a leader must not waver even when faced with conflicting interests. This firmness is also in line with the concept of 'azimah, which is the ability to uphold principles completely without compromise on fundamental matters. In this context, the rofa' alif sign symbolizes that firmness is the foundation of the legitimacy of leadership. Without firmness, the leader's authority will be weak and easily ignored by the community. Therefore, consistency is an essential quality.

Pratama's (2023) research on letter symbols in Sufism found that the letter alif represents the oneness of God and unity of direction. In leadership, this can be interpreted as a focus that does not deviate from the principle of truth. Alif does not branch out or curve, just as a leader is steadfast in direction and attitude. This interpretation expands the understanding that linguistic symbols can be the basis for shaping a leader's character. Firmness is not merely about quick decisions, but about making the right decisions based

on spiritual and intellectual values. Thus, the symbol of alif can be used in Islamic values-based leadership education. This is particularly important in the context of Islamic boarding schools, where letter symbols are closely tied to learning. The visualization of letters can serve as a tool for moral reflection in the process of leadership development. In Arabic grammar, the rofa' alif sign only applies to specific grammatical structures such as isim mutsanna (Pratama, 2023).

Thus, the rofa' alif symbol offers a reflective framework for understanding the value of firmness in Islamic leadership. Semiotic analysis shows that the grammatical form and function of this letter hold deep philosophical meaning. Firmness is not the result of power, but of submission to consistent rules and values. In the context of education, this can be material that integrates linguistics and leadership ethics. The alif symbol teaches that clarity of direction and attitude are essential and should not be compromised. Therefore, leaders who understand this meaning will be better prepared to maintain a balance between authority and responsibility. Such assertiveness is a form of maturity in thinking and acting as a leader of the people.

c. Integration of Semiotic Theory and Leadership

The semiotic approach to interpreting the rofa' alif sign opens up new possibilities for understanding leadership from a linguistic perspective. Within Charles Sanders Peirce's semiotic framework, a sign is divided into three categories: icon, index, and symbol. All three can be applied to the analysis of the alif letter as a sign in the context of nahwu and Islamic leadership values. Iconically, the straight form of the alif letter reflects the steadfastness of principles. It does not branch out or bend, as if to imply that ideal leaders are those who are steadfast, straight, and do not deviate from the path of truth. This also supports the concept of istiqamah, which is very important in Islamic leadership.

As an index, the rofa' alif sign only appears in certain contexts, such as in isim mutsanna. This shows that the symbol is not used arbitrarily, but follows strict grammatical rules. In the context of leadership, this indicates that a leader's actions should be based on rules and objective considerations, not on personal whims or external pressures. The right decisions come from submission to the system, not from baseless improvisation. Therefore, the rofa' alif symbol can be an important reflection that power must be limited by agreed-upon laws, values, and structures.

In a symbolic dimension, the rofa' alif sign has a deeper meaning in the context of nahwu science. It symbolizes Islamic values such as justice, wisdom (hikmah), and moral consistency. When this letter appears as a rofa' marker, it not only indicates grammatical structure but also conveys a rich moral message. These values are highly relevant to instill in leadership education, especially in pesantren environments familiar with classical Arabic texts. Thus, the process of learning Arabic is not merely a grammatical exercise but also a means of shaping the character of Islamic leaders (Santos, 2021).

The implications of this integration of semiotics and leadership are quite broad. The rofa' alif symbol can be used as a medium for reflection in language-based leadership training. Especially in Islamic boarding schools, linguistic symbols like this can serve as a bridge between nahwu studies and character education. This semiotic model can help students understand that every language structure carries implicit values and teachings that can be translated into concrete actions. By understanding the meaning of signs such as rofa' alif, future leaders are expected to not only be eloquent in words but also steadfast in principles and fair in actions. Thus, language semiotics becomes a relevant and innovative approach in shaping value-based leadership.

Conclusion

The rofa' alif symbol has a symbolic meaning that reflects firmness, justice, and wisdom—three core values in Islamic leadership. Its upright form signifies the steadfastness of principles, its limited use reflects justice, and its contextual application symbolizes wisdom. This symbol is relevant for reflection in the formation of leadership character. Further research could explore other Arabic language symbols for strengthening leadership values and character education.

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